THE COURSE OF REASON
by John Lee Longeway

Introduction

1. THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF PHILOSOPHY

> A number of young men with wealthy fathers and plenty of leisure have deliberately attached themselves to me because they enjoy hearing other people cross-questioned. These often take me as their model, and go on to try to question other persons. Whereupon, I suppose, they find an unlimited number of people who think they know something, but really know little or nothing. Consequently their victims become annoyed, not with themselves but with me, and they complain that there is a pestilential busybody called Socrates who fills young people's heads with wrong ideas. If you ask them what he does, and what he teaches that has this effect, they have no answer, not knowing what to say. But as they do not want to admit their confusion, they fall back on stock charges against any philosopher, that he teaches his pupils about things in the heavens and below the earth, and to disbelieve in the gods, and to make the weaker argument the stronger. They would be very loath, I fancy, to admit the truth—which is that they are being convicted of pretending to knowledge when they are entirely ignorant.

> Socrates, in Plato's *Apology of Socrates,* 23cd[1]

One might well doubt the value of philosophy. Its questions seem to bear on nothing practical or concrete, and enjoy a disturbing reputation for never getting settled. The doctrines of the schools are often disconcerting and implausible, deepening perplexity rather than removing it. Many, of course, take no interest in the matter. They have their views, to be sure, but feel no need to articulate them any further than casual bar talk might require, and certainly no need to search out justifications. They have not really conceived they could be wrong, or could fail to grasp the nature and consequences of their beliefs. Or perhaps they do not consider these matters of any importance, so that any plausible and attractive view will do as well as any other. In any case, everyone of good sense agrees with them, and their opinions need no defense.

Philosophy begins only with the suspicion that we may not have a correct view of ourselves, of the world, and our place in it, and that it is of some importance to get these things straight. The views under suspicion here are those we would muster to the defense of our way of life, the ideals, practices and institutions

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[1] Translation by Hugh Tredennick, Plato (1961) 9. My father remarked once that if an author put something in a footnote, he didn't really want him to read it. I use footnotes to provide documentation for those who might be interested, to explain where an idea came from (and disabuse the reader of the notion I invented this all by myself). They help to keep me honest. I also use them to provide further consideration of a topic, looking at complexities of argument, theoretical options and such, that some readers might be interested in. Again, sometimes this helps keep me honest, particularly when my views are not generally shared in the scholarly community. I do intend to present *my* views in the body of this work. In any case, if you don't feel like looking at a footnote, then I don't want you to, so don't.

to which we are committed. Philosophy's defining task is to figure out which views here *are* correct, what reasons there are for accepting them, and to what way of life they in fact lend their support.[2] For those already certain about such things, philosophy questions what cannot be questioned, and doubts what must not be doubted. Surely, they suppose, we do altogether better to avoid it and rely on tradition, religious revelation, or plain common sense. For those who think such things of no practical interest or importance, it seems foolish to waste time and effort on getting them right, even if there *is* such a thing as getting them right. And then there are, of course, those who think they cannot be got right, either because no sense can be made of lsuch views, or because we are never in a position to know the truth about this matter.

But philosophy is not so easily avoided. Even the most dogmatic, and the most careless, do have beliefs, and they imagine that there is justification for their beliefs. If they can be brought to state that justification, they have been brought to do a bit of philosophy. One might hope to avoid philosophy entirely by arguing that there is no evidence for the truth of anyone's world view, but someone might ask her reasons for believing this, and answering that question would be philosophy.[3] Moreover, if one gave some reason to accept beliefs even though there can be no evidence for them, or argued that a very wide range of traditional ways of life are all equally good, that too would be philosophy.

We might believe the Chief is the descendent of the Lion God, and so have faith in him, follow his orders, enjoy social stability and make effective warriors. No convincing reasons in favor of this belief are likely to be provided, but it will have established itself in competition with other useful beliefs in part because it is relatively immune to counter-evidence.[4] If something does throw doubt on it, we can reinterpret it to avoid the issue—he is the *spiritual* descendent of the Lion God. It will do no harm to dodge the issue in this way, for

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[2]For this conception of philosophy, see Passmore (1967), Jones (1969-70), Kekes (1980), and, indeed, Brucker, in the 18th century, who defines philosophy as the pursuit of wisdom, wisdom being a solid apprehension of those things that contribute to true human happiness. Philosophy was conceived on these lines from its beginnings, though the word "philosophy" was often used in a quite general sense among the Greeks for theoretical knowledge or intellectual culture in general, as Zeller (1881) observes. For one dissenting view, see Rorty (1979), who argues that philosophy is a field based on false preconceptions to the effect that there is a "method" to be discovered in the sciences. Enlightenment figures such as Condorcet do seem to take that view of what they are doing, and the view, as Rorty understands it, does seem to be false, but there are many who intend to do Philosophy who either do not share, or attach little importance to that false view.

[3]Aristotle pointed out in his youthful *Protrepticus* that philosophy cannot be avoided, since if we ought not to philosophize, we must philosophize to discover this.

[4]It is also in itself an attractive belief. That is to say, we have evolved as a species in such a way that we find certain sorts of beliefs more attractive than others, and this is one that appeals to us. Why? Well, we'd have to figure out why it is attractive, and then figure out why creatures that found such beliefs attractive might have some advantage over others like them who don't.

the belief works because it is edifying, forming our attitudes, and it does not matter if it actually describes the way the world is, with addresses and phone numbers, say, of the Chief's ancestors.[5] Clearly, some beliefs work by describing the world, by being true or guiding us to other beliefs that are true, thus leading, eventually, to action—the belief that antelopes are to be found in one place rather than another is like this. Such a belief will naturally be tested by experience, and it is absurd to hold onto it by dodging counter-evidence, claiming, say, that the antelope is there *spiritually* even if it can't be seen or touched. One can't, after all, eat spiritual antelopes. But other beliefs, including many whose apparent function is to justify our way of life, help us in another way. We don't need to talk with his ancestor, we only need to have faith in his leadership, and the belief contributes significantly to that faith.

But that means that even if it is false (or true in some less-than-literal sense), the belief in the chief's ancestry leads us to certain true beliefs that *are* useful to us because they are true, and lead to effective actions, for instance, the belief that we do well to trust his leadership. The problem seems to be the route it takes to such straightforwardly true beliefs. What if it were *not* wise to trust his leadership, after all? Surely we would want to be in a position to discover that it is not, but if we base our belief on the chief's divine ancestry, we are left with no way to do that.[6] There are various ways to check out a person's ancestry, and yet more ways to tell if it is a good idea to adopt someone as our leader, but this belief has been disconnected from these ordinary mechanisms of investigation, so that none of the ordinary ways of casting doubt on the chief's ancestry, and none of the ordinary ways of casting doubt on his competence, will be, initially at least, a danger to our presumably necessary faith. A skeptic might ask us to explain why this faith is so necessary, and if we do, we can then explain why it is a good idea to adopt the edifying belief, no matter how investigation into its actual truth turns out. Of course, once we have done this, we might well decide we can do without the belief in his ancestry, for we now see the real reason, and a much more defensible reason, why we must have faith in him. The chief's ancestry only provides cover for the real reasons. Why do they need cover? Well, perhaps most people aren't smart enough to understand the real reasons for having faith in the Chief, and so they'd best not think about it, and we need to lie to them, and tell them the Lion God story. Some philosophical traditions,

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[5]For this notion of an edifying belief, and the example, see Matson (2000), Ch. 1.

[6]A more intriguing possibility: we will only check into his ancestry if we begin to have reason to doubt, and then we can always find good reasons to reject his divine ancestry. That would mean, in practice, that we would have a default trust in the chief, but give it up and look for alternatives if we found any reason to suppose it unwise. This could be a very useful way to proceed within a traditional society. Generally the reason a belief is established is not that it has been proved to be so, but rather that it has proved useful to believe it. Beliefs are subject to evolutionary pressures just as much as genetic traits are.

the Platonic tradition, for instance, are 'esoteric,' that is, they hold that philosophy is necessary for those smart enough to question common edifying beliefs, but should not be revealed to others. It may be, of course, that it is not quite a lie, because they realize what we are up to (and we understand that they do), and see that the Lion God story is not to be taken quite literally, let us say, but also know that they won't understand a literal account what is going on, and that this story is a good guide for life, even if they don't know why it is.

The situation is actually rather like one that occurs frequently in the sciences. The most useful scientific beliefs often turn out not to be true, but still lead to true predictions. For instance, Newtonian mechanics is known to be false, since Einstein's work has been experimentally confirmed, but it is much easier to work with mathematically, and yields true predictions as long as we don't insist on unreasonable levels of precision, and the velocities involved are significantly lower than the speed of light. So we might act as though we believed it, recognizing these facts, even though we don't, but only believe that its predictions will be true (or close enough). Or we might actually believe it, and as long as we stay away from Relativistic situations, which may be easy to do, we will have no cause to regret this.

Now the effectiveness of Newtonian mechanics is due to its true predictions, not its effects on our emotional life, and so we can be aware that it is false and still use it effectively, knowing that its predictions will be true. *Some* of the predictions from the Lion God story contribute to its effectiveness, of course, the prediction that trusting him in matters of war is a good idea, say, but don't we have to *believe* in the Chief's ancestry if the story is to do its work even when we are following out its predictions? Perhaps the right emotional stance, *real* faith in the Chief's leadership, is needed, not a mere theoretical stance, and it cannot be produced simply by considering the reasons why it is good to have it—even we intelligent folks have to tell ourselves stories, talk ourselves into it, entertaining hopeful but groundless beliefs, to attain to the necessary attitude. Moreover, we value some attitudes for their own sake, for the kind of person they make us, or for the way they influence our behavior by affecting our emotional responses, not for the way they guide our behavior in rational calculation. It is a good thing to be optimistic and cheerful, regardless of the situation, both because it makes us more effective, and because it is *part* of a good life to be optimistic and cheerful, not merely useful for the attainment of a good life. Perhaps we ought, then, to hold certain edifying beliefs, for instance, that the world is basically friendly to us, that God exists, even *against* all the evidence. It is a bad idea to do philosophy, in that case, if it undermines such beliefs. But even this line of argument falls under philosophy—it attempts to show that it is rational to hold the world view it recommends, even if this rationality is established by purely practical considerations—and even this approach respects the truth and seeks out evidence for it,

even if it is not the truth of our beliefs, but the truth that some beliefs are beneficial to us even if false, so that we do well to tell ourselves stories to support them and protect them from scientific and philosophical criticism. The chief result of philosophy might be that we, or, if it is too late for us, others more innocent, should not do philosophy.

The situation in Philosophy, in that case, might be compared to the situation faced by a physician who knows that placebos are effective, and that the effect is lost if we don't really believe they are. There is a relatively minor problem if he is dealing with an inexpert patient—he has good reason to deceive the patient, and if it is objected that false beliefs in medicine often lead to bad outcomes, he can argue that only an expert physician with the good of his patient at heart has the right to deceive his patient in this way. The expert physician is in a position to judge whether a given false belief will be damaging to the patient or beneficial to him. He will advise his patient (without being too specific why) that she ought to believe her physician, not the quacks and other dangerous sorts out there spreading dangerous false beliefs, and that will keep the patient as safe as can be from medical harm. A philosopher, or a psychological therapist, or a statesman or economist, might take a similar approach.

But what should the physician do if required to treat herself for her own ailments? Perhaps she simply can't treat herself as effectively as she can others, and must forego the benefits of placebos. A second approach would be to hand herself over to another physician, if she can muster the necessary uncritical faith to make his placebos effective for her. But this seems to require that she deliberately refrain from asking questions and pursuing understanding, and even if the other physician is more expert than she is, it will be hard for her to escape the suspicion he has prescribed a placebo, a suspicion made reasonable by the very strategy she adopts. Perhaps, as a third approach, she could accept that there is something above medicine, religion and the ministrations of the priest or shaman, on which she can depend. This might be defended by the notion that the priest has access to supernatural powers that do not admit of scientific understanding or explanation. Some physicians, and some philosophers, do this. If it is objected that she ought to be critical of the claims of the priest if she is a proper physician, we might claim that medical expertise does not extend beyond the application of our understanding of the natural world to questions of health, and so does not apply to what the priest does. So the priest can give her placebos. Perhaps he will suggest prayer or pilgrimage.

But this might break down, if one takes it that a proper physician is committed to "naturalism," the view that the only source of information we have about the world are observation, natural science and the rational and observational procedures used to acquire it. This view has been associated with scientific medicine

from Ancient times. If we take this view of the physician, assigning a philosophical position to her, then it seems a rational physician will have difficulty carrying out our third strategy. The ironic advice, "Physician, heal thyself!" turns out to be ironic in ways one might not have suspected. And the philosopher, of course, will have a similar difficulty. "Philosopher, believe what it is best to believe!" poses the same ironic situation. Only if solid philosophical argument supports the view that the story about the supernatural world really is true, and that the messages from that world delivered to us by the priest are genuine, will the philosopher be allowed to muster faith to her aid.

And so we come round, with stronger arguments, to the remark made several paragraphs above: The chief result of philosophy might be that we, or, if it is too late for us, others more innocent, should not do philosophy.[7] Of course, it may be that doing philosophy is not a mistake, after all. Perhaps the placebo effect can be exploited without our believing the truth of the beneficial beliefs proposed. Perhaps the right attitudes can be attained in other, rationally acceptable ways. Perhaps we can get the necessary effects by telling ourselves stories, and integrating them into our lives in various ways, acting them out, while remaining skeptical or even unbelieving as to their truth. Perhaps it helps even atheists to pray. Plato seems to have thought this. He supported his view with the notion that the rational portion of ourselves uses the stories to shape the attitudes of our irrational parts. The psychological theory here, assuming parts of oneself that are somehow separated from other parts in their beliefs and attitudes, enables us to exploit the picture of telling false stories to others, and it seems that the theory is very likely true. If we are to be self-sufficient, then, we should do philosophy, and learn to tell ourselves false stories as needed. We certainly don't want to allow others the privilege of telling us the false stories we need, if we can help it. It gives much too big an opportunity to others to exploit us. In dealing with others' stories, we usually do well to suspect their motives, and even if the motives are pure, we can generally worry about the others' competence to judge what we need and how we should get it. If we are to be adults, in charge of our own lives, we must be philosophers.

What if the placebo effect cannot be exploited without our actually believing the beneficial lies proposed? Then, it seems, one is faced with a choice. We either act as children, exposing ourselves to the possibly harmful lies of those we trust in, or we act as adults, and protect ourselves as best we can from others's deceptions. This stark choice is referred to, of course, in the advice to become as little children, if we wish to be saved. If one becomes as a little child, of course, one *believes*, and so the notion that the belief works only

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[7]By the way, it must be pointed out that this could be true, and it would not prove that philosophy does not arrive at the truth when done right. Philosophy would undermine itself pragmatically, but not epistemologically.

because of its placebo effect is no longer one we can accept, any more than we can accept, if the placebo is to work, that it *is* a placebo. To explain why the belief works, it is necessary to contrive a whole world view, involving an after-life, heaven, a benevolent God, and all the rest. If the child is to be a scientist as well, he must insulate this religious picture from scientific discussion and criticism. He must also protect the areas where science is appropriate from invasion by the religious picture. The Earth goes around the Sun even if the *Bible* says otherwise, evolution is a good theory of the development and origins of life even if it does *seem* to imply that there is nothing supernatural about human beings, there is global warming due to human actions even if that means we must modify our allegiance to free market economics, and so on. One reason to make the choice to be an adult is perhaps the perception how extensive the story must become if it is to maintain its effectiveness within a rational person, and how easily it can undermine rational criticism and investigation where those things are necessary and appropriate.

Another, connected concern might be the perception that faith, if deliberately adopted by an adult, who thereby *becomes* as a little child, introduces a fundamental and unresolvable conflict into a rational person. We can't adopt faith deliberately, after recognizing the faith's groundlessness, without violating our rational nature. One who makes the choice to be a child in a responsible and reasonable way, like a good adult, will not want to scandalize the faithful, but he may well reveal his deeper motivations, pleading the rational necessity of faith passionately, if he is cornered by someone who sees through his dogmatism. This will be done in private, of course, among intellectuals who cannot bring themselves to ignore rationality and evidence. He will no doubt consider it something of a misfortune, if a noble one, to be an intellectual. Too much scientific rationality bars one from an easy child-like faith. It is a burden one must bear and overcome. So his first advice will be to trust, and not to think too much. Only if one cannot follow this advice should he turn to these convoluted philosophical reflections. But those who are to trust, he will propose in the end, should trust *him*, for someone must decide when to take a rational approach and when to have faith, and only a philosopher, one with the *true* faith, who recognizes the legitimate claims of science and reason can do that. He doesn't want the children to fall prey to heretics. If the children find themselves suspicious of this, and view it as a hypocritical justification of his claim to authority over them, the history of human exploitation of the innocent might surely justify the suspicion. In all of this I have been thinking of Christianity, of course, but these remarks apply equally well to political and economic, psychological and sociological ideologies, popular morality, nationalist and racist views, and so on. Faith may be necessary for a good life, but it also supports every form of human viciousness.

With that exploration of our options, what are the relevant facts bearing on our choice? Just what are the advantages of faith over philosophy? If there are advantages that make it preferable, can a philosopher enjoy faith without abandoning his commitment to rationality of belief, or is that psychologically impossible, or otherwise unacceptable? If he cannot, is the best choice to become as a little child as best one may, while recognizing adult responsibilities to care for those who really are little children, or is it to opt for adulthood, even if this involves a certain facing up to hard and depressing realities? All of these are questions that have been on the minds of philosophers from the beginning.

Why do people do philosophy, in view of the dangers it poses for the possibly false beliefs we perhaps must hold to live a good life at all? Well, however hostile we might be to philosophy, we *do* think that *our* world view is true, or that there is some good reason to believe it, and so we think it has some rational defense beyond the insistence that it shows bad character to believe otherwise. The disturbing thing about childlike faith is its naive trust that it has the right world view, without any rational effort or justification backing it up. Of course, these beliefs are usually taken to be obvious, and no one feels a need to work out a defense for the obvious. But if things just aren't going well for us despite the truth of our world view, or we meet someone who seems to be doing well despite a false world view, or we attempt to answer the arguments of a skeptic and find the task more difficult than we had supposed, then our beliefs may cease to be obvious to us, so that we find a need to *defend* our world view and way of life, perhaps even to change them. If we do not recognize such challenges, even after reaching adulthood, we are surely naive to a degree that suggests self-deception. If we do recognize them, and insist that nothing need be done, naivety has been transformed, it seems, into unreasoning dogmatism. Perforce we turn to philosophy, then. Philosophy does not begin with wonder, as Aristotle naively remarks.[8] Rather she is, like Athena, goddess of wisdom, a child of battle, springing into existence fully armed from the head of Zeus. We do philosophy when we *need* to. Where world views conflict, there only does philosophy begin.

2. PHILOSOPHY AS A SUBVERSION OF PHILOSOPHY

Philosophers constantly see the method of science before their eyes, and are irresistibly tempted to ask and answer in the way science does. This tendency is the real source of metaphysics, and leads the philosopher into complete darkness. I want to say here that it can never be our job to reduce anything

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[8]Aristotle, *Metaphysics* I 2.

> to anything, or to explain anything. Philosophy is 'purely descriptive.'
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> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Blue Book.*
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> Philosophy is the battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language.
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> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* I 109.

And having said all this, I have not yet said what I think the outcome of philosophy, done right, may be. Is it like astronomy, in which we eventually come to a much deeper understanding of what is actually going on, making observations and developing deep and complex theories that we can see account for the observations far better than alternative theories, so that we can be quite sure these theories are, at least approximately, right? As a matter of fact, it turns out to be very difficult to develop philosophical theories that are clearly superior to alternatives, and that provide a deep insight into underlying, hitherto unknown, processes. In most areas a number of conflicting theories have been proposed from early on, and philosophers seem unable to kill off any of them. Unlike the empirical sciences, Philosophy seems to make little progress. We might hope for things to turn around, since, after all, the sciences were in the same shape quite a while, until the developments of the last few centuries. But one has to suspect that something other than immaturity is wrong. If we pursue the matter through all its convolutions, we may begin to understand that most of what philosophers do to defend their ways of lives and themselves is in fact nonsense. The project is to establish certain things as undoubtedly true, forcing themselves on all men of reason, and to show, given those things, that *this* is the way one *must* live. If we can discover and prove the truth…

Here are some problems with this. First of all, we shall see that philosophical theories are developed as theories knowable in advance of all experience, generally because they must be true if there is to be any possibility of experiential knowledge of the world at all. For instance, perhaps there must be natural causal laws, for otherwise experience would be impossible. This way of approaching philosophical, or metaphysical, theories, as they are called, supposes that they explain something (how it is possible that…) and do so in the way that scientific theories do, so that Philosophy is a scientific discipline, but one that underlies science, as it were. But we will see that there have been skeptics from the beginning about this metaphysical enterprise. Isn't it, for one thing, viciously circular. "*This* must be true because otherwise we can't see why the things must be true that we see must be true." Really? Again, is it perhaps the case that experience plays an essential role in coming to know about the world (this sounds like good metaphysics), but then how can we know anything in

advance of experience? Aren't you really saying that we have to have faith that these things are so? And when one delves into the details of the arguments, as we shall, she finds that it may well be that *all* metaphysical arguments are bad ones, and metaphysical theories only pretend to explain. All of this we shall find crystallizing the thought of Immanuel Kant in the 18th century. And so there arises after Kant, in the 20th century, a sort of minimalist, anti-metaphysical movement in philosophy, decrying the pretense of philosophy to imitate the empirical sciences.

In a different vein, we can note that the desperate search for the right way to live, to prove it is right and enforce it against other ways of life, which lies behind this philosophical drive to become a form of physics, produces a great many serious problems. We fight wars, find moral and religious intolerance and persecution reasonable, ruin others' lives and our own, by insisting on the enormous importance of doing things *right*, that is, doing them our way. If we can prove it is right, it makes sense for us to force it on others for their own good. Simply attending to our own good, we hold much in contempt that perhaps we might admire, if we could only relax a bit. We see terrible problems everywhere when we might live in relative peace if we just didn't get so excited about things. We make ourselves miserable trying to be happy, and take ourselves so seriously we ruin our lives, becoming ridiculous as we do so. Philosophy of the metaphysical sort, that is, almost all philosophy as it has actually been practiced, contributes mightily to all of this, for those intellectual enough to be attracted to it. Through Philosophy we come to think we *know* that we are right to take the stance and hold the beliefs we do, and that those who do not see the point are fools or worse, and this certainty and freedom from doubt is poisonous. Philosophy is neither valid in its methods, nor does it contribute to a good life, but rather it seems to be a contrived, intellectually bankrupt and even dishonest support for narrow-minded intolerance, exploitive institutions, self-righteousness, and, most of the time, the prevailing religious, political and social ideologies within the culture in which it arises.

Recognition of this has led several times in the history of philosophy to anti-metaphysical movements. The Ancient Skeptics of Greece and Rome perhaps fell prey to the "scientific" method in the field, providing their own proofs so that we can know scientifically that one cannot in fact know anything at all scientifically. We also find Skeptics arising among the Indian thinkers, the Carvakans. In the West from early on, and in China, with the Sophists and Daoists, we find relativists, who hold that somehow every view is true, and knowable, instead of no view being knowable. The paradox is even more severe than the Skeptic's. Both these movements result in the rejection of Philosophy (and the religious and political doctrines it supports), at least metaphysical Philosophy, while searching for strategies to hold on to science, not as a body of knowable truth,

but as a pragmatically useful set of assumptions. In Buddhist philosophy, we find both these tendencies, but with attention first of all to the aim of philosophical investigation instead of its methods. Buddhists remained very much concerned to find the best way of life, and thought we could discover that we are of little if any importance in the grand scheme of things, that the very idea of "importance" is a little silly, that there is no one way of looking at things that will always guide us aright, no one set of rules or values that will always make the best of things. They find the secret to living well is to take it easy, and stop trying so hard to live well, that flexibility, improvisation and attention to circumstances, with a willingness to shift beliefs and goals as seems suitable, are more important than getting the overall plan in focus and forcing it through past the difficulties. Still, the position is paradoxical, of course, for Buddhists insist on the enormous importance of seeing that nothing is important, seek to save themselves by recognizing there is no Self to be saved, and so on. They do not suggest that there is nothing to be learned, nor do they insist that experience and knowledge have no bearing on how we should lead our lives, but they take it that the chief things to be learned are compassion, friendliness, peace and joyfulness, approaching things with as little Self in the game as possible. From intellectual culture, we can learn above all the necessity of facing up to what's so, and making the best of it, the virtue of honesty and truth, and the poisonous effects of self-deception.

It is my belief that these paradoxical movements have the right of it, and we shall see that they produce work of real intellectual content, in part in an attempt to defend the very paradoxicality of their proposals. As a matter of fact, Philosophy has most often been done badly, although it always contains within itself the seeds of its own reformation, else it ceases to be philosophy at all. It is turned to the defense of more or less rigid dogmas and plans, the enforcement of the right way, proof of *correct* religious and political views. The vast majority of Philosophical arguments are bad arguments. That is why they must be so clever. That does not mean Philosophy, as it occurs in our historical account, is not fascinating as an intellectual endeavor. But it is usually a perverse adaptation of rationality, in particular scientific rationality, to the aims of self-deception. We know what we want the world to be like, and where we want to fit into it, and so we set out to prove it is so. Metaphysics is a powerful tool for this, for the most obvious applications of scientific reasoning to the issues, which would result in modesty and skepticism about our place in the world, are trumped by the metaphysical proof that science *presupposes* God's existence, the nobility of the Rational Soul, or whatever. The great systems we will spend so much time on are fascinating monuments of human reason, great works of art, *and* great diseases of the mind that we may need to understand if we are ourselves to stay free from them. They are, I suspect, an inevitable accompaniment to science.

The Philosophers skeptical about Philosophy, the anti-metaphysicians, do produce defensible philosophical theories—though it must be admitted that the same sorts of bad arguments produced by other philosophers often turn up among them—it is important to the skeptic to be able to show that he is right, and the errors of traditional philosophy are tempting (and subtle) enough so that a critic of philosophy can still fall into them. One can, for instance, use metaphysics to establish one's skepticism, as David Hume does. We will find the best philosophical theories rather different from scientific theories. They tell us little of practical import, and fail entirely to uncover interesting new facts about what *really* underlies the world we live in. Nowadays they are sometimes called "minimalist" theories, for their function seems to be to clear up confusions, and very little more. For *more* we need science. Metaphysical theories, if true, seem always to be trivial. The whole point of such a minimalist theory seems to be to replace any substantive theories we might be tempted to advance. But such theories are a late development, and from the beginning the best Philosophers have been skeptical about and critical of their own enterprise, and its subornment by the ideologues, and their chief goal has been to undermine the monumental systems that fell so naturally into place very shortly after Philosophy began. Indeed, the chief job of Philosophy done well seems to be to immunize us against Philosophy done badly. But with all that, I think it is also the job of Philosophy done well to clarify for us how we ought to lead our lives, even if it must be admitted that if we did not know already, we'd have precious little chance of finding out. The rejection of metaphysics is not purely a matter of methodology, in my view, then, rather it contributes to leading a good life with clarity and aplomb.

And this provides reason of a philosophical sort to study the history of philosophy. Philosophy requires that we become self-conscious about our methods and presuppositions, and the sorts of errors we instinctually fall into, and so it makes a good deal of sense for a philosopher to rehearse old errors. Perhaps, if we were not ourselves so prone to them… but we *are*. The errors of philosophy are seductive, and only a careful analysis of a number of case histories will innoculate the student against them.

We might also have extra-philosophical reasons to regard the history of philosophy as valuable just as we have extra-scientific reasons to view the history of science as valuable. Philosophy is one of the things that make human beings and their culture what they are. Indeed, it seems to arise spontaneously whenever culture reaches a level where scientific thought becomes possible. And Philosophies often shape the culture of the educated classes to a considerable degree. We might hope to gain an understanding of the origins of the philosophies that dominate the scene today, simply because we think it valuable to understand our own culture,

and one understands nothing if one does not understand its history.[9] Or we might do it to gain an understanding of old and alien cultures through their own picture of their ideals and world views and the reasons they thought they had to hold them. Or we might note how people embrace so many different approaches to life, approaches that philosophers of the past have explored sympathetically, and perhaps understood and expressed better than their latter-day proponents, unconscious Stoics or Platonists though they be. There are few views so false that it is *never* useful to remind ourselves of them.

The history of philosophy, then, is the history of a determined attempt by the very smartest people we have to avoid self-deception, and we ignore such a history only at the peril of falling into self-deception ourselves. To grasp fully the difficulties of our situation we must understand philosophy and its history, we must review the long history of the human struggle against the bewitchment of reason. There is consolation in the difficult self-examination this entails, for the complex and modulated reaction to the world embodied in a mature philosophical theory is, among other things, a work of art, and the great systematic philosophers who explore and articulate these works are artists whose masterpieces have a beauty and an interest not unlike that of great literature. And eventually, I think, one does find a philosophical stance one can take. There is much to be observed and learned in these masterpieces, much to be admired, even if, in the end, they are case histories of a disease of reason.

3. INTELLIGENCE AND RATIONALITY

All men by nature desire to understand.

Aristotle, *Metaphysics* I 1, 980a22.

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[9]Some have argued that the defining function of philosophy is its intellectual elaboration and justification of a culture in its own terms, that is, of a way of life with its institutions and stories, values and life-patterns, passed down from one generation to the next in an ongoing community, using its own notions, good or bad, about what would justify adherence to it. So a history of philosophy is much more akin to the history of art, say, than the history of mathematics, and a philosophy's success is to be judged by its ability to express, and reconcile intellectually, all the contrasting tendencies of the culture that gives birth to it. That is not my picture of philosophy. I take it that philosophy is the pursuit of the truth about what the best way of life is. Done right, it might well condemn a culture, or some aspects of it, as unjustifiable. Of course, any given culture's philosophy is likely to start from the assumption that it has the best way, but this leads, usually, directly to philosophical criticisms of that culture, and a culture is as likely to produce philosophies critical of it as it is philosophies defending it. So socialism and fascism are indigenous as protest movements in a liberal, democratic Capitalism. At some point, indeed, philosophy should take on a certain independence of the popular and traditional culture in which it is embedded as geology, say, has. Philosophy should move from serving culture to forming it. I view philosophy here as something like medicine. There are culturally bound, traditional modes of medical treatment, and scientific medicine begins from these, but I would not regard medicine as fulfilling its nature simply through expressing the culture of which it is a part. Medicine seeks out truth, and has aims other than cultural formation and expression, and if we must abandon some beautiful cultural medical practices and theories for the sake of effectiveness in health care and truth in anatomy or physiology, that's what a physician does.

The practice of Philosophy presupposes an interest in justifications for our beliefs and practices, and this need for justification, more than anything else, separates human beings from the other animals. What is the source of this most human need?

It begins with intelligence.[10] An intelligent animal forms beliefs on the basis of evidence, mostly the evidence of its senses, and reassesses those beliefs when it obtains new evidence. Intelligence evolved to guide action, and intelligent animals depend on intelligent action to accomplish their aims. Intelligent action involves intention, and arises from our beliefs and our interest in doing something, not as an instinctual or automatic response. Goals and belief interact within a single system—beliefs shape our actions toward what we want, and our aims cannot guide our actions if we have no beliefs about how they might be secured. Belief must respond to the evidence, for if it is to guide action efficiently, it must reflect the world in which we act. An intelligent animal's beliefs will usually be true, or will at least generate useful true predictions, else a belief system directing behavior could not have established itself in the species.

But intelligence alone, even great intelligence, is insufficient by itself to create an interest in justification for our beliefs and actions. For this a certain sense of responsibility to others must be present, a sense how one looks to others and a concern to look good. It is the others before whom we first feel compelled to justify ourselves, and if we share a society with the others, there may be standards of justification conventionally agreed to within that society, as well as a language developed within it in which the whole drama of justification takes place.

Consider a cat. Surely it will be intelligent enough about matters that concern it, and it has beliefs, but does not have the language to express or discuss them. Its beliefs reveal themselves not in what it says, even to itself, but in what it does, in the way they shape its actions. Even though the cat has beliefs, and its beliefs are based on evidence, and so *can* be rationally justified, the cat would never in fact consider whether its beliefs are justified. In this, the cat is like ourselves most of the time. Usually we simply believe, perhaps on the evidence of the senses, without considering whether such a belief is justified, or even taking note of the fact that we have the belief. An explicit consideration whether we are justified rarely enters into the production

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[10]On intelligence and rationality see Bennett (1964). Also valuable is Frankfurt (1971), on the nature of rationality. For the assumption that rationality and intelligence are naturally occurring properties of animals whose origins are explicable through evolutionary theory, see, for instance, the well documented discussion of Robert Nozick (1993), Chapter 4. Goodenough (1990) provides an Anthropologist's analysis of the situation.

of belief.[11] We usually justify after the fact, when a concern arises whether we can expect others to credit our beliefs. Without some system of signs through which members of the society can inform one another when they think a belief reasonable or not, justification cannot occur.

Following the common practice among philosophers, I will call animals "rational" when they are reflective about their views, recognizing how they might look to others, and so capable of dealing with others' views of themselves, of justifying themselves before others. But why should they worry about such things? Rationality in this sense only evolves in social animals, who need others to cooperate with them if they are to accomplish their aims. They need to worry about how they look to others, and so they learn the trick of putting themselves in the place of others, and they worry how they look to themselves. It is important to a social animal that its companions trust it in various ways, and justification is often an attempt to defend or create that trust. In defending itself it must defer to standards of justification that others recognize. These may be conventional social standards, learned as the culture is learned, or they may be more fundamental than that, rooted in an ability, possessed even by more intelligent non-rational animals, to detect under some circumstances that their cognitive apparatus is not functioning well. More advanced practitioners of rationality may even formulate new standards and convince others to accept them, perhaps by extending old standards, or by pointing out how old standards fail and the new may rectify the situation. They may also question conventional standards peculiar to their society, and try to work from fundamental, purely rational, standards which should be recognized by all intelligent, social creatures, at least of their own species. The notion of rationality presupposes such standards, and assumes that agreement on matters of rational justification is obtainable, with enough work, even if the disputants come from completely disparate social backgrounds. These standards depend on the underlying common structure of reasoning and belief formation within human beings, a structure which is fundamentally reliable, under normal conditions, in producing true beliefs. First, we are concerned that we may have malfunctioned, and feel ourselves justified if our belief or action is not due to some sensory malfunction, error or oversight, to some failure of natural intelligence. Later, we may question

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[11]It does sometimes, of course. But when a justification produces belief, it is generally someone else's justification, which convinces us to rely on him. When we ourselves provide the justification, a change in belief is almost always due to doubts that arise when we find justification harder to come by than expected, and to further investigation undertaken as a result of those doubts. We often justify a belief, of course, by describing how we came to it, in the expectation that the process will be found to be a reliable producer of true beliefs, but we also do it in quite other ways, and always with an eye to what will or ought to convince our audience. Often, when pressed, we can't say just how we did arrive at a belief we hold quite firmly. All this must be qualified when we consider the way in which a group of scholars or scientists arrive at the truth cooperatively, through extensive discussion and investigation in which justification plays a considerable role. Such a joint search for the truth is a secondary phenomenon, and it depends on the individual's grasp of reality, arrived at without any consideration of justifications.

if even our best natural functioning might be improved upon, and construct new ways of functioning where our instincts fall short. Reason begins to reconstruct intelligence, and eventually itself.

This ability to modify one's intelligent functioning is the great advantage of rationality. In its youth a rational animal will try to anticipate the other's judgment, to play-act at being the other, to see itself as others see it, and so come to judge itself, criticize itself, change itself, keep itself up to the mark, and do all of this even when others are absent. If it is a member of a society, it will come to feel the urgency of the society's demands, even when alone and unobserved. It will become a member of its culture. Thus a rational animal learns to review and control its own behavior in a way impossible to mere intelligence. But the trick of self-criticism, once learned, is hard to keep within bounds. The animal may begin to review and criticize its society's standards as well. It might turn to the examination even of those standards that seem fundamental to intelligence and rationality itself.

It might also raise the question whether a goal or ideal is reasonable, or whether the standards used to decide that question are reasonable. It can try to answer such questions by considering what the world is like, and arguing that it is such that their ideals and standards are not only reasonable, but such as would be pursued by any reasonable person who understood the situation. Thus a rational animal comes to have a world view. It may even come round full circle, and try to justify the rules of belief-formation that in fact govern its thinking, or the world view that justifies adherence to the ideals and goals guiding its behavior. That is, it can, given time, and enough intelligence, raise all the questions of philosophy.

4. A SKETCH OF THE STORY

One of the most salient features of our culture is that there is so much bullshit.

Harry G. Frankfurt, "On Bullshit" in
The Importance of What We Care About

To teach how to live without certainty, and yet without being paralyzed by hesitation, is perhaps the chief thing that philosophy, in our age, can still do for those who study it.

Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*

The earliest philosophy, like the earliest science, was no doubt a matter of everyday thinking based on

everyday observations. For the most part one can make out what sense there is in doing the things people do, and philosophy only becomes self-conscious when common sense gets into difficulties, or the justifications provided by common sense seem emotionally unconvincing. Self-conscious philosophy first arose in opposition to mythology. When common sense fails in justifying our way of life, often the most urgent thing to deal with is the emotional issue, to maintain or restore morale and social cohesion.[12] Justification for our way of life is not a mere intellectual game—it is necessary for survival. So when a world view provides convincing justification, making our lives seem reasonable and meaningful, but is threatened with contrary evidence, it might survive, if it can be made more or less immune to possible refutation, while still doing its work. Of course, wishful thinking is almost always a part of any thinking at all, and we assume what we'd like to be true is true as long as we have no very good reason not to.[13] When we do begin to have a good reason not to, it may be easier, much easier, to hold on to the old views than it is to form effective new ones. Wishful thinking begins to take on the character of self-delusion, and if we defend our collective wishful thinking from modification by exempting it somehow from rational testing, it takes on the character of myth. Myth is accepted because it justifies our way of life, not because the evidence supports it. But the formation of a mythical world view *begins* from beliefs with evidence behind them that happen to "make sense" of the world, emotionally speaking. Myth begins life as plausible hypothesis. When the hypothesis comes under pressure, the character of our thinking gradually changes, until we begin to explain counter-evidence away, rather than explaining, and the survival of the myth comes to depend on how emotionally satisfying it is, not on how well it explains what we observe. Our myths are given a special status that protects them from rational criticism. The philosopher turns away from this strategy, and, determined to reject beliefs that she has good reason to think are false, attempts to find a justification for a way of life that she can honestly accept, given the evidence. She may have to espouse a different way of life than the usual to pull this off, one involving rather different emotional defenses, and she may have to espouse rather different beliefs, but she is open to these changes as long as she can find a way of life that is *rationally* defensible.

A good deal of the defense of myth consists in avoidance. Myth is defended in part by the idea, which became established early in human thought, that it is good not to question too sharply the justification of our

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[12]One might think that reform of our way of life would be needed, and it might be, if that can make it justifiable. But often the crisis is one of "meaning," and reform may be quite irrelevant to dealing with a sense that our life just doesn't have meaning.

[13]In this way one avoids wasting time and resources, and taking risks, investigating matters that don't need investigation. This is a matter of some importance.

world view, that here faith, setting aside rational criticism, is a virtue, or a sign of it, however much it might elsewhere be a fault. Wherever it is accepted that faith is a virtue, of course, there are those cynical enough to take advantage of it, or uncritical enough to accept faith too easily, since they see no reason why *any* belief they regard as important should be subjected to rational examination. But that does not mean that there cannot be a valid philosophical defense of faith known to the wise, and the wise would no doubt advise most people to avoid thinking about it—just have faith. They would set up a protective aura around myth—one does not criticize it in the way one might criticize more ordinary beliefs. If someone cannot help but be critical of faith, then the wise will take them aside for a private discussion of the reasons why they should not raise questions in public even if their doubts are right.

The central tenet of myth in Ancient times was that the world is controlled by persons who can be influenced in the same way other members of our own society are influenced. That assumption is probably a natural fallout of our built-in tendency as social beings to read things in personal and social terms. So myth arises from naturally formed initial assumptions about the world, when an intellectual elite begins to defend those assumptions by finding ways to avoid subjecting them to ordinary rational criticism. One natural road to myth is the use of stories forming our world view in art and ritual to shape our emotional responses, a practice characteristic of, but certainly not restricted to, religion. The artistic elaboration of the story requires a certain willingness to fill in convincing details that we cannot really know are correct, and a culture becomes attached to many of these details, so that a story that we know at best to be true in its broad outlines becomes part of our cultural heritage and our world view. Carelessness about the truth of the details, though, as every historian knows, fosters a cavalier attitude towards truth in general. After a while the important thing becomes its agreement with the tradition, not the question whether it is supported by evidence or not, and there seems to be little point exploring just what parts of the myth we have real reason to believe, and what parts were made up for artistic effect. Indeed, it seems rude, anti-social, and impious.

That is not to say that these mythological world views were not considered true, at least by most people, or not considered to justify the emotions, attitudes, and practices that they did *because* they were true. The connection between justification and the truth of justifying stories was too obvious for myth to have any effect unless people treated it "as though it were true." But *really* verifying the truth of a myth was not something to be accomplished easily, or perhaps at all. Someone might rely on revelation in dreams or trance, and there was always tradition, but myths were elaborated not by working out the details of explanatory schemes to match observations more closely, but through the art, story-telling and ritual by which they were

brought to bear on emotional and practical life. They took whatever shape helped them form our attitudes to the world most effectively and usefully. Often, of course, such artistic and ritualistic elaboration would produce its own verification in the dreams and revelations of believers.

Mythology is most important in justifying the social and political arrangements under which people live, and fostering a certain optimism in the face of inevitable and irremediable evils that might well cast us into despair. When loss of a fundamental trust in the world, or in our social order and other human beings, threatens us, collective wishful thinking answers the threat. All along, no doubt, some believed in facing up to reality and understood the deliberate avoidance of evidential difficulties that lay behind their mythology. They may have trusted that our ordinary means of discovering that reality could be relied on, and that reality, once discovered, would justify us in our ordinary and necessary optimism without resort to fantasy. Or they might have found other means for dealing with despair and depression. But most people saw no reason to question reassuring myth so closely, and so it sprang up where needed in the gaps in our ordinary knowledge of the world. The less we know, the easier it is to construct a picture of the world that will meet our emotional needs.

Myth is closely related to what is crudely called bullshit. Bull (there seems to be no more polite term with quite the same meaning) is what we say, to ourselves and others, when concerned with the impact of what is said more than its truth. We say what sounds right in this social environment, in the situation, to these people, and we take it we are speaking well as long as it gets approval, whether or not it is true or meaningful, whether or not we intend to follow up on it, acting as if we really believed it. If our bull is subjected to examination to see if it is true or sincere, we find ways to avoid such examination, denigrating the ability of people to find such things out, or pointing out that "everyone thinks so" or "it's common sense," or taking exception that our sincerity might be questioned, or making some other maneuver to cut short the investigative process. A large proportion of our everyday discussion is bull. We go on about things we know nothing about, we support one another's view of things simply to be supportive, or at least not to be rude, and we second one another's emotional reconstructions of reality. Much of what we relate we make up or alter so that it will be interesting to the listener. Myth, like bull, is the socially acceptable thing, and one objection to criticizing it is that it would be socially unacceptable, rude, inconsiderate, depraved, or something of a betrayal of one's social group, to do so. Truth is irrelevant here. People often repeat the myths without acting as if they *really* believe them. It is even socially unacceptable to consider too closely how we ought to act if the myths are true,

or whether we are in fact acting that way.[14] We are expected to take it seriously enough not to criticize it, and to allow it to shape our emotions, but not so seriously as to follow out its consequences in action.[15]

Myth is, notoriously, related to neurotic and psychotic thinking. Indeed, one might, like Freud, view neurotic and psychotic beliefs as a private mythology in opposition to the 'reality principle' that governs the 'ego'. Myth comes from the 'superego' or the 'id'. Religiosity (that is to say, excessive reliance on mythical thinking) and its hostility to the reality principle is often characteristic of psychologically maladjusted people, and the line between a prophet and a madman, a neurotic and a saint, can be difficult to draw. To say all this is provocative, and rather rude, of course. Among Freud's associates, Carl Jung developed a brief for myth, and modern defenders of religion often insist on the importance of myth in our world view, suggesting that science and reality are rather overrated, that mythical thinking is the best way to deal with our emotional problems, and that myth has "its own truth."[16] This sort of thing constitutes a philosophical defense of myth. The defenders of myth view any suggestion that it be assessed for its truth, and that it ignores or flies in the face of the evidence, as imperceptive and intolerant.[17]

Old and established forms of mythological thinking repeatedly come into conflict with new political and social realities as human culture develops, demanding new justifications. Sooner or later, someone facing such a periodic crisis of justification was bound to try 'scientific' account of things to justify the new arrangements, rather than new mythology. Such an account would be rooted largely in our ordinary ways of investigating (reflecting, no doubt, an excessive optimism about how effective those ordinary ways are), and would accompany a natural critique of the older mythology that was being discarded, on the basis of evidence.

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[14]Often such socially unacceptable behavior is assigned to the Fool, in the guise, perhaps, of a Minister, Priest or Rabbi, or simply of a locally recognized saint, who is permitted, and even expected, to raise all these criticisms. But this is on the condition that one in that role need not be taken too seriously, because he is a fool, or because he is committed to higher ideals of behavior than the rest of us are, and somehow protects us from the consequences of not meeting those higher standards by intervening with the powers that be on our behalf. Philosophers are generally cast in the role of the Fool.

[15]Mark Twain tells a story of a gunman present at a church meeting, who offered to kill anyone who professed the Faith, so that they could die a martyr and be assured of heaven. No one took him up on his offer, of course.

[16]"Its own truth" – that is, standards by which it is to be judged *other* than truth or evidence, but which stand in the place of truth and evidence. If it meets those standards it is, of course, reasonable to believe it. An attempt to express this truth that is in the myth in clear and literal terms so that it can be assessed is generally resisted, of course. The idea is to accept the myth without worrying too much about precisely what it means or what follows from it.

[17]A critic of any given myth, of course, is often someone with a different myth to peddle, and so ordinary folk often see the attempt of a philosopher to undermine mythological thinking as simply the propaganda of one more saintly fool for his own mythical world view. *Practical* people don't deal with such matters, but give them lip service. Their bullshit is self-aware, and in the end they have a more or less open contempt for the fool who takes it too seriously, even though bullshit requires them to honor such people.

If done honestly, it would recognize the uncertainty of our ordinary ways of knowing, and substitute for mythological dogmatism a provisional, evolving set of beliefs. This set of beliefs would not only be open to modification in the face of rational criticism, but might also be joined with the institution of continual investigation intended to produce such criticism if it could be found. Thus the new point of view could claim to subject itself to tests the old mythology could not pass. Such an approach might be peculiarly suitable to a relatively fluid situation in which a good deal of social experimentation was taking place in response to new economic and technological developments. A scientific world view could adapt to changing times more readily than a mythological world view could.

This is precisely what happened in Greece and China in the 6th century BCE, and perhaps somewhat earlier in India, though it was in Greece that the scientific tradition was far and away most successful and influential. In all three cases, philosophical argument emerged, justifying trust in our ordinary ways of knowing, and undermining trust in divine revelation and tradition. The new science intended to take the place of the mythological world view in reassuring us in our necessary trust in existing social and political arrangements, and so philosophy filled in the arguments carrying us from the scientific world view to the needed conclusions about the rationality of our way of life. Philosophy also took on the task of showing that a basic trust in the world was justifiable, for if myth could not be used to address the problem of evil, then reason had to do it. Science evolved materialistic accounts of the world in Atomism and Stoicism, but the mainstream held to one variation or another of the old view that persons and minds are fundamental in the world, holding to a dualism of mind and body, sometimes even a pure idealism, and, in Aristotle, to a world without an explicit supernatural element modeled above all on biology as the fundamental science rather than physics. Straightening out the relationships between biological, physical and mental phenomena, and determining which were most fundamental, became one of the major projects of Early Modern science and philosophy from the 16th century right to the present. These options all had serious bearing on the fortunes of philosophy in accounting for the possibility of knowledge. Plato's assumption that the world is fundamentally intelligible because it is formed first of all by mind, and its reliance, in the end, on a priori argument was pitted against the empiricism of Aristotle and the Atomists, tracking knowledge to observation and the senses. There resulted a tangle of metaphysical/epistemological systems, all of them supposing that something was the real fundamental stuff of the world from which all the rest arose and is to be understood, whether it be the living substantial forms of Aristotle, the Forms and Mind of the Platonists, or the physical Atoms of the Epicureans. The same options persisted, taking on new names and new sophistication, through the Middle Ages and

Renaissance, and into the "Modern" period from the mid-16th to the end of the 19th century.

But it all miscarried. In all three philosophical-scientific traditions, Indian, Chinese and European, a circularity in reason's self-justification became apparent early on, and stood as a central problem ever after. To justify our ordinary ways of knowing, one had to presuppose the effectiveness of those ways of knowing in order to come to the supposed knowledge that they were effective. In response, "Metaphysical" argument was hit upon. Metaphysics is based on a special kind of argument peculiar to philosophy, to the effect that *certain assumptions have to be true of the world if it is to be spoken of, experienced, or understood at all, and so it is surely rational to make those assumptions*. This looks like wishful thinking, but nothing else was available in practice, and such argumentation became central to Philosophy, and distinguished it from the sciences, which simply assumed the effectiveness of reason without seeking proof of it, since it had other matters to tend to. Metaphysics resembles mythology in the impenetrable defenses it erects against empirical refutation. The proponents of myth, seeing an opportunity, turned the criticisms scientific philosophy presented against myth back against science itself, and used the new metaphysical moves to support a religious world-view. After all, the best way to support optimism about the possibility of our knowing about the world may be to suppose that the world (or whatever is behind it) is itself rational, intelligent, and devoted to the good. That leads directly to the old mythological assumption of a God or gods. Reliance on the natural can only be justified, one might think, by reference to the supernatural. Reliance on reason can only be justified if we have faith in reason, and that requires faith in God. In a less constructive mood, Skeptics pointed out that the scientist's reliance on human cognitive abilities seemed just as unjustifiable in principle as the mythographer's reliance on tradition and revelation, so that no justified belief was to be found either place. The proponent of myth, of course,¹⁸ would point to the skeptic as a terrible example of the outcome of scientifically oriented philosophy.

The notion of god evolved to take advantage of this new style of argument, and new, philosophically informed, religious metaphysical systems were developed, complete with metaphysical proofs of God's existence.¹⁹ Thus philosophy came to be divided in its allegiance. There were philosophers allied to naturalism and science, and philosophers allied to a supernaturalist world view with much of the same content that had been present in myth. And as the support for the scientific impulse waned with changing political realities—the

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¹⁸Etienne Gilson, for instance.

¹⁹That is, demonstrations that if there is no God we cannot understand the world or form any justified beliefs concerning it.

decline of the more or less democratic city-state and the reestablishment of autocratic government with the rise of empires—new mythological religions emerged to resume the task of justifying social and political arrangements, and to address the problem of evil. The old polytheistic mythologies acquired philosophical support in such movements as Neoplatonism and the Indian Vedantic philosophies allied with Hindu orthodoxy. New, monotheistic religions arose within the context of empires, no longer restricted to a single culture, but universal and suited to bring the many cultures combined within these empires together. These universal religions tended to be competitive with and intolerant of each other, each tied to the fortunes of the particular empire that adopted it, and philosophers were recruited for the ensuing warfare of faiths, each attempting to prove his own religion correct and the others false. Thus arose the potent mixtures of mythology and philosophy that characterize the great universal religions of the last two millennia, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, and their less successful brethren, Gnosticism, Mazdaism, and the rest. Each religion now supported a philosophical wing purporting to provide rational justification for its mythology, supplementing tradition and revelation with reason. If the reason they used was metaphysical reason, and rather far removed from our ordinary, empirical ways of knowing, it could be pointed out that the scientist too had to resort to such reasoning in order to establish the rationality of trusting our ordinary, empirical ways of knowing. Indeed, the general strategy was to combine the justifications for science and religious belief in the same system.[20]

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[20]Zeller's more or less Hegelian view of the course of Ancient Philosophy actually captures my picture of developments here rather neatly. "The Spirit, we might say, is, during the first stage of Greek thought, immediately present to itself in the natural object; in the second it separates itself from the natural object, that it may attain a higher truth in the thought of the super-sensible object; and in the third it asserts itself in its subjectivity, in opposition to the object, as supreme and unconditioned. The stand-point, however, of the Greek world is thereby abandoned, while at the same time no deeper reconciliation of the opposing elements is possible on Greek soil. Thought being thus separated from the actual, loses its content, and becomes involved in a contradiction, for it maintains subjectivity to be the final and highest form of being, and yet opposes to it the Absolute in unattainable transcendency. To this contradiction Greek Philosophy ultimately succumbed," Zeller (1881) 183. Let me translate this, as I think it brilliantly insightful, though, of course, I don't think the contradiction to which Greek Philosophy succumbed in fact *has* a resolution, or needs one, since one can avoid making the metaphysical moves that lead to it in the first place. My proposal is not to follow the metaphysical line of thought out to its final end, since this can't be done, but not to start in the first place. Putting it in my terms: among the Presocratics one finds at first natural science, and then in the Pythagoreans, Parmenides and after one finds attention turned to the super-sensible, known only by reason. But this shift does not abandon the fundamental reality of the sensible, natural object of investigation. Even in Plato, we find that the purely intelligible can be understood only through its realization among sensibles participating in the Good, i.e. in Plato's *Timaeaus*. In the third phase, the unintelligible aspects of the sensible are declared unreal, and all is derived from the One = the absolute, and is made concrete only as thought, non-being making no contribution to the reality of the world, beyond providing a limit to it. This is the view of Plotinus and Neoplatonism. The contradiction here is not resolved, but rather the viewpoint remains one-sidedly Idealistic. In my picture, even Plato held on to the view that the Good can exist only in conjunction with its participants in the natural world, and found, somehow, at the limits of intelligibility, a positive contribution to reality from the unintelligible sensible. To be fair, the Absolute is not conceived quite completely in distinction from the natural world even in Plotinus, and so he does not view the world as created from nothing, but as evolving from the One's awareness of itself. Christianity, with its doctrine of creation, finally makes the break complete, and suffers the consequences of the contradiction by falling into conflict with natural science, presenting, not an extension of or development from the scientific way of knowing, but an

Traditionalists, of course, objected to philosophers as untrustworthy allies, and some aimed to abandon rationalist pretensions—sometimes providing rational proofs that rationality was not the way to go—basing their religion purely on faith or the authority of supernatural revelation. The problem of reconciling faith and reason was defined. One new religion, Buddhism, went quite another way in some of its more central movements of thought, adopting the scientific, naturalistic approach wholesale in attacking the problem of evil, developing an atheistic view, and principled reasons to reject metaphysical argument in general, and giving over mythology except as a means of guiding those incapable of understanding the truth in its own terms. But this form of thought was esoteric, that is, it was accepted only by the educated religious specialist, the monk, and perhaps rather an advanced and well-read monk at that, and popular Buddhism held on to the same mythologies found elsewhere. Science, as an independent effort, failed to establish itself in Buddhist countries, leaving the naturalistic Buddhist without a natural ally outside his own tradition. In the West, where philosophy, tied to the fortunes of Western science, had its future, metaphysics and theism won out at first, and by the 1st century CE most philosophy was religious philosophy, with a secondary application to ethical and political concerns—philosophical reason became a handmaid to theology.

Philosophy within these new religious traditions remained, for the most part, connected to science, and in at least some of its branches continued to explore the nature of and justification for our ordinary ways of knowing, even if it saw its chief purpose as providing rationalized mythology in the guise of religious metaphysics. Logic was a branch of philosophy, and in the West, the notion maintained itself that a non-mythological justification for at least a certain degree of social organization and ethical restraint could be developed—following the lines of argument established by Aristotle and others in the heyday of philosophy before it had been absorbed into the new religions. The memory of those days of philosophical independence from religion was never lost in the West, and the religiously conservative continued to be uneasy with the alliance of faith and reason. They were right to be uneasy, for with the Scientific Revolution beginning in the 16th century, philosophy started to break away. Natural science, with its enormous successes, became powerfully influential intellectually, and the project of a purely scientific defense of our way of life became once more an acceptable option to many of the intellectual elite. Metaphysics and the problem of circularity

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alternative way of knowing, to get at the absolute. I think this crisis becomes fully self-conscious in Kant, and it is only resolved by the abandonment of metaphysics and a return to naturalism, straight up, made possible by evolutionary theory in biology, and other modern breakthroughs in logic and the foundations of mathematics. The drive to postulate the absolute in the first place must be diagnosed and cured, so that the contradiction never arises.

in justification was left to the technical part of philosophy, with the understanding that nothing bearing on the other sciences or on our practical affairs in the world came out of that investigation. Philosophers without allegiance to the mythology of monotheism, such as David Hume and Spinoza, were to be found, and in response to them other philosophers, such as Kant and Leibniz, worked hard to defend a dual loyalty to the new science and the old religious world view.

A somewhat more detailed review of these events is in order. In the Middle Ages Platonic metaphysics at first established itself after the recovery of learning, culminating in the work of Anselm in the 11th century. But the mismatch between the Idealism of later Platonism and the Supernaturalism of Christian thought created continuing difficulties. Detailed investigations in logic and philosophy of language, however, began to undermine this Platonic synthesis (the "problem of universals"), and with the rediscovery of Aristotle and the work of Abelard in the 12th century, things were shaken, and then settled into the 13th century views of Aquinas and other "Moderate Realists," who, for the moment, made Aristotle, Neoplatonism, and Christianity live together. But the new picture of things remained highly vulnerable to criticism from philosophy of language, and with Ockham and Terminism an Empiricist, Nominalistic form of Aristotelianism became established as a permanent minority view, and a thorn in the side of more conservative theologians. Now Nominalism in the 14th and 15th century did not intend to abandon the alliance with religion. Rather, it came to be associated with an attempt to purify religion of its connection to philosophy, making it a matter of faith alone, and abandoning the joint epistemology for theology and natural science that had been formed by the Moderate Realists. With the Protestant Reformation and the Scientific Revolution, this Empiricism came into its own in the work of Locke and Hume, as it freed itself from Aristotelian connections, and found its opponent in the Platonic metaphysics of the Rationalists, Descartes and Leibniz. Kant, at the end of the 18th century, recognized that Empiricism was winning the fight, and made a brilliant effort to get the Medieval Nominalism to work, with two methodologies, one for theology and the other for the sciences, presupposing an underlying Idealist theology to give an account of the world deeper and more fundamental than natural science. But this quickly fell back into a purer Platonism in the later German Idealists, now divested of its duties to Christianity, and supporting instead an esoteric philosophy for which Christianity might be considered a mythical expression. Not surprisingly, Christianity survived, and the German Idealism, after taking on a number of secular forms, including Marxism, did not. With the end of the 19th century, the problems inherent in the attempt at a consistent Empiricism led finally to a serious consideration that the problem was not to be found in doing metaphysics right, but in not doing it at all. Empiricism was followed by various attempts to root up

metaphysics, to understand where it was coming from, taking different shapes in Continental philosophy and Analytic philosophy. Some, accepting the claim of religious philosophers that a world without God could not be understood, rejected "scientism" as well as religion. A number of other schools of philosophy rejecting mythology and relying entirely on science also become established, and, with the success of Western science and the development of its present enormous prestige, the religious philosophers now seem to be fighting an increasingly desperate rear-guard action, no longer attempting to prove their mythologies through dogmatic metaphysics, but hoping instead simply to make room for the possibility that it may be rational to have religious faith without support from, or even in the teeth of, the evidence.

Philosophy in the West in the last hundred and fifty years or more has been working through this conflict between religion and science from a much more sophisticated take on the notion of ultimate reality and the relations between psychological, biological and physical phenomena. Many philosophers were concerned with purifying philosophy of the old mythological associations, and whatever mistakes in metaphysical investigation contributed to those associations. Some philosophers see philosophy as essentially critical, a clearing of the fields so we can engage in science, everyday political and ethical discussion, and other such endeavors without being bothered by mythology or philosophy and its metaphysical questions, either one. Increasingly, though, this view of the matter seems old-fashioned, as philosophers recognize it is their job, not the scientist's, to lay out the justification for a way of life, even if the scientist must provide the materials for the world view from which such a justification is developed. "Conceptual Analysis," conceived in a number of different ways, and various techniques of "criticism" have replaced A Priori metaphysical argumentation. The A Priori survives, if at all, only in our accounts of mathematical and logical knowledge. The more fundamental normative issues, separated with ever increasing sophistication from factual issues, have become the reserve of philosophy, and the autonomy of philosophical ethics, aesthetics and the philosophical side of political and economic thought is now widely accepted. Again, logic and 'philosophy of science' is generally recognized as a legitimate discipline, and along with this, the philosophical investigation of language and certain residual topics in metaphysics, above all the nature of necessity and possibility, and the relations between the very different descriptions of what appear to be the same events in psychology and physics, biology and chemistry. Some of us hope no longer do metaphysics, but we can only keep ourselves from doing it by understanding it and its temptations better than the average metaphysician does. These investigations have become largely dissociated from the support of religious belief, and "minimalist" theories without claims to explanatory or justificatory power, even for everyday practices or the empirical sciences, have been introduced in most of

them, though the majority view still leans toward more substantive theories, at least in support of a scientific world view.

It is perhaps just beginning to become evident that philosophy may attempt to take over the aims of religion as well, despite the fact that philosophers, in their loyalty to the scientific world view, have often in the past century or so repudiated any attempt to deal with religious issues and rejected religious aims entirely. The discovery of Buddhism in the West has produced the recognition that at least some religious questions can be raised and answered outside any mythological framework, depending on a purely philosophical metaphysics, or rather the criticism of it, rejecting constructive metaphysics entirely. This seems to be leading to the development of a strictly philosophical treatment of problems concerning the meaning of life and our reconciliation to evil. This is a task that scientific psychology has also undertaken, and it is psychology (and perhaps evolutionary biology) that provides the center of the world view from which many philosophers are developing their non-mythological replies to these religious concerns today.

Philosophy is the attempt to provide a rational justification of a way of life, developing it from a rationally acceptable world view. It has its own function, distinguishing it from other sciences, and the history of the field is the history how it has come to serve that function better over time. Philosophy is, in the end, the natural enemy of mythological religion, which involves a retreat from reality, and a rejection of the competence of our natural ways of knowing, or else an underestimation how able human beings are at dealing with reality and putting together a meaningful life even in a world that may seem hostile to the endeavor. Philosophy is a rational discipline, and rationality is a natural phenomenon, our natural way of knowing, and so philosophy assumes that our natural ways of knowing are what we have to work with, even if it also tries to do its best to establish the rationality of relying on them. Very broadly indeed, the central conclusions of philosophy at present are that our trust in our natural ways of knowing is rationally justifiable, a trust in supernatural ways of knowing is not, and our trust that a life worth the trouble can be led by us as we are, in the world as it is and within a human community, is. An outline of the sort of life worth the trouble includes ethical, social and aesthetic values, the pursuit of knowledge and "scientific method," perhaps liberal democracy or democratic socialism in politics, and a certain attitude making one at home in the world. Above all, a commitment to philosophy presupposes that the best sort of life is one that faces up to reality as we can know it, and lives in its midst, without resorting to fantasy or deliberately turning away from recognition of the truth, and philosophy seems to be able to defend the rationality of this commitment.

Having said all this (and I recognize how biased it is toward my own conclusions in philosophy), I

should note that right from the beginning many philosophers had a certain hesitation about metaphysics, which led to a dissident style of philosophy, which has clarified itself over time, and bids (I hope) now to dominate the field. The trick here is one more level of introspection, or reflexive thinking. Metaphysics is an attempt to elucidate what things must be like if they are to be knowable at all. Thus it seems to be non-empirical because it comes before the empirical. Any natural explanation must, it seems, presuppose the correct metaphysical world view. But metaphysical theories continue to work rather like empirical, natural theories. They make assumptions about what things there are, how they are combined, often they proceed not only constructively, but historically, detailing the only possible road of development of thought, particularly after Hegel. If we try to summarize broadly the nature of a metaphysical theory, asking what it is that it explains, it seems it must explain *how it is possible that there should be knowledge and experience of a world*. Now that question turns out to be rather slippery. Do we mean to ask how natural cognitive systems arise among animals? Then the theory of evolution would seem to offer some hope of explanation. But any metaphysician will hasten to point out the error here. Perhaps she will say that it is the possibility of knowledge and experience in general, not the possibility of the particular sort of knowledge and experience that is evinced in animals, that is at issue in metaphysics. If we mix up the two, we are in danger of "psychologizing" metaphysics, turning it into an empirical natural theory of minds as we observe them to be naturally. Particularly after Kant metaphysicians became very alive to the danger here. But if that is not what we want to do, what *do* we want to do? Apparently it is not the possibility of knowledge and experience of the world *given the structure of the world*, that is our target in metaphysics. That is cognitive or evolutionary psychology, let us say, a natural science.

So it must be the possibility of knowledge and experience of the world *logically speaking*. But here too, there are difficulties, for then metaphysics would look like a series of simple logical deductions from the definitions of "knowledge and experience of the world." Whatever follows from "there is knowledge and experience of the world" metaphysically would turn out to be logically already contained in the statement, so that for instance, "there is a world," would follow, as well as "something knows and experiences the world," "something is known," therefore "something is true," and so on. All of metaphysics should be obvious. But this raises the issue what these obvious statements mean (and brings us to the philosophical preoccupations of early 20th century "analysis"). If they are really obvious, they seem to tell us nothing at all. There is a world. Sure, but what follows from that? Not that this or that or the other item is found in the world, nor that natural laws of one or another sort are followed in it… and so on. Of course, our need for emotional support may distort our thinking so that we think somehow if there is a world, there must be a God, but always such arguments

are going to turn out mistaken. One cannot (as Norman Malcolm once remarked in my hearing) get an "aha!" from an "oh, hum," or at least not logically speaking. The minute we arrive at anything even resembling a substantive result from metaphysical argument beginning with what is obvious, we can be sure a mistake has been made. As Aristotle says of Melissus, it is easy enough to answer his arguments—one needs only to note at the right spot that *that* does not follow, and *this* is not true, at least not in any sense useful to Melissus. This might lead us to some version of the notion that if any remark is to *mean* something, it must be possible that it is false, so that logical and metaphysical truths are all of them simply tautological, and uninformative. Once one has tried to state this position, one begins to doubt it, and this led many thinkers in the later 20th century to the view that saying as much as this is once more a matter of falling into metaphysics. One must refrain from saying anything at all here, to avoid nonsense. That view has somewhat refined itself (moving, say, from Wittgenstein to Paul Horwitz) in the view that any correct theory of truth, meaning, and the like, will turn out to be a minimalist theory, which is formally true, as it were, but contains no information at all about the world. Such theories suggest that talk about truth, the World, Reality, Possibility, and the like are in fact eliminable from our language without interfering with our ability to do science and talk about any particular truth or reality. In effect, such words are tricks for a completely universal generalization. I can use "true" to refer to *all* the things that are true, without listing these things. Sometimes, we now know from modern mathematical logic, that attempt to refer to the totality of things will generate contradictions, and must not be allowed, but it is useful to generalize this way as long as we don't press the matter very hard. It is not so useful that we should allow such generalizations in any empirical theory, or to assume that they somehow must be presupposed to justify such theories. Science can get along quite nicely without them, and does not stand in need of justification, at least of this sort. The clue that it does not stand in need (if common sense is absent) is that any such attempt leads to paradox and contradiction the minute we try to pretend we are really saying something.

Now a defender of metaphysics might well point out that this, the last word in anti-metaphysical philosophy for the moment, itself borders on incoherence. To deny metaphysics is to do metaphysics, and so to undermine one's own denial, he might say. But the anti-metaphysicians, or "minimalists" in metaphysics, if we want to call them that, are aware of the difficulty and hope eventually to come to a coherent (though no doubt rather paradoxical) account of what they are up to that will resolve it. They are aware how easy it is to start talking nonsense, but think that it *can* be avoided, and hope eventually to state their views (or non-views) without talking nonsense. There are a lot of questions, no doubt, that they will not answer, but that is because,

in their view, any answer to such questions must be nonsense.

What is the future of philosophy? If the developing alliance of philosophy with natural science becomes permanent, and a reversion to the religious alliance or an alliance with political or some other kind of ideology does not occur, then philosophers have plenty of useful work to do, even if the anti-metaphysicans are right. They can pursue naturalistically based ethics and political philosophy, and they can study the nature of the good in all its aspects, and of rationality in action, belief, and every other area of life. They can explore, of course, the philosophy of the empirical sciences, of mathematics, and general epistemology, as well as philosophy of language and logic (developing "minimalist" theories of truth and meaning as a replacement for metaphysics). Much of aesthetics remains viable (and much of it was no doubt always nonsense), and the phenomena of popular culture, sports and games seem increasingly amenable to philosophical investigation. More interesting, a philosophical replacement for supernatural religion, perhaps parallel to Buddhism, might be developed, exploring why it is not rational to despair, and what the rational response to the perceived problems of meaning and evil might be. And in none of this need the work that has been done up to the present be abandoned. The general shape of the naturalistic philosophy that is emerging, its chief theories and techniques, are rooted in its long warfare with the religious and ideological impulse, and many details of argument and observation can be preserved from the long period of investigation before the emergence of the current paradigm. Moreover, given the deep roots of the mythological and ideological impulse in human nature, the weapons philosophy has developed to defend science, and the very shape of our lives, from that impulse will remain an essential part of an intellectual's arsenal into the indefinite future. The anti-metaphysician may imagine a utopian world in which no one ever began to do metaphysical philosophy, so that there is no need of his anti-metaphysical philosophy, but he knows that we do not and never will live in such a world. Always at some point the philosophical issues will arise for a thoughtful person, and a guide through the ensuing labyrinth will remain useful. Those who do not learn history are condemned to repeat it, and it is hard to get where we want to go when we are lost in a labyrinth, even (or especially) if the labyrinth is itself imaginary in the end.

5. THE WESTERN TRADITION OF THE HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY:
AN APOLOGY FOR THE AUTHOR

> Such is the object of the work I have undertaken ; the result of which will be to show, from reasoning and from facts, that no bounds have been fixed to the improvement of the human faculties; that the perfectibility of man is absolutely indefinite; that the process of this perfectibility, henceforth above

the control of every power that would impede it, has no other limit than the
duration of the globe upon which nature has placed us. The course of this
progress may doubtless be more or less rapid, but it can never be retrograde,
at least while the earth retains its situation in the system of universe.

Condorcet, *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind*[21]

Modern study of the history of philosophy began in the 17th century. It followed at first the precedent established in later Antiquity and the Middle Ages, compiling anecdotal lives of great philosophers and tales of controversy, replete with scandal, moral instruction, bold irony, and clever strokes of argument. The doctrines of the philosophers received only secondary attention, most often in epigrammatic remarks and incomplete, imperceptive summaries, unaccompanied by any account how the views in question had arisen. Above all, it aimed at entertainment and moral instruction for the educated lay public. When one reads Diogenes Laërtius's *Lives and Opinions of the Famous Philosophers* (3rd century CE), the chief work in history of philosophy for late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, even the temporal order of the figures discussed is difficult to make out. Diogenes treats each school or "succession" of thinkers independently, considering Plato in Book III without reference to Pythagoras, who appears only in Book VIII, or Parmenides or Heraclitus, who appear in Book IX.[22] Walter Burleigh's popular and unreliable 14th-century condensation of Diogenes only made the situation worse, and nothing better was to be found until the 18th century. One might view the literary form of such histories as episodic and anecdotal, like the common sort of travel journal or diary, without any overarching scheme beyond restriction of one's considerations to those identified as philosophers.

Francis Bacon's *Advancement of Learning* (1623) called for historians to go beyond the mere lists of names and opinions to be observed in such compendia, elaborating the viewpoints of the various sects and the substance of their controversies with one another. Such histories as George Horn's *Philosophical Histories of the Origin, Succession, Sects and Lives of the Philosophers from the Foundation of the World to Our Own Age* (1645) could scarcely have been what he had in mind.[23] Despite some attention to the matters that concerned Bacon, Horn

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[21]*Outlines of an Historical View of the Progress of the Human Mind . . . translated from the French* (printed for J. Johnson, in St. Paul's Churchyard, London, 1795), p. 4. For reflections relevant to this section, concerning the writing of history in general, see Canary and Kozicki (1978), especially the articles by Louis Mink and Hayden White.

[22]Pythagoras, Heraclitus and Parmenides were major influences on Plato's thought, and all lived before him and shaped the philosophical scene in which he worked.

[23]In 1655, a history of philosophy was published by Thomas Stanley, who features a motto from Bacon, and, beginning from the "Chaldaics," ends incomplete, without reaching the Christian Era.

also assumed that all philosophy was known to Adam, that the division into schools was a result of the Fall, and that the original, true philosophy is evidenced only in the *Old Testament*. Bacon saw the history of philosophy as a tool for progress in the sciences, rehearsing alternative theories and the reasons advanced for and against them, all in preparation for a more mature consideration penetrating to the truth. This follows loosely the pattern of Aristotle's historical reviews in his treatises. Horn converts it into a religious study of the Fall as it manifests itself in intellectual matters, a tool of Christian propaganda. Both of their approaches seem to someone who takes philosophy seriously to approach the story of the field from outside, fitting it to the history of God's self-revelation, or the development of the empirical sciences.

Perhaps we should not expect much better. To take philosophy in its own terms would be to challenge one's world view, and Bacon and Horn were both concerned chiefly to delineate it, assuming that the correct world view was obvious enough of itself. There result, as usual in such histories, was to present philosophy as a history of error, and the task of philosophy as a gradual purification of its doctrines of errors, not through internal development and criticism, but through recognition of an external standard that settled all matters philosophical without having to bother with thinking philosophically. A neutral account of views and arguments has rarely been the aim of the historians of philosophy, for rarely has their central interest been the exploration of previous philosophical reflection to advance philsoophical knowledge. That would presuppose one does not already know the truth on the most important matters, and such a presupposition would be unusual in any age. Of course, it is not generally the historian's only purpose to entertain and inform. These histories of the lives and opinions of the philosophers *are* entertaining, and have a certain naive charm for a modern historian, but their authors were not innocents. They worked and wrote from an ideological viewpoint as much as any Marxist. The lives of the philosophers were lives with a point, the incidents in them depicting the effects of their doctrines on their characters and careers. Sympathy with a philosopher's doctrine identified him as a saint, recounting his conversion to philosophy, the wisdom of his teaching, his noble character and ascetic practices, even his communion with God. As witness to this, there stand the accounts of Socrates in Plato and Xenophon, which led later ages to view him as the founding hero of Philosophy itself, Porphyry's life of Plotinus, the founder of Neoplatonism in the 3ʳᵈ century, and many another worshipful tale in the ancient histories. In the early modern period some imitations of these Ancient philosophical lives, for instance, Pierre Gassendi's *Concerning the Life, Character and Teachings of Epicurus* (1647), revealed real scholarship and some acumen, but even Gassendi's work remained a hero's tale of the founder of the sect.

Distaste for a philosopher's doctrine assured his life would be made the stuff of satire, or a tale of moral

corruption and hypocrisy. Skeptics, for instance, took special interest in the endless, irresoluble disputes of the sects, and aimed to make out every dogmatic thinker a fool. We find witness to this early and late, in the interest Sextus Empiricus takes in the endless quarrels among the Dogmatists in his 3rd-century skeptical treatises, and in Pierre Bayle's *Historical and Critical Dictionary* (1695–7), a skeptical document of the Enlightenment with a penchant for satire whenever it turns to philosophy. In the 17th century the story of philosophy often appears as a story of ancient error and fruitless disputes, to be abandoned in favor of good Christian views, as Horn would have it, or in favor of modern, enlightened thought rooted in honest observation and good science, as in Bacon, or as Brücker has it, in *A Critical History of Philosophy from the Infancy of the World Up to Our Own Age* (1742). This work was the standard authority for the French Encyclopedists as well as Kant, and, in a popular English translation from Brücker's Latin, for British philosophers until 1820 or so. Brücker arranges his facts far better than Diogenes, and goes beyond him for his material, and he is scholarly and canny in his assessment of his sources, but in the end his chief aim is to praise truth and condemn error, and he still makes little effort to understand the reasoning behind the doctrines he reports.

Not everyone saw the history of philosophy as one long story of error—some saw it as a vast storehouse within which the truth was to be found, so that the study of its history is a necessary first step in the study of philosophy itself. Goclenus found the truth in what all schools have in common, seeking to resolve their contradictions in his *Philosophical Conciliator* (1609), and so followed the road laid out long before in the Ancient reconciliations of Aristotle and Plato, and, just a little before, in the work of the founder of German philosophy, Leibniz. Others, such as Sturm in his *Eclectic Philosophy* (1686), and Diderot in the *Encyclopedia* (1746–72), viewed the history of philosophy as a vast accumulation of doctrines from which one should pick and choose what is good, rejecting the bad. Victor Cousin pursued the same idea in the 19th century, arguing that some portion of truth is contained in even the strangest of philosophies, and all we need do to construct a complete philosophy is exercise our common sense, selecting the various truths from the matrices of system in which they are imbedded.[24] Thus history becomes a central part of a philosophical methodology, providing a menu of doctrines from which our choices must be made. But most did not go on to do philosophy using this menu. They simply chose the doctrines that fit whatever they took to be the obvious truth, on grounds extrinsic

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[24]The notion is Christian, perhaps, but goes back before Christianity to those Ancients who saw all the doctrines of the Greeks in the philosophy of the Egyptians and Chaldeans. For the Christian, the Truth was in our possession, and then was lost through sin. For the Ancients, history consists in an endless sequence of cycles, natural catastrophes destroying civilization and knowledge which is then recovered in time, only to be destroyed again. So every philosophical discovery is only the recovery of what was known before the most recent catastrophe threw us once more back to the beginning.

to philosophy. They were more tolerant than Horn, perhaps, but not so clearly of any greater philosophical sophistication.

It is assumed here, of course, that the truth on each point is obvious enough so that by this time it will have been hit on by somebody generally treated in the histories of philosophy, and can be readily identified by any modern thinker free of prejudice and superstition. The eclectic method would never do in a field where important truth remains to be discovered, and by the 19th century the development of the sciences clearly indicated that new discoveries could entirely displace *all* the old options. It should come as no surprise, then, that as we move into the 19th century eclecticism is virtually abandoned, and a belief in *progress* begins to dominate the history of thought, tracing an upward path from error to the truth, and abandoning the notion that the truth has been in our possession from the beginning, and needs only to be identified and recovered. So Condorcet, in his *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind* (1795), depicts a movement beginning from the mere assertion of unsubstantiated opinion in the philosophical sects and ending with the reasoned science of modern times, and allows that the Greeks initiated the investigation rather than falling away from the excellent ideas of Adam or the Oriental thinkers that preceded them. With those before the Greeks, though, Condorcet also drops the entire Middle Ages from the historical development of philosophy, following the orthodoxy of the Enlightenment in tracking real philosophy from the Greeks directly to their heirs of the 17th century. A history of progress must not, he thought, spend time on the byways of unfruitful error and superstition. He still sees his history of philosophy in terms of the final outcome, not the processes of philosophical research itself.

The attempt to read the past as prologue to and preparation for the glories of the present took hold in the German historiography in the 19th century, beginning with Dietrich Tiedemann's *The Spirit of Speculative Philosophy* (1791–97), the first recognizably modern history of philosophy. Tiedemann attempts to find a leading idea in each philosophical system he recounts, relating it to the social and historical conditions in which it arose, but, like Gottlieb Tennemann in his *History of Philosophy* (1797), he sees all previous thought as Kant poorly understood.[25] Of course, he thinks of this as fairness to previous ages, ferreting out the truth hidden in

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[25]Tenneman's bent appears in his definition of philosophy as "the efforts of reason to realize the idea of science according to the primary laws of nature and liberty." This seems to follow on our own account above, as long as it is assumed that a metaphysical study of what must be true if there is to be knowledge, both of the natural world and of ethical truths, given the nature of that world and those truths, will result in knowledge of the ends of humanity and the ways in which they can be accomplished. In particular, of course, it is assumed that this study will lead to an affirmation, if not exactly knowledge, of God, human freedom, and human immortality, as the necessary assumptions of Practical Reason. Those views disagreeing with Kant's system, of course, are brought under the history of the field by considering them as stages on the way to Kant, or preliminary takes on Kantian truths. Kant was the

their systems, which is revealed without disguise in modern, scientific thought. Somewhat later, Auguste Comte, in his *Course in Positive Philosophy* (1830), found philosophy gradually maturing into objective, empirical science, abandoning its origins in theology and moving beyond its commitment to speculative metaphysics.

In his lectures on the history of philosophy in the 1820's, Hegel[26] criticized these historians for pointing out anticipations of modern thought without explaining the necessary process by which modern thought in fact evolved from these anticipations. To his mind, doing the history of philosophy properly, tracking the progress of thought towards the truth, means redoing philosophy itself, rethinking the old thoughts and capturing the logic of each new development, else we merely list a series of events without imparting any understanding why they happened the way they did, or why their outcome should be thought to constitute progress.

Hegel did not think the history of philosophy a series of accidents. For Hegel it is a life-history, a natural and organic course of development from immature to mature forms. That history will be formed both by its eventual outcome, the adult form, and by the characteristic manner of its natural development of adult characteristic from less mature characteristics in which they are implicitly contained. Only an understanding of the adult gives us an understanding of earlier phases of development, and to the extent that events do not form part of this developmental story, they are not genuinely part of the history at all. In philosophy, in particular, self-understanding is characteristic of the adult form, and the life-history can only be understood by the adult, reflecting on itself and its origins.

Hegel approaches the history of philosophy, then, as itself a part of philosophy. Taking philosophy to be an investigation into fundamental and inescapable ideas which learns more and more about their nature and consequences as it proceeds, he traces the development of our understanding as a logical self-revelation of those ideas, revealing step by step the richness of their internal implications and necessary content. History becomes the working out of a dialectical proof of the truth, and, of course, that a Hegelian truth.

In particular, within history, contradictory tendencies within an idea reveal themselves as the idea

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dominant philosopher of the end of the 18th century, and even today his thought appears to us as a watershed in the history of the field. Kant himself was perhaps more knowledgeable in the best history of philosophy than anyone else in the 18th century, and though he is not given to making historical remarks, it is not difficult for someone who knows the history to see a continuous dialogue in his works with past figures. Windelband, *History of Ancient Philosophy* (1893) lists a number of German works done "with reference to systems," adding to Tenneman, Fries (1837) and Buhle (1796) from the Kantian point of view, Ast (1807) and Reinhold (1858) from Schelling's point of view, and Schleiermacher (1839) from his own point of view along with Ritter (1829 ff.) and Pötter (1873).

[26]For Hegel, see his *Introduction to the Lectures on the History of Philosophy* (Hegel (1985)), from the 1820's, first published in 1833. The Hegelian histories of philosophy are an "advance" on those listed in the previous note inasmuch as Hegel's philosophical system is itself self-consciously historical.

moves from its initial, merely abstract conception to concrete application, and thought then moves forward by finding ways to reconcile the contradictions it has uncovered through the application of new, unifying conceptions that bring the contradictions together into a more complex, but coherent whole. These unifying conceptions, however, are inevitably abstract themselves at first, and in working them out in concrete detail further contradictions arise requiring further reconciliation. Thus, in a series of movements from the abstract to the concrete, and from the mere juxtaposition of contradictions to organically unified wholes within which the contradictions are reconciled, philosophy develops a more and more adequate understanding of the world and the conscious self within it. In working through this rather difficult conception of the course of philosophical dialectic Hegel provides an instructive and pregnant account of intellectual progress in every area of life, scientific, ethical, political and religious, and his history of philosophy becomes an account of real thinking, so that we see philosophers solving problems and responding to difficulties, arguing, analyzing and criticizing the views of their predecessors, and making what we can genuinely identify as progress.

It should be noted that all historians of philosophy who try to understand the past, not just report it, make use of their own theories concerning the natural course of thought, and the best methods of thought, which are part of their philosophy, in their endeavor. The same holds true of historians of science, for instance, and if we really do know what's going on in a field, at last, that will force a certain view of the history of the field on us. How can a modern chemist ignore what he knows of scientific methods of investigation, and what he knows about chemistry, in writing the history of the field? And, as long as he keeps it in mind that his subjects did not know these things, why should he, if he wants to get it right? Must he describe the old experiments and observations in terms of phlogiston, to be objective? It is necessary to note that they saw them in terms of phlogiston, but one does want to say what actually happened and what was actually observed, and none of that in fact involved phlogiston, because phlogiston does not exist. Those who object to Hegelian history disagree with Hegel, of course, but it is not as if they did not have their own viewpoint on things. The history of philosophy is plagued, though, by the fact that philosophy itself has not settled on one view of things, in the way that chemistry has, and each historian accuses others with fundamentally different philosophical paradigms of misinterpreting the past when he relies on his own theoretical resources, even though, really, there is no other way to proceed.

Nonetheless, Hegel does take too little notice of what was actually said and argued by individuals. In the end, he thought, one should be able to recount the history of philosophy without using experience or historical records at all. One need only trace the logical self-development of certain fundamental concepts,

unfolding the content of the ideas of reality and the intelligible. Hegel's dialectic forced the history of philosophy into the straitjacket of a dialectical argument. History's necessity was a logical necessity arising out of the stage of the argument that had been reached, not a historical necessity arising out of the culture, historical background and events, debates, problems, unpredictable events and idiosyncratic insights of a particular time and place.[27] It comes as no surprise, then, that Hegel regards those philosophers who do not fit his scheme as worthy of but slight attention, no matter how important they might have been considered in their own time and later ages, and he regards those who do fit his scheme, even if they seem clearly to be third-rate thinkers, as truly representative of the world-spirit of their time. Rarely has the selectivity unavoidable in the writing of history been pressed so hard to give the right appearance to the facts.

Moreover, the dialectical process does not really allow of irreconcilably contradictory points of view, and since most philosophers have thought that they disagreed with other philosophers, a Hegelian will not take these people at their word. They see the truth, but only part of it, or they see it from a blinkered point of view, but in the end they see the same truth as every other philosopher. Perhaps it is so, but it is very frustrating for a philosopher who disagrees to see the opposition to what appears to him false views treated as a kind of failure of insight into the real truth, which transcends and embraces both sides of the dispute.

Despite all this, Hegel's insistence that we rethink the old thoughts, working out how they survive as forces within our current philosophy and world view, and why they have been so altered over time, provided an attractive and effective way into the past, and the great historians of the 19th century, Kuno Fischer,[28]

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[27]Cf. Zeller's criticism of the Hegelian approach in general, Zeller (1881) 11 ff., and his criticism of the details of its application to Greek thought, Zeller (1881) 165 ff. But Zeller adopts a more or less Hegelian scheme himself, as noted earlier in this Introduction.

[28]Kuno Fischer (1824–1907) wrote a *History of Modern Philosophy* (1852–77), and *Kant's Life and the Foundations of his Doctrine* (1860), which strongly influenced neo–Kantian thought.

Erdmann,[29] Windelband[30] and Høffding[31] were all disciples of Hegel.

But not all 19th-century historians were Hegelians. Charles Renouvier (1815–1903), in his *Sketch of a Systematic Classification of Philosophic Doctrines* (1885) saw not progress, but only irreconcilable oppositions patterned on the Kantian antinomy between freedom and determinism,[32] and, despairing of reason as an adjudicator of the truth, he found the source of a philosopher's thought in his personal character (not, be it noted, in social forces), which lead to the selection of one or another of a small number of possible metaphysical options, none of which can be shown true or false.

Dilthey (1833–1911) took a similar viewpoint.[33] He identified three basic world views which provide a sense of the whole of life, of the meaning of our experience—the Naturalism exemplified in Epicurus and Hume, which makes the mind a part of the natural world and subject to its laws,[34] the Idealism of Freedom

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[29]Published a three volume *Outlines of a History of Philosophy* in 1865.

[30]German author of a *History of Philosophy* (1892; revised edition 1901), Windelband suggests that philosophy has no definite subject matter or problematic, unlike the other sciences, but has been viewed successively as (1) seeking to produce a perfectly general knowledge of the world or of reality as such (Plato and Aristotle); as (2) seeking "a view of life which should give a complete expression to the highest value of will and feeling"; (Hellenistic, Roman and Medieval philosophy) and as (3) seeking the self-knowledge of reason (the view of the modern period). Still, in every phase of its history, philosophy can be considered a "process in which European humanity has embodied in scientific conceptions its views of the world and its judgments of life." (Windelband (1901) 9.

[31]Harald Høffding (1843–1931), a Danish philosopher, was author of a *History of Modern Philosophy* (1894–95), the first history of modern philosophy to emphasize the connections between epistemology and the mathematical–empirical methods of physics in recent times.

[32]Kant held that reasoned thought leads inevitably to certain pairs of contradictory views of the world that cannot be reconciled, and can, with equal force, both be 'proven' true. This provides an indicator of the estrangement of reason from ultimate reality, the thing-in-itself which is knowable only as it occurs in our experience, never as it is in itself. What the contradictions reveal is that the world to which they are applied is not ultimate reality, which cannot be contradictory, but a representation of reality constructed by our mind, which may embrace contradictions because such a representation is never complete, so that which of the two contradictory interpretations is to be imposed on it can never be definitively settled. One of these pairs of contradictory views, or antinomies, would hold on the one hand that every event is caused, and therefore determined to occur as it does by its causes (else it would have no reason why it occurs), and then on the other hand that some events are free actions, and so are not determined, and are uncaused (the first cause, at least, would seem to be uncaused and free). Since we always see the world incompletely, we cannot in fact trace all the causes determining an action, though we *assume,* in a scientific frame of mind, that they are there to be traced. But we are not always in a scientific frame of mind. When we are about to act, we find ourselves in another frame of mind, and, ignorant of the determining causes of one's own choice, a person contemplates what she is to do and assumes, following out practical rather than theoretical rationality, that her choice will not be determined by causes, but will be made freely. Since we cannot know the *real* world as it is in itself, we cannot know which view is, in the end, correct.

[33]See his *The Types of World Views and Their Unfolding Within the Metaphysical Systems* (Dilthey (1957)).

[34]On this view the mind, as part of the natural world, is physical and causally determined in its actions. In ethics, the Naturalist will tend to a hedonism modified by a resigned contemplation of nature. In epistemology, he will insist that all knowledge comes through the senses.

exemplified in Plato and Kant, which postulates that the mind and will somehow transcend and is in conflict

with the natural world,[35] and the Objective Idealism exemplified in Parmenides, Spinoza, and Hegel, which

finds a perfect unity behind the whole of our experience of ourselves and the world, embodied in some ideal

Form.[36] These three cannot be reconciled, but they are the only ways in which we can satisfy our ineradicable

desire for a comprehensive understanding of our existence, and so at any given time we must work from one

or another of them. The trick is never to settle into one as though it were the only way to view reality, to

approach the world without one-sided metaphysical commitments that blind one to important aspects of life.

History, Dilthey held, is essential for understanding every phenomenon, and it can only be done by entering

in imagination into the viewpoint of the age studied, and contriving a meaningful story from the facts. This in

its turn can only be done by making use of one's own experience of life, and so one inevitably writes history

from the viewpoint of one's own age. The meaning of our past is the meaning *we* find in it.

Dilthey demands that we enter into the spirit of its age when we study any of its philosophies, and then

insists that we cannot enter into the spirit of another age, except from the viewpoint of our own. Historical

events as they were in themselves are never available to us, only historical events as we perceive them from

our later vantage point are. This is a specific application to history of a more general epistemological point well

established among philosophers after Kant and Hegel—we cannot know a thing as it really is in itself (or,

assuming it is conscious or an aspect of consciousness, as it is for itself or for *its* consciousness), but only as it

is *in our consciousness*, so *for us*. This would seem to make absolute knowledge of reality as it is in itself

impossible. Hegel thought he had found a way around the problem by taking the past to be an expression of

the development of pure rational concepts, a development that can be appreciated by any rational being.

Dilthey, with many other philosophers later in the century, did not see how Hegel's solution could work, for

he did not see reason penetrating to every aspect of life, or finally settling on a single, all-inclusive reading of

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[35]This view holds that the mind stands outside the natural order of cause and effect in its actions, and so acts freely in response not only to natural inclinations, but also to the dictates its lays down for itself in the moral law. Due to this orientation to moral duty, the mind has a reality independent of the physical world. This independence is projected onto the world at large, giving rise in Christianity to the idea of a God transcending the world. The mind's transcendence of the physical here is the reason why Dilthey refers to this form of thought as an Idealism. In epistemology, this view will lean towards Rationalism, the view that knowledge of the world depends on a direct knowledge of the rational structures in God on which the world is built, a knowledge not gained from the senses.

[36]The Idealism of Hegel goes beyond Kant because it assumes that the object of experience, the world, is constructed by the mind and can have no existence outside the mind, and so it is an object-ive idealism. In general, this sort of system postulates that the struggles and contradictions in life are in the end resolved in the One Being out of which the world evolved. The other two systems suppose that a conflict between ourselves and the world is, in one way or another, built irresolvably into reality.

history and the world. Thus he insists that no one of his three philosophical world views can be taken to be correct, excluding or encompassing the others.

Nonetheless, Dilthey thought the commonalities of human life were sufficient for a knowledge of history, for we have more in common with others than mere reason. His resolution of the problem of historical understanding roots itself in the historian's normal practice of his trade. He suggests that we can get an approximate view of another philosopher's thought, simply because we are, like that other philosopher, human, and so can make a plausible guess at how the world may appear to him. This enables us to interpret the philosopher's words, but will then force refinements to our account of the underlying drive of his thought, as our interpretation runs into difficulties and indigestible stretches of text. We may then return to the positive evidence of the words another time, with our revised interpretational background, providing a better sense where they are coming from and what they might mean, but this new reading generally reveals further problems leading to a further revision of our assumptions—and so it goes, back and forth, until we arrive at an understanding of our subject's thought which makes adequate sense of his words, as they are interpreted on that understanding, that is, an interpretation which remains, for the moment, stable, even with repeated, careful rereading of the philosopher's work. This process may lead us not only to new understandings of the philosophies we study, but also to new understandings of ourselves and our own world.

Thinkers such as Renouvier and Dilthey take the history of philosophy to provide a classification of possible philosophical world views, but behind this use of history is the Hegelian notion that the world views in question are produced by reason, which has only a limited list of logical possibilities available to it in its understanding of the world, responding to a limited number of fundamental problems. One should be able to generate the list *a priori*, but history provides a handy way to verify one's reasoning. All the options, it is assumed, have already been exhausted in the work of our predecessors, and all that is left for us to do is to refine them. This is, of course, a large assumption. Other historians of philosophy followed up quite another direction in Hegel's thought. Turning away from the logic and evidence of the philosophers as a key to their world views, they looked to the culture in which they were rooted. Instead of seeing the philosophical world views and problems as perennial, and the historical development of philosophy as a reflection of necessary logical options to be uncovered and explored, they see these world views and problems arising from specific cultures, peculiar to an age, and accessible to other ages only through historical, as opposed to purely philosophical, imagination.

The most notable philosophical theorists of this approach are Benedetto Croce (1866–1952) and R.G.

Collingwood (1899–1943).[37] Croce insists that history deals, not with abstractions, as science does, but with individuals, which can be understood only through the historical accidents that define them, not through an abstract study of the universal laws of their universal natures. Indeed, only history gets at the real, the individual, and so only contingent historical statements can be true. In the history of philosophy, this means that the historical matrix of a philosopher's thought becomes its source and the source of its meaning. A philosopher is the child, not of a universal Spirit of Reason, but of his time.

Collingwood similarly takes a metaphysics as the delineation of the most basic presuppositions of a given historical epoch, so that metaphysics changes as our presuppositions do, and since it deals with pure presuppositions, metaphysics is never demonstrable. To account for progress in philosophy (and the sciences) Collingwood suggests that the metaphysical view of a given age may enable the formulation and resolution of many problems, but must fail in the end as it accumulates a set of problems it cannot solve. These insoluble problems produce a new awareness of the presuppositions hitherto assumed, and a period of radical experimentation with alternative presuppositions eventually leads to the consolidation of a new metaphysics opening up these problems to solution. The new presuppositions will be chosen so as to retain the solutions to most of the problems successfully worked out under the old presuppositions, but the old problems are inevitably reinterpreted from the standpoint of the new presuppositions, and in some cases may no longer be considered at all, since they simply do not arise under the new world view. Hence our theories, though they are never provable, become more and more adequate to our experience as one supersedes another.

Despite Collingwood's attractive ideas, practitioners of cultural history often assume that no progress is to be found, precisely because the philosophy of an age reflects its world view, not the outcome of some scientific investigation. So they take a "horizontal" view of the subject, looking at a philosophy from the standpoint of its culture and its age, not a "vertical" view, looking at it as a response to earlier thinkers.[38] There tends to be a reversion to the "doxographic" approach, ignoring the philosopher's arguments for his position as mere rationalization, and taking the greatest interest in the sweep and depth of the philosopher's systematic views. What philosophers regard as the greatest and most original philosophers of an age become almost

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[37]For Collingwood on the history of philosophy, see his *An Autobiography* (1939).

[38]I borrow the terminology of Passmore (1967) here, who remarks that a cultural historian is "likely to see philosophy as a social symptom rather than as an activity with its own traditions and its own standards of success and failure." It takes a trained philosopher to write the history of the field in what Passmore would take to be its own terms, as a history of the attempt to solve philosophical problems.

suspect, since they do not reflect the spirit of the culture as accurately as the minor figures do, and those philosophers without close connection to literature, theology, politics, and art receive scant treatment. These tendencies are especially exaggerated in historians trained primarily in literature and other disciplines outside philosophy itself, who are especially inclined to view the "scholastic" thought of the philosophical specialist as sterile intellectualization. Thus medieval philosophy before the 13th century, being less technical and more literary, will be emphasized, while the 14th and 15th centuries, the time when philosophy became most technical and specialized, will be virtually ignored. The fact that the philosophy of the "scholastic" periods is of much greater interest to academic philosophers today than that of the more "literary" periods often creates a gulf between these cultural historians and contemporary philosophical thought. It would seem that both the vertical and the horizontal approach are required for a real understanding of past philosophies, and historians of philosophy with philosophical training who take the cultural approach nowadays, such figures as John Hermann Randall in his *Career of Philosophy* (1962), in fact use both, assuming a continuity of development and discovery from age to age even when their philosophy of history would seem to rule this out.

In all this I assume the author's predilections have become evident. I would like to write a history of philosophy that focuses on the processes of development within the field, and explains how we got where we are today in a fashion that takes the philosophical work of the past seriously, assessing it as philosophy, though I do not want to ignore external influences—indeed, one must understand them to assess the philosophical work itself. I would like not to assume that "our" position today[39] represents the truth, even if it is the position we must work from to understand the past. But I know of no other way to honor this fact that I may be wrong, other than allowing that if we change our minds, and we may, we will need to reconsider and reevaluate the past. As long as any field of knowledge progresses, one cannot be *done* with its history. But however temporary it may be, I want to write a *philosopher's* history of philosophy.

6. DRAWING AUTHORIAL LIMITS

It was a dark and stormy night . . .

Snoopy, from an incomplete novel

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[39]That is, *my* position. But I invite you to share it, at least in the sense that you are willing to show some imaginative sympathy for it, with me as I proceed with my work. I invite you to look at it from my point of view. You will have to to understand me, just as I will have to look at things from their point of view to understand the people I talk about. I'll try if you will.

How shall *we* proceed, then? Above all we must grant the valid claims of both the cultural and the philosophical historian. Very often we can understand a view, and the reasons why a philosopher came to it, only by looking at the irreducibly contingent events of history, whether they be events in his world, the accident of a particular background, or accidents of temperament which enable some insights and hinder others. But we must also recognize that philosophers' views form *reasoned* reactions to their experience of the world, as well as reasoned responses to the views, methods and difficulties of their predecessors, working within inherited systems of problems and puzzles, systems within which progress is often possible and identifiable. To do the job right, historians must approach their material both as philosophers trying to understand what their colleagues were trying to do within their own philosophical traditions, and as cultural historians, noting the ways in which their colleagues' views are rooted in their personal, cultural, economic, and historical background. We should try to do these jobs without worrying too much about philosophical arguments to the effect that they cannot be done, or that the course of philosophical reasoning, say, must take a certain predestined shape. We cannot avoid assessing the past in view of the present, if only because one cannot understand a person's thought without trying to assess it,[40] and thus our history is bound to reveal the extent of our own philosophical competence. Again, discoveries in other fields lead us to a more just picture of causes and influences outside philosophical argument, of the nature and formation of world views, and their dependence on culture, economics, and the rest. So this history cannot be the last word, but it can provide a useful account up to the present time from the viewpoint of the present stage in the discussion, and a way into the present discussion for those who wish to understand it.

Perhaps a further, more skeptical word or two is needed here.[41] The considered thought of an intelligent person is a complex thing, not easily caught in a schematic presentation represented as a deductive system. Nonetheless, the many faces presented and half presented in the work of any good philosopher cannot all be discussed, or even sketched, in a history of finite length. We must present a simplification of the man's views, one that is consistent, we hope, that has a deductive structure that captures what he seems to take as his most important reasons for holding the views he does, that corrects what he would surely have taken as

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[40]The typical rhythm is that we characterize a philosopher's thought, find problems, contradictions and obtuseness within it, then return to the philosopher's work with all this in mind and discover that we had misunderstood him, that he actually did not intend this, or has a cogent reply to that… Then, of course, new problems occur to us upon reflection, and we begin the cycle again. One who never questions a philosophy will never understand it.

[41]These remarks are especially prompted by the Introduction to Wedburg (1982), pages 1-6, whose succinct intelligence leads me to recommend in particular for anyone looking for an author less wordy than myself.

misreadings of his reasoning if they were presented to him, despite the fact that they are what he actually says. Charity is required for accuracy, not just for kindness, for even Homer nods. Moreover, we often need to make what a philosopher says more precise than it in fact is to present it in a clear schematic, deductive structure, and to relate it appropriately to the (schematically understood!) thought of other philosophers who influenced his thought. Every historical account of a philosopher's thought is actually a reconstruction of it. Even more delicate, we have to take account of how later philosophers read his thought, which may require giving several accounts of a philosopher—one representing what he seems really to have thought, and perhaps several others representing what he was thought to have thought by various of those he influenced. Always there will be ways of schematizing, formalizing, and making precise, drawing on aspects of a philosopher's work one has ignored, that are enlightening and merit consideration. All one can say is that anyone who wants to see what is really going on had better read some books other than this one. There is no way one story can capture reality as it is. Above all, if any figure interests the reader, she should go to the source. Every historian tries to guide a reader to the original, often commenting on it quite directly, as an aid to the reader who chooses to deal with it, rather than doing a proper job of schematizing, and tries to point out alternative readings worth looking at. For all this one should attend to footnotes and asides.

Even more delicate is the fact that if to make these philosophers live for the reader, we must subject their views to critical examination. The living philosopher is the one that interests us, and that, in the end, is the one who might have it, or at least some aspect of it, right. At the very least, the historian must explain why a sensible and well-informed person of that period and culture might have believed such things as he attributes to his subjects. But intellectual sympathy, if it is not to turn into a form of condescension, must go further than that. We must actually be *tempted* to think the same thoughts these people thought. That requires taking their thoughts seriously, not simply as a reflection of their culture, say, but as philosophy. Once one sees, perhaps, the condescension in the purely "cultural" "historical" approach, she may be more inclined to tolerate the anti historical insistence on considering what truth there is in these views, in the light of what we currently know. (But in what other light can we *honestly* consider this?)

And to whom is this all this addressed? It will be of interest chiefly to people with some academic background in philosophy, and most useful, I hope, to people with advanced degrees in philosophy who are not specialists in its history. (I have not given enough consideration to the reasons we should accept my story over alternatives to make it of interest to the specialist.) The intention is to give readers an accurate and complete enough account so that they can reasonably assess and learn from the thought of the philosophers

discussed. Philosophical technicalities will not be avoided if they are necessary for comprehension, nor will material that is especially difficult and deep, though, of course, we must omit what seems philosophically trivial enough not to merit the effort, as well as the more detailed elaborations of the fundamental ideas presented. The most influential and plausible lines of argument given by these philosophers in support of their opinions will be presented, and I will not shrink from assessing the success of their work. The philosophical commitments of the author (prejudices, if you wish) have no doubt already been made clear to the reader, but that is as it should be. How else could the reader introduce correctives for his biases and blind-spots, if they are needed?

However, the book is intended also for the educated person with some acquaintance with Western history and culture, who wishes to enter into the subject in sufficient depth to make it interesting, and wants enough detail to get a feel for the personal, cultural and historical background, as well as the vision and arguments of the great philosophers. The best way to *begin* doing philosophy may be to review the history of the field, and I don't want to assume my audience knows philosophy before we begin. Though a reader who knows no philosophy will have to work hard to get through what is written here, I hope I have made it possible for an intelligent reader to do so. Those who read carefully *from the beginning* should find the technicalities and difficulties later on have received sufficient preparation and explanation earlier, and find the treatment even of the most difficult patches comprehensible. Those who pick up the story at a later point where it becomes interesting will doubtless have to do some backtracking, and otherwise fend for themselves. Judicious skipping is recommended, since I endeavor to be comprehensive, and so there are bound to be dull or incomprehensible sections for everyone who reads this. (I confess that some of the sections are dull to me, and in others it was painful enough to produce what I think is sense from the materials examined that I should have liked to skip them.) I hope, in short, to write a history that can be read through by an educated, intelligent and attentive person with some background in human history, and understood throughout without any knowledge of philosophy to start with. Reading it through will take a while, and require close attention, but my hope that it will repay the effort will not be realized if it gives too simplified a view of things, or fails to challenge the reader himself to the philosophical endeavor.