

INTRODUCTION

A little over twenty years ago, according to a 1989 anthology edited by Avner Cohen and Marcelo Dascal, there may have been a crisis in philosophy. Such, they suggest, occurs when “dissidents question the accepted standards on all fronts” (*IP*, xiii), and at that time two main challenges appeared to be underway. Globally, the rise of postmodernism was throwing into doubt both the meaning and the usefulness of such accepted normative terms as “truth,” “reason,” “freedom,” and “progress.” Within philosophy itself, at least within American philosophy, the “pluralist revolt” at the American Philosophical Association (APA) was challenging the clubby practices by which leadership roles were distributed among professors in leading departments of philosophy.

I will say more about postmodernism in the course of this book. As to the pluralists, I will simply note that their revolt was consciously modeled on the larger revolt of people of color, nonheterosexuals, and women which, by that time, had already been underway for about twenty-five years. The pluralists claimed, as A. J. Mandt shows in his essay in the anthology (Mandt 1989), that they were being adversely judged not on the basis of their philosophical merits as individuals but on the basis of philosophical groupings to which they belonged (e.g., phenomenologists, pragmatists, Catholics). The response of the philosophical establishment to the pluralists, as Mandt conveys it, was very like establishment responses to those earlier demands: a denial that anyone in a position of power was personally prejudiced against such groups, coupled with a self-reassuring insistence that philosophical rewards were in fact distributed

solely in terms of philosophical merit. A paraphrase of Saul Bellow's famous remark on African writers captures the spirit: "When they produce [Quines and Davidsons], we will read them."¹

The crisis died away, as crises tend to do in tenured professions. The pluralists began electing people to offices at the APA, and the postmodernists drifted off to other departments. Twenty years after, reports on philosophy are good.

Crisis as Separation: Scraps on the Wind

And yet, occasionally, there are things . . . scraps on the wind which land in your office and suggest that, on some levels and in some ways, some things may be missing from this picture. Permit me to mention a few that have come my way. The recital will be depressing, but it is necessary to the coming diagnosis.

Some scraps blow in from the Internet, which tells me that mainstream philosophers no longer win the most prestigious fellowships.² Philosopher Jason Stanley may thus be right when he says that "the great figures of American philosophy, lauded the world over, are passed over within the American academy." It may even be a matter not of neglect but of downright ostracism: Stanley has it that "we [philosophers] are ignored at dinner parties, and considered arrogant and perhaps uncouth."³

It has been a long time since I have seen a philosopher at a dinner party, so I am unable to confirm Stanley's point. I do know that other humanists are not very happy about the current crisis in the academic economy (or the general economy), and their problems are shared by philosophy. A visit to the web page of the APA recently yielded the news that there were not enough available jobs to justify printing the May 7, 2010, edition of *Jobs for Philosophers*; there were protests on that same site against the projected closing of philosophy departments at two universities in England.⁴ A few months later (November 18, 2010), the APA reported that "only one NEH Summer Seminar for College and University teachers in Philosophy has been awarded for 2011." But how many were awarded in all fields that year?

So it seems that while philosophy shares the general problems inevitably encountered by the humanities in a science-based culture, its unique problems are restricted to social occasions. Away from the dinner parties, deep within the admittedly troubled academy, philosophy departments function as smoothly, or as bumpily, as ever. Philosophers (or their graduate assistants) teach basic argumentative writing to undergraduates, often to great numbers of them, and generally these students do well on GREs, LSATs, and the like. Philosophers

also teach logical analysis, and sometimes deconstruction, to graduate students, and occasionally those graduate students get jobs. Disputes arise among philosophers, to be sure—philosophical, academic, personal, and otherwise. Some get resolved, others fester, and none of them matter very much to outsiders. But all in all, philosophy does its job. Twenty years after Cohen and Dascal, all's quiet on the philosophical front—or, to adapt Remarque's original German title, *In der Philosophie nichts neues*.

This sounds more like doldrums than a crisis; but what, exactly, is a crisis? According to legend, the Chinese character for “crisis” is composed of the character for “danger” plus the character for “opportunity.” So understood, a crisis is a moment of indeterminacy, of decisively open future. This is the temporal sense conveyed by the medical heritage of the term in English, in which it denotes a sudden change of course, for better or worse, in the progress of a disease. But there is another, older sense of the term, connected with the root meaning of the associated Greek verb *krinō*—which means to separate or divide.⁵ In this sense, I suggest, philosophy is in “crisis” because it is undergoing a number of separations at once: separations of philosophers from the wider culture, from each other, and from philosophy itself.

In an earlier work (*TD*) I suggested that philosophy's exit from the national conversation, now in the ill-remembered past, may have been a self-protective move during the tumult of the McCarthy Era. If so, the self-protection continues; indeed, it has moved to new heights. A couple of years ago, I needed to consult the main publication of the APA, *Proceedings and Addresses*, and so I went off to the Young Research Library at UCLA. The entire west end of the ground floor is a vast collection of recent issues of various periodicals, lying quietly on their sides on bookcases about twenty shelves high. But I couldn't find *Proceedings and Addresses* anywhere among the philosophy journals, so I went to a nearby computer terminal to get the exact call number. Armed with that I returned to the journal stacks, only to find that it was still not there. Returning to the computer, I noticed a small statement below the call number: “Library now has online subscription only.”

Well and good, I thought; I'm happy to save trees. Only there was no evidence that trees were being saved, because the overall number of journals in the library had clearly not decreased. The shelves were packed and groaning. Why had the print edition of *Proceedings and Addresses* been cancelled at a major research library? I went to the electronic version of the journal, only to find that it was three years behind. As I write, any issue of *Proceedings and*

Addresses after 2007 is unavailable to me unless I had bought it at the meeting or obtained it through membership in the APA. What, one might ask, is so risky about *Proceedings and Addresses* that three years must pass before its contents are generally available to outsiders?

Other scraps arrive from the media. A few years ago, *Newsweek* published a lament by philosopher Eric Wielenberg claiming that philosophers get insufficient respect from the general public (Wielenberg 2006). I had heard this before, of course, and not only from Jason Stanley; the general public, after all, killed Socrates. But why today? Is contemporary America peopled by Anytuses and Meletuses?

Consider what it is, in Wielenberg's view, that a philosopher does:

I find a question or puzzle that interests me. I try to figure out a solution, usually reading what others have had to say about it along the way. If I come up with anything good, I write it down and see if anyone is interested in publishing it.

If this is what philosophers do, one wonders why they would be entitled to any respect at all. Is it really true that the only thing that makes a philosophical problem or issue worth engaging with is that it "interests" some individual philosopher? When doctors are curing new diseases and physicists are inching closer to nature's deepest secrets, when literary and political theorists are giving voice and hope to untold millions of oppressed and excluded people, shouldn't philosophers be obliged to be more than "interesting" to themselves and each other? Shouldn't they have to think about whether the problems they are interested in are of any importance to other academics, or even to the public at large?⁶ And if a philosopher doesn't take such people into account, why *should* they respect her? Who is disrespecting whom here?

The separation of philosophy from the larger culture goes along with an increasing separation of philosophers from other philosophers. This has long been the norm in the case of the infamous analytic-continental split. Far more revealing than the split itself is that a full sixty years after it began as a turf battle between phenomenologists and logical positivists, it remains inscrutable. This can be established by a simple experiment: Take any American philosopher and ask her whether she is continental or analytical. You will usually get an immediate and definite answer; no philosopher is ignorant of where she stands with regard to the split, and few can credibly claim to be in the middle. Then ask, Why? All too often, you will either get some simpleminded caricature of the other side (analysts are "symbol-pushing logic-choppers"; conti-

nentials are “woolly-minded irrationalists”), or a lot of hemming and hawing which eventually reduces to the fact that this was the only kind of philosophy your interlocutor was able to study; the other side was simply not taught where she went to grad school. Philosophers, whose *raison d'être* has always been the critical examination of basic values and beliefs, are thus separated into two contrasting camps but are unable to state the contrasts. Not having located the basic issues on which they disagree, they have not begun to resolve them. And if philosophers cannot successfully deal with such basic issues regarding their own discipline, why think that they are going to have much success elsewhere?

Separation is also evident within each side of the split. Scott Soames has described the contemporary situation of analytical philosophy in such terms:

Gone are the days of large, central figures, whose work is accessible and relevant to, as well as read by, nearly all analytic philosophers. Philosophy has become a highly organized discipline, done by specialists primarily for other specialists. (Soames 2003, 2:463)

According to Soames, the fragmentation of analytical philosophy into a vast number of (sometimes) overlapping networks is motivated by a desire for progress, and progress is indeed being made—on the microlevel:

It is, I think, a mistake to look for one big, unified picture of analytic philosophy [in the last twenty years]. What we need is a collection of more focused pictures, each giving a view of the major developments of related lines of work, and each drawn with an eye to illuminating the larger lessons for work in neighboring fields. (Soames 2003, 2:464)

Progress in philosophy thus requires philosophers to be specialists, which—to Soames—allows them to disregard the work of anyone outside their own microspecialty and its “neighbors.” Such narrowness would not get you much funding at the National Institutes of Health or the Large Hadron Collider—if philosophy had analogues to such things. That philosophy does not points to the main problem with Soames’s portrait, which concerns not its content but its optimism. As the chronic underfunding of philosophy becomes acute, it is naïve to expect that the mutually ignorant fiefdoms Soames portrays will not turn on one another.⁷

There is also evidence, moreover, that philosophers are alienated from even their own microfields. Consider the implications of Zurich philosopher Hans-Johann Glock’s acerbic description of the current fate of non-Anglophone

analytical philosophy in his *What Is Analytical Philosophy?* (2008). Glock points out that analytical philosophy is now being done quite well by philosophers who write in languages other than English and who teach in universities outside the English-speaking world. But these philosophers, according to Glock, get no hearing at all from their Anglophone colleagues:

There is no excuse, however, for the notable failure of many analytic philosophers to pay due attention to figures and ideas that hail from beyond their philosophical, their linguistic, or their national horizons. . . . This holds not just of those contemporaries who indulge in hackneyed jibes at the “continentals.” It also afflicts some (first time) visitors to the continent who note, with genuine surprise, that some of the natives are neither Hegelians, nor Heideggerians, nor postmodernists, and may even be capable of intelligent questions and objections. (Glock 2008, 253–254)

On Glock’s account, progress in any sense or on any level is no longer the point. For what he is saying is that contemporary philosophers do not care about good work that is being done *even in their own fields*, unless the work is done by people in their own (Anglophone) milieu—which means that they do not really care about those fields at all: philosophers are separating, apparently, from philosophy itself.

If this is so, then behind all the rhetoric about progress-through-specialization, all that is left for philosophers to care about is palling around with the right people. As with so much else, this approach was pioneered by W. V. O. Quine. Asked about John McDermott’s observation that it was ironic that the new edition of William James was being edited by McDermott himself at Texas A&M rather than at James’s own Harvard, “Professor Quine looked somewhat quizzical and said, ‘I don’t believe I know McDermott’” (Fiske 1981).

Just what “palling around” means was evidenced in an Open Letter written in 1992 by nineteen philosophers to protest Cambridge University’s plan to award an honorary degree to Jacques Derrida. Earlier analytical philosophers would have based their opposition to Derrida on invocations of science and appeals to the logical rules of rational inquiry, but there is little of that here (though philosophy is at one point compared to physics). Rather, the letter’s entire argument is based on the opinion of “philosophers, and certainly those . . . working in leading departments of philosophy throughout the world.”⁸

Just why such well-employed philosophers were so concerned about Derrida’s laurel is not clear. The proposed degree was not to be in philosophy but

in “letters,” and the Open Letter itself conceded that Derrida had been influential in the lettered fields of literature and film studies. But the deeper and more revealing problem with the Open Letter is that its appeal to the opinion of well-placed professionals is a case of the argument to authority. This used to be a fallacy;⁹ that it should be so openly and exclusively appealed to as a principle of exclusion suggests that by 1992 philosophy’s intellectual vision of itself had dimmed to the point that much of the field had been overwhelmed by what is called its “sociology.” In particular, what mattered most in philosophy at the close of the millennium was, apparently, who had jobs in “leading departments.”

Scraps, of course, are merely scraps; an inspiring list of exceptions to the trends noted above could easily fill the rest of this book. But these scraps converge: they come together to suggest that to many philosophers, what makes a problem philosophically important is that it is “interesting” (Wielenberg) to a small group of people (Soames) who are linked, not by the quality of their work (Glock) but by their employment in major departments of philosophy (the Open Letter). What is here being converged on is Richard Rorty’s observation that in philosophy today, “the institutional tale [wags] the scientific dog” (Rorty 1982, 217). Which issues come to be discussed philosophically is decided merely by the sociological constraint that the philosophers who want to discuss them should belong to a “good” philosophy department.

But Rorty’s observation was made thirty years ago; “today” was 1982. Have things really stayed basically the same since then? Such stasis, if real, would be unique to philosophy. Physics and mathematics have recently been transformed by new technologies in the forms of computerized proof techniques and the Large Hadron Collider; literary theory by the rise of postcolonial studies and the new historicism; and so on. Philosophy, in contrast, soldiers on alone without basic change.

Maybe, it will be said, this holds among the “analysts.” But while prestigious employment has not been much of an issue for continental philosophers, they too have their microfields. Continental philosophy used to center on arguments between Husserlian phenomenologists and Sartrean or Heideggerian existentialists, which is why the name of its umbrella group, “SPEP,” was an abbreviation for “Society for Phenomenological and Existential Philosophy.” Now “SPEP” abbreviates nothing at all, and its members too often flock separately around European superstars whose latest thought they eagerly expound.¹⁰ In the tumult, Habermasians rarely intersect with postmodernists, Hegelians can’t make themselves understood to anyone, and speculative realists excoriate any-

one they consider to be a “correlationist.”¹¹ Again, there are many exceptions; but much American continental philosophy remains what Reiner Schürmann called it just three years after Rorty’s quote above: “reportage” (Schürmann 1985).

The danger here is that philosophy’s widening separations will become “critical” in the temporal sense: that philosophy will reach a point where its future becomes decisively open. What do philosophers think, then, about philosophy’s future?

As far as I can tell, very little. I have in recent years attended, as a member, the annual meetings of both the Modern Language Association (MLA) and the American Political Science Association (APSA). I found that both groups allocate serious resources to informed reflection on their respective disciplines. They devote major sessions at those meetings to scholars, senior and not, who debate issues of where the profession is and where it should go. The MLA even publishes an annual, *Profession*, with essays on such issues.

Neither the APA nor the SPEP has a habit of this; in fact, I cannot remember the last time either group scheduled such a session. As far as publications are concerned, in philosophy we find *Metaphilosophy*, which publishes some articles reflecting on the discipline but by no means only those, and the letters column of the APA’s *Proceedings and Addresses*—if it still exists, for I am of course three years behind in my reading of it. As far as private conversations are concerned, the philosophers I know seem to be of two opinions: either the future of philosophy will be very like the present, or it will be very different.

Which sounds “decisively open” to me.

Philosophy and the Wider Crisis

In asking whether the two senses of “crisis” are converging—whether the multiple separations philosophers are undergoing from the nonphilosophical world, from each other, and from philosophy itself are approaching a point at which they cannot continue—it is well to remember another sense in which philosophy can be “in crisis”: it can be *in the midst of* a crisis in its wider social environment. If the society or culture of which philosophers are a part is at a critical state, then philosophy, as a component of that culture, is also “in crisis.” Indeed, in this sense, philosophy is usually, if not always, in (the midst of) a crisis, for the critical examination of our basic values and beliefs is a sufficiently unnatural way of thinking that people normally engage in it only when things are going seriously wrong—only when we are in or approaching a state of crisis.

Crises in the wider society do not always, of course, affect philosophers. The crisis of the Greek polis in the fourth century BCE was roundly ignored by Aristotle, who apparently believed that his account of the good life was unaffected by Alexander's incorporation of its political horizon into a larger imperial order. In the United States, the main crisis-inducing event of the twenty-first century has been treated similarly. A glance at the programs for the various meetings of the APA shows that, as of 2007, American philosophers were still conducting business as before—worrying about arcane topics such as the context sensitivity of language, obscure conundrums in the history of philosophy such as the proper formulation of Kant's categorical imperative, and highly general issues such as whether events are as real as objects. Though 9/11 and its aftermath have been taken up as objects of reflection by a number of prominent philosophers,¹² these are exceptions, not the rule.

But such isolation may have become a luxury that philosophers can no longer afford. The death of the polis at the hands of the Alexandrian Empire might not have mattered much to Aristotle—but he was not its target. The same cannot be said of contemporary philosophers with respect to terrorism. There are many things about the West that terrorists clearly abhor—political and sexual freedom, modern versions of Christianity and/or Judaism, Middle East policy, science, capitalism. All of them, however, have one important thing in common: their current forms have largely been shaped by philosophers. It is hard to imagine what political and sexual freedom might be without Locke and Nietzsche, modern religion without Feuerbach and Kierkegaard, recent Middle East policy without Strauss, science without Descartes, democracy without Rousseau, colonialism without the British Empiricists¹³—or capitalism without Marx. And where would any of these things be without Kant?

We should not assume that religious terrorists the world over do not know this, or that they are not smart enough to figure it out. Philosophy is not only one combatant among others in the struggle with terrorism, then; it is, or may become, a primary target of the terrorists. This means that what many have called the “war of ideas” is not, in fact, an option for philosophers, but a struggle for their own self-preservation.

We must also, here, cast a wider net than 9/11, for we all know that terrorism is only part of a wider phenomenon. Garry Wills made this crystal clear in an op-ed piece in the *New York Times* on November 4, 2004:

Where [besides America] do we find fundamentalist zeal, a rage at secularity, religious intolerance, fear of and hatred for modernity? Not in France or Britain

or Germany or Italy or Spain. We find it in the Muslim world, in Al Qaeda, in Saddam Hussein's Sunni loyalists. . . . It is often observed that enemies come to resemble each other. We torture the torturers, we call our God better than theirs—as one American general put it, in words that the President has not repudiated. (Wills 2004)

Wills is arguing two things here. One is that what the terrorists hate is Enlightenment itself—the ongoing commitment to reason in private and public affairs that defines modernity at its best. Wills's other point is that when we see 9/11 as an attack on Enlightenment values, we see that those values are under serious attack here at home as well as out there in the “Muslim world.”

What 9/11 forced into the open is a global backlash, not merely against philosophy but against the Enlightenment itself. This backlash is a complex historical development with many different branches, but it can be seen to stretch from the mountains of Pakistan to the American Bible Belt and beyond—for example, into the mind of an American general. It may even extend into philosophy, for since Foucault it has become commonplace for postmodern thinkers to attack, or at least question, the Enlightenment. Does this not ally postmodern thinkers such as Foucault with the anti-Enlightenment backlash, as Habermas has suggested (Habermas 1981)?

Let me sum this up. If we restrict our vision to the day-to-day activities of the philosophers in our circle—those in our own department or microfield—things seem to be going smoothly enough. If we look a little farther, however, there are indications that philosophy has lost its way: that those microfields are not components of some larger and successful enterprise but are merely adrift on separate intellectual oceans, held together by little more than reportage and “palling around.” And if we look beyond philosophy itself to the larger societies in which philosophers work, we find looming threats directed both specifically against philosophy and against the broader set of Enlightenment values to which philosophy has long been committed. Philosophy's crisis yawns wide indeed. On the gloomy side, philosophy's future looks like a combination of growing internal incoherence and external menace. On the optimistic side, we see—what? There are a number of promising new programs in philosophy, but whether they promise renewal of the whole field is open to doubt. Consider two of the most vigorous: experimental philosophy and speculative realism. Both are motivated by the kind of disillusion expressed in the preceding pages: a feeling that philosophy is not merely in need of refinement or furthering but that it has gone seriously off the rails.¹⁴ Hans Reichenbach, of course, thought the same thing

(Reichenbach 1951); and these approaches, like his, assimilate philosophy to science—the “experimentalists” to psychology and the “realists” to mathematics (see Meillassoux, Badiou, and Brassier 2008). Neither, then, can supply what we most need to see today: a defense of philosophy as philosophy.

Such defense, in turn, is rightly identified with a defense of the Enlightenment itself. But here, Foucault and the postmodernists are right—with a twist: in order to defend the Enlightenment, philosophy must turn against it, at least long enough to ask this question: Is there something in Enlightenment itself which has provoked this vehement, worldwide rejection?

The Paradoxes of Enlightenment

I think there is—that philosophical Enlightenment, in the main forms it has assumed since Kant, has turned all too many people into its enemies. Indeed, I suggest that philosophy’s *sociological crisis*—the fact that philosophers find themselves increasingly separated from their larger communities, from each other, and from philosophy itself—has its roots in a *philosophical crisis* of Enlightenment.

But the roots are deeper still; the real problem lies not with Enlightenment values but behind them. Kant’s 1784 essay “What Is Enlightenment?” (AA, 8:35–42) is not only philosophy’s most lucid and condensed statement of Enlightenment principles but the ultimate reformulation of one of philosophy’s oldest dreams. For Socrates, life should be guided by a form of dialogue which was egalitarian (since even Socrates did not have the knowledge needed to control it), honest, and critically supreme. Plato, traumatized by his teacher’s death, relocated such speech from the agora, where Socrates conducted it and made his fatal enemies, to more secluded circumstances: various gymnasia (as in the *Charmides*), the house of Cephalus (in the *Republic*), the country stream where Socrates and Phaedrus while away an afternoon. As further protection, Plato devised his theory of Platonic love: for if you argue only against a background of disinterested affection, those with whom you argue will probably be less likely to put you to death.

Kant’s vision, two millennia later, of the public use of reason, in which individuals speak their minds without direction from others, echoes the egalitarian honesty of Platonic dialogue. As he puts it toward the end of 1781’s *Critique of Pure Reason*:

In matters of concern to all human beings, without distinction, nature cannot be accused of partiality in the distribution of its gifts; and . . . with regard to the essential purposes of human nature, the highest philosophy cannot get fur-

ther than can the guidance that nature has bestowed even upon the commonest understanding. (*CPR* B, 859)

Kant's work thus stands, as Charles Mills has written, as "the best articulation of the moral egalitarianism associated with the Enlightenment, the American and French revolutions, and the rise of modernist individualism" (Mills 1998, 68).

When we couple the passage above with the *Critique's* opening invocation of the "tribunal of reason" (*CPR* A, 11–12; cf. B, 779), we see that Kant's egalitarian dialogue takes place not merely *in* but *as* the agora. Three years later, in "What Is Enlightenment?," we see (as Peter Gay has written) the optimistic hope that the philosophers can become "the potential masters of Europe"—and eventually, Kant suggests elsewhere, of the world.¹⁵ Platonic love and seclusion are now unnecessary. The philosopher-king is back, in the form of Frederick the Great, and this time he has an army. How could philosophers not rush to swear allegiance to this newly glorious version of their ancient dream?

But the new hope was paradoxical in two senses, both of which become evident when we put Enlightenment into time—when we view it not as a state but as a process. Doing that was essential to Kant, who opens "What Is Enlightenment?" with the formula that we live not in an "Enlightened age" but in an ongoing "age of Enlightenment." It proved crucial as well to Enlightenment thought in general, for which the revolutionary force of history, guided by *la déesse de la raison*, proved to be a far more important ally than Frederick the Great.¹⁶ Viewing Enlightenment as a process wreaks havoc, however, with the principle of human equality, to which Kant has given such brilliant formulation. For human equality will come about only at the end of the process of Enlightenment, when everyone is enlightened and therefore actively rational. The current state of affairs is far from that, and before we are through the second paragraph of "What Is Enlightenment?" Kant has excluded "the entire fair sex" from his Prussian agora. He also excludes, and with equal brutality, those of other races. As he put it in 1764, in words from which his thought never recovered, "this fellow was quite black from head to foot, a clear proof that what he said was stupid."¹⁷

These comments do not merely express bachelor spleen or white resentment. Nor do they merely reflect Kant's unique personal psychology, or the mind-set of a culture with strong economic incentives for the exploitation of women and people of color, or the heritage of a long cultural tradition of excluding such people. They express all those things and more: they lead us to a problem intrinsic to philosophy itself, which produces paradoxical effects in Kant's very conception of Enlightenment.

The problem is with time. I have noted that human equality, if it is to be achieved by an historical process, cannot exist at the beginning of that process. Kant's proclamation of Enlightenment as a process thus *requires* an initial state in which humanity is divided not merely into male and female, European and non-European, but—and, for him, far more importantly—into those who are participating in the grand process of Enlightenment and those who are not. This division goes deep: if Enlightenment is the fulfillment of reason, and reason is the nature of humanity, then those who have not entered into the process of becoming enlightened, whether for reasons of nature or of culture, are not fully human. *Extra ecclesiam nihil salus*, we may say: there is no salvation outside the Church of Enlightenment—as Kant himself implies, through a small word of just three letters, in the concluding sentence to “What Is Enlightenment?” As a result of the process of Enlightenment, he tells us, government “finds it profitable to treat the human being, which is *now* [*nun*] more than a machine, in keeping with its dignity” (emphasis added). “Now” here means “then”: only once Enlightenment is established can we be more than machines. In short, as Kant puts it in “On Pedagogy,” “the human being can only become human through upbringing [*Erziehung*]. He is nothing but what upbringing makes him” (AA, 9:443).

Kant's effort to validate human equality, valiant in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, thus reverses itself and ends in the opposite: in a division within humanity so radical that those on the wrong side of it are not really within humanity at all. Here we have the conceptual groundwork not of Enlightenment but of a general theory of oppression. It is not simply that, as Lucius Outlaw has shown with particular elegance, Enlightenment's overly abstract view of human nature excluded from it particularities of race and gender, allowing the struggles of people stamped with those particularities to drop from view.¹⁸ It is also the case that Enlightenment thought (and not only Kant's formulation of it) establishes, in spite of its abstraction, one pair of particularities which, though not itself aimed directly against women, people of color, and nonheterosexuals, can be filled in so as to apply invidiously to them: the dichotomy between those who are on the way to Enlightenment and those who are not. Both tactics, then, contributed to what Outlaw calls a situation in which “a circumscribed dehumanizing, dominated subworld was constructed and institutionalized, into which Africans were herded and confined as slaves” (Outlaw 1996e, 163).

The joint themes of oppression and confinement will occupy us later; for the moment, I wish to point out, with Outlaw here, that they are nothing new. Since

Aristotle, as we will see in Chapter 3, philosophy has been associated with a theory of rightful oppression, according to which some people *should* let others think for them. Kant tells us that this happens not simply because of supposedly natural groups to which such people are consigned but because members of those groups are not on the road to Enlightenment. Kant's racism and sexism are not blemishes on his philosophy; they are specifications of some of its most basic and ancient views.

This makes oppression integral to philosophy. It has long been known, for example, that one of the basic ways in which philosophers, Kantian or other, justify the oppression of women and people of color is by assimilating them in one way or another to nature and the categories we use to describe it—passive, irrational, unthinking, unfree. What has not received sufficient attention, I think, is the strictly philosophical side of this: where did the category of “nature” come from? What philosophical exigencies shaped it, and how did they get to be exigencies? Such questions, which cannot be reduced to personal psychology or sociocultural conditioning, are central to understanding how these exigencies operate. For once the category of “nature” is there, something has to occupy it; and once philosophers ask who in the human world is to play the role of “natural being,” their personal psychology, cultural biases, and economic interests provide them, all too easily, with answers. But whence the category of “natural being” itself?

That placing Enlightenment into time ratifies human inequality is the first paradox of Enlightenment. The second begins when we consider that the public use of reason, for Kant, has to proceed under the guidance of philosophy (for details, see the “Doctrine of Method” at the end of the *Critique of Pure Reason*). For it is philosophy, now reformed as Kantian critique, which tells us how reason functions. Without it, reason falls into unresolvable metaphysical disputes.

Critique, however, has limits. On the one hand, Kant was very happy to be criticized as to whether he had properly carried out his philosophical project, that is to say, whether he had correctly stated the “transcendental” principles of the mind's various basic functions. His willingness to subject himself to critique is not mere philosophical congeniality. It is an application of one of the basic principles of modernity, that of the rule of law. The idea that the person who wields the law—who formulates it and enforces it—is also subject to it can be found, to be sure, in premodern political theory. But not often, and not consistently. In Plato's *Republic*, for example, everybody had to tell the truth—except the rulers.

Hence Kant, though he formulates the critical philosophy, is subject to it himself—for it is a statement of the basic principles of the human mind, and he has a human mind. The basic principles and findings of his own project, once he has articulated them, are *not*, however, subject to criticism. Consider his reaction to Fichte.¹⁹ Fichte, almost forty years younger than Kant, considered himself to be a good Kantian. But he thought there were some loose ends that the Great Man had left untied, and so he undertook to clean them up. This catapulted him into an entirely different philosophy—but Fichte did not know it. He thought he was still a Kantian. So he sent his book off to Kant, hoping to receive the Master’s blessing.

He got the reverse. Kant was horrified and wrote an “Open Letter on Fichte’s *Wissenschaftslehre*” in which he said:

The critical philosophy must remain . . . confident that no change of opinion, no touching up or reconstruction into some other form, is in store for it; the system of the *Critique* rests on fully secured foundations, established forever; it will be indispensable too for the noblest ends of mankind in all future ages.²⁰

This goes far beyond correcting Fichte and indeed is as pure a statement of philosophical foundationalism as you are ever likely to find. What it reveals is the distance between being able to criticize the way you use your basic critical categories and being able to bring those categories themselves under critical fire.

Fast-forward to the early twenty-first century and imagine that philosophy has not moved beyond these two Kantian paradoxes. What would we find? On the one hand, growing numbers of people whom Kant would classify as less than human: women and people of color, certainly, and presumably also those whose gender he would consider (in his word) unmentionable.²¹ These people are not on the way to Enlightenment, and their discourse therefore does not follow its rules. Indeed, even if they were on that path, their discourse would not follow the rules with exactitude, for they would not yet be rational enough for that. There being no other rules to follow, their discourse is unregulated: *Wildheit ist die Unabhängigkeit von Gesetzen* (AA, 9:442)—savagery is independence from laws. On the other hand, we would find philosophers still believing themselves to be in possession of an unchangeable architectonic of rules and procedures, “established forever” by critique and increasingly unable to hear, let alone understand and evaluate, members of that growing group of people.

Some of these expectations are fulfilled in the Open Letter mentioned previously, when it characterizes Derrida’s work as “little more than semi-intelligible

attacks upon the values of reason, truth, and scholarship" (Derrida 1995, 420–421). But if the letter writers expectably view Derrida as an unregulated thinker, and so as what Kant might call a philosophical savage, they do not see themselves as critical philosophers. By their own clear testimony, they are armed not with rules and procedures "resting on fully secured foundations" but merely with well-paid jobs. No matter; their foundations are assumed to be no less absolute. As W. V. O. Quine, one of the signers of the letter, put it in his "Speaking of Objects" (Quine 1969b, 24–25), "I philosophize from the vantage point of our own provincial conceptual scheme and scientific epoch, but I know no better." Full stop, end of essay.

Quine's refusal to ask if his "provincial conceptual scheme," even if the best one around, could be made still better means that his adherence to foundationism is no less resolute than Kant's. One way in which they differ is that, where for Kant philosophy was to be set on "the secure path of a science" (*CPR* B, vii), it has for Quine been on that path for some time:

But if one pursues philosophy in a scientific spirit as a quest for truth, then tolerance of wrong-headed philosophy is as unreasonable as tolerance of astrology would be on the part of the astrophysicist, and as unethical as tolerance of Unitarianism would be on the part of hell-fire fundamentalists.²²

It is not my task here to trace the ways in which egalitarianism and elitism, critique and dogma, coil and intersect through the work of these two great philosophers.²³ I do pause to note, however, that this dichotomy has not just captured philosophers but has shaped the university itself. Consider this statement from Franklin D. Murphy, an early chancellor of UCLA (1960–1968) and then, even more influentially, head of the Times-Mirror Corporation in Los Angeles (1968–1980):

I had, and I still have, very grave questions as to these black studies programs, Indian study programs, Chicano studies programs. I think they're devoid of much intellectual content. I think it was psychotherapy rather than intellectual activity. But I'm not going to second-guess anybody, because maybe some psychotherapy was needed to quiet people down. I think it's a miscarriage of space and everything else, on a campus that's very short on space, to provide a sort of social meeting room for these people. . . . The history of the blacks in this country and the history of the Chicano in this country ought to be an integral part of history. And any department of history with integrity will put it in. And they'd

even have a separate course. But to create these so-called centers is, I think, really quite absurd. (Murphy 1976, 249–250)

The problem with the centers, of course, is that they do not meet accepted standards of “reason, truth, and scholarship.” Outside these, we find psychotherapy, a kind of pacifier for the mind.

The Winds of Paradox

Certain scraps of evidence suggest that philosophy today is fragmented and lacking in self-respect. This Introduction has suggested that in virtue of the paradoxes of Enlightenment, it is rigid and elitist. The next question is how these are connected. Are contemporary philosophy’s multiple separations somehow produced by its rigidity and elitism?

The paradoxes tell us, in a nutshell, that philosophy’s ancient and unexceptionable allegiance to egalitarianism and reason have assumed forms which are ill equipped to deal with the temporal nature of Enlightenment. The results are that the egalitarianism of the first paradox unexpectedly drives an elitist wedge into humanity, while the rigid reason of the second loses its comprehensive power and becomes dismissive. Philosophers thus find themselves, professionally speaking, on the wrong side of history; for the most important intellectual development of the last half century, at least as important as the rise of science in preceding centuries, is the global uprising of the very people whom Kant dismissed as philosophical savages. However sympathetic to this philosophers may be as human beings, the only way its Kantian heritage gives philosophy itself to understand this uprising is, to be blunt, as a return to intellectual savagery.

The first, entirely predictable result of this is the kind of isolation lamented by Stanley and Wielenberg. The new paradigms in the humanities and social sciences, many of which see themselves as opposed to Enlightenment, pass philosophy by, leaving philosophers with less and less to talk about—until what they have is only what is “interesting” to one or a few of them. The philosophical groups united by such interests are small, transient, and both unwilling and unable to lay claim to the kind of critical apparatus Kant thought he had established “on secured foundations.” The thinness of their repertoire of rules, laudable when we compare them to Kant’s overblown transcendentalism, renders those rules inadequate to deal with the real problems of the age, and so the rules lose respect, even among those who—often grumpily—adhere to them.

The paradoxes of Enlightenment thus come to spell out the tragedy of philosophy: what should have saved it is what has destroyed it. Its adherence to reason, admirable in itself, became, like the probity of Antigone or the cleverness of Oedipus, fatally strong.²⁴

But was it adherence to reason which did this, or adherence to a specific form of reason? Sally Sedgwick has argued that with Hegel, a new concept of reason comes on the scene: a concept according to which reason has no fixed principles but gains all its content from shared human experience—from history.²⁵ Adopting this Hegelian view allows us to undo reason's rigidity, making it malleable; then, and only then, we can reshape it to meet current needs—a reshaping which, by the end of this book, will not only render reason malleable (in an Hegelian sense) but fragile (in a Heideggerian sense). But if reason is malleable, then it is historical: it is what it is because it has *come to be* what it is. In order to reshape it, we must know its history, and we must, in particular, know two things about that history. First, that it is what produced us; there is nothing in today's philosophy which is not, one way or another, a product of its history. Second, that it does not stop with us; indeed, we have an obligation to transcend it. But we cannot transcend it unless we understand both it and ourselves as its current outcome. The "crisis" in philosophy thus turns out to be, in the first instance, its separation from its own history.

It is to the recovery and transcendence of that history that the rest of this book will be devoted. The aim is to be able not merely to adhere to the Enlightenment as we have it (largely from Kant), or to abjure it altogether, but to reshape it into a critical practice more adequate to the times.

Prefatory Synopsis

When humanity withers, philosophy blossoms—or so implied Hegel, at the end of the "Preface" to the *Philosophy of Right*. For it is the fact that "a shape of life has grown old" (*PhR*, 21) which allows Hegel to get his philosophy underway; only what has no future can be philosophically comprehended, for to have a future means to be capable of surprising us. If Hegel could not assert in his "Preface" that Germanic modernity had already withered, he would be unable to say anything at all in the rest of the book. The Owl of Minerva would be grounded.

Hegel was, in this respect, neither an observer nor a prophet. Germanic modernity had not withered when he wrote, and we can only wish that it had withered later on rather than exploding in a cataclysm of hatred. As we move

beyond Germany and into the twenty-first century, however, his words start to ring true. It takes no special acuity to see that the human race today is not withering but burgeoning—its problems worldwide, while serious, are largely those of material and intellectual growth. So we don't know what is going to happen and Minerva's owl must delay takeoff. I shall not, therefore, write an Hegelian book; right now I shall, rather, give a preliminary account of one thing that is yet to come: this book.

In the second half of the twentieth century, philosophers devoted themselves to reflection on the rise of modern empirical science, which had by then been going on for about a century. They mined it for epistemological, ontological, and ethical insights, adapted philosophical method to it, and in so doing shaped much of the intellectual culture of their time. But if the "rise of scientific philosophy" (Reichenbach 1951) was an inspiration to philosophers, the "rise of the formerly oppressed of the world" is less so. Reflection on the identities and experiences of women, people of color, and the wholly disparate groups I can only, and apologetically, call "nonheterosexuals"²⁶ remains far too ghettoized today. Indeed, as I write, David Hilbert is pointing out that the newly released National Research Council rankings of philosophy departments show that the mere presence of women and minorities in a philosophy department, whatever their field, goes with a lowering of its reputation.²⁷ It is as if philosophers fear that opening out to such things will be the withering of philosophy: that the discipline will lose its core, whatever that is, and find its own death just as global humanity comes alive. In other words, the relationship of philosophy to the species which conducts it is wholly inverse: when humanity withers, philosophy thrives; when humanity thrives, philosophy withers.

The thesis of this book is that philosophy can lose its traditional "core" and still be philosophy. To ground this, I will turn to the only place where we can hope to discover the core of philosophy: to its history. My aim will be to show that philosophy has always had a set of core presuppositions and tactics; that those presuppositions must now be definitively abandoned; and that doing so will enable philosophy to thrive in tandem with humanity, rather than inversely to it.

If the problems of Enlightenment thought have to do with the relation of what is in time to what is not, then they are much older than Kant. Philosophy's *real* crisis has been building, I claim, since Parmenides. I will explore it, and the resources philosophers have now developed for coping with it, in four pairs of chapters.

The first two chapters will develop two correlative notions. One concerns the kind of humanness to which philosophy must open itself, which I call the “speaking of matter”; the other concerns a general principle of philosophical closure which I call “ousia.” Both notions can be understood in terms of philosophy’s core binary, that of form and matter. They are correlative in that it is from the point of view of ousia that what must be repressed in humanity appears as the speaking of matter, and it is from the point of view of the speaking of matter that its philosophical repression via ousia can be identified as *oppressive*.

Chapters 1 and 2 thus presuppose each other. Chapter 1 will seek to free the speaking of matter from its dispersal among a variety of human pursuits. I will adduce examples and treatments of it in the philosophy of science and in literature, finally focusing on David Foster Wallace’s detailed account of Boston AA in his *Infinite Jest*. Chapter 2 will seek to lay bare the longstanding role of ousia as philosophy’s core principle by questioning philosophy’s equally longstanding view of itself as a search for truth.

Not that philosophy is *not* such a search; matters here are too complex for sudden either/or’s. What we find, when we get beyond the view that philosophy is *simply* a search for truth, is what I will call an “ontological schema.” A “schema” for Kant is a sort of a priori image, formed from the pure conditions of sensibility and too general to be given in an intuition (*CPR* B, 179). The structure I shall explore is not a priori in any Kantian transcendental sense, but it is not directly derived from sensory experience, either—even if we construe that broadly enough to include social conditions. It is formulated and argued for by Aristotle as an ontological doctrine, that is, as an account of what it is to be; and the exigencies which lead him to adopt it are the failures of Plato’s Theory of Forms and of Aristotle’s own earlier metaphysics of substance to do the jobs that ontology is supposed to do. The result of this is a structure which, though originally derived through conceptual considerations, is a clear model for, and ingredient in, much real world oppression.

As Foucault has shown, we cannot speak responsibly about historical structures without tracing them to specific origins, and after Chapter 2 has given a general account of ousia, I will consider its history more specifically in Chapters 3 and 4. Chapter 3 will be a more detailed account of its role in Aristotle, culminating in a double view of how philosophers close themselves off from the speaking of matter: by “tolerating” it, in what Aristotle calls *karteria*, as long as no one pays attention to it (as with the speech of women); and by responding

with anger when it gains a hearing. Chapter 4 will continue the story into some stage setting with Descartes, after which it will examine how *ousia* begins to be subverted, as a general schema, in Kant's account of reflective judgment.

Such judgment has two sides—that of the beautiful and that of the sublime—and Chapters 5 and 6 will look at Hegel and Heidegger, respectively, as developing each. This will mean disinterring Hegel from the myths that he is either a throwback to pre-Kantian metaphysics or a continuation of Kant's critique of that. It will also mean cutting Heidegger partially free from the reality of his Nazi engagement. The result will be a view of reason itself as "malleable" in Hegel, with Aristotelian *karteria* replaced by what Hegel calls "reconciliation." In Heidegger, reason becomes "fragile," and reconciliation is supplemented by "letting-be."

The final two chapters, Chapters 7 and 8, will show how these two aspects of Hegel's and Heidegger's thought can be incorporated into a "postcritical" or "situating" practice which opens philosophy out to one aspect of the speaking of matter, what I call public language. I will consider examples from Hegel and Frederick Douglass to show how this can work, focusing on Abraham Lincoln's "House Divided" speech.