

14 Introduction

*Meditations*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), especially the second essay.

- 15 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, second revised edn, trans. and revised J. Weinsheimer and D. G. Marshall (New York: Crossroad, 1989), p. 303. See Gadamer's perceptive discussion of "horizon," pp. 300–307.
- 16 Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. G. Bennington and B. Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).
- 17 See Richard J. Bernstein, *John Dewey* (1966; reprinted Atascadero, Cal.: Ridgeview, 1981).

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## Philosophy, History, and Critique

In her preface to *Between Past and Future*, Hannah Arendt imaginatively interprets a parable by Franz Kafka. Kafka's parable reads as follows:

He has two antagonists: the first presses him from behind, from the origin. The second blocks the road ahead. He gives battle to both. To be sure, the first supports him in his fight with the second, for he wants to push him forward, and in the same way the second supports him in his fight with the first, since he drives him back. But it is only theoretically so. For it is not only the two antagonists who are there, but he himself as well, and who really knows his intentions? His dream, though, is that some time in an unguarded moment – and this would require a night darker than any night has ever been yet – he will jump out of the fighting line and be promoted, on account of his experience in fighting, to the position of umpire over his antagonists in their fight with each other.<sup>1</sup>

Arendt's interpretation of this parable illuminates the gap in which the activity of thinking takes place – thinking that is situated in "a battleground on which the forces of the past and the future clash with each other." It is in this gap that the experience of thinking occurs – thinking that must be practiced and exercised over and over again but which knows no finality.

Kafka's parable is sufficiently rich so that it can be interpreted as a parable of the relation of philosophy to its past, to its history. For just as the "He" of the parable gains his identity in the battle with

the two antagonists, so I want to suggest that this is the situation of philosophy. While it may dream of jumping out of the fighting line and achieving the position of a neutral umpire, it is an illusory dream. And like Kant's analysis of dialectical illusion, and Wittgenstein's Tractarian understanding of the limits of language, even when we are dimly aware that we cannot break out of these limits, that we cannot "jump out of the fighting line," we are still tempted to try. We never escape the battlefield in which there is always uneasy resolution and unresolved tension. It is a battle that is fraught with different types of dangers and illusions. For there is the illusion that philosophy can once and for all cut itself off from its past, jump out of its own history – something it never succeeds in doing. If it could, it would simply disappear and lose its identity. And there is the illusion of imagining that it can completely identify itself with its past, an illusion which, if it could be realized, would also mean a loss of its identity. For its proper place, its *topos* is always in the gap, and in fighting the battle between past and future.

When the danger is perceived as being overwhelmed by its past, philosophy fights back. We see this moment exemplified by Descartes, Kant, Nietzsche, Husserl, and more recently by logical positivists and analytic philosophers. At such moments philosophers are prone to make a sharp distinction between "doing philosophy" and the history of philosophy, with the confidence that once we hit on the right method, discover the way of making philosophy into a rigorous discipline, then we can simply abandon to antiquarians what appears to be the "dead weight" of the past. At such moments the history of philosophy is viewed with extreme suspicion, a repository of confusions and obscurities, an endless battleground of competing opinions with no resolution, a trap that can ensnare us. We need to make a break with the past; we need to forget in order to get on with the serious endeavor of philosophizing. And there are times when there is a backlash against the pretensions of the ahistorical character of philosophy, when we realize that even the boldest attempts to break with history fail, when we see how even those philosophers who thought that they were laying entirely new foundations for philosophy are themselves deeply marked by prejudices and biases which they have inherited from the very past that they have been battling. At such moments there is sometimes the temptation to claim that philosophy itself is nothing but the history of philosophy – a stance which ironically is itself unhistorical insofar

as it tends to forget that there would be no history of philosophy unless philosophers themselves (who make this history) thought of themselves as breaking with the past.

I do not think that this unstable, in-between status of philosophy is a cause for despair, but rather that it is the *topos* in which philosophy always dwells. It would only be a cause for despair if we had reason to think that there can be an end to the battle, that philosophy could and should achieve the position of a neutral umpire. The quest for certainty, the search for an Archimedean point which can serve as a foundation for philosophy, the aspiration to see the world aright *sub specie aeternitatis*, the metaphysics of presence where we desire to break out of the endless process of signification and interpretation and face reality with immediacy and directness, are all variations on the dream of "He" to jump out of the fighting line. And even if we judge these attempts to fail in their ultimate objective, we do a serious injustice to philosophy if we fail to realize how much is achieved and illuminated in these failed attempts. Philosophers – especially since the beginnings of modern philosophy – have been plagued by the anxiety that unless we can discover fixed, indubitable foundations, we are confronted with intellectual and moral chaos, radical skepticism, and self-defeating relativism – a situation that is metaphorically described by Descartes when he says it is "as if I had all of a sudden fallen into very deep water [and] I am so disconcerted that I can neither make certain of setting my feet on the bottom, nor can I swim and so support myself on the surface."<sup>2</sup> In another context I have labeled this anxiety "the Cartesian Anxiety" and have argued that it is an anxiety that needs to be exorcized, that can only be cured by a type of philosophic therapy.<sup>3</sup> But here I want to focus on the critical space of this unstable gap between philosophy and its past. For the theme that I want to explore is the way in which an appeal to history (and not just the history of philosophy) serves a critical function in the battle of philosophy. It is not simply that we locate the critical function of philosophy in those moments when philosophy fights back and seeks to push back its past, but also in those moments when this process is reversed, when we appeal to history and the history of philosophy in order to uncover, challenge, and criticize current prejudgments and prejudices – prejudices that can run so deep that we are not even aware of them as uncritical biases. I do not want to suggest that this is the only function which the study of history of philosophy can serve, but it is a function which I think

has not always been fully appreciated. So let me turn to several attempts and several different ways in which the appeal to history has been used critically in our contemporary situation.

### The uses of history for philosophic critique

The two major philosophic movements of the twentieth century have prided themselves on their ahistorical thrust, and both initially helped to foster a deep suspicion of the positive role that the study of history might play for philosophy. In this respect, both analytic philosophy and phenomenology were true heirs of the Cartesian bias. Both in very different ways sought to rid us once and for all from what they took to be the dangers of historicism and to delineate ways in which philosophy might “finally” become a rigorous discipline that would no longer be burdened by past errors and dead ends. This anti-historical animus was no less fundamental for Frege and Husserl than it was for later logical positivists and conceptual analysts. To the extent that either movement showed an interest in the history of philosophy, it was motivated by the desire to show how what was valuable and viable in this tradition could be interpreted as seeing through a glass darkly what now was supposedly seen so perspicaciously – to show how the task of philosophy, properly understood, could correct the mistakes and confusions of the past.

Although I think parallel stories can be told about the breakdown of the anti-historical bias of analytic philosophy and phenomenology, a breakdown which can be seen as a “return of the repressed,” I want to focus on the development of analytic philosophy and some of its recent critics. Analytic philosophy as a style of philosophizing has undergone many internal transformations from its early origins in logical positivism and the writings of Russell and Moore. But even when we follow its sometimes tortuous paths and its diverse currents from positivism to ordinary-language analysis to the philosophy of language and formal semantics, the anti-historical bias of this style of philosophizing has persisted. Recently, however, there are many signs of the breakup of the hegemony of analytic philosophy. Even a generation ago there seemed to be an optimistic confidence among many analytic philosophers that philosophy had finally discovered its proper subject matter, its problems and its procedures, so that genuine progress could be made in solving or dissolving philosophic

problems. But even among the staunchest defenders of analytic philosophy this confidence is now seriously questioned. Recently there have been a growing number of critiques of the presuppositions, unquestioned assumptions, and metaphors that have characterized so much of contemporary analytic philosophy.

Two of the most forceful and controversial critics of analytic philosophy have been Richard Rorty and Alasdair MacIntyre. Philosophers are frequently insensitive to the criticisms of “outsiders,” but what has disturbed (or delighted) so many philosophers is that both Rorty and MacIntyre are “insiders.” I do not simply mean that they have established their credentials as professional philosophers, but more specifically that each has contributed to discussions which have been in the foreground of analytic philosophy. But the distinctive feature of their recent critiques is the use that they make of history in carrying out these critiques. Rorty, in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*,<sup>4</sup> not only “goes after” the pretensions of analytic philosophy, he also seeks to deconstruct what he calls the “Cartesian-Lockean-Kantian” tradition, and the obsession with epistemology and foundationalism that he takes to be characteristic of so much of modern philosophy. Rorty typically begins his critiques with a “softening-up” strategy in which he shows his dexterity in picking apart the typical argumentative strategies that have been valorized by analytic philosophers. But the subversive quality of his critique soon becomes evident, for he is calling into question just this adversarial, argumentative style of philosophizing. He wants to dig deeper and come to some understanding of why philosophers engage in the language games that they do. And this requires a historical critique, a type of genealogical unmasking where we become aware of the historical accidents and contingencies that shape what we frequently take to be intuitive and self-evident.

One of the many spinoffs of Rorty’s reflections is a distinctive (and controversial) interpretation of how the history of philosophy has developed. He rejects the view that there are perennial problems of philosophy which arise as soon as we reflect. He is equally relentless in his criticism of a variant of this, where we take the more charitable and self-congratulatory attitude that our philosophic ancestors were dealing with basic problems, but the trouble is that they lacked the proper conceptual tools for solving them. His alternative, which can be seen as a novel blending of themes suggested by Heidegger, Derrida, Foucault, Kuhn, and Feyerabend, may be stated as follows.

There are moments in history when, because of all sorts of historical accidents – like what is going on in some part of culture such as science or religion – a new set of metaphors, distinctions, and problems is invented and captures the imagination of followers. For a time, when a particular philosophic language game gets entrenched, it sets the direction for “normal” philosophizing. After a while, because of some other historical accidents – like the appearance of a new genius or just plain boredom and sterility – another cluster of metaphors, distinctions, and problems usurps the place of what is now a dying tradition. At first the abnormal talk of some new genius may be dismissed as idiosyncratic, as not being “genuine” or “serious” philosophy. But sometimes this abnormal talk will set philosophy in new directions. We must resist the Whiggish temptation to rewrite the history of philosophy in our own image – where we see our predecessors as “really” treating what we now take to be fundamental problems. The crucial point for Rorty is to realize that a philosophical paradigm does *not* displace a former one because it can better formulate the legitimate problems of a prior paradigm; rather, because of a set of historical contingencies, it nudges the former paradigm aside. This is what happened in the seventeenth century when within a relatively short period of time the entire tradition of scholasticism collapsed and no longer seemed to have much point. After such a revolution or upheaval occurs, philosophers have a difficult time figuring out the point of the elaborate language game that had evolved. While Rorty refuses to make predictions, he certainly suggests that this is likely to happen again with modern philosophy and its offspring, analytic philosophy. To understand a historical movement such as analytic philosophy, we must uncover the metaphors, distinctions, and problems that characterize its form of normal philosophizing, and this requires historical digging into how a distinctive type of problematic was invented.

I do not want to suggest that I uncritically accept Rorty’s understanding of how the history of philosophy develops, or rather moves by fits and starts. There is plenty to criticize in the specific genealogies that he elaborates. But I do want to highlight the seriousness (and playfulness) of Rorty’s critique, for if he is right then many analytic philosophers are self-deceived in what they think they are doing – solving and dissolving the “genuine” problems of philosophy. In this context the most important point to emphasize is that Rorty’s forays into the history of philosophy and the normal

philosophizing of analytic philosophers is primarily critical in its intent. His historical analyses are intended to uncover prejudgments and prejudices, to expose their historical contingencies. At the very least, he forces us to ask new sorts of questions about just what analytic philosophers are doing, and these critical questions could not even be raised without a historical perspective on the present.

MacIntyre, who has been critical of Rorty’s historical interpretations and more generally Rorty’s conception of the history of philosophy, makes an even more ambitious use of history in his critique of contemporary moral philosophy in *After Virtue*. In the main, Rorty restricts himself to the history of philosophy. But in a quasi-Hegelian manner, MacIntyre thinks that if we want to understand philosophy and its history, we can only properly make sense of it in terms of more pervasive themes in culture and society. This is evidenced in the way in which he examines emotivism. For emotivism is not just a curious minor chapter in the history of moral philosophy. We can argumentatively show why an emotivist theory of meaning is mistaken, but this does not yet touch what MacIntyre takes to be a more fundamental issue. For he claims that,

to a large degree people now think, talk, and act *as if* emotivism were true, no matter what their avowed theoretical standpoint may be. Emotivism has become embodied in our culture. But of course in saying this I am not merely contending that morality is not what it once was, but also and more importantly that what once was morality has to a large degree disappeared ... and that this marks a degeneration, a grave cultural loss.<sup>5</sup>

MacIntyre seeks to show us that emotivism has become embodied in our culture and sketches a historical account of just how this came to be – a historical account which is not meant to be neutral but rather has the critical intent of showing us why this is a degeneration and a cultural loss. A degeneration from what? From what MacIntyre calls the “tradition of the virtues” – a tradition that began long before Aristotle, but where Aristotle’s ethical and political writings are the canonical texts, a tradition which according to MacIntyre continued to develop creatively through the Middle Ages. If MacIntyre is to complete his narrative argument, it is not sufficient simply to describe and evoke the memory of this tradition. He must also defend it. To use his own words, he seeks to make “the rational case”

for a tradition in which the Aristotelian ethical and political texts are canonical. The Aristotelian tradition of the virtues must be “rationally vindicated.” According to MacIntyre’s narrative it was the Enlightenment project of seeking to justify moral principles that bears a great deal of the responsibility for the “catastrophe” of the collapse of the tradition of the virtues. This Enlightenment project, when unmasked – as it was by Nietzsche – ineluctably leads to emotivism. According to MacIntyre we are confronted with a grand Either/Or.

*Either* one must follow through the aspirations and the collapse of the different versions of the Enlightenment project until there remains only the Nietzschean diagnosis and the Nietzschean problematic *or* one must hold that the Enlightenment project was not only mistaken, but should never have been commenced in the first place. There is no third alternative.<sup>6</sup>

Once again, in citing MacIntyre, my main point is not to endorse what he is claiming, but to highlight another variation of the way in which the appeal to history can serve a critical philosophical function.<sup>7</sup> To anticipate a point that I want to emphasize later in this essay, MacIntyre’s own historical critique of contemporary morality and moral philosophy itself demands a close critical examination of his “rational vindication” of the Aristotelian tradition. To return to Kafka’s parable, both Rorty and MacIntyre help us to see how “He” uses one antagonist in his fight with the second, how the appeal to history can enable us to think critically in the gap between past and future. But “He” must give battle to both antagonists. Rorty and MacIntyre are not just telling us likely stories that are intended to make sense of our present predicament. They are making claims to validity, claims which have an implicit future reference and which must themselves be subjected to careful scrutiny and evaluation. In carrying out this critical task, an appeal to the past, to the history of philosophy, or to a more general cultural and social history is never sufficient. But before dealing more explicitly with the doubly critical character of the fight of philosophy, I want to extend the horizon of the ways in which the appeal to history has served a critical function in recent philosophy.

One of the most dramatic consequences of the appeal to history in

recent philosophy has been the appeal to history in the understanding of the nature of science. Kuhn was certainly prophetic when he opened *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* with the following claim:

History, if viewed as a repository for more than anecdote or chronology, could produce a decisive transformation in the image of science by which we are now possessed. That image has been previously drawn, even by scientists themselves, mainly from the study of finished scientific achievements as these are recorded in the classics, and more recently, in the textbooks from which each new scientific generation learns to practice its trade. Inevitably, however, the aim of such books is persuasive and pedagogic; a concept of science drawn from them is no more likely to fit the enterprise that produced them than an image of a national culture drawn from a tourist brochure or a language text. This essay attempts to show that we have been misled by them in fundamental ways. Its aim is to sketch a quite different concept of science that can emerge from the historical record of research activity itself.<sup>8</sup>

If we place Kuhn’s remarks in their historical context we can grasp why *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* had such an impact on our understanding of science and also influenced many other areas of inquiry. For Kuhn gave expression to a new emerging orientation – to emphases and concerns that were being fed by a wide variety of sources. By 1962, the “received” or “orthodox” view of the structure of scientific theory and explanation was coming under increased attack.<sup>9</sup> Not only was there a questioning of the fundamental dogmas of logical empiricism, including a sharp analytic–synthetic distinction, the observational–theoretical distinction, the dichotomy between the context of discovery and the context of justification, and the primacy of the deductive-nomological analysis of scientific explanation, there was a growing sense that there was something artificial and distortive about the very way in which problems in the philosophy of science were formulated. Hanson, Feyerabend, Toulmin, Lakatos, and even Popper emphasized how a sensitivity to science as a historical, ongoing activity transformed our “image of science.” The appeal to history was not anecdotal, it was critical. I do not want to underestimate the differences among those who transformed our understanding of scientific inquiry, but this should not blind us to the common themes and affinities that emerged in these debates

and controversies.<sup>10</sup> Although Kuhn's slippery and ambiguous term "paradigm" has been seriously challenged for clarifying the character of scientific development, Kuhn helped to initiate a "paradigm shift" in the philosophy and history of science. The new sensitivity to the relevance of the history of scientific inquiry for gaining a philosophical perspective on science was itself fraught with dangers. For there was the danger of displacing the "epistemological myth of the given" with a "historical myth of the given," where we falsely imagine that global interpretations of the nature of science can be resolved by direct appeals to history.<sup>11</sup> But the appeal to history is not sufficient to bear this weight. The history of science has served a powerful critical function in our understanding of science, but the diverse appeals to history themselves demand careful critical scrutiny.

Thus far, in discussing Rorty, MacIntyre, and Kuhn, I have been focusing on diverse uses of history in criticizing some of the anti-historical biases of analytic philosophy, but I have already suggested that we can find affinities with what has happened in Continental philosophy since the early days of phenomenology. To illustrate what I mean, let me briefly consider some of the contributions of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Michel Foucault.

The transition from Rorty, MacIntyre, and Kuhn to Gadamer is an easy and natural one. Rorty himself appropriated the expression "hermeneutics" from Gadamer. (The penultimate chapter of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* is entitled "From Epistemology to Hermeneutics.") Kuhn, too, recognizes the affinity of his approach to understanding scientific inquiry and hermeneutics.<sup>12</sup> There are many family resemblances between MacIntyre's understanding of the role of narrative and tradition – and especially his appeal to Aristotle – and Gadamer's appropriation of Aristotle. (Indeed, I think one of the most exciting aspects of recent philosophy is the increased crisscrossing that is taking place between Anglo-American and Continental philosophy.)

Gadamer not only is constantly making a critical use of the history of philosophy, he is a thinker who has sought to challenge the Enlightenment's prejudice against prejudice. He has defended the centrality of tradition and rightful authority in all human understanding. We are beings thrown into the world who are always shaped by and shaping the traditions that form us. Tradition for Gadamer is a repository of truth, and in the dialogical conversation

with tradition our task is to recover this truth. This is not the occasion for a full-scale explication and assessment of Gadamer's claims, but I would like to focus on one dominant theme in Gadamer which exemplifies what he means by hermeneutics, and how it can enable us to gain a critical perspective on our contemporary situation: his interpretation of Aristotle's conception of *praxis* and *phronēsis*.<sup>13</sup> All understanding for Gadamer involves appropriation; and this is what he seeks to do with Aristotle's texts. Appropriation itself for Gadamer requires what Aristotle called *phronēsis*, where knowledge is not detached from our being but is determinative of what we are in the process of becoming. Hermeneutical understanding for Gadamer is itself a form of *phronēsis*, a judgmental mediation between the universal and the particular. And Gadamer himself has sought to delineate the ways in which the practical wisdom of *phronēsis* differs from *epistēmē* and *technē*. But Gadamer's interest in Aristotle's ethical and political writings is not merely philological or antiquarian. He tells us: "When Aristotle, in the sixth book of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, distinguishes the manner of 'practical' knowledge ... from theoretical and technical knowledge, he expresses, in my opinion, one of the greatest truths by which the Greeks throw light upon 'scientific' mystification of the modern society of specialization."<sup>14</sup>

He spells out what he means when he writes:

In my own eyes, the great merit of Aristotle was that he anticipated the impasse of our scientific culture by his description of the structure of practical reason as distinct from theoretical knowledge and technical skill. By philosophical arguments he refuted the claim of the professional lawmakers whose function at that time corresponded to the role of the expert in the modern scientific society. Of course, I do not mean to equate the modern expert with the professional sophist. In his own field he is a faithful and reliable investigator, and in general he is well aware of the particularity of his methodical assumptions and realizes that the results of his investigation have a limited relevance. Nevertheless, the problem of our society is that the longing of the citizenry for orientation and normative patterns invests the expert with an exaggerated authority. Modern society expects him to provide a substitute for past moral and political orientations. Consequently, the concept of "*praxis*" which was developed in the last two centuries is an awful deformation of what practice really is. In all the debates of the last century practice was understood as application of science to technical tasks .... It degrades practical reason to technical control.<sup>15</sup>

Here, too, we witness still another subtle and powerful critical encounter with the present – an encounter informed by the appropriation of Aristotle’s reflections on *praxis* and *phronēsis*. But again there is double movement in this critique. If Gadamer is right about what he takes to be “one of the greatest truths” found in Aristotle, then this needs to be rationally vindicated. It is here that the “He” of Kafka’s parable needs to fight back. If we accept Gadamer’s analysis of the problem of our scientific civilization, it cannot be simply because when compared with the classical Greek understanding of *praxis* and *phronēsis* we judge our society to be deficient and deformed, but rather because we are *now* prepared to defend and argumentatively justify what we take to be the “truth” in the tradition of practical philosophy. Such an argumentative defense always makes an implicit reference to the future, to the openness of critical examination of validity claims. It is a bad or degenerate form of historicism to think we can justify such validity claims by the appeal to tradition and inherited authority. In this respect, I am in complete agreement with Habermas, who has forcefully argued against Gadamer that in any critical encounter with tradition we never escape the demand to warrant our validity claims, to defend them by the best possible arguments and reasons which are available to us. This is the “truth” in the Enlightenment tradition that still needs to be preserved and defended.<sup>16</sup> This is the “truth” in Kant’s call for “the freedom to make public use of one’s reason at every point.”<sup>17</sup>

Before returning explicitly to the double gesture – the dialectical tension – between philosophy and its history, I want to consider how we can enlarge our appreciation of the critical function of the appeal to history by briefly considering the work of Michel Foucault. At first glance Foucault is problematic in several respects. Whereas Gadamer seeks to show continuities and affinities between the past and the present, to enable us to fuse alien horizons, Foucault’s characteristic emphasis is on epistemological ruptures and radical breaks of *epistēmē* and discursive practice. He has an uncanny ability to make the familiar appear strange and alien. His histories, archaeological excavations, and genealogical unmaskings strike us as anti-histories.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, his texts defy any easy genre classification. Are they history, philosophy, sociology, fictions? Transgression is not only a constant theme in Foucault, it is embodied in his rhetorical style – a style that makes us acutely aware of the exclusionary tactics of all forms of discourse, including the discourse of philosophers. Just as he

is an anti-historical “historian,” he sometimes appears to be an anti-philosophical philosopher. When he asks the question: how is a given form of knowledge possible? – he is not searching for transcendental conditions but for an analysis of these micropractices and “unthought” rules embedded in what seems so marginal – the substructure of our discourses.

Foucault is always throwing us off-center, forcing us to ask new sorts of questions and engaging in new sorts of inquiries to write a “history of the present.” Consider his *Discipline and Punish*, which strikingly begins with a description of the brutal public execution of Damiens, a description juxtaposed with the “timetable” – the rules for “the house of young prisoners in Paris” which was drawn up eighty years later by Léon Faucher.<sup>19</sup> What does any of this have to do with philosophy? What concern for philosophers is there in a study which announces itself as “The Birth of the Prison”? And yet, as Foucault’s own “narrative” unfolds, we gradually become aware that such themes as “knowledge,” “power,” “truth,” “subjectivity,” the nature of “man,” “the character of the human sciences” – themes which have been central for philosophy – come obliquely into the foreground. He concludes with a chilling analysis of the “Panopticon society,” “the disciplinary society,” “the carceral city” – which turns out to be our society. In short, Foucault presents us with nothing less than a radical critique of our present condition, radical not only in the sense of holding up to us a mirror of what we have become, but radical in the sense of getting at its archaeological underpinnings: “the historical background to various studies of the power of normalization and the formation of knowledge in modern society.” Foucault frequently leaves us with more questions than he resolves. His analyses force us to raise new questions about freedom, power, knowledge, and emancipation.<sup>20</sup> We witness a penetrating critique that could only be achieved by “historical” digging – a digging not into the history of philosophy but the “history” that makes philosophy itself possible.

### The double critical gesture of philosophy

My brief discussions of Rorty, MacIntyre, Kuhn, Gadamer, and Foucault are intended to be a series of reminders – signposts – of some of the diverse ways in which the appeal to history serves the

critical function of philosophy. For all their differences, they share the intent to expose prejudgments, prejudices, and illusions. Each manifests a negative moment which calls into question what has been unquestioned. In this respect they share in the *ēthos* that is perhaps the deepest and most persistent theme in the tradition of philosophic reflection. There is a double character, a double gesture in all these “historical” critiques. For the more seriously we take them, the more seriously we must critically evaluate them, exploring their ramifications, testing their validity, pursuing the questions that they raise. We are not only thrust backward, but forward. “He” must always engage in a double battle. Philosophy becomes thin and is in danger of losing its identity when it forgets its past, when it gives up trying to grapple with both the strangeness and familiarity of what is “other” and alien. But it also becomes thin when it is seduced into thinking that the appeal to tradition is sufficient to answer its questions. It should be clear that I reject foundationalism in its multifarious forms. I not only reject the idea that philosophy itself can be grounded on permanent foundations and that philosophy itself is a foundational discipline, an arbitrator for the rest of culture; I also reject the idea that history – in any of its forms – is or can be a foundational discipline, that it can answer the questions we ask in philosophy. I do not believe that there are perennial problems in philosophy or philosophical intuitions which are so deep that they escape historical contingencies. But there is another way of understanding the perennial character of philosophy, for there is a perennial impulse of wonder that can take a variety of forms. There is a deep impulse to understand, to make sense of, to comprehend “that articulated and integrated vision of man-in-the-universe – or shall I say, discourse-about-man-in-all-discourse – which has traditionally been its goal,”<sup>21</sup> even when this discourse seeks to unravel what has been taken to be intelligible. And this impulse and the task it sets for us – although it may be suppressed or repressed – has itself an uncanny way of reasserting itself, even when it appears most moribund.

Let me conclude with a passage from John Dewey. For the interpretation of Kafka’s parable that I have sketched above might well be taken as commentary on what Dewey wrote:

There is current among those who philosophize the conviction that, while past thinkers have reflected in their systems the conditions and

perplexities of their own day, present-day philosophy in general, and one’s own philosophy in particular, is emancipated from the influence of that complex of institutions which forms culture. Bacon, Descartes, Kant each thought with fervor that he was founding philosophy anew because he was placing it securely upon an exclusive intellectual basis, exclusive, that is, of everything but intellect. The movement of time has revealed the illusion; it exhibits as the work of philosophy the old and ever new undertaking of adjusting that body of traditions which constitute the actual mind of man to scientific tendencies and political aspirations which are novel and incompatible with received authorities. Philosophers are parts of history, caught in its movement; creators perhaps in some measure of its future, but also assuredly creatures of its past.<sup>22</sup>

## NOTES

- 1 Cited in Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future* (New York: Viking Press, 1961), p. 7.
- 2 René Descartes, *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, trans. Elizabeth S. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 1, p. 149.
- 3 See *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), pp. 16–20.
- 4 The following paragraph is based upon my critical study of Rorty’s *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979). See “Philosophy in the Conversation of Mankind,” in Richard J. Bernstein, *Philosophical Profiles* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), p. 86.
- 5 Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), p. 21.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 111.
- 7 For my critique of MacIntyre, see “Nietzsche or Aristotle? Reflections on Alasdair MacIntyre’s *After Virtue*,” *Philosophical Profiles*, pp. 115–40.
- 8 Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, second edn (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 1.
- 9 For a detailed elaboration of the “received view” and the criticisms brought against it, see the foreword to Frederick Suppe, ed., *The Structure of Scientific Theories*, second edn (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977).
- 10 I have analyzed this historical shift in the understanding of science in *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*, part 2.
- 11 See my discussion of this danger in *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*, pp. 71ff.
- 12 See Kuhn’s preface to *The Essential Tension* (Chicago: University of



- Chicago Press, 1977). See also my discussion of hermeneutics and the philosophy of science in *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*.
- 13 See my discussion and critique of Gadamer in *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*, part 3.
  - 14 Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Problem of Historical Consciousness," reprinted in Paul Rabinow and William Sullivan, eds, *Interpretive Social Science: A Reader* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1979), p. 107.
  - 15 Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Hermeneutics and Social Science," *Cultural Hermeneutics* 2 (1975), p. 312.
  - 16 I have developed this theme more fully in *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*. See especially pp. 150ff.
  - 17 Immanuel Kant, "What is Enlightenment?" in *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Lewis White Beck (New York: Library of Liberal Arts, 1959), p. 87.
  - 18 See Hayden White, "Foucault Decoded: Notes from Underground," in *Tropics of Discourse* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1978).
  - 19 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1979), pp. 3–7.
  - 20 For a critique of Foucault, see Charles Taylor, "Foucault on Freedom and Truth," in David Hoy, ed., *Foucault: A Critical Reader* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986).
  - 21 Wilfrid Sellars, *Science, Perception and Reality* (New York: Humanities Press, 1963), p. 171.
  - 22 John Dewey, *Philosophy and Civilization* (New York: Mouton, Balch and Company, 1931), pp. 3–4.

## 2

## The Rage Against Reason

Recently, a number of philosophers including Alasdair MacIntyre, Richard Rorty, Paul Ricoeur, and Jean-François Lyotard have reminded us about the central (and problematic) role of narrative for philosophic inquiry. I say "reminded us" because narrative discourse has always been important for philosophy. Typically, even a significant philosopher situates his or her own work by telling a story about what happened before he or she came along – a story that he or she tells with its own heroes and villains. This is the way in which philosophers are always creating and recreating their own traditions and canons. And the stories that they tell are systematically interwoven with what they take to be their distinctive contributions. Consider Aristotle's narrative in the first book of the *Metaphysics* about the insights and blindneses of his predecessors in grasping the multidimensional character of our scientific knowledge of causes. Or – to leap to the contemporary scene – think of the story that logical positivists have told us about the confusions and linguistic blunders of most of their predecessors – with a few bright moments of anticipation of their own radical program for reforming philosophy. Or again, there is the powerful, seductive story that Husserl tells, where the entire history of philosophy is viewed as a teleological anticipation of the new, rigorous *Wissenschaft* of transcendental phenomenology. There is a common rhetorical pattern in these narratives. They tell stories of anticipations, setbacks, and trials, but they culminate with the progressive realization of truth and reason, which is normally identified