

Chapter Two

The Counter-Enlightenment Attack on Reason

Enlightenment reason, liberalism, and science

The Enlightenment developed those features of the modern world that many now take largely for granted—liberal politics and free markets, scientific progress and technological innovation. All four of those institutions depend upon confidence in the power of reason.

Political and economic liberalism depend upon confidence that individuals can run their own lives. One gives political power and economic freedom to individuals only to the extent one thinks they are capable of using it wisely. That confidence in individuals is fundamentally a confidence in the power of reason—reason being the means by which individuals can come to know their world, plan their lives, and interact socially the way that reasonable people do—by trade, discussion, and the force of argument.

Science and technology more obviously depend upon confidence in the power of reason. Scientific method is an increasingly refined application of reason to understanding nature. Trusting science's results cognitively is an act of confidence in reason, as is trusting one's life to its technological products.

Institutionalizing confidence in the power of reason is the most outstanding achievement of the Enlightenment.

One indication of this is that of the thousands of brilliant and hardworking individuals who made the Enlightenment happen, the three men, all of them English, most often identified as being most influential in making the Enlightenment possible are: Francis Bacon, for his work on empiricism and scientific method; Isaac Newton, for his work on physics; and John Locke, for his work on reason, empiricism, and liberal politics. Confidence in the power of reason underlay all of their achievements. Their analyses and arguments carried the day, and it was the framework that they developed that provided the intellectual basis for every major development in the eighteenth century.

The beginnings of the Counter-Enlightenment

The Enlightenment confidence in reason, however, upon which all progress had been based, had always been philosophically incomplete and vulnerable. These philosophical weaknesses had emerged clearly by the middle of the eighteenth century, in the skepticism of David Hume's empiricism and the dead-end reached by traditional rationalism. The perceived vulnerability of Enlightenment reason was one of the major rallying points for an emerging Counter-Enlightenment.¹

The era from 1780 to 1815 is one of the defining periods of the modern era. During those thirty-five years, Anglo-American culture

¹ See Beck 1969, Berlin 1980, Williams 1999, and Dahlstrom 2000 for the historical and philosophical range of "Counter-Enlightenment" as used here.

and German culture split decisively from each other, one following a broadly Enlightenment program, the other a Counter-Enlightenment one.

The Enlightenment had started in England, and it took England from having been a second-rate European power to being a first rate one. The rest of Europe noticed. Especially the French and the Germans noticed. The French were first to pick up on the English Enlightenment and to transform brilliantly their own intellectual culture on the basis of it, before the Rousseauians wrested the Revolution away from the Lockean and turned it into the chaos of the Terror.

Many Germans, however, had been suspicious of the Enlightenment long before the French Revolution. Some German intellectuals absorbed Enlightenment themes, but most were deeply troubled by its implications for religion, morality, and politics.

Enlightenment reason, the critics charged, undermined traditional religion. The leading Enlightenment thinkers were deists, having abandoned the traditional theistic conception of God. God was no longer a personal, caring creator—he was now the supreme mathematician who had aeons ago designed the universe in terms of the beautiful equations that Johannes Kepler and Newton had discovered. The deists' God operated according to logic and mathematics—not will and whim. The deists' God also seemed to have done his work a long time ago, and to have done it well—meaning he was no longer needed on the scene to operate the machinery of the universe. Deism thus did two things: it turned God into a distant architect, and it accepted a rational epistemology. Both of those features caused major problems for traditional theism.

A distant architect is a far cry from a personal God who is there looking after us or checking up on us day to day—he is not someone we pray to or look to comfort from or fear the wrath of. The deists' god is a bloodless abstraction—not a being that is going

to get people fired up in church on Sunday morning and give them a sense of meaning and moral guidance in their lives.

An even more important consequence of deism is the loss of faith. To the extent that reason is the standard, faith loses, and the theists of the eighteenth century knew that. To the extent that reason develops, science develops; and to the extent that science develops, supernaturalistic religious answers to be accepted on faith will be replaced with naturalistic scientific explanations that are rationally compelling. By the middle of the eighteenth century, everyone had spotted that trend and everyone knew where it was headed.

Even worse, from the perspective of the early Counter-Enlightenment thinkers, was the content of the naturalistic answers that science was giving in the eighteenth century. Science's most successful models then were mechanistic and reductionistic. When applied to human beings, such models posed an obvious threat to the human spirit. What place is there for free will and passion, spontaneity and creativity if the world is governed by mechanism and logic, causality and necessity?

And what about the value consequences? Reason is a faculty of the individual, and respect for reason and individualism had developed together during the Enlightenment. The individual is an end in himself, the Enlightenment thinkers taught, not a slave or servant of others. His happiness is his own to pursue, and by giving him the tools of education, science, and technology he can be set free to set his own goals and to chart his own course in life. But what happens, worried the early Counter-Enlightenment thinkers, to traditional values of community and sacrifice, of duty and connectedness, if individuals are encouraged to calculate rationally their own gain? Will not such rational individualism encourage cold-blooded, short-range, and grasping selfishness? Will it not encourage individuals to reject long-standing traditions and to

sever communal ties, thus creating a non-society of isolated, rootless and restless atoms?

The Enlightenment's championing of reason and individualism thus confronted the early Counter-Enlightenment thinkers with the specter of a godless, spiritless, passionless, and amoral future.

Horror at that specter was most prevalent among intellectuals in the German states, where the prevailing attitude was hostility toward the Enlightenment. Many drew inspiration from Jean-Jacques Rousseau's collectivist social philosophy. Many drew inspiration from Hume's attack on reason. And many wanted to reinvigorate the German traditions of faith, duty, and ethnic identity that had been undermined by the Enlightenment's emphasis upon reason, the pursuit of happiness, and cosmopolitanism. As the Enlightenment grew in power and prestige in England and France, an emerging Counter-Enlightenment gathered its forces in the German states.

Our concern in this chapter and the next is with post-modernism's attack on reason. Postmodernism emerged as a social force among intellectuals because in the humanities the Counter-Enlightenment defeated the Enlightenment. The weakness of the Enlightenment account of reason was its fatal flaw. Postmodernism's extreme skepticism, subjectivism, and relativism are the results of a two-centuries-long epistemological battle. That battle is the story of pro-reason intellectuals trying to defend realist accounts of perception, concepts, logic, but gradually giving ground and abandoning the field while the anti-reason intellectuals advanced in the sophistication of their arguments and developed increasingly non-rational alternatives. Postmodernism is the end result of the Counter-Enlightenment attack on reason.

Kant's skeptical conclusion

Immanuel Kant is the most significant thinker of the Counter-Enlightenment. His philosophy, more than any other thinker's, buttressed the pre-modern worldview of faith and duty against the inroads of the Enlightenment; and his attack on Enlightenment reason more than anyone else's opened the door to the nineteenth-century irrationalists and idealist metaphysicians. Kant's innovations in philosophy were thus the beginning of the epistemological route to postmodernism.

Kant is sometimes considered to be an advocate of reason. Kant was in favor of science, it is argued. He emphasized the importance of rational consistency in ethics. He posited regulative principles of reason to guide our thinking, even our thinking about religion. And he resisted the ravings of Johann Hamann and the relativism of Johann Herder. Thus, the argument runs, Kant should be placed in the pantheon of Enlightenment greats.² That is a mistake.

The fundamental question of reason is its relationship to reality. Is reason capable of knowing reality—or is it not? Is our rational faculty a cognitive function, taking its material from reality, understanding the significance of that material, and using that understanding to guide our actions in reality—or is it not? This is the question that divides philosophers into pro- and anti-reason camps, this is the question that divides the rational gnostics and the skeptics, and this was Kant's question in his *Critique of Pure Reason*.

Kant was crystal clear about his answer. Reality—real, noumenal reality—is forever closed off to reason, and reason is limited to awareness and understanding of its own subjective products. Reason has “no other purpose than to prescribe its own formal rule for the extension of its empirical employment, and not

² E.g., Höffe 1994, 1.

any extension *beyond all limits of empirical employment*.”³ Limited to knowledge of phenomena that it has itself constructed according to its own design, reason cannot know anything outside itself. Contrary to the “dogmatists” who had for centuries held out hope for knowledge of reality itself, Kant concluded that “[t]he dogmatic solution is therefore not only uncertain, but impossible.”⁴

Thus Kant, that great champion of reason, asserted that the most important fact about reason is that it is clueless about reality.

Part of Kant’s motivation was religious. He saw the beating that religion had taken at the hands of the Enlightenment thinkers, and he agreed strongly with them that religion cannot be justified by reason. So he realized that we need to decide which has priority—reason or religion. Kant firmly chose religion. This meant that reason had to be put in its proper, subordinate, place. And so, as he stated famously in the Second Preface to the first *Critique*, “I here therefore found it necessary to deny *knowledge* in order to make room for *faith*.”⁵ One purpose of the *Critique*, accordingly, was to limit severely the scope of reason. By closing noumenal reality off to reason, all rational arguments against the existence of God could be dismissed. If reason could be shown to be limited to the merely phenomenal realm, then the noumenal realm—the realm of religion—would be off limits to reason, and those arguing against religion could be told to be quiet and go away.⁶

Kant’s problematic from empiricism and rationalism

In addition to his religious concerns, Kant was also grappling with the problems that the empiricists and the rationalists had run into in attempting to develop satisfactory accounts of reason.

³ Kant 1781, A686/B714.

⁴ Kant 1781, B512/A484.

⁵ Kant 1781, Bxxx.

⁶ Kant 1781, Bxxxi.

For all of their differences, the empiricists and rationalists had agreed with the broadly Enlightenment conception of reason—that human reason is a faculty of the individual, that it is competent to know reality objectively, that it is capable of functioning autonomously and in accordance with universal principles. Reason so conceived underlay their confidence in science, human dignity, and the perfectibility of human institutions.

Of those five features of reason—objectivity, competence, autonomy, universality, and being an individual faculty—Kant concluded that the sad experience of recent philosophy demonstrated that the most fundamental of them, objectivity, must be abandoned. The failures of empiricism and rationalism had shown that objectivity is impossible.

For reason to be objective, it must have contact with reality. The most obvious candidate for such direct contact is sense-perception. On realist accounts, the senses give us our most direct contact with reality, and they thereby provide the material that reason then organizes and integrates into concepts, those concepts in turn becoming integrated into propositions and theories.

If, however, the senses give us only internal representations of objects, then an obstacle is erected between reality and reason. If reason is presented with an internal sensory representation of reality, then it is not aware directly of reality; reality then becomes something to be inferred or hoped for beyond a veil of sense-perception.

Two arguments had traditionally generated the conclusion that we are aware only of internal sensory representations. The first was based on the fact that sense-perception is a causal process. Since it is a causal process, the argument ran, it seems that one's reason comes to be aware of an internal state at the end of the causal process and not of the external object that initiated the process. The senses, unfortunately, get in the way of our consciousness of reality. The second argument was based on the fact that the features of sense-

perception vary from individual to individual and across time for any given individual. One individual sees an object as red while another sees it as gray. An orange tastes sweet—but not after tasting a spoonful of sugar. What then is the real color of the object or the real taste of the orange? It seems that neither can be said to be the real feature. Instead, each sense-perception must be merely a subjective effect, and one's reason must be aware only of the subjective effect and not the external object.

What both of these arguments have in common is a recognition of the uncontroversial fact that our sense organs have an identity, that they work in specific ways, and that the form in which we experience reality is a function of our sense organs' identities. And they have in common the crucial and controversial premise that our sense organs' having an identity means that they become obstacles to direct consciousness of reality. This latter premise was critical for Kant's analysis.

The empiricists had drawn from this analysis of sense-perception the conclusion that while we must rely on our sense perceptions, we must always be tentative with regard to our confidence in them. From sense-perception we can draw no certain conclusions. The rationalists had drawn the conclusions that sense-experience is useless as a source of significant truths and that for the source of such truths we must look elsewhere.

This brings us to abstract concepts. The empiricists, stressing the experiential source of all of our beliefs, had held that concepts too must be contingent. As based on sense-perception, concepts are two stages removed from reality and so less certain. And as groupings based on our choices, concepts are human artifices, so they and the propositions generated from them can have no necessity or universality ascribed to them.

The rationalists, agreeing that necessary and universal concepts could not be derived from sense-experience—but insisting that we do have necessary and universal knowledge—had concluded that

our concepts must have a source somewhere other than in sense-experience. The problematic implication of this was that if concepts did not have their source in sense-experience, then it was hard to see how they could have any application to the sensory realm.

What these two analyses of concepts had in common is the following hard choice. If we think of concepts as telling us something universal and necessary, then we have to think of them as having nothing to do with the world of sense experience; and if we think of concepts as having something to do with the world of sense experience, then we have to abandon the idea of knowing any real universal and necessary truths. In other words, experience and necessity have nothing to do with each other. This premise too was critical for Kant's analysis.

The rationalists and the empiricists had jointly struck a blow to the Enlightenment confidence in reason. Reason works with concepts. But now we were to accept either that reason's concepts have little to do with the world of sense experience—in which case, science's conception of itself as generating universal and necessary truths about the world of sense-experience was in big trouble—or we were to accept that reason's concepts are merely provisional and contingent groupings of sense-experiences—in which case science's conception of itself as generating universal and necessary truths about the world of sense-experience was in big trouble.

Thus, by the time of Kant, the Enlightenment philosophers' account of reason was faltering on two counts. Given their analysis of sense-perception, reason seemed cut off from direct access to reality. And given their analysis of concepts, reason seemed either irrelevant to reality or limited to merely contingent truths.

Kant's significance in the history of philosophy is that he absorbed the lessons of the rationalists and empiricists and, agreeing with the central assumptions of both sides, transformed radically the terms of the relationship between reason and reality.

Kant's essential argument

Kant began by identifying a premise common to both empiricists and rationalists. They had assumed that knowledge must be objective. That is, they took for granted that the object of knowledge sets the terms and that therefore it was up to the subject to identify the object on the object's terms. In other words, the empiricists and the rationalists were realists: they believed that reality is what it is independently of consciousness, and that the purpose of consciousness is to come to an awareness of reality as it is. In Kant's terms, they assumed that the subject is to conform to object.⁷ Kant then noted that the realist/objectivist assumption had led repeatedly to failure, and—more strikingly—that it *must* necessarily lead to failure.

To demonstrate this, Kant proposed a dilemma for all analyses of knowledge. The first premise of the dilemma is given at the beginning of the Transcendental Deduction. Here Kant states that knowledge of objects can come to be in only one of two ways.

There are only two possible ways in which synthetic representations [i.e., what one experiences] and their objects can establish connection, obtain necessary relation to one another, and, as it were, meet one another. Either the object alone must make the representation possible, or the representation alone must make the object possible.⁸

The terms of the dilemma are crucial, particularly for the first alternative. If we say that “the object alone must make the representation possible,” then we imply that the subject must have nothing to do with the process. The implication is that the subject can have no identity of its own, that the mind must not be anything in particular, that consciousness must be, to borrow a phrase, a

⁷ Kant 1781, Bxvi.

⁸ Kant 1781, A92/B125.

purely “diaphanous” medium on which or through which reality writes itself.⁹ In other words, Kant assumed—as had most thinkers before him—that objectivity presupposes naïve realism’s metaphysics of an identity-less subject.

But clearly that metaphysics of mind is hopeless. This was Kant’s next premise. The knowing subject is something: its processes are causal and definite, and they shape the subject’s awareness. In Kant’s words, when we experience “we always remain involved in *conditions*,” conditions that make our experiences a “finite synthesis.”¹⁰

This is why naïve realism has been an impossible project. The knowing subject is not a blank, identity-less tablet, so it cannot be that the object alone makes knowledge possible. Given its finite identity, the knowing subject is implicated in producing its experiences, and from the limited and conditioned experiences that are produced the subject cannot read off what is really real.

Thus we arrive at the second alternative, the one that Kant proposed as being true—namely that the representation makes the object possible. And thus we have part of the motivation for Kant’s “Copernican” revolution in philosophy, announced in the Second Preface.¹¹ Given that the knowing subject has an identity, we must abandon the traditional assumption that the subject conforms to the object. Accordingly, the converse must be true: the object must conform to the subject, and only if we make that assumption—i.e., only if we abandon objectivity for subjectivity—can we make sense of empirical knowledge.

The second part of Kant’s motivation was attempting to make sense of necessary and universal concepts and propositions. Neither the rationalists nor the empiricists had found a way to derive them from experience. Kant again faulted their assumption

⁹ Kelley 1986, 22-24.

¹⁰ Kant 1781, A483/B511.

¹¹ Kant 1781, Bxvi-Bxvii.

of realism and objectivism. Those assumptions made the project impossible. “In the former case [i.e., the object alone making the representation possible], this relation is only empirical, and the representation is never possible *a priori*.”¹² Or putting the point in language Kant had learned from Hume, passive experience will never reveal what *must* be, for such experience “teaches us that a thing is so and so, but not that it cannot be otherwise.”¹³

So again we must infer that the converse is true: Necessity and universality must be functions of the knowing subject, not items impressed upon subjects by objects. If we assume that our identity as knowing subjects is implicated in constructing our experiences, then we can assume that our identity will generate certain necessary and universal features of our experiences.¹⁴ Accordingly we have Kant’s central project in the first *Critique* of tracking down fourteen such constructive functions of the subject: space and time as two forms of sensibility, and the twelve categories. As a result of the operations of those constructive functions, we can find necessary and universal features within our experiential world—because we have put them there.

Now for the payoffs and trade-offs. The first payoff is that the phenomenal world of experience now has necessary and universal features built into it, so we get a nice, orderly world for science to explore. Science is rescued from the unintended skepticism that the empiricists and rationalists had reached, and its aspiration to discover necessary and universal truths is made possible.

But there is also the Kantian trade-off. The objects that science explores exist “only in our brain,”¹⁵ so we can never come to know the world outside it. Since the phenomenal world’s necessary and universal features are a function of our subjective activities, any

¹² Kant 1781, A92/B125.

¹³ Kant 1781, B3.

¹⁴ Kant 1781, Bxvii-Bxviii; A125-A126.

¹⁵ Kant 1781, A484/B512.

necessary and universal features that science discovers in the phenomenal world have application only in the phenomenal world. Science must work with experience and reason, and on Kantian grounds this means that science is cut off from reality itself.

[E]verything intuited in space or time, and therefore all objects of experience possible to us, are nothing but appearances, that is, mere representations, which in the manner in which they are represented, as extended beings, or as series of alterations, have no independent existence outside our thoughts.¹⁶

As for what has independent existence outside our thoughts, nobody knows or can know.

From Kant's perspective, that is a trade-off he was happy to make, for science's loss is religion's gain. Kant's argument, if successful, means that "all objections to morality and religion will be forever silenced, and this in Socratic fashion, namely, by the clearest proof of the ignorance of the objectors."¹⁷ Reason and science are now limited to playing with phenomena, leaving the noumenal realm untouched and untouchable. Having denied knowledge, room was made for faith. For who can say what is or is not out there in the real world?

Identifying Kant's key assumptions

Kant's strikingly skeptical conclusions depend upon philosophical assumptions that continue to inform contemporary debates between postmodernists and their foes. Most postmodernists take these assumptions to be solid, and many times their foes are at a loss to challenge them. Yet they are the assumptions that must be addressed if postmodernist conclusions are to be avoided. So it is worth highlighting them for future reference.

¹⁶ Kant 1781, B519/A491.

¹⁷ Kant 1781, Bxxxi.

The first assumption is that the knowing subject's having an identity is an obstacle to cognition. This assumption is implicit in many verbal formulations: the critics of objectivity will insist that the mind is not a diaphanous medium; nor is it a glossy mirror within which reality reflects itself; nor is it a passive tablet upon which reality writes. The assumption emerges when those facts are taken to disqualify the subject from awareness of reality. The assumption then is that for awareness of reality to occur, the mind *would* have to be a diaphanous medium, a glossy mirror, a passive tablet.¹⁸ In other words, the mind would have to have no identity of its own; it would have to be nothing itself, and cognition would have to involve no causal processes. The mind's identity and its causal processes are thus taken to be the enemies of cognition.

The diaphanous assumption is implicit in the relativity and causality of perception arguments that were part of the background problematic to Kant's philosophy.

In the relativity-of-senses argument, the diaphanous assumption plays out as follows. We notice that one person reports seeing an object as red while another reports seeing it as gray. This puzzles us because it draws our attention to the fact that our sense organs differ in how they respond to reality. This is an epistemological puzzle, however, only if we assume that our sense organs should have nothing to do with our awareness of reality—that somehow awareness should occur by a pure stamping of reality upon our transparent minds. That is, it is a problem only if we assume our senses should operate diaphanously.

In the case of the causality of perception argument, the diaphanous assumption is involved if we are puzzled by the fact that consciousness requires that one's brain be in a certain state, and that between that brain state and the object in reality is a causal process involving sense organs. This is puzzling only if we have previously assumed that awareness should be an unmediated

¹⁸ This is exactly Rorty's key conclusion in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979).

phenomenon, that one's brain being in the appropriate state should just somehow happen. That is, the causal process of perception is a puzzle only on the assumption that our senses should have no identity of their own but rather be a diaphanous medium.¹⁹

In the arguments based on the relativity and the causality of perception, the identity of our sense organs is taken to be the enemy of awareness of reality.

Kant generalized this point to all organs of consciousness. The subject's mind is not diaphanous. It has identity: it has structures that limit what the subject can be aware of, and they are causally active. From this Kant inferred that the subject is prohibited from awareness of reality. Whatever we take our mind's identity to be—in Kant's case, the forms of sensibility and the categories—those causal processes block us. On the Kantian model, our minds' structures are seen not as existing for the purpose of *registering* or *responding* to structures that exist in reality, but as existing for the purpose of *imposing* themselves upon a malleable reality.

The question to return to is: Is there not something perverse about making our organs of consciousness obstacles to consciousness?²⁰

The second key assumption of Kant's argument is that abstractness, universality, and necessity have no legitimate basis in our experiences. This assumption was not original to Kant, but had a long history in the traditional problem of universals and the problem of induction. Kant, however, following Hume, declared

¹⁹ The diaphanous assumption is sometimes but not necessarily assisted by a lingering mind/body dualism in two ways. In one way, dualism encourages us to conceive of the mind as a ghostly, pure substance that somehow magically confronts and comes to know physical reality. In another way, such dualism posits a non-physical mind that is distinct from the physical sense organs and brain, and so immediately leads us to conceive of the physical senses and the brain as obstacles standing in the way of contact between mind and reality.

²⁰ See Kelley 1986 for an extended analysis and response to the diaphanous and Kantian theses.

the problems to be in principle unsolvable on the realist/objectivist approach, and he institutionalized that declaration in the subsequent history of philosophy. In the case of abstract, universal concepts, the argument was that there is no way to account for their abstractness and universality empirically: Since what is given empirically is concrete and particular, abstractness and universality must be added subjectively. The parallel argument in the case of general and necessary propositions was that there is no way to account for their generality and necessity empirically: Since what is given empirically is particular and contingent, generality and necessity must be subjectively added.

Institutionalizing this premise is crucial for postmodernism, since what has been added subjectively can be taken away subjectively. Postmodernists, struck by and favoring contingency and particularity for a host of reasons, accept the Humean/Kantian premise that neither abstractness nor generality can be derived legitimately from the empirical.

Why Kant is the turning point

Kant was the decisive break with the Enlightenment and the first major step toward postmodernism. Contrary to the Enlightenment account of reason, Kant held that the mind is not a response mechanism but a constitutive mechanism. He held that the mind—and not reality—sets the terms for knowledge. And he held that reality conforms to reason, not vice versa. In the history of philosophy, Kant marks a fundamental shift from objectivity as the standard to subjectivity as the standard.

Wait a minute, a defender of Kant may reply. Kant was hardly opposed to reason. After all, he favored rational consistency and he believed in universal principles. So what is anti-reason about that? The answer is that more fundamental to reason than consistency and universality is a connection to reality. Any thinker who

concludes that in principle reason cannot know reality is not fundamentally an advocate of reason. That Kant was in favor of consistency and universality is of derivative and ultimately inconsequential significance. Consistency with no connection to reality is a game based on subjective rules. If the rules of the game have nothing to do with reality, then why should everyone play by the same rules? These were precisely the implications the post-modernists were to draw eventually.

Kant was thus different from previous skeptics and religious apologists. Many earlier skeptics had denied that we can know anything, and many earlier religious apologists had subordinated reason to faith. But earlier skeptics had never been as sweeping in their conclusions. Earlier skeptics would identify particular cognitive operations and raise problems for them. Maybe a given experience is a perceptual illusion—thus undermining our confidence in our perceptual faculties; or maybe it is a dream—thus undermining our confidence in being distinguishing truth from fantasy; or maybe induction is only probabilistic—thus undermining our confidence in our generalizations; and so on. But the conclusion of those skeptical arguments would be merely that we cannot be sure that we are right about the way reality is. We might be, but we cannot guarantee it, the skeptics would conclude. Kant's point was deeper, arguing that in principle *any* conclusion reached by *any* of our faculties must necessarily not be about reality. *Any* form of cognition, because it must operate a certain way, cannot put us in contact with reality. On principle, because our minds' faculties are structured in a certain way, we cannot say what reality is. We can only say how our minds have structured the subjective reality we perceive. This thesis had been implicit in the works of some earlier thinkers, including Aristotle's, but Kant made it explicit and drew the conclusion systematically.

Kant is a landmark in a second respect. Earlier skeptics had, despite their negative conclusions, continued to conceive of truth as

correspondence to reality. Kant went a step further and redefined truth on subjective grounds. Given his premises, this makes perfect sense. Truth is an epistemological concept. But if our minds are in principle disconnected from reality, then to speak of truth as an external relationship between mind and reality is nonsense. Truth must be solely an internal relationship of consistency.

With Kant, then, external reality thus drops almost totally out of the picture, and we are trapped inescapably in subjectivity—and that is why Kant is a landmark. Once reason is in principle severed from reality, one then enters a different philosophical universe altogether.

This interpretive point about Kant is crucial and controversial. An analogy may help drive the point home. Suppose a thinker argued the following: "I am an advocate of freedom for women. Options and the power to choose among them are crucial to our human dignity. And I am wholeheartedly an advocate of women's human dignity. But we must understand that a scope of a woman's choice is confined to the kitchen. Beyond the kitchen's door she must not attempt to exercise choice. Within the kitchen, however, she has a whole feast of choices—whether to cook or clean, whether to cook rice or potatoes, whether to decorate in blue or yellow. She is sovereign and autonomous. And the mark of a good woman is a well-organized and tidy kitchen." No one would mistake such a thinker for an advocate of woman's freedom. Anyone would point out that there is a whole world beyond the kitchen and that freedom is essentially about exercising choice about defining and creating one's place in the world as a whole. The key point about Kant, to draw the analogy crudely, is that he prohibits knowledge of anything outside our skulls. He gives reason lots to do within the skull, and he does advocate a well-organized and tidy mind, but this hardly makes him a champion of reason. The point for any advocate of reason is that there is a whole world outside our skulls, and reason is essentially about knowing it.

Kant's contemporary Moses Mendelssohn was thus prescient in identifying Kant as "the all-destroyer."²¹ Kant did not take all of the steps down to postmodernism, but he did take the decisive one. Of the five major features of Enlightenment reason—objectivity, competence, autonomy, universality, and being an individual faculty—Kant rejects objectivity. Once reason is so severed from reality, the rest is details—details that are worked out over the next two centuries. By the time we get to the postmodernist account, reason is seen not only as subjective, but also as incompetent, highly contingent, relative, and collective. Between Kant and the postmodernists comes the successive abandonment of the rest of reason's features.

After Kant: reality or reason, but not both

Kant's legacy to the next generation is a principled separation of subject and object, of reason and reality. His philosophy is thus a forerunner of postmodernism's strong anti-realist and anti-reason stances.

After Kant, the story of philosophy is the story of German philosophy. Kant died early in the nineteenth century, just as Germany was beginning to replace France as the world's leading intellectual nation, and it was German philosophy that set the program for the nineteenth century.

Understanding German philosophy is crucial to understanding the origins of postmodernism. Continental postmodernists such as Foucault and Derrida will cite Heidegger, Nietzsche, and Hegel as their major formative influences—all of them German thinkers. American postmodernists such as Rorty emerged primarily from the collapse of the Logical Positivist tradition, but will also cite Heidegger and pragmatism as major formative influences. When we look to the roots of Logical Positivism we find cultural Germans

²¹ Quoted in Beck 1969, 337.

such as Wittgenstein and the members of the Vienna Circle. And when we look at pragmatism, we find it to be an Americanized version of Kantianism and Hegelianism. Postmodernism is thus the supplanting of the Enlightenment with its roots in seventeenth century English philosophy by the Counter-Enlightenment with its roots in late eighteenth-century German philosophy.

Kant is central to that story. By the time of his death Kant's philosophy had conquered the German intellectual world,²² and so the story of German philosophy became the story of extensions and reactions to Kant

Three broad strains of post-Kantian philosophy emerged. What shall we do, members of each strain asked, about the gulf between subject and object that Kant has said cannot be crossed by reason?

1. Kant's closest followers decided to accept the gulf and live with it. Neo-Kantianism evolved during the nineteenth century, and by the twentieth century two main forms had emerged. One form was Structuralism, of which Ferdinand de Saussure was a prominent exponent, representing the broadly rationalist wing of Kantianism. The other was Phenomenology, of which Edmund Husserl was a prominent representative, representing the broadly empiricist wing of Kantianism. Structuralism was a linguistic version of Kantianism, holding that language is a self-contained, non-referential system, and that the philosophical task was to seek out language's necessary and universal structural features, those features taken to underlie and be prior to the empirical, contingent features of language. Phenomenology's focus was upon careful examination of the contingent flow of the experiential given, avoiding any existential inferences or assumptions about what one experiences, and seeking simply to describe experience as neutrally and as clearly as possible. In effect, the Structuralists were seeking subjective noumenal categories, and the Phenomenologists were

²² See, e.g., Wood, in Kant 1996, vi; also Meinecke 1977, 25.

content with describing the phenomena without asking what connection to an external reality those experiences might have.

Structuralism and Phenomenology came to prominence in the twentieth century, however, and so my focus next will be on the two strains of German philosophy that dominated the nineteenth century. For those two strains, Kant's philosophy set a problem to be solved—though one to be solved within the constraints of Kant's most fundamental premises.

2. The speculative metaphysical strain, best represented by Hegel, was dissatisfied with the principled separation of subject and object. This strain granted Kant's claim that the separation cannot be bridged *epistemologically* by reason, and so proposed to bridge it *metaphysically* by identifying the subject with the object.

3. The irrationalist strain, best represented by Kierkegaard, was also dissatisfied by the principled separation of subject and object. It granted Kant's claim that the separation cannot be bridged epistemologically by *reason*, and so proposed to bridge it epistemologically by *irrational* means.

Kantian philosophy thus set the stage for the reign of speculative metaphysics and epistemological irrationalism in the nineteenth century.

Metaphysical solutions to Kant: from Hegel to Nietzsche

Georg W. F. Hegel's philosophy is another fundamentally Counter-Enlightenment attack on reason and individualism. His philosophy is a partially secularized version of traditional Judeo-Christian cosmology. While Kant's concerns centered upon epistemology, Hegel's centered upon metaphysics. For Kant, preserving faith led him to deny reason, while for Hegel preserving the spirit of Judeo-Christian metaphysics led him to be more anti-reason and anti-individualist than Kant ever was.

Hegel agreed with Kant that realism and objectivism were dead ends. Kant had transcended them by making the subject prior, but from Hegel's perspective he had been too wishy-washy in doing so. Kant made the subject responsible only for the phenomenal world of experience, leaving noumenal reality forever closed off to us. This was intolerable to Hegel—after all, the whole point of philosophy is to achieve union with reality, to escape the merely sensuous and finite and to come to know and be one with the supersensuous and infinite.

However, Hegel had no intention of trying to solve the epistemological puzzles about perception, concept-formation, and induction that had set Kant's agenda, in order to show us how we might acquire knowledge of the noumenal. Instead, taking a cue from Johann Fichte, Hegel's strategy was to assert boldly an identity of subject and object, thus closing the gap metaphysically.

On Kantian grounds, the subject is responsible for the form of awareness; but Kant was still enough of a realist to posit a noumenal reality that was the source of the content that our minds shape and structure. For Hegel, the realist element drops out entirely: the subject generates both content and form. The subject is in no way responsive to an external reality; instead, the whole of reality is a creation of the subject.

"In my view," Hegel wrote at the beginning of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, "which can be justified only by the exposition of the system itself, everything turns on grasping and expressing the True, not only as *Substance*, but equally as *Subject*".²³ The Subject that Hegel had in mind is not the empirical, individual subject of traditional philosophy. The creative Subject that is also Substance is the universe as a whole (or God, or Spirit, or the Absolute), of which we individual subjects are mere portions. Realists had seen the universe as a whole as an object or set of objects within which there are some subjects. Hegel reversed that:

²³ Hegel 1807, 17.

the universe as a whole is a subject, and within the subject are objects. Such a bold posit solves a lot of problems.

We can get even more necessity and universality than Kant had given us. Hume had told us that we cannot get necessary and universal truths from reality. Kant, agreeing with Hume's conclusion, had suggested that we supply necessity and universality from ourselves. That grounded necessity and universality, but at a price: since we supply them subjectively, we cannot be sure that they apply to reality. Hegel agreed with Kant that our minds supply necessity and universality, but said that *all* of reality is a product of mind, the Mind that contains all of our little minds within it. Since reality comes from us, we can know all of reality in all of its glorious necessity.

We can also get a universe that does not dehumanize us. Hegel argued that the realist and objectivist models had, by separating subject and object, inevitably led to mechanical and reductionist accounts of the self. By taking the everyday objects of empirical reality as the model and explaining everything in terms of them, they necessarily had to reduce the subject to a mechanical device. But if instead we start with the subject and not the object, then our model of reality changes significantly. The subject, we know from the inside, is conscious and organic, and if the subject is a microcosm of the whole, then applying its features to the whole generates a conscious and organic model of the world. Such a model of the world is much more hospitable to traditional values than the materialist and reductionist leanings of the Enlightenment.

Hegel could also claim to be more of an advocate of reason than Kant was. Reason, Kant, taught us, is fundamentally a creative function. And, Kant also taught us, it can know only its own phenomenal creations. But having asserted that reason creates all of reality, Hegel could offer us the very optimistic, Enlightenment-sounding conclusion that reason can know *all* of reality.

Dialectic and saving religion

We are now, however, talking about a very different Reason than the Enlightenment one. Hegel's reason is fundamentally a creative function, not a cognitive one. It does not come to know a pre-existing reality; it brings all of reality into existence.

More notoriously, Hegel's reason operates by dialectical and contradictory means, and not in accordance with the Aristotelian principle of non-contradiction.

Hegel's dialectic is driven partly by the fact that by the early nineteenth century evolutionary ideas are in the air. In contrast to Kant's belief that the subjective categories of reason are necessarily unchanging and universal, Hegel argued that the appropriate categories themselves are changeable. But Hegel's dialectic is a special kind of evolution, one designed less to be responsive to discoveries in biology than to square with Judeo-Christian cosmology.

Judeo-Christian cosmology had traditionally been plagued by metaphysical assertions that were repugnant to reason. Respect for reason during the Enlightenment had led accordingly to a significant decline in religious belief among the intellectuals. Aristotelian reason cannot countenance a god that creates something out of nothing, that is both three and one, that is perfect but creates a world that contains evil. Accordingly, the thrust of Enlightenment theology had been to alter religion by eliminating its contradictory theses in order to make it compatible with reason. Hegel's strategy was to accept that Judeo-Christian cosmology is rife with contradictions—but to alter reason in order to make it compatible with contradiction.

Here Hegel made another significant step beyond Kant and further away from the Enlightenment. Kant had come close to the truth, Hegel believed, in developing the antinomies of reason in the

first *Critique*. Kant's purpose there was to show that reason is out of its depth when it tries to figure out noumenal truths about reality. He did so by developing four pairs of parallel arguments on four metaphysical issues and by showing that in each case reason leads to contradictory conclusions. One can prove that the universe must have had a beginning in time, but one can equally soundly prove that the universe must be eternal. One can prove the world must be made up of simplest parts and also that it cannot be, that we have free will and that strict determinism is true, that God must exist and that He does not exist.²⁴ These contradictions of reason show, Kant concluded, that reason can never know reality, and that therefore our reason is limited to structuring and manipulating its subjective creations.

Hegel thought that Kant had missed a deep point here. The antinomies are not a problem for reason, contrary to Kant but rather the key to the whole universe. The antinomies of reason are a problem *only* if one thinks that logical contradictions are a problem. That was Kant's mistake—he was too trapped in the old Aristotelian logic of non-contradiction. What Kant's antinomies show is not that reason is limited but rather that we need a new and better kind of reason, one that embraces contradictions and sees the whole of reality as evolving out of contradictory forces.

Such a conception of contradictory evolution is compatible with Judeo-Christian cosmology. That cosmology begins with a creation *ex nihilo*, posits a perfect being that generates evil, believes in a just being that gives humans independent judgment but punishes them for using it, includes accounts of virgin births and other miracles, says that the infinite becomes finite, the immaterial becomes material, the essentially unitary becomes plural, and so on. Given the primacy of that metaphysics, reason must give way. Reason, for example, must be adapted to the demands of this metaphysics of creation:

²⁴ Kant 1781, A426-A452.

As yet, there is nothing and there is to become something. The beginning is not pure nothing, but a nothing from which something is to proceed; therefore being, too, is already contained in the beginning. The beginning, therefore, contains both, being and nothing, is the unity of being and nothing; or is non-being which is at the same time being, and being which is at the same time non-being.²⁵

While that account of creation is incoherent from the perspective of Aristotelian reason, such a poetically grand-sounding drama of evolution by contradiction is perfectly rational –if one grants that reason contains within itself contradiction, that analysis consists in seeking the implicit contradiction within anything and teasing it out in order to put the contradictory elements explicitly in tension with each other, thus leading to a resolution that both goes beyond the contradiction to another evolutionary stage while at the same time preserving the original contradiction. Whatever that means.

Hegel thus explicitly rejected Aristotle's law of non-contradiction: Absolutely everything depends on "the identity of identity and non-identity," Hegel wrote in *The Science of Logic*.²⁶

Hegelian dialectical reason also differs from Enlightenment reason by implying a strong relativism, against the universality of Enlightenment reason. For all of Hegel's talk of the ultimate Universal perspective of the Absolute, from any other perspective nothing holds for long: dialectic injects contradiction into reality at any given time as well as across eras. If everything is evolving by the clash of contradictions, then what is metaphysically and epistemologically true in one epoch will be contradicted by what is true in the next, and so on.

²⁵ Hegel 1812-16, 73.

²⁶ Hegel 1812-16, 74.

Finally, Hegel's reason differs from Enlightenment reason by not only being creative of reality and in embracing contradiction, but also by being a fundamentally collective function rather than an individual one. Here again, Hegel went beyond Kant in rejecting the Enlightenment. While Kant preserved some elements of individual autonomy, Hegel rejected those elements. Just as the Judeo-Christian cosmology sees everything as God working out His plan for the world in, around, and through us, for Hegel individuals' minds and whole being are a function of the deeper forces of the universe operating upon them and through them. Individuals are constructed by their surrounding cultures, cultures that have an evolutionary life of their own, those cultures themselves being a function of yet still deeper cosmic forces. The individual is a tiny emergent aspect of the largest whole, the collective Subject's working itself out, and the creation of reality occurs at that level with little or no regard for the individual. The individual is merely along for the ride. Speaking in *Philosophy of History* of collective reason's operations, Hegel stated that as "Universal Reason *does* realize itself, we have indeed nothing to do with the individual empirically regarded"; "This *Good*, this *Reason*, in its most concrete form, is God. God governs the world; the actual working of his government—the carrying out of his plan—is the History of the World."²⁷

Hegel's contribution to postmodernism

Hegel's place historically is to have institutionalized four theses in nineteenth-century metaphysics.

1. Reality is an entirely subjective creation;
2. Contradictions are built into reason and reality;
3. Since reality evolves contradictorily, truth is relative to time and place; and

²⁷ Hegel 1830-31, 35-36.

4. The collective, not the individual, is the operative unit.

Hegel's influence was and is profound upon future metaphysicians. Among those metaphysicians, fierce debates emerged over secondary theses. Was the clash of contradiction ultimately progressive, as Hegel thought—or was Hegel willfully blinding himself to the totally irrational chaos that Schopenhauer believed reality to be? Was the ontological substrate of clash and contradiction ideal, as Hegel held—or was it material, as Marx argued? Was the process as totally collectivizing as Hegel took it to be—or were there some individualist elements within an overall collectivizing framework, as Nietzsche asserted?

Whatever the variations, the metaphysical themes of clash and conflict, of truth as relative, of reason as limited and constructed, and of collectivism were dominant. For all of their differences with Hegel, postmodernists adopt all four of these theses.

Epistemological solutions to Kant: irrationalism from Kierkegaard to Nietzsche

The Kantians and the Hegelians represent the pro-reason contingent in nineteenth century German philosophy.

While the Hegelians pursued metaphysical solutions to Kant's unbridgeable gap between subject and object, in the process altering reason into something unrecognizable to the Enlightenment, they had competition from the explicitly irrationalist wing of German philosophy. This line of development included major figures such as Friedrich Schleiermacher, Arthur Schopenhauer, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Denmark's lonely contribution to the history of modern philosophy, Søren Kierkegaard.

The irrationalists divided over whether religion is true—Schleiermacher and Kierkegaard being theists, and Schopenhauer and Nietzsche being atheists—but all shared a contempt for reason. All condemned reason as a totally artificial and limiting faculty, one

that must be abandoned in the bold quest to embrace reality. Perhaps Kant had prohibited access to reality—but he had shown *only* that *reason* could not get us there. That left other options open to us: faith, feeling, and instinct.

Schleiermacher (1768-1834) came of age in a Kant-dominated intellectual scene, and he took Kant's cue for how religion could respond to the threat of the Enlightenment. Intellectually most active from 1799, with the publication of *On Religion, Speeches to its Cultural Despisers*, Schleiermacher more than anyone made happen the revival of Pietism and orthodox Protestantism over the course of the next generation. So great was Schleiermacher's influence that, as theologian Richard Niebuhr put it, he "may justifiably be called the Kant of modern Protestantism."²⁸

As someone who came of age in the 1790s in Germany, Schleiermacher was broadly Kantian in his approach and embraced whole-heartedly the Kantian rejection of reason's access to reality. Schleiermacher, like Kant, was deeply offended by the assault that reason, science, and naturalism had made on the true faith. Following Hamann, Schleiermacher held that feeling, especially religious feeling, is a mode of cognition, one that gives us access to noumenal reality. Except, argued Schleiermacher, these feelings are not so much directed outward as inward. One cannot grasp noumena directly, but one can phenomenologically inspect oneself, one's deepest feelings, and therein find indirect senses of the divine ultimate.²⁹ As Hamann had stated, directly confronted religious feeling reveals one's essential nature.

When one discovers one's essential nature, the core self-feeling that one is forced to accept is that of absolute dependence. In Schleiermacher's words, "The essence of religion is *the feeling of absolute dependence*. I repudiated rational thought in favour of a

²⁸ Niebuhr, in Schleiermacher 1963, ix.

²⁹ Schleiermacher 1799, 18.

theology of feeling.”³⁰ One should strive to realize oneself by exploring and embracing this feeling of absolute dependence. This requires attacking reason, for reason gives one a feeling of independence and confidence. Limiting reason is thus the essence of religious piety—for it makes possible a fully-entered-into feeling of dependence and orientation toward that being upon which one is absolutely dependent. That being is of course God.³¹

In the next generation, Kierkegaard (“Hamann’s most brilliant and profound disciple”³²) gave irrationality an activist twist. Educated in Germany, Kierkegaard was, like Kant, deeply worried by the beating religion had taken during the Enlightenment. So he was cheered—or at least as cheered as Kierkegaard could ever be—to learn from Kant that reason cannot reach the noumena.

The Enlightenment thinkers had said that individuals relate to reality as knowers. On the basis of their acquired knowledge, individuals then act to better themselves and their world. “Knowledge is power,” wrote Bacon. But after Kant we know that knowledge of reality is impossible. So while we still must act in the real world, we do not and cannot have the necessary knowledge upon which to base our choices. And since our entire destinies are at stake in the choices we make, we cannot choose dispassionately between options. We must choose, and choose passionately, all the while knowing that we are choosing in ignorance.

For Kierkegaard, the core lesson from Kant was that one must not try to relate to reality cognitively—what is needed is action, commitment, a leap into that which one cannot know but which one feels is essential to give meaning to one’s life. In accordance with Kierkegaard’s felt religious needs, what is needed is an irrational leap of faith. It must be a leap because after the Enlightenment it is clear that the existence of God cannot be

³⁰ Schleiermacher 1821-22, Section 4.

³¹ Schleiermacher 1821-22, 12.

³² Berlin 1980, 19.

justified rationally, and it must be irrational because the God that Kierkegaard finds compelling is absurd.

But such a leap into the absurd puts one in a crisis. It flies in the face of everything sensible, rational, and moral. So how should one deal with this crisis of both wanting and not wanting to leap into absurdity? In *Fear and Trembling* we find Kierkegaard's panegyric to Abraham, a hero of the Hebrew Scriptures who in defiance of all reason and morality was willing to turn off his mind and kill his son Isaac. Why? Because God ordered him to. How could that be—would a good God make such a demand of a man? That makes God incomprehensibly cruel. What about God's promise that through Isaac the future generations of Israel would be born? The demand makes God a promise-breaker. What about the fact that it is killing an innocent? That makes God immoral. What about the immense pain that the loss of their son would cause in Abraham and Sarah? That makes God a sadist. Does Abraham rebel? No. Does he even question? No. He shuts down his mind and obeys. *That*, said Kierkegaard, is the essence of our cognitive relation to reality. Like Abraham, each of us must learn "to relinquish his understanding and his thinking, and to keep his soul fixed upon the absurd."

Like Abraham, we do not know and we cannot know. What we must do is jump blindly into the unknown. Kierkegaard revered Abraham as a "knight of faith" for his willingness to "crucify reason" and leap into absurdity.³³

Schopenhauer, also of the generation after Kant and a contemporary of Hegel, disagreed violently with the cowardly attempts to return to religion after the rejection of Enlightenment reason. While Hegel populated Kant's noumenal realm with Dialectical Spirit and Schleiermacher and Kierkegaard felt or hoped desperately that God was out there, Schopenhauer's feelings had revealed to him that reality is Will—a deeply irrational and

³³ Kierkegaard 1843, 31.

conflictual Will, striving always and blindly toward nothing.³⁴ No wonder then that reason had no chance of comprehending it: Reason's rigid categories and neat organizational schemes are wholly inadequate for a reality that is the opposite of that. Only like can know like. Only via our own wills, our passionate feelings—especially those evoked in us by music—can we grasp the essence of reality.

But most of us are too cowardly to try, for reality is cruel and frightening. This is why we cling to reason so desperately—reason allows us to tidy things up, to make ourselves feel safe and secure, to escape from the swirling horror that, in our honest moments, we sense reality to be. Only the bravest few have the courage to pierce through the illusions of reason to the irrationality of reality. Only a few individuals of special sensitivity are willing to pierce reason's veil and intuit passionately the seething flow.

Of course, having intuited the cruel horror of the seething flow, Schopenhauer wished for self-annihilation.³⁵ This was the weakness that his disciple, Nietzsche urged us to overcome.

Nietzsche began epistemologically by agreeing with Kant: "When Kant says: 'reason does not derive its laws from nature but prescribes them to nature,' this is, in regard to the concept of nature, completely true." All of the problems of philosophy, from the decadent Socrates³⁶ to that "catastrophic spider" Kant,³⁷ are

³⁴ Reality, Schopenhauer wrote, is a "world of constantly needy creatures who continue for a time merely by devouring one another, pass their existence in anxiety and want, and often endure terrible affliction, until they fall at last into the arms of death" (1819/1966, 349).

³⁵ Schopenhauer: "we have not to be pleased but rather sorry about the existence of the world, that its non-existence would be preferable to its existence" (1819/1966, Vol. 2, 576). As for mankind: "nothing else can be stated as the aim of our existence except the knowledge that it would be better for us not to exist" (1819/1966, Vol. 2, 605).

³⁶ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, "Why I Am So Wise," 1.

³⁷ Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, 11.

caused by their emphasis on reason. The rise of the philosophers meant the fall of man, for once reason took over, men

no longer possessed their former guides, their regulating, unconscious and infallible drives: they were reduced to thinking, inferring, reckoning, co-ordinating cause and effect, these unfortunate creatures; they were reduced to their 'consciousness,' their weakest and most fallible organ!³⁸

And: "how pitiful, how shadowy and fleeting, how aimless and capricious the human intellect is." Being merely a surface phenomenon and dependent upon underlying instinctual drives, the intellect certainly is not autonomous or in control of anything.³⁹

What Nietzsche meant, then, with his passionate exhortations to be true to oneself, is to break out of the artificial and constricting categories of reason. Reason is a tool of weaklings who are afraid to be naked in the face of a cruel and conflictual reality and who therefore build fantasy intellectual structures to hide in. What we need to bring out the best possible in us is "the perfect functioning of the regulating *unconscious* instincts."⁴⁰ The yea-sayer—the man of the future—will not be tempted to play word-games but will embrace conflict. He will tap into his deepest drives, his will to power, and channel all of his instinctual energies in a vital new direction.⁴¹

³⁸ Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, II:16.

³⁹ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 478.

⁴⁰ Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, I:7.

⁴¹ In *Beyond Good and Evil* (252), Nietzsche shares the view that the deepest battle is the Enlightenment, with its roots in English philosophy, against the Counter-Enlightenment, with its roots in German philosophy: "They are no philosophical race, these Englishmen: Bacon signifies an *attack* on the philosophical spirit; Hobbes, Hume, and Locke a debasement and lowering of the value of the concept of 'philosophy' for more than a century. It was *against* Hume that Kant arose, and rose; it was Locke of whom Schelling said, *understandably, je méprise Locke* [I despise Locke]; in their fight against the English-mechanistic doltification of the world, Hegel and Schopenhauer were of one mind (with Goethe)—these two hostile

Summary of irrationalist themes

In contrast to Schleiermacher, Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche, then, Kant and Hegel seem like champions of reason. Yet Kantian and Hegelian assumptions launched the irrationalist movements of the nineteenth century.

The legacy of the irrationalists for the twentieth century included four key themes:

1. An agreement with Kant that reason is impotent to know reality;
2. an agreement with Hegel that reality is deeply conflictual and/or absurd;
3. a conclusion that reason is therefore trumped by claims based on feeling, instinct, or leaps of faith; and
4. that the non-rational and the irrational yield deep truths about reality.

The death of Nietzsche in 1900 brings us to the twentieth century. Nineteenth-century German philosophy had developed two main lines of thought—the speculative metaphysical and the irrationalist epistemological. What was needed was a way to bring together these two strands of thought into a new synthesis for the next century. The philosopher who accomplished this was Martin Heidegger.

* * *

brother geniuses in philosophy who strove apart toward opposite poles of the German spirit and in the process wronged each other as only brothers wrong each other. “

See also *Daybreak*: “The whole great tendency of the Germans ran counter to the Enlightenment” (Section 197).