
I. THE GENUINE AND SURROGATE CANON

A Philosophical Education

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Abstract

Programs of graduate study in philosophy have abandoned the study of the history of philosophy as their basis. Reading the canon of the great philosophical texts has been replaced by training in social criticism based on writings selected according to their author's race, gender, and ethnicity. What has been lost in replacing the traditional canon with this new canon? And, how has this new canon come about?

Introduction: The Problem

Programs of education in philosophy in American universities have moved away from reading the great works of the great philosophers. Or, if read, their importance is minimized by mixing the study of such works with the discussion of writings selected on the basis of the race, gender, and ethnicity of their authors. The study of the history of philosophy has been replaced with training in the doctrine of social criticism. The writings in this newly formed canon have none of the complexity of thought of the works of the traditional canon. Little can be found in this new canon that addresses the fundamental questions of metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and aesthetics.

Today's graduate students are tomorrow's professors. We can thus expect philosophy to become a spectacle of ever-changing doctrines of social criticism, coupled with ideological reform of modes of speech, in pursuit of a standard of "correctness" in place of the pursuit of truth. The realm of ideas and the Republic of Letters ends not with a bang but a whimper.

What is lost in giving only nominal attention to the history of philosophy? How did the mentality of social criticism come about, through which philosophy becomes a kind of journalism?

The School of the Ages

In his Preface to the *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (*Phenomenology of Spirit*), Hegel says: “The study of philosophy is as much hindered by the conceit [*Einbildung*] that will not argue, as it is by the argumentative [*räsonnierende*] approach. This conceit relies on truths which are taken for granted which it sees no need to re-examine. It just lays them down, and believes it is entitled to assert them, as well as to judge and pass sentence by appealing to them.”¹ The social criticism mentality believes it reaches its position by an argumentative approach, but in fact it proceeds by means of the conceit Hegel describes.

Hegel says: “In place of the long process of education [*Weg der Bildung*] towards genuine philosophy, a movement as rich as it is profound, through which Spirit achieves knowledge, we are offered as quite equivalent either direct revelations from heaven, or the sound common sense [*den gesunden Menschenverstand*] that has never laboured over, or informed itself regarding, other knowledge or genuine philosophy.” Hegel says it is not pleasant to witness such substitutes for the real pursuit of philosophical truth. We are left with thought taken with its own imagery, “an imagery that is neither fish nor flesh, neither poetry nor philosophy.”² The mentality of social criticism cannot reach the level of true philosophy and its language cannot reach the level of poetry. We are left with the dead-serious drone of protest thought and speech.

A philosophical education, as well as an education in poetry, its necessary companion, can be obtained only in the School of the Ages.³ The School of the Ages is the memory of the European peoples as preserved in their languages and literatures. Wilhelm Windelband, in his *History of Philosophy*, says: “The History of Philosophy is the process in which European humanity has embodied in scientific conceptions its views of the world and its judgments of life.” This fact, Windelband

¹ G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes*, vol. 3 of *Werke* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), 62; Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977), 41–42.

² *Ibid.*, 64; 42.

³ I take the terms, the “School of the Ages” and the “School of Resentment,” from Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994), 15–41.

says, “is the reason why a knowledge of the history of philosophy is a necessary requirement, not only for all scholarly education, but for all culture whatever; for it teaches how the conceptions and forms have been coined, in which we all, in every-day life as well as in the particular sciences, think and judge the world of our experience.”⁴

Education is memory. To be learned is the ability to bring forth, on a particular point, something that illuminates an issue that takes the issue beyond its personal or present significance. Learning is musical. It is the art of the Muses to express what was, is, and is to come in a harmonious voice. Memory, as Aristotle says in the *De anima*, has imagination within it. What is in memory is first in the senses. “Since sight is the chief sense,” Aristotle says, “the name *phantasia* (imagination) is derived from *phaos* (light), because without light it is not possible to see” (429a).

Imagination provides content and light for reason. It tempers the tendency of the intellect to take reason to abstraction. Memory as imagination acts against abstraction as the past acts against the abstraction of the present. Philosophy, as guided by the School of the Ages, gives form to culture and keeps us from forgetting. Like myth and music, philosophy is a denial of time. To separate philosophy from the memory that is the School of the Ages is a great mistake. Then philosophy becomes just words in the service of some ideology; the words, pressed into such service, lose their connections with ideas. They become simply an instrument of critical thinking, devoid of their natural poetry.

The four masters of the School of the Ages are Plato, Aristotle, Kant, and Hegel. Around them revolves the history of philosophy. In Plato and Aristotle all of ancient philosophy comes together. All of Medieval and Renaissance philosophy can be read in terms of the reactions to their ideas. Goethe, in his *Materialien zur Geschichte der Farbenlehre* (*Materials on the History of the Doctrine of Colors*), says: “Plato relates himself to the world as a blessed spirit, whom it pleases sometimes to stay for a while in the world; he is not so much concerned to come to know the world, because he already presupposes it, as to communicate to it in a friendly way what he brings along with him and what it needs.” Plato is a welcome visitor but one who will too quickly

⁴ Wilhelm Windelband, *A History of Philosophy*, vol. 1, trans. James H. Tufts (New York: Harper, 1958), 9–10.

return whence he came. “Aristotle,” Goethe says, “on the contrary, stands to the world as a man, an architect. He is only here once and must here make and create.” He gathers materials from all sides and arranges them in pyramid fashion to the top. “Whereas Plato, like an obelisk, indeed like a pointed flame, seeks heaven.”⁵

Cassirer, in commenting on this passage, says: “This division, which found its first classical expression in Plato and Aristotle, henceforth runs throughout the whole history of philosophy. . . . Again and again we become aware of these two opposed tendencies in the systematic development and expansion of philosophical thought.”⁶ The history of philosophy can be read as the coincidence of these two opposites. It is, however, not their separation that is important; it is their dialectical interrelationship. They are not two substances standing apart; they are each a function of the other. And so they make up the inner form of philosophy itself.

All of the period of modern philosophy terminates in Kant. The oppositions imbedded in its streams of rationalism and empiricism coincide in Kantian critique. The key sentence for understanding Kant appears in the footnote to his Preface to the first edition of the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*: “Unser Zeitalter ist das eigentliche Zeitalter der Kritik, der sich alles unterwerfen muss [Our age is the proper age of criticism, to which everything must submit].”⁷ Kant’s philosophy of criticism offers us no more than a metaphysics confined to experience. The transcendental method limits philosophy to the pure understanding.

Kant says he has fully surveyed the territory of the pure understanding and assigned everything to its rightful place. He says: “This domain is an island, enclosed by nature itself within unalterable limits. It is the land of truth—enchanted name!” He says there are those who would wish to go beyond this island (i.e., speculative philosophers), deluding themselves with empty hopes of thinking beyond experience. But such a seafarer would be engaging “in enterprises which he can never

⁵ Goethe, *Naturwissenschaftliche Schriften*, vol. 16 of *Gedenkausgabe der Werke, Briefe und Gespräche*, ed. Ernst Beutler (Zurich: Artemis, 1949), 346–47.

⁶ Ernst Cassirer, “The Concept of Philosophy as a Philosophical Problem,” in *Symbol, Myth, and Culture: Essays and Lectures of Ernst Cassirer 1935–1945*, ed. Donald Phillip Verene (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 51.

⁷ Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1956), 7. My translation.

abandon and yet is unable to carry to completion.”⁸ In this claim Kant is paraphrasing Descartes’ warning, in his *Discourse on the Method*, to those who would desert the method of right reasoning and “fall into the extravagances of Paladins of our tales of romance, and conceive designs that surpass their powers.”⁹ So much of recent philosophy has been unable to escape the confines of the Kantian island.

Counter to Kant’s sentence, that ours is an age of criticism, is Hegel’s sentence, that “The True is the whole [*Das Wahre ist das Ganze*].”¹⁰ The whole is attained by means of “the speculative sentence [*spekulativer Satz*].” To illustrate such a sentence, Hegel refutes Kant’s claim, in his criticism of the ontological proof, that being is not a real predicate that can be asserted of God. Hegel says that, in the proposition: “*Gott ist das Sein*,” *Sein* is a real predicate, with genuine meaning extracted from the subject.¹¹ Kant is able only to regard the copula as an external connection between two terms. Trapped on the island of the Understanding, Kant cannot see how the predicate is dialectically drawn forth from its subject and that, to acquire its own meaning, it must return to the meaning of the subject. Subject and predicate are not independent entities. They form a circle. Any sentence, when grasped speculatively by Reason, not simply by the Understanding, is a whole.

Hegel’s land of truth is not an island but a “gallery of images [*Galerie von Bildern*]” through which Spirit (*Geist*) moves toward “absolute knowing [*absolutes Wissen*].” This phenomenology as the “science of the experience of consciousness” is a process of memory in the sense of recollection [*Erinnerung*]. Consciousness recalls all of its guises until it realizes its “inner form” (*Er-Innerung*).¹² The passing of consciousness through this gallery of images allows it to emerge from Plato’s cave into the realm of ideas as the categories of Hegel’s

⁸ Ibid., 287. See *Immanuel Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (London: Macmillan, 1958), 257.

⁹ René Descartes, *Discours de la méthode*, vol. 6 of *Oeuvres de Descartes* (Paris: Vrin, 1996), 7. My translation.

¹⁰ Hegel, *Phänomenologie*, 24.

¹¹ Ibid., 59. Cf. Kant, *Critique*, 571–72.

¹² Hegel, *Phänomenologie*, 590–91. See also Donald Phillip Verene, *Hegel’s Recollection: A Study of Images in the Phenomenology of Spirit* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1985), esp. ch. 9.

Wissenschaft der Logik. This ascent to the Absolute is something most contemporary philosophy has been unable to accomplish.

The essence of philosophy is metaphysics. In metaphysics, philosophical thought is taken to being, to the really real (*to ontos on*), which for Plato were the plural *eide*. For Aristotle, the object of metaphysics is being *qua* being (*to on he on*), as distinct from individual beings that are the objects of the particular sciences. Being as *absolutum*, the term first introduced in Latin by Nicholas of Cusa to refer to God, is that which is self-contained, perfect, and complete, not limited by or comparable to anything else. This sense of an unconditioned reality, referred to as *Das Absolute* by both Kant and Hegel (although with very different views of it), runs throughout modern idealism. Without the command of the divine science of metaphysics, of the “what is,” philosophy is just another way of thinking about things. Philosophy becomes just another form of critical thinking, and critical thinking is to be found in any of the particular fields of knowledge.

The promoters of social criticism often include some texts of Asian thought in their reading lists, as if, in so doing, to discredit the Western canon. In fact the study of the Western philosophical canon is enriched by attention to what is outside it. Take two examples—the *I Ching* or *Book of Changes*, the oldest known book in the history of humanity, and the *Tao tê Ching*, the central text of philosophical Taoism. In the *I Ching* the speculative philosopher finds conceptions of the nature of opposites, causality, and temporal repetition that are not prominent in Western metaphysics. In the *Tao tê Ching* is the conception of *wu wei* or actionless action, a principle of human comportment not found in the major works of Western ethics. The study of such texts does not displace what is present in the history of philosophy. Instead it provides the groundwork for a valuable dialectic. For this reason, I have taught a course in Asian philosophy throughout my career.

The School of the Ages includes whatever can bring forth the truth as opposed to what is regarded as useful for a particular purpose. Cassirer says: “Truth is not a matter of usefulness; it is a formal value. There is an *eidos* of truth. . . . The recognition of this purely formal value of truth ‘itself in itself’ is what distinguishes the ‘philosopher’ from the ‘sophist.’”¹³

¹³ Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 4, *The Metaphysics of Symbolic Forms*, ed. John Michael Krois and Donald Phillip Verene, trans. John Michael Krois (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 187.

Without the richness of thought and the pursuit of truth that stands above any particular purpose, we are like Aeneas, who, early in the *Aeneid*, must confess to his mother, Venus: “We wander ignorant of the men and the places [*Ignari hominumque locorumque erramus*]” (1.332–33).¹⁴ Once the teachings of the School of the Ages are comprehended there is nothing in all of philosophy that is closed to us.¹⁵

The School of Resentment

In *Zur Genealogie der Moral (On the Genealogy of Morals)* Nietzsche speaks of a morality that derives from resentment.¹⁶ Resentment is a feeling of indignant displeasure because of something regarded as a wrong, insult, or other injury. Nietzsche says that the attitude of resentment: “says No to what is ‘outside,’ what is ‘different,’ what is ‘not itself’: and this No is its creative deed.” Resentment is not a self-defining act; it is a reaction to what is not liked. Nietzsche says: “This need to direct one’s view outward instead of back to oneself—is the essence of *ressentiment*.”¹⁷

Philosophical education in the School of Resentment consists of learning how to reduce the great narratives of being that are present in the School of the Ages to the politics of race, gender, ethnic, or class interests. In the School of Resentment philosophy becomes a kind of politics. Morality becomes just the demand for “social justice.” Social justice is whatever it is thought to be by those calling for it. Justice ceases to be the chief virtue of the ancient four cardinal virtues, along with

¹⁴ These are the words with which Vico begins the first book of his *Scienza nuova prima* (1725). See Giambattista Vico, *Opere*, 2 vols., ed. Andrea Battistini (Milan: Mondadori, 1990), 2:979.

¹⁵ For a broader statement on the study of the history of philosophy see Donald Phillip Verene, *The History of Philosophy: A Reader’s Guide; Including a List of 100 Great Philosophical Works from the Pre-Socratics to the Mid-Twentieth Century* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2008).

¹⁶ Nietzsche uses the French term *ressentiment* (from which the English is derived). Walter Kaufmann points out that there is no close equivalent in German (“to resent” in German is *übelnehmen*). See Kaufmann’s comments in Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1967), 5–10.

¹⁷ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, 36–37.

courage, temperance, and wisdom. Justice is not regarded as a rational standard, transcendent of ideology or the interests of any group.

Inherent in group ideology is the problem that nothing can be beyond it. There is no universal standard of reason to which ideology must answer. The ideological mentality is always unsure of itself. It is always re-defining the meaning of its terms, in an effort to generate an ultimate standard. But such an immanent standard repeatedly remains out of reach. No compliance with its ever-shifting standard is ever enough. Nothing answers critical thinking except more critical thinking. Nothing answers suspicion of what is other but more suspicion of what is other.

The masters of the School of Resentment are Nietzsche, Freud, and Marx. Paul Ricoeur calls them the “masters of suspicion” of the “school of suspicion.”¹⁸ Nietzsche himself becomes a master of suspicion in calling for the “transvaluation of values.” In the secondary literature, Ricoeur’s characterization has become known as the “hermeneutics of suspicion.” In this literature this sense of hermeneutics designates the reading of texts so as to uncover the meanings that lie below the surfaces of their narratives. It is a reading between the lines so as to unmask the secrets that are hidden within, to uncover the politics of the author’s views. The School of Suspicion and the School of Resentment may be regarded as synonymous. The suspicious hermeneutical reader resents what the text says and seeks to discredit it. Such a hermeneutical reader is always looking through the keyhole.

It is likely that the source for Ricoeur’s list of the three masters of suspicion is Cassirer’s naming of them in his thesis of the “crisis of man’s knowledge of himself,” in *An Essay on Man*. Cassirer says that in modern thought there is no common view of human nature in terms of which disagreements concerning it can occur. Instead of attention to empirical evidence available from the study of human culture, theories about human nature are based on arbitrary assumptions from their outset. Cassirer says: “This arbitrariness becomes more and more obvious as the theory proceeds and takes on a more elaborate and sophisticated aspect. Nietzsche proclaims the will to power, Freud signalizes the sexual instinct, Marx enthrones the economic instinct.” Cassirer concludes:

¹⁸ Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. Denis Savage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 32–33, 35.

“Each theory becomes a Procrustean bed on which the empirical facts are stretched to fit a preconceived pattern.”¹⁹

The School of Resentment is not limited to the hermeneutics of suspicion; it has the movements of post-modernism and deconstruction as allies. They help to provide the stage on which resentment plays its roles. The hermeneutics of suspicion, in its drive to reveal the preconceived patterns in the texts to which it turns its attention, does so on the basis of its own preconception of what it is determined to find. In fact, hermeneutics is flawed from the start, whether driven by suspicion or not. Since hermeneutics as a method eschews the metaphysical pursuit of an ultimate truth, its activity is groundless. Hermeneutics cannot answer the question of what is worth being hermeneutical about. Its attention can be guided by political interests. Such interests replace the object under investigation with what they wish it to be. Biblical hermeneutics, by contrast, and what Ricoeur calls the “hermeneutics of faith,” do not have the problem of an ultimate ground to determine which texts contain truth. Secular hermeneutics is a form of intellectual homelessness.

Analytic philosophy, which has dominated Anglo-American philosophy and philosophical education for over fifty years, is also part of the School of Resentment. Although there are today analytically trained thinkers who have interest and expertise in particular figures and issues in the history of philosophy, analytic philosophy has largely regarded past philosophy as deficient. Major figures in the analytic movement, such as Russell, Moore, Wittgenstein, and Ryle, have not seen ideas developed in the School of the Ages as politically incorrect; they have seen them as simply wrong, unsupported by scientific evidence, or logically and linguistically confused. Analytic philosophy, whether it be logical positivism, logical empiricism, or ordinary language analysis, understands philosophy to be argumentative problem-solving.

In its acme in the 1960s and 1970s, practitioners of analytic philosophy often completely dismissed study of the history of philosophy. An expression common at that time was that to study past thinkers was “like reading inscriptions on tombstones.” Ordinary language analysts claimed all that was needed to do philosophy was the “O. E. D. and a pencil.” A later, more

¹⁹ Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1944), 21.

moderate view regarded the history of philosophy as nothing more than a large warehouse in which arguments could be found, criticized, and put to use. The analytic mentality regards philosophy as nothing but the formulation of arguments, a kind of advanced form of debate. In so doing it never faces the fact that, for any argument put forth on a philosophical issue, it is never beyond human wit, sooner or later, to formulate a counterargument. There are no knockout arguments in philosophy.

The analytic philosopher does at least engage in ratiocination. Analytic philosophy has this commitment to reason, even if it is unable to engage in the speculative power of reason. In the *Function of Reason*, Whitehead says: “The Greeks have bequeathed to us two figures, whose real or mythical lives conform to these two notions—Plato and Ulysses. The one shares Reason with the Gods, the other shares it with the foxes.”²⁰ Ulysses is a problem-solver; Plato takes us beyond ourselves. The hermeneutics of suspicion uses reason in neither of these two ways. Instead of confronting the School of the Ages with evidence and argument, as the analytic tradition at least does, it employs reason simply as critical thinking, in a series of ever-changing ideologies. Presented with such maneuvering, we might respond with Ezra Pound’s reaction, when James Joyce first sent him the Shaun book of *Work in Progress*, which was to become an episode in *Finnegans Wake*, that: “Nothing, so far as I make out, nothing short of divine vision or a new cure for the clap can possibly be worth all the circumambient peripherization.”²¹

Of the masters of suspicion, Joyce tells us: “in the Nichtian glossery which purveys aprioric roots for aposteriorious tongues this is nat language at any sinse of the world”; “we grisly old Sykos who have done our unsmiling bit on ’alices, when they were yung and easily freundened, in the penumbra of the procuring room and what oracular come-pression we have had apply to them!”; “nompos mentis like Novus Elector, what with his Marx and their Groups, yet did a doubt, should a dare, were to you, you would do and dhamnk me, shenker, dhumnk you.”²²

²⁰ Alfred North Whitehead, *The Function of Reason* (Boston: Beacon, 1962), 10.

²¹ Ezra Pound, letter of Nov. 15, 1926, quoted in Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce*, rev. ed. (New York: Oxford, 1982), 584.

²² James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (New York: Penguin, 1999), 83.10–12; 115.21–24; 365.19–21. For Joyce’s connection to philosophy see Donald Phillip Verene, *James Joyce and the Philosophers at Finnegans Wake*

The masters of suspicion take themselves very seriously. All thinkers in the School of Resentment take themselves very seriously. But Joyce shows us how to take them not seriously. Bad philosophy, like bad poetry, is always sincere. Such philosophy lacks irony.

Much of contemporary pragmatism has also taken its place within the School of Resentment. Pragmatism shares the view with it, that reason is essentially an instrument to be applied to shape social process. The contemporary pragmatist is like Ulysses, a figure of “twists and turns.”

As mentioned above, the canon of the School of Resentment is based on race, gender, and ethnicity. It prominently includes the writings of W. E. B. Du Bois, Judith Butler, and Enrique Dussel. I cite these three as examples because they are thinkers of the first order. But their work does not attain to the greatness, the complexity of thought of the figures whose works make up the canon of the School of the Ages. Each of these three thinkers has one principal idea. Their works are important for the understanding of contemporary thought, but the study of such works does not supplant the need for the study of the canon of the great books for a philosophical education.

Du Bois explains the sense in which the black American of his era has a “double consciousness” (a term having its roots in Emerson and William James), two souls in one body, that remain unreconciled—as an American and as a black American. The black American world is behind a veil that exists between it and the white American world.²³

Judith Butler holds that gender identity is a reflection, not of nature but of politics, which supplies the terms through which gender identity is articulated. The “binarism of sex” is to be denaturalized, leading to the view that gender is a matter of choice, not an identity determined by biology.²⁴

Enrique Dussel is an Argentine with an international academic career, one of the founders in the 1970s of “Liberation Philosophy” and the author of a great number of books. His version of this type of philosophy is based on a criticism of Eurocentric and North Atlantic modernity, to the goal of advancing a universally valid but distinctive Latin-

(Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2016).

²³ W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and Terri Hume Oliver (New York: Norton, 1999).

²⁴ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990).

American philosophy. In his formulation of liberation philosophy, Dussel conceives the philosopher as a prophetic teacher who could speak for the poor and oppressed in Latin America, those who are otherwise without a voice.²⁵

The School of Resentment eliminates political philosophy as a subject matter by defining all of philosophy as a kind of mental politics. Political philosophy, having its sources in Plato's *Republic* and *Laws*, Aristotle's *Politics*, Kant's *Perpetual Peace*, and Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, and other great works, such as Locke's *Two Treatises of Government* and *Letters on Toleration*, and Rousseau's *Social Contract*, can be largely set aside for the higher aim of having philosophy itself become a political agent. Philosophy is not to illuminate the political in human experience; it is to become political, to take up the cause of making all things right. The politics of resentment is a bad infinity in which no improvement of a social condition is ever enough—more must always be done. The sun never sets on the pursuit of social justice.

Conclusion: The False Socrates and Waiting for Godot

Adherents to the School of Resentment believe they are like Socrates. They believe that Socrates saw himself as an agent for political change, that he was condemned by the Athenians for his political views. Although this view of Socrates, the protest figure, can be derived from portraits of Socrates in popular literature, there is nothing to support it in the Platonic texts. Anyone who knows these texts knows that Socrates had no quarrel with the laws of Athens, as he makes clear with his dialogue with those laws in the *Crito*, shortly before his death (*Crito* 50–54). In the *Apology* Socrates says he has served the state as a gadfly, placed there by the god (30e). It is an instance of Socratic irony, directed to remind the Athenians that they should examine what it means to be a human being in order to confront their own individual mortality.

In the *Phaedo* Socrates states, with complete clarity, the purpose of philosophy. He says: “Those who rightly philosophize are practicing to die [*hoi orthos philosophountes apothneskein meletosi*]” (67e3–4; see also 81a1–2). What Socrates urges on the Athenians, and on all who would know of his views, after him, is not political reform, but to seek

²⁵ Enrique Dussel, *Philosophy of Liberation* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2003).

the examined life in order to acknowledge one's mortality and in so doing to make no one the worse for knowing you. Socrates' doctrine is both completely personal and completely universal. To know the good is what matters; no harm can come to a good person. Socrates has no program of social criticism or social reform. He is known to engage in all the observances of the Athenian religion and he believes in the gods. He is convicted of irreligion because of his adherence to a proto-version of Plato's forms, which are a divine order of supernatural reality, above that of the Athenian pantheon (*Apology* 27c–e).

To see Socrates as an archetype of political activity is to see a false Socrates. Socrates resents nothing; his doctrine of self-knowledge, taken from the inscription on the *pronaos* of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi (*Gnothi seauton*), is the positive doctrine repeated throughout the School of the Ages. In beginning *An Essay on Man*, Cassirer says: "That self-knowledge is the highest aim of philosophical inquiry appears to be generally acknowledged. In all the conflicts between the different philosophical schools this objective remained invariable and unshaken; it proved to be the Archimedean point, the fixed and immovable center, of all thought."²⁶

The School of Resentment is a philosophical version of the phenomenon of the "cargo cult." The cargo cult was first observed in the mid-twentieth century as a religio-political movement among peoples of various South Pacific islands, characterized by the messianic expectation of the return of their ancestors, in ships or planes carrying cargoes of the products of modern civilization, which would suffice for all their needs, render work unnecessary, and free them from colonial control. The cargo cult as a political idea is that all social problems must be solved at once, in a complete way. Until this is accomplished nothing can come to rest. In the secular version of the School of Resentment this solution can be achieved by seeing through the great narratives and reforming speech, so that only the right words are permitted and we escape the prison-house of traditional language. Even the past must be cured. Once our suspicions of the great narratives of the pursuit of truth are confirmed, we cannot wait on the gods to deliver what is missing. We must do this ourselves. The problem of resentment, of critical thinking, is to know when and how resentment is to cease.

²⁶ Cassirer, *Essay*, 1.

The state of resentment is one of perpetual unease. It is the state of being, captured by Samuel Beckett in *Waiting for Godot*. Vladimir and Estragon are unable to find what they need in themselves. They find themselves waiting for the solution to their condition, which they see as external to themselves. They resent their condition. The solution is the arrival of Mr. Godot, who, if he comes, will save them.²⁷ Godot is the presence of a bad infinity, for he will always arrive tomorrow. They are waiting on Being. They can only wait to have an authentic existence. It is at this point that the School of Resentment intervenes. It promises to have Godot arrive by putting aside the past, and, by means of its critical thinking, to produce the future. The future can be produced only by the present in relation to the past. Once our backs are turned on the past, we are caught in the eternal present, repeating ourselves. The song of the Muses, of what was, is, and is to come, cannot be heard. We are left with an ideology of the future. Until everything is corrected we cannot have social justice.

Resentment, then, is the ultimate pragmatism. Reason is directed to the forming of tomorrow. Any steps taken in this direction are never enough. Any desire fulfilled in the present is only temporary. Desire, like suspicion, engenders a further version of itself. Ultimate satisfaction is always just out of reach. Philosophy, turned into politics, finds itself, finally, in Hegel's *Das geistige Tierreich*, his human menagerie or zoo, in which each person is busy with a personal project—a desire to be fulfilled.²⁸ None of the projects are that of the true Socrates—how to confront the fact of human mortality.

The mortality of the human being requires the pursuit of self-knowledge. Devotion to social criticism is bad faith, for it acts as if politics is the highest concern for a human being. In politics there is nothing divine. Philosophical education begins with this realization. Politics has nothing to say to the concern of Socrates. Politics leaves the individual wholly within the world, unable to comprehend Socrates' last words: "We owe a cock to Asclepius."

²⁷ Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot: A Tragicomedy in Two Acts* (New York: Grove Press, 1956), 60.

²⁸ For a discussion of Hegel's *Das geistige Tierreich* see Verene, *Hegel's Recollection*, chap. 8.