

*Was Ist Aufklärung? Notes on
Maritain, Rorty, and Bloom
With Thanks But No Apologies
to Immanuel Kant*

Francis Slade

Our crucial need and problem is to rediscover the natural faith of reason in truth.

Jacques Maritain, *Education at the Crossroads*

I

Education at the Crossroads is Jacques Maritain speaking at Yale in 1943 as a philosopher and as a Catholic about education, doing then and there what he had always done and continued to do until his death: speaking as a philosopher and as a confessing Catholic. What strikes us as we look back at Maritain through the books that he has left us is his public loneliness. And in that light what must impress us is the love of truth and the aspiration towards wisdom out of which these books had to have been written.

Because Maritain's public voice was always that of a Catholic as well as a philosopher, he exemplified what Josef Pieper calls "existential honesty as a philosopher," refusing to "disregard the truths of divine revelation that you have accepted in faith."¹ Consequently as a philosopher he was largely ignored outside Catholic milieu. Being a Catholic and making no secret of its significance for his thinking as a philosopher, what he said was considered

¹ Josef Pieper, *In Defense of Philosophy* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1992), p. 113.

beyond the permissible limits of what can be accepted as serious public discourse. As Richard Rorty puts it, "To be part of society is, in the relevant sense, to be taken as a possible conversational partner by those who shape the society's self-image."² Maritain spoke and wrote, and was accorded polite, even respectful receptions, but he had no conversational partners among the shapers of the society's self-image. He was not part of what Rorty calls "society." His presence is undetectable on the radar screens that catch what counts as instances of canonically-done twentieth-century philosophy.

Maritain's situation was hardly unique: it was, and it is, the situation of Christianity, and the Catholic Church in particular, in European modernity. Intellectual disestablishment of Christianity at the Enlightenment was followed by political disestablishment, which in time became social marginalization. Religious modernism is one of the responses to this. Modernism grasps that the Church is not a private sect, existing on the margins of society, excluded from the public space and accepting that exclusion. It understands that to be public again Christianity must become reestablished in some sense, and, that to do this, it must overcome the intellectual disestablishment effected by the Enlightenment. Modernism's response, both Protestant and Catholic, is "aggiornamento," i.e., the abandonment of everything in historical Christianity that does not conform to Enlightenment standards of rationality. Modernism's "aggiornamento" leaves us with what looks a lot like Enlightenment, but hardly resembles historical Christianity. Modernists successfully reestablish themselves as "conversational partners," but they have nothing to say which differs in substance from what can be said by anyone who is not a Christian; they become undetectable on the radar screens of orthodoxy. Richard Rorty's formulations again serve to delineate the situation of Catholic belief when Enlightenment modernity and postmodernity has become the public voice:

To say that there is no place for the questions that Nietzsche or Loyola would raise is not to say that the views of either are unintelligible. . . . Nor is it just to say that our preferences conflict with theirs. It is to say that the conflict between these men and us is so great that "preferences" is the wrong word. . . . Rather we heirs of the Enlightenment think of . . . Nietzsche or Loyola as . . . "mad." We do so because there is no way to see them as fellow citizens . . . people whose life plans might, given ingenuity and good will, be fitted in with other citizens. . . . They are crazy because the limits of sanity are set by what we can take seriously. . . . We do not conclude that Nietzsche and Loyola

² "On Ethnocentrism," in *Philosophical Papers*, vol. 1 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 206.

are crazy because they hold unusual views on certain "fundamental" topics; rather we conclude this only after extensive attempts at exchange of . . . views have made us realize that we are not going to get anywhere.³

The "we" here is the Rortian *we*, the meaning of which is, in Rorty's words, "contrastive in the sense that it contrasts with a "they" which is also made up of human beings—the wrong sort of human beings."⁴ Rorty is saying that *we*, the heirs of the Enlightenment, cannot converse with *you* who believe as Loyola did. And since *we* define the terms of public discourse, what *you* say must be private. No one of course wishes to be "the wrong sort of human being." Someone in this position finds himself pushed in the direction of a divorce between what he asserts privately to himself and what, as one of the *we*, he says is true. While in his heart he may know he's right, he's not allowed, and does not allow himself, to tell anyone, a theme upon which there are a number of variations depending upon the enthusiasm manifested for the suppression of private belief in favor of public utterance. What Sir Paul Rycaut, Secretary to the English Embassy at the Porte, noted in his *Memoirs* (1668) about the conduct of Christians living under Ottoman rule describes the behavior which tempts many Christians, and is adopted by some, living under, and accepting, the rule of the aggressively secular elites—the Rortian *we*—of our society:

It is worth a wise man's observation how gladly the Greek and Armenian Christians imitate the Turkish habit, and come as near to it as they dare, and how proud they are when they are privileged upon some extraordinary occasion to appear without their Christian distinction.

We may take as an instance of this temptation the "seamless garment," a contribution to what has been called "the ideological vulgate, always in the process of being reworked,"⁵ which imitates the habit of the secular elites

³ Richard Rorty, "The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy," *Philosophical Papers* vol. 1, pp. 187–188; 191. One is reminded here of the opening of Auguste Comte's *Catechisme Positiviste*: "Au nom du passé et de l'avenir, les serviteurs théoriques et les serviteurs pratique de l'HUMANITE viennent prendre dignement la direction générale des affaires terrestres . . . en excluant irrévocablement de la suprématie politique tous les divers esclaves de Dieu, catholiques, protestants, ou déistes, comme étant à la fois arrières et perturbateurs." *Catechisme Positiviste* (Paris: Garnier), p. 1.

⁴ *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 190. The Rortian "we"—the right sort of human beings—is variously described. It will mean something like we twentieth-century liberals or we heirs to the historical contingencies which have created more and more cosmopolitan, more and more democratic political institutions. But the core identity is "liberal intellectuals of the secular modern West." Rorty, *Philosophical Papers*, vol. 1, p. 29.

as closely as those who propose it dare. Repeated suppression of what one would like to think one believes in favor of what it is allowable to say as publicly acceptable—"self-censorship," to employ the current vogue term—shapes what one actually believes in conformity with what it is publicly acceptable to say. Is it possible that Mario Cuomo really believes that abortion is morally wrong? What he said he privately believed was never discernible beyond the sheer assertion of it. It never made any difference, it never possessed any visible *morphē*, shape, or form. The assertion was empty. What counts is what is visible, what is publicly said and done. In what he publicly said and did abortion does not appear as an immoral act. On the other hand, everyone knows that Governor Cuomo really believes that capital punishment is an immoral act. The old Roman liturgy in the Collect of the second Mass of Christmas Day prayed for the life lived in obedience to revealed truth:

Da nobis, quaesumus, omnipotens Deus: ut, qui nova incarnati Verbi tuo luce perfundimur; hoc in nostro resplendeat opere, quod per fidem fulget in mente. (Grant, we beseech Thee, almighty God, that we, upon whom is poured the new light of Thy Word made flesh, may show forth in our actions that which by faith shineth in our minds.)⁶

⁵ Alain Besançon, "The Confusion of Tongues," *Daedalus* (Spring 1979): p. 40. The "seamless garment" refers to the effort made by some American Catholics to soften the political impact of the Catholic stance against abortion by asserting that principled opposition to abortion should entail acceptance of those provisions of the liberal welfare state they denominate as "life issues." Being consistent on all life issues is "the seamless garment." The dominant liberal elites will tend to be morally inconsistent on one point, abortion, while conservatives who oppose abortion would tend to be inconsistent when it is a question of the other "life issues." Thus candidates of the secularized liberal elites could be considered to be morally superior, despite their aggressive position on abortion, and, the implication is, should be preferred at elections to conservative candidates. This also meant that Democrats who professed to be Catholics need not take issue with their party's identification with "abortion rights." In the "seamless garment" we have a mixture of the secular political agenda of social justice with a religious rhetoric intended to legitimate it and to justify the posture of the ecclesiastical bureaucracies whose members aspire "to be taken seriously" as conversational partners by the "liberal intellectuals of the secular modern West" (Rorty, *Philosophical Papers*, vol. 1, p. 29). Cf. James Hitchcock, "The Guilty Secret of Liberal Christianity," *New Oxford Review* (October 1996): pp. 10–17; and Peter Berger, "The Decline of Secularism," *The National Interest* (Winter 1996–97): p. 12.

⁶ Romans 1:6 speaks of "the obedience of faith"; 1:7 that "the just man shall live by faith." On the etiolation of belief that occurs with the separation of life from faith, see Jacques Maritain, "The Substitute for Theology Among the Simple," in *The Collected Works of Jacques Maritain*, vol. 20 (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), pp. 275; 284–88.

"I believed and so I spoke, we too believe, and so we speak." St. Paul says, citing Psalm 116.⁷ Christianity cannot live in the privacy of the heart. It is the religion of publicness. To cease to profess it publicly is "to lose the Faith." This is because Christianity is the religion of truth. That is why Christianity is rightly known as "Catholic." The Catholic understanding of truth is that all truth is from God, given by Him and received by us, whether it be truth known by natural reason or by supernatural revelation. Its being from God does not cancel either human thought or human will. Knowledge of the truth presupposes both exercise of mind in the case of truths naturally knowable by us and the exercise of will in the case of supernatural truths. The Catholic understanding of truth is structurally the same as the Catholic understanding of nature and grace. Grace and salvation are entirely from God, but they are completely dependent upon human assent: "Be it done unto me according to Thy word."⁸ The Catholic-Christian understanding of truth is presented by St. Augustine in *Confessions* XII.25:

They are proud and have not known Moses's meaning, but love their own, not because it is true, but because it is their own. Otherwise they would have an equal love for another man's true opinion, just as I love what they say when they speak the truth, not because it is theirs but because it is true. Therefore, because it is true, it is by that very fact not theirs. Therefore, if they love it because it is true, then it is both theirs and mine, since it is the common property of all lovers of truth. But in that they contend that Moses did not mean what I say but what they say, I will have none of them. I do not love them, because even if what they say is so, yet their boldness is not the boldness of knowledge but of rashness, it is born not of vision but of pride.⁹ Your judgments, O Lord, are to be feared with trembling. For Your truth is not mine, nor his, nor any other man's, but belongs to all of us whom You publicly call to its communion warning us most terribly that we must not will to keep it for ourselves lest we be deprived of it. Whoever arrogates completely to himself that which you propose for the enjoyment of all men, and desires that to be his own which belongs to all men, is driven from what is common to all men to what is really his own, that is from truth to a lie. For he who speaks a lie speaks his own.

⁷ 2 Corinthians 4:13.

⁸ Luke 1:48.

⁹ Augustine is saying here that they hold it is their asserting it, that makes it true; it is because it is *theirs* that it is true. As has been well said, "Such is human vanity that we often prefer having any view, just so long as it is ours, to having the truth." John C. McCarthy, "Some Preliminary Remarks on 'Cognitive Interest' in Husserlian Phenomenology," *Husserl Studies* 11:146, 1994-95.

Those who love truth because it is *theirs* understand truth as originating from themselves; it is true because they made it true. They have made the truth and this is why they claim it is theirs. They love it as their creation. This is their boldness, the boldness of the rash, born of arrogance. And this is why Augustine does not love them and will have none of them. They appropriate for themselves what is God's. Truth does not originate in men. "Your truth is not mine, nor his, nor any other man's, but belongs to all of us whom You publicly call to its communion." *Your truth Not mine, nor his, nor any man's*: In making us capable of thinking, God has made us capable of truth. The public call to communion in the truth is thinking. Thinking is communion in the truth, not generation of the truth. Thinking as the disclosure of the truth is the essentially public act. That human beings do not originate truth by generating it from themselves is most emphatically confirmed by revelation in which God discloses the truth about Himself to us. Just to the extent that we understand truth as originating from ourselves—*willing to keep it for ourselves*, in Augustine's words—to that extent, Augustine says, *we are deprived of it*. Truth disappears from our vocabulary as an operative term defining human speech. What men say becomes unrecognizable in terms appropriate to truth; it is taken as self-creation, freedom. *Each turns aside into a world of his own*.¹⁰ What men say becomes instruments of power. Rorty gets it exactly right here:

Philosophical superficiality and lightmindedness helps along the disenchantment of the world. It helps make the world's inhabitants more pragmatic. . . . more receptive to the appeal of instrumental rationality.¹¹

In a postmetaphysical culture thinking ceases to be access to the truth which God has manifested to all. Rorty remarks that a postmetaphysical culture is as possible and as desirable as a postreligious one.¹² But in this instance Rorty doesn't get it quite right. Whether or not a postreligious culture is desirable, a postmetaphysical culture is a necessary condition for a postreligious one, if the postreligious one is, as ours is, a post-Christian one. Recently, Cardinal Ratzinger has observed that

the indigence of philosophy, the indigence to which paralyzed, positivist reason has led itself, has turned into the indigence of our faith. . . . If

¹⁰ Cf. Heraclitus, DK B89.

¹¹ "The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy," *Philosophical Papers*, vol.1, p. 193.

¹² *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, p. xvi.

the door to metaphysical cognition remains closed . . . faith is destined to atrophy: it simply lacks air to breathe.¹³

As St. Clement of Alexandria pointed in the second century when he described the role of Greek Philosophy as *praeparatio evangelii*¹⁴: the Gospel, addressed to the minds of men, presupposes reason in its full and reflective exercise. The exclusion of Christianity from reason is what the Enlightenment is all about. The Enlightenment attack on Christianity attacks not only the explicit symbols of belief, the articles of the Creed, but also the conceptions of reason and truth which Christianity presupposes, the *praecambula fidei*.¹⁵

II

Was ist Aufklärung? Enlightenment is reason understood as rule. Enlightenment is consubstantial with classic modern philosophy from Descartes to Hegel. Classic modern philosophy has two major components: on the one hand, as everyone recognizes, the determination of the boundaries of human knowledge and how the mind should conduct itself in acquiring knowledge¹⁶, epistemological and methodological concerns, the establishment of what may be called "inner sovereignty,"¹⁷ and, on the other, political philosophy. That political philosophy is a component of equal stature in the modern philosophical project is perhaps not quite so widely acknowledged as the ascendancy of the epistemological. As the nineteenth century progressed political philosophy ceased to be a thematic interest for philosophers—Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, published in 1821, is the last great statement of modern political philosophy—and modern philosophy became for all intents and purposes equated with epistemology. The explicitly political phase of modern philosophy had passed. Between the seven-

¹³ "The Current Situation of Faith and Theology," *L'Osservatore Romano*, English edition, 6 November 1996. This was an address given by Cardinal Ratzinger during the meeting of the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith with the presidents of the doctrinal commissions of the bishops' conferences of Latin America, Guadalajara, Mexico, May, 1996.

¹⁴ *Stromata* I 28–29; VI 67; p. 117.

¹⁵ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* Ia, q. 2, a. 2, ad 1.

¹⁶ Thus *Novum Organum, Regulae ad Directionem Ingenii, Discourse on Method, Tractatus De Intellectus Emendatione, Essay and Treatise on Human Understanding, Critique of Pure Reason*.

¹⁷ The term, but not the sense given to the term here, is appropriated from Gerhard Krüger, *Philosophie und Moral und der Kantischen Kritik*, 2nd ed. (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1967), p. 9, n. 2.

teenth and the nineteenth centuries the political part of modern philosophy had done its work; it had created a new form of rule, the State. Its conclusions were palpably present in the modern political structures of Western European countries and the United States and their imitators. Regimes which did not conform to this pattern were regarded as regimes lacking moral legitimacy. The propositions of modern political philosophy were almost everywhere dominant. These propositions were regarded as self-evident, in no need of justification. The propositions of modern political philosophy as an actual political system and ideology were known, in Europe at least, as *Liberalism*. At the end of the nineteenth century and through the first half of the twentieth the only critical reflection on the principles of modern political philosophy, or on *Liberalism*, came from Reaction and Revolution, that is from positions outside the agreed-upon propositions. Since the propositions of modern political philosophy were considered the sentences of reason itself, their defense against the opposition to them was in essence simple. Reaction and Revolution were manifestations of the irrational. The fundamental issues had been settled. There was nothing to do here, nothing to question. Thus the political component of modern philosophy receded into the background.

I am not saying that there is no serious political thinking, great political thinking, being done in the nineteenth century. I am saying that it is not being done by modern philosophers. Great names in nineteenth-century political thinking, such as de Tocqueville, Burckhardt, and Acton, are historians prognosticating a future in terms of their understanding of what has happened in the past. Tocqueville, Burckhardt, and Acton are preoccupied with threats to liberty that have their source in modern political philosophy's great creation, the *State*. All were partisans of constitutional rule and fearful for its future. Tocqueville and Acton would have agreed with Burckhardt's statement, "The state's form becomes increasingly questionable and its radius of power even broader. . . ." ¹⁸

What is distinctive about modern political philosophy? What makes modern political philosophy *modern*? The answer, of course, is that it is precisely what makes modern philosophy modern. Pre-modern political philosophy had dealt with the various claims men make to rule, or more exactly, with the claims that are endemic to the political association as such: the claims of the wealthy, the poor, the middle sort, the better sort. These

¹⁸ *Force and Freedom: Reflections on History*, ed. James Hastings Nichols, (New York: Pantheon Books, Inc., 1943), p. 227.

competing claims are what politics is about because politics is about who will rule over the political association. Pre-modern political philosophy regarded all of the arguments that support these various claims to rule as *political* arguments, that is, arguments advanced by those who claim rule as their right, arguments which show why it is right that this kind of man, or these kinds of men, rule in the city. They are arguments for rule, and for rule of a certain kind. Of course it is not a difficult task for philosophers to take these arguments apart, to show their deficiencies as arguments.¹⁹ But having done so, it must be recognized that nothing, nothing political at least, has been accomplished when this is done. For what would be put in their place? Philosophical arguments that justify some form of rule as yet unrecognized by human beings, a *novus ordo seculorum*?

Pre-modern political philosophy, as distinguished from modern political philosophy, is not political because it provides a philosophical, as distinguished from a political, basis for rule. The political bases for rule are present in the city and its citizens; they are not derived from philosophy. The "Philosopher-King" of the *Republic* does not exercise rule on the basis of philosophy, but on the basis of the kind of people present in the city who understand themselves in terms of a "noble," or "royal" falsehood, "an old Phoenician tale."²⁰ Pre-modern political philosophy is concerned principally with evaluating the claims men make why it is right that they should rule in the city in order to determine what kind of rule is best for the political association. Most of all it is concerned to point out that there is something better than ruling over human beings; that the best kind of activity is not ruling but contemplative knowing, and thus to show that rule has an intrinsic limit; and consequently that the attempt to derive from it fulfillment commensurate with what is the highest in man is endless and futile.²¹ The existence of philosophy as contemplative fulfillment and perfection of man not only manifests the whole which contains the city as an articulated part,

¹⁹ "All of these considerations appear to show that none of the principles on which men claim to rule and to hold other men in subjection to them are strictly right." Aristotle. *Politics* III.13 1283b27.

²⁰ He rules as a *king*. They are lucky he is a philosopher, because he lacks any desire to rule. *Republic* V 520d22–26; 520e31–521b10. This is what makes the city best.

²¹ "I consider this mighty structure as a monument of the insufficiency of human enjoyments. A king whose power is unlimited, and whose treasures surmount all real and imaginary wants, is compelled to solace, by the erection of a Pyramid, the satiety of dominion and the tastelessness of pleasures, and to amuse the tediousness of declining life, by seeing thousands laboring without end, and one stone, for no purpose, laid upon another." Samuel Johnson, *Rasselas*, ed. George Birkbeck, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1949), p. 114.

but in doing so it places the city within the whole. By not ruling philosophy rules.

This is the greatest benefit which philosophy renders to the political association, not as the service of a servant, but as magnanimous gesture. It was in this sense, as Josef Pieper points out, that pre-modern political philosophy understood philosophical *theōria* to be “an indispensable constituent of the common good itself.”²² Beyond this, pre-modern political philosophy limits itself to recommending the rule of laws—what we call constitutional rule—as generally the best form of rule for men, and to warning against tyranny as the worst of all forms of rule, worst because in being rule over men as slaves by means of speech, tyranny is the perversion of that which distinguishes men among the animals. Thus pre-modern political philosophy exhibits moderation and restraint both in what it expects of politics and what it expects of itself with respect to politics, the moderation and restraint which classical philosophy recognizes as emblematic of reason.²³

Yet this very restraint and moderation is the weakness of pre-modern political philosophy. It does not satisfy political men, those who do not wish to see, or cannot see, anything beyond ruling over human beings.²⁴ It is not going to satisfy Machiavelli, for instance. Modernity views this restraint and moderation as a form of excess.²⁵ But then so does Callicles in Plato’s *Gorgias*. The components of modernity are not *modern*. They are coeval with the human mind and the possibilities in terms of which the mind enacts itself. Classical philosophy acknowledges this weakness, but it belongs also to its moderation and restraint to acknowledge that it cannot be overcome. Not everything is transparent to reason.

²² Josef Pieper, *In Defense of Philosophy*, p. 59.

²³ “We always picture Plato and Aristotle wearing long academic gowns, but they were ordinary decent people like everyone else, who enjoyed a laugh with their friends. And when they amused themselves by composing their *Laws* and *Politics* they did it for fun. It was the least philosophical and least serious part of their lives: the most philosophical part was living simply and without fuss. If they wrote about politics it was to lay down rules for a madhouse. And if they pretended to treat it as something important it was because they knew that the madmen they were talking to believed themselves to be kings and emperors. They humored these beliefs in order to calm down their madness with as little harm as possible.” Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, trans. A.J. Krailsheimer (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Classics, 1996), no. 331, pp. 216–217.

²⁴ This is why classical political philosophy favors the rule of gentlemen.

²⁵ See Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, XV.

Modern political philosophy casts off the restraint and moderation characteristic of pre-modern philosophy. Of course it does not despise philosophy as Calicles did, but it is ashamed that philosophy was able to be despised. Therefore it despises the cause of its shame: it despises pre-modern philosophy. It despises the way philosophy had accepted its weakness vis-a-vis political men. It despises Socrates' inability to defend himself successfully before the Athenians. It despises Socrates wrapped in contemplation at the siege at Potidaea during the Peloponnesian War, described by Alcibiades in his speech in praise of Socrates in the *Symposium*.²⁶ Modern philosophy turns itself into political philosophy in the strong sense. It aims to rule. It will become a partisan among the parties who vie for supremacy in the city. It will take apart the arguments upon which political men base their claims to exercise rule and show the pretentiousness of these claims. It will advance, in opposition, the only claim worthy of respect, the claim to rule of reason itself, a claim which equalizes and cancels all the other claims. Reason ruling the political association is known as *Sovereignty*. *Sovereignty* transforms the political association into the *State*. Reason can make this claim because, according to modern philosophy, reason as such is rule. It is the essence of reason, as modern philosophy and the Enlightenment understand reason, to rule. It is because reason as such is rule, that the claims of reason to political supremacy are justified. Reason understood as rule is what makes modern philosophy *modern*. Political philosophy was not just an *ad hoc* issue for modern philosophers, a response to the political problems created by the religious divisions of Europe after the Reformation, for instance. It was a manifestation of modern philosophy's essential character.

This essential character can be expressed in a word, Kant's word. Enlightenment is *Kritik*, reason ruling over itself, giving itself the rules. *Kritik* is Kant's word, but what it names is not peculiarly Kantian. *Kritik* names what modern philosophy is. This is usually read as the priority of the epistemological, but to say that epistemology comes first is simply to say reason establishes itself as rule. *Kritik* means reason as the act of self-appropriation, *the act of establishing itself as reason*. The fundamental character of reason is not the *nous* of *theōria*. It does not mean self-discovery in the presence of intelligible objects. Reason creates itself as reason in ruling over itself because mind is not naturally, or spontaneously, given to itself in this mode. It has to be made over beyond its natural givenness, for this nat-

²⁶ *Symposium* 219e5 ff.

ural givenness is without direction. The first sentence of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, "All men by nature desire to know," is just the problem. This natural desire for knowledge is a naive appropriation of the mind.²⁷ Left to itself, this natural desire carries us into the dreamland of purely speculative reason, or into the endless play of possibility that is skepticism.²⁸ Reason as rule emerges from the play of possibilities concerning what it could be. Creating itself as rule, reason suppresses skepticism. But in order to suppress skepticism and to take possession of itself as rule, any intimation that there is a teleology immanent in reason must be denied. The critique of knowing as fulfillment and perfection is at the root of the epistemology of modern philosophy. The contemplation of truth cannot constitute the fulfillment of man, if reason is to establish itself as rule. And unless reason establishes itself as rule, we cannot become autonomous. It is because reason can create itself as rule, that reason is free, not subject to anything outside itself. *Kritik* teaches us to use reason in order to establish ourselves as rulers, and in the act of establishing reason as rule, to emancipate ourselves from what, at the beginning of his *opusculum*, Kant calls "self-incurred immaturity."²⁹ Slightly amending what Gilles Deleuze says in *La Philosophie Critique de Kant*, "The first thing we learn from the Copernican Revolution [in Philosophy] is that we are giving the orders."³⁰ The Enlightenment asserts its superiority to what preceded it—classical philosophy and Christianity—not just insofar as *science*, but its *moral* superiority as well. As moral ideal autonomy supplants the fulfillment, perfection, completion of the *telos* being realized.

The problem with Enlightenment reason, reason as rule, is the initial situation out of which it understands itself to arise. Reason must make itself as rule; it is not given to itself as rule. Reason as rule emerges from the play of possibilities concerning what it could be. Reason is free because the initial situation is taken to be directionless. Reason's autonomy as rule is founded upon an act by which reason creates itself as rule. It is without any immanent *telos*. That is why it can be rule. Reason as rule arises out of a

²⁷ Descartes, *Discourse on Method; Meditations I*.

²⁸ "As to it [philosophy] belongs the universal survey [*consideratio*] of truth, so belongs to it the universal doubt of truth." St. Thomas Aquinas, *In III Metaphysicorum Aristotelis Expositio* lect.1, no. 343.

²⁹ The first sentence of *Was Ist Aufklärung?*: "Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity." Immanuel Kant, *What is Enlightenment?*, in Hans Reiss, ed., *Kant's Political Writings* (Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 54.

³⁰ Gilles Deleuze, *La Philosophie Critique de Kant* (Paris: Presses Universitaire de France, 1963), p. 19.

condition understood to be indetermination. This suggests that the autonomy of Enlightenment reason presupposes a freedom of sheer spontaneity, and that reason as *Kritik* is groundless. This is the point at which what is called "postmodernity" kicks in.

III

"Postmodernity," or a certain version of it, is what has happened to higher education in this country according to Allan Bloom. "Reason," he says in *The Closing of the American Mind*, "has been knocked off its perch by the master lyricists of postmodernism, Nietzsche and Heidegger, and their followers." But it is not so much Nietzsche and Heidegger, both, according to Bloom, "genuine philosophers," who are responsible for the condition of American higher education, as it is the vulgarized versions of Nietzsche and Heidegger. Bloom calls the university the "home of reason." "The university as we know it, in its content and its aim, is the product of the Enlightenment. . . . The foundations of the university have become extremely doubtful to the highest intelligences . . . : the essence of it all is not social, political, psychological, or economic, but philosophic. . . . Western rationalism has culminated in a rejection of reason."³¹

Bloom says that Socrates "was the founder of the tradition of rationalism . . . the essence of the university . . . [which] exists to preserve and further what he represents." Bloom identifies Socrates with the Enlightenment conception of reason, with the proposition that everything is questionable except reason itself. "Enlightenment is Socrates respected."³² He gives no indication that there is anything problematic about this identification. We, however, can recognize that Bloom's Socrates is indistinguishable from the *ego cogitans* of Descartes. Bloom finds nothing problematic about this because the identity of ancient and modern philosophy *qua* philosophy is one of his essential theses.³³ When Bloom says that the American mind, the university, has become closed, he does not mean that it has abandoned Socrates in favor of Nietzsche and Heidegger, but that it has abandoned Socrates for vulgarized, or popular, versions of Nietzsche and Heidegger, what he calls "the Nietzscheanization of the Left or Vice Versa." For Bloom

³¹ *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987), pp. 260; 152; 377; 256; 262; 312; 240.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 307; 272; 267. Socrates respected is Socrates as ruler.

³³ "The great modern philosophers were as much philosophers as were the ancients. They were perfectly conscious of what separates them from all other men, and they knew the gulf is unbridgeable. They knew that their connection with other men would always be mediated by unreason." *Ibid.*, p. 290.

himself philosophy, the ultimate openness, embraces both Socrates and Nietzsche: "Reason itself is rejected by philosophy itself."³⁴ But such openness is accessible only to the genuinely philosophic souls and so must remain the prerogative of the few. What Bloom calls the "closing of the American mind" is the democratization of openness. It is "reason rejected," but not "by philosophy itself." It is here that Bloom locates the divergence between Socrates, who in this respect stands for all ancient philosophers, and modern philosophical enlightenment. The difference according to Bloom lies not within philosophy, but in the respective stances taken towards the non-philosophical many: it is a difference in how they address the non-philosophical many. The difference is rhetorical, not philosophical.

"The philosophers in their closets or their academies have entirely different ends than the rest of mankind." For Bloom all philosophers are finally indistinguishable, because all philosophers are identical as philosophers even if they teach very different things. Bloom says philosophy is a life; it is a life whose forms are protean. Being a philosopher does not depend on the content of what one teaches; it consists of being *open* to all the alternatives. Bloom calls this the contemplative life. According to Bloom openness is the capacity to entertain all questions, but to answer none of them. Answers are decisions, not knowledge. Openness is the prerogative of philosophers. And for this it is required that the majority of men remain closed, i.e., ignorant absolutists, who must give their souls completely to the societies of their place and time. "One has to have the experience of really believing before one can have the thrill of liberation." Democratization of openness is *closedness* because it shuts out the possibility of what Bloom considers to be the two "peak" human experiences: unconditional commitment to the horizons of a society and philosophy in its Bloomian version as endless, untrammelled questioning, the former being—but not for everyone—the condition of the latter. *Humanum paucis vivit genus.*³⁵

There is an alternative to which Bloom is not open. It is that represented by philosophers such as Maritain. Consequently, Bloom in fact does distinguish among philosophers, between those who refuse as philosophers to disregard what they have accepted in faith and those whose claim to be philosophers excludes such thinkers from the ranks of philosophers. For Bloom philosophy is possible only in the light of the decision to reject divine revelation as impossible. Bloom thinks that modern and pre-modern

³⁴ Ibid., p. 311.

³⁵ Ibid., pp. 291; 43; 377; and Lucan *De bello civili*, V.343.

philosophy, insofar as it is not Christian, are continuous.³⁶ The essential agreement "among ancient and modern philosophers is lost sight of," Bloom says, "because scholasticism, the use of Aristotle by the Roman Catholic Church, was the phantom of philosophy . . . that was violently attacked by modern philosophers, more out of anti-theological ire than by dislike of ancient philosophy." Bloom insists that the difference between modern and pre-modern philosophy "was a dispute within philosophy and that there was an agreement among the parties to it about what philosophy is."³⁷ But Bloom is wrong about this. The differences between modern and pre-modern philosophy concern precisely what philosophy is. One way to state this difference is as a difference about how philosophy comes into existence. For modern philosophers philosophy is not just a possibility of human nature which is actualized in some human beings; rather, philosophy is the creation of the philosopher, something established by his own act. This is clearly visible in Descartes. For the ancients, however, philosophy is a discovery of a possibility inherent in the nature of man. Gerhard Kruger has described this difference in his essay, *The Origin of Philosophical Self-consciousness*, which defines modern philosophy's self-understanding of this difference:

The freedom which always belongs to philosophy had a very different character for the Greeks than it has for us today. The Greeks made use of it naively; we take it explicitly into account. The freedom of philosophy is for us a self-conscious freedom. We understand ourselves as originating philosophy, while the Greeks encountered it as a possibility among other possibilities. The Greek knew the possibility of philosophy, but he did not know it as his own actual deed. The *nous* of Aristotle forgets itself in the contemplation of things, dwelling in *theōria* and absorbed into it. In this respect the Aristotelian position represents that of Greek philosophy generally. Even the Socratic-Platonic self-knowledge does not differ on this point. The problem of reflection, to be sure, is objectively latent in it, but there is no actual sense of it. . . . It

³⁶ "The great modern philosophers were as much philosophers as were the ancients. . . . The theoretical life remained as distinct from the practical life in their view as in the ancient one. . . . The modern philosophers knew that theory is pursued for its own sake. . . ." Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, p. 290. On the contrary, it is just the denial that "theory is pursued for its own sake" that is constitutive of modern philosophy in its difference from ancient philosophy. Let note be made of the fact that Bloom can appear to give inconsistent accounts of this matter. See, for instance, p. 209.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 264.

is with the discovery of the free self as such that philosophy has left behind its classical *naïveté*.³⁸

The philosopher (ancient) knew philosophy, but he did not know himself as the origin of philosophy ("his own actual deed"). The philosopher (modern) knows himself as the origin of philosophy. Philosophy is not something given with the givenness of man, but a manifestation of human freedom. Not to know this, not to know that it is we who "are giving the orders," is to be naive. This is the "self-incurred immaturity," emergence from which, Kant says, constitutes Enlightenment.³⁹ Thus *naïveté* is the characteristic accusation brought by modern philosophy against the ancient. Accusers such as Hume place ancient philosophers in the company of children and poets⁴⁰; Descartes, indicting the ancients, says, "It is not enough to have a good mind; the main thing is to employ it well. The greatest souls are capable of the greatest vices as well as the greatest virtues."⁴¹

Naïveté means here accepting philosophy as given with the nature of man situated among the beings within the whole of that which is. "Leaving behind" that *naïveté* means recognizing that philosophy creates its own possibility, that it generates itself, and is self-constituted. On this point of difference Bloom does not distinguish Socrates from Descartes. Had he done so, he could have understood how there can be continuity between classical philosophy and the scholasticism he contemptuously dismisses and discontinuity between ancient and modern philosophy. It is because modern philosophy is discontinuous with pre-modern philosophy from the Greeks through the Middle Ages—a discontinuity for which the term *epistemology* serves nicely as a label—that it is continuous with postmodernism. It is modern philosophic rationalism, the Enlightenment, not philosophy, that ends in the rejection of reason. "Reason itself" can be "rejected by philosophy itself" because the reason that is rejected has been constituted by philosophy itself.

³⁸ *Die Herkunft des philosophischen Selbstbewusstseins* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1962), pp. 1–3. Originally in *Logos* 22 (1933): pp. 225–227. The translation is my own.

³⁹ See note 28.

⁴⁰ *Treatise of Human Nature*, I iv 3. Unlike modern philosophers, children, poets and ancient philosophers do not understand themselves to be outside the whole about which they speak. Their speaking and their doing is given with the whole in which it occurs.

⁴¹ *Discours de la méthode*, Etienne Gilson, ed., 3rd edition (Paris: Vrin, 1962), p. 2.

While modern philosophy is discontinuous with premodern philosophy, it is continuous with medieval theology. The contemptuous dismissal of scholasticism, i.e., medieval philosophy in so far as it is Christian⁴², signals Bloom's failure to catch the significance of what he refers to as "the anti-theological ire" of modern philosophers, and to attend to its importance in understanding modern philosophy.⁴³ *Aufklärung* is "religion within the limits of reason alone." i.e., it is the denial that it is possible that the human mind could be addressed by divine revelation. Reason, as modernity construes it, must be closed to that possibility. Modern philosophy constitutes itself by rejecting the possibility of the truth of revelation. The rejection of this possibility is constitutive of what it means by reason. "Anti-theological ire" is not accidental to what modern philosophy is, it is its essence. To assure that the possibility of the truth of revelation is excluded from reason, reason must be self-constituted. Reason can be self-constituted and close off the possibility of revelation by constituting itself as rule. And it constitutes itself as rule by denying the immanent teleology of the mind towards truth.

Those ancient philosophers whom Bloom most admires⁴⁴, as well as me-

⁴² Bloom does mention Thomas Aquinas favorably. "Professors of Greek forget or are unawares that Thomas Aquinas, who did not know Greek, was a better interpreter of Aristotle than any of them have proved to be." Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, p. 376. This means that Aquinas was more of a philosopher than the professors of Greek. If so, then he was not completely a "phantom of philosophy." Perhaps Bloom meant to suggest that Saint Thomas Aquinas being more of a philosopher was less of a Christian. In his last book, *Love and Friendship* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), p. 432, bracketing Aquinas with Aristotle and Kant, Bloom speaks of him as a philosopher.

⁴³ There is a certain irony here since Bloom himself is possessed of considerable "anti-theological ire." And to the extent that Bloom fails to acknowledge it as a formal element in his understanding of how philosophy is constituted, he is not clear about the requirements of his own position. This explains why Bloom's expression of his position displays inconsistency in the matter of ancient and modern philosophers. Bloom fails to appreciate that "the modern age does not have recourse to what went before it, so much as it opposes and takes a stand against the challenge constituted by what went before it." Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1983), p. 75.

⁴⁴ When Bloom speaks of "the ancients" he almost always means Socrates/Plato or Aristotle. Moreover, Bloom's ancients are ancients assimilated to a romantic version of modernity for which the last word is "free creation." Right from the very beginning modernity meant liberation from the object, the successive versions of modernity being variations on this fundamental theme. Bloom's inclination to romanticism is clear in a statement such as the following from *Love and Friendship* (p. 510): "Human life is too ugly for anyone who thinks about it to rest content with it. This is the cause of the being of the gods, who underwrite the cosmic significance of human life. . . . [T]he poets . . . create gods for the consolation and uplifting of mankind. This longing impossible of fulfillment, culminates in the Olympian

dieval Christian philosophy, are in essential agreement concerning the immanent teleology of the mind and, therefore, about the highest act of mind which completes and perfects man's nature, *theōria*, contemplation.⁴⁵ For this to be the case we have to say that man is capable of truth, but that he does not generate it.⁴⁶ What Bloom calls "the peak," or end, exists, he believes, when "the best minds debate on the highest level."⁴⁷ Bloom applies the word *theōria* to this. But *theōria* means seeing; what Bloom calls *theōria* is *talking*. Bloom severs reason as the movement of discourse (*ratio* or *logos*) from the act of understanding (*intellectus* or *nous*) to which it is

gods, always young, always beautiful." Mind idealizes (and not least of all in the natural sciences). It is the power to go beyond what is given. Mind creates what is not given, what the given gives no inkling of. Mind does not disclose, but creates form. Mind is freedom. Form, irreducible to the given, manifests the creativity of mind. Contrast Bloom's statement above with Montaigne's: "There is nothing so beautiful and legitimate as to play the man well and properly . . . the most barbarous of our maladies is to despise our being." *Essays*, vol. 3, n. 13, trans. Donald M. Frame (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1958), p. 852. The romantic flight from the world presented by the natural sciences, as well as that world itself, take their origin from the same source: the modern conception of mind. What makes deconstruction potent is this: form being understood as the way in which the mind has more or less arbitrarily decided to see itself. Deconstruction focuses on the arbitrary, dissolving form back into the materials out of which mind made it.

⁴⁵ The character of this agreement has been well expressed by Paul Ludwig Landsberg, "Kant als Sohn seiner Zeit," *Rhein-Mainische Volkszeitung*, nos. 94, 95 (1924). "Antikes und katholisches Europaertum hatte im Grunde dieselbe Art und denselben Begriff von Erkenntnis. Erkenntnis ist für beide ein Vorgang, in dem das erkennende Bewusstsein eine *homiosis*, eine *adaequatio*, eine seinsmassige Gleichwerdung mit dem erkannten Gegenstand erleidet. Erkenntnis ist ein *paschein*, ein *Erleiden*; der Gegenstand ist geichsam tätig, er strahlt hinein in das erkennende Bewusstsein." Cf. Erich Przywara, S.J., *Kantentfaltung und Kantverleugnung in Ringen der Gegenwart: Gesammelte Aufsätze 1922–1927*, vol. 2, p. 788.

⁴⁶ This is Pascal's point against Descartes when he says, "*Nous avons une impuissance de prouver, invincible à tout le dogmatisme. Nous avons une idée de la vérité, invincible à tout le pyrrhonisme*" (#395). Truth is not founded upon our power of proof—*le dogmatisme*—as is the case with Descartes where the mind escapes skepticism because it generates truth about the world as long as it conducts itself according to the rules of method (*Pensées* #345). Bloom uses this same passage from Pascal's *Pensées* to describe his own position—see *Giants and Dwarfs: Essays 1960–1990* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990), p. 18. In doing this, however, Bloom does not recognize that Pascal is distinguishing himself from Descartes and so misconstrues its meaning.

⁴⁷ Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, p. 347. Unlike the Latin Middle Ages as Bloom understands them, when, according to Bloom, "everyone except a few foolish and intrepid souls professed Christianity and the only discussion concerned what constituted orthodoxy" (p. 355).

ordered.⁴⁸ Bloom's *theōria* recalls Gadamer's description of what Schleiermacher calls "free dialogue":

[in] which . . . the content of the thoughts 'plays almost no part.' Dialogue is the mutual stimulation of thought ('and has no other natural end than the gradual exhaustion of the process described'), a kind of artistic construction in the reciprocity of communication.⁴⁹

No longer ordered to understanding, reason is movement without end.⁵⁰ Severed from understanding, reason does not move toward the disclosure of the intelligibilities whose presence is truth. Philosophy is endless talk about questions that cannot be resolved. The mind encounters itself as a multitude of voices. "Confusions within the philosophical enterprise create alternative voices, "I's" that are set in opposition, voices that can only at best quote one another's speeches while being unable to state them as their own."⁵¹ This kind of encounter of the mind with itself is depicted by Milton near the beginning of *Paradise Lost*:

Others apart sat on a Hill retir'd,
In thoughts more elevate, and reasoned high
Of Providence, Foreknowledge, Will, and Fate,
Fixed Fate, free will, foreknowledge absolute,
And found no end in wandering mazes lost.
Of good and evil much they argued then,
Of happiness and final misery,
Passion and Apathy, and glory and shame:
Vain wisdom all, and false Philosophie:
Yet with a pleasing sorcery could charm
Pain for a while or anguish, and excite
Fallacious hope, or arm the obdured breast
With stubborn patience as with triple steel.⁵²

⁴⁸ St. Thomas Aquinas, *De Veritate*, q. 15, a. 1, c. A discussion, it may be remarked, which does not concern "orthodoxy."

⁴⁹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), p. 165. The parenthesis and single quotes enclose material Gadamer is citing from Schleiermacher, *Dialektik* (ed. Odebrecht), p. 572.

⁵⁰ "Man by his reason apprehends movably, proceeding discursively from one thing to another, and having the way open by which he may proceed to either of two opposites." St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* Ia, q. 64 a. 2.

⁵¹ Robert Sokolowski, *Moral Action: A Phenomenological Study* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1985), p. 185.

⁵² *Paradise Lost* II, lines 555–569. What Milton describes here is the antithesis of that beatitude that constitutes the perfection, completion, perfection of the achieved *telos*. Mind so encountered he presents in these lines as a condition obtaining among fallen angels.

Bloom's account of the condition of the universities and colleges in *The Closing of the American Mind* won him applause, especially from those of more traditional inclinations who believed that in Bloom they had found someone who as a philosopher gave voice to those inclinations. However, I would suggest that what they had found—and here we return to Rorty—was an instance of philosophy as self-invention.⁵³ *The Closing of the American Mind* is a script which furnishes Bloom with many roles. Philosophy as self-invention, plus a considerable talent for histrionics, enables Bloom to play all the philosophers' parts: Socrates, Nietzsche, Plato, Rousseau, Max Weber, Heidegger, among others. They become for Bloom what Rorty calls "figures whom the rest of us can use as examples and as material in our own attempts to create a new self by writing a *bildungsroman* about our old self."⁵⁴ There is no difficulty understanding how, if philosophy is a form of self-invention, it can embrace both Socrates and Nietzsche. I conjoin them with me, Derrida says in a description of philosophy as the center of a self which invents itself.⁵⁵

Here Freud and Heidegger, I conjoin them with me like the two great ghosts of the "great epoch." . . . They did not know each other, but according to me they form a couple. . . . They are bound to each other without reading each other and without corresponding: . . . [T]wo thinkers whose glances never crossed. . . .⁵⁶

In effect Bloom says Socrates and Nietzsche can form a couple and in the conjoining I appear, I am that conjunction. Philosophy as self-invention is a cogito, which has relinquished its identity with reason, the very formula of postmodernity. So practiced it is, as Rorty points out, "a private project without public significance." But self-invention with the State as the guarantor of every form of self-identity is what late liberal society is all about, and in a society of this sort philosophy will be accorded recognition to the extent that it takes the form of "the uninhibited cultivation of individual-

⁵³ See Rorty, *Philosophical Papers*, vol. 2, pp. 195–196. In his review of *The Closing of the American Mind* ("That Old-Time Philosophy," *The New Republic*, 4 April, 1988, pp. 28–33) Rorty's tone is not unfriendly to Bloom.

⁵⁴ Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, p. 119. In this respect are not Rorty and Bloom instances of what has been called an "aesthetic metaphysics of individuality" characteristic of romanticism? Since "all individuality is a manifestation of universal life and hence everyone carries a little bit of everyone else within himself . . . the individuality of [an] author can be directly grasped "by, as it were, transforming oneself into the other." Cf. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. 167–68.

⁵⁵ This is the subtitle of Derrida's *The Post Card* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

ity."⁵⁷ Rorty describes as well as any of our contemporaries, and Bloom illustrates, what happens to philosophy when it loses what Maritain called "the natural faith of reason in truth," or, what comes the same thing, when its premise is "our inability to acquire any genuine knowledge of what is intrinsically good or right."⁵⁸ and, in Rorty's words, "substitutes Freedom for Truth as the goal of thinking."⁵⁹

As for philosophers who profess Christianity they are instructed by the First Epistle of Peter to "be ever ready to make a defense to anyone who calls you to account for the hope that is in you."⁶⁰ That we are called to account is the good news: it means "men by nature desire to know."

⁵⁷ The phrase is taken from Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), p. 5.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, p. xiii.

⁶⁰ 1 Peter 3:15.