



II. Talking about My Generation

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Critical Response

II

Talking about My Generation

Ian Hunter

Regardless that he treats my “The History of Theory” essay as exemplary of how not to pursue its chosen task, I am appreciative of Fredric Jameson’s sustained engagement with it, especially where he provides opportunities to clarify and extend the arguments (see Ian Hunter, “The History of Theory,” *Critical Inquiry* 33 [Autumn 2006]: 78–112). Indeed, there is even something nostalgic in Jameson’s more extravagant denunciations of the essay and its author when treated as symptomatic of the antitheory ideology of late capitalist (anti-) intellectual apostasy. This harks back to a time when academics could accuse each other of being mouthpieces for forces far more momentous than those that run university departments and gatekeep learned journals. I see no reason though to take these florid denunciations to heart, especially as neither of us works in circumstances where my putative betrayal could matter to anyone outside the tiniest and most self-involved of academic groupings. In responding to Jameson’s remarks my focus thus will be on what I take to be a mischaracterization of the central argument of “The History of Theory.” This is his claim that the essay is an attack on the “idealism” of theory, which, in the event, is undermined by its own idealism—a work of antitheory that fails to grasp its own theoretical determinations—as a result of its lack of a proper (dialectical materialist) conception of history. I shall argue that this characterization arises as a standard antitype of dialectical philosophical history: the figure of the intellectual whose relative class autonomy permits him to think the idealism of bourgeois ideology without realizing the ma-

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terial grounds of his thinking, leaving him in the position of the satirist satirized. Not only is this analytical figure too rigid to capture the kind of argument being offered about the history of theory, but it also preempts the possibility of correcting or falsifying the argument by exposing it to “further research”—a phrase that Jameson regards as a slightly deluded appeal to what is in fact a censorious positivism.

Jameson’s view arises from a dialectical philosophical hermeneutics that regards history as the passage of consciousness towards comprehension of its own material determination, driven by an inescapable dualism between ideas and their social production. The kind of historiography that informs my essay, however, treats thinking itself as an historical activity: the achievement of an open-ended array of intellectual performances using a variety of arts of thinking for particular contextual purposes. These arts are not regarded as opaque to a latent material (economic) determination whose future revelation gives history its prophetic direction. Rather, they are treated as instruments for the most diverse array of human activities—of economic calculation to be sure, but also of erotic intensification, juridical regulation, spiritual contemplation, scientific experimentation, political rationalization, aesthetic cultivation, and so on—from which histories flow as the scarcely foreseeable and largely unintended outcomes of the activities themselves. The central argument of my essay is that 1960s humanities theory is one such art of thinking. What Jameson’s response makes clear is that historical understanding of the 1960s *ars theorica* is fractured by (at least) two rival historiographies—themselves special arts of thinking—requiring our discussion to enter the history of historiography.

1

Jameson is right to identify as central to my argument the redescription of 1960s humanities theory in terms of its deployment of a certain kind of spiritual exercise. He is wrong though to regard this redescription as if it were intended as an unmasking of theory’s latent idealism. According to Jameson, my characterization of Husserl’s *epochē* as a spiritual exercise is

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intended to make it not only serve as “the badge of the idealism of theorists and philosophers from Plotinus to Kant and down to our time, but also more generally to reveal behind it the conspiratorial program of religion as such and of Nietzsche’s evil ascetic priests” (p. 566). For Jameson, “The History of Theory” also implies “an indictment of the intellectual as such, which is the burden of the assimilation of theory to a ‘spiritual exercise’ and of the unmasking of theoretical analysis and interpretation as an idealism and indeed an asceticism of a quasi-religious type” (p. 567). This forms part of Jameson’s larger argument that this supposed exposé of theory’s idealism is not so much wrong as half-baked—stranded by its own incapacity to comprehend theoretical idealism as the ideological expression of late capitalist production relations—and thus condemned to oscillate between its own unacknowledged idealist premises and a flat-footed positivism. Jameson unfavorably compares this intransitive oscillation with the genuine dialectical reconciliation of ideality and materiality achieved in the properly theoretical “critique of aesthetics.”¹ This is a critique that uncovers the true material-political foundation of aesthetic spiritual exercises in the form of their alliance with “anti-Left status quo politics, in this country anti-antiglobalization and in France democratic and parliamentary propaganda of the type embodied by Luc Ferry” (p. 568).

Jameson misunderstands the point of redescribing theory in terms of the deployment of a certain kind of spiritual exercise when he runs together two very different levels of analysis, both of which are present, but not conjoined, in the essay. There is a methodological use of the concept of spiritual exercises—modes of intellectual self-transformation and self-cultivation—as part of a program for treating forms of thought as activities open to historical description (compare also speech acts, languages of thought, arts of thinking). Then there is the substantive use of the concept in this particular case to redescribe Husserl’s transcendental reduction as a highly specialized spiritual exercise—one that allows its practitioners to withdraw from formal-positive knowledges and quotidian values in preparation for an encounter with a renovatory, pure phenomenon.

It should be clear that, methodologically speaking, to ascribe a spiritual exercise to a thinker or style of thought is in no sense to convict them of the philosophical sin of idealism. The notion of spiritual exercise is simply a

1. At the risk of waking the dead and making them do battle again, it can be noted that I offered a discussion of this set of issues in Hunter, “Aesthetics and Cultural Studies,” in *Cultural Studies*, ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula A. Treichler (New York, 1992), pp. 347–67, to which Jameson responded *inter alia* in Fredric Jameson, “On ‘Cultural Studies,’” *Social Text*, no. 34 (1993): 17–52.

way of characterizing an array of acts of inner self-transformation—of work on the self by the self—aimed at forming personae suited to an open-ended variety of ethical aspirations, “psychological” deportments, cognitive dispositions, public duties, and private desires.² These exercises are not themselves reducible to ideas. They draw from a repertory of *technē* and practices—timetables, architectures and spatial organizations, practices of meditation and self-scrutiny, skeptical exercises of various kinds, and a whole variety of discursive rhetorics—whose mode of existence is that of historically instituted arts of the self. Moreover, while some of these exercises are indeed oriented to purifying an intellect to make it capable of acceding to pure ideas,³ others are oriented to such distinctly nonidealist purposes as purging religious passions from judicial judgment;⁴ cultivating the personae required for the holding of various public offices;⁵ forming the Baconian disposition capable of openness to experimentally generated phenomena;⁶ and so on.

As for my substantive application of the concept to Husserl’s transcendental reduction, I have no interest in characterizing the latter as idealist—that’s Jameson’s term of heretication, not mine—let alone of treating it as the “badge of the idealism of theorists and philosophers from Plotinus to Kant and down to our time” (p. 566). Setting aside my comments on the anti-Kantian dimension of Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology,⁷ Husserl’s construction of the transcendental phenomenon as something like the breakthrough appearance of Kant’s *noumenon* would normally have him classified as a transcendental realist rather than a Kantian transcendental idealist, although I am not interested in this kind of philosophical taxonomy either. What is interesting and significant about the transcendental reduction from the viewpoint of intellectual historiogra-

2. For overviews, see Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, trans. Michael Chase (Oxford, 1995), and Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject: Lectures at the Collège de France 1981–1982*, trans. Graham Burchell, ed. Frédéric Gros (New York, 2006).

3. See Hadot, *Plotinus, or The Simplicity of Vision*, trans. Chase (Chicago, 1993), and Hunter, “The Morals of Metaphysics: Kant’s *Groundwork* as Intellectual *Paideia*,” *Critical Inquiry* 28 (Summer 2002): 908–29.

4. See David Saunders, “The Judicial *Persona* in Historical Context: The Case of Matthew Hale,” in *The Philosopher in Early Modern Europe: The Nature of a Contested Identity*, ed. Conal Condren, Stephen Gaukroger, and Hunter (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 140–59.

5. See Condren, “The Persona of the Philosopher and the Rhetorics of Office in Early Modern England” and Robert von Friedeburg, “*Persona* and Office: Althusius on the Formation of Magistrates and Councillors,” in *The Philosopher in Early Modern Europe*, pp. 66–89, 160–81.

6. See Gaukroger, *Francis Bacon and the Transformation of Early-Modern Philosophy* (Cambridge, 2001).

7. See Hunter, “The History of Theory,” pp. 95, 99.

phy is not its doctrinal error or truth but its use as a means of intellectual self-transformation by those who master it in order to change their cognitive and moral disposition. The activity of skeptical suspension or “bracketing” of the philosopher’s prior cognitive and moral attachments is just that: a concrete activity, a practice of withdrawal from all “factual sciences,” formal structures, and practical values. This is undertaken in accordance with the ethical aspiration to cleanse the consciousness of everything that might block the breakthrough appearance of a phenomenon unsullied by the existing disposition of a natural self to its quotidian world life. The *epochē* is not a philosophical mistake but an existential practice.

For the purposes of the essay, the point of redescribing the transcendental reduction in this way is not to engage with Husserl’s philosophy as such, let alone to denounce it as idealism. Rather, it is to identify the source of a spiritual exercise that, just because it is a means of cultivating a particular intellectual disposition or persona, is capable of migrating to other (extraphilosophical) fields of knowledge, carrying its problematizing power with it. The central historical argument of the essay is that post-structuralist theorizing arose from this process of migration, problematization, and colonization. It thus emerged in a variety of forms, depending on the disciplinary field targeted as the fossilized carapace that had to be shattered in order to admit a renovatory engagement with the so-called other. These forms included Althusser’s suspension of humanist values and positivist political economy as a means of allowing a renovated Marxism to break through in the form of an answer to a question not yet asked. A further instance is supplied by Julia Kristeva’s identification of a claustal symbolic level of poetic language underpinned by the pulsing energies and flows of a semiotic chora, whose containment permits signification and whose irruptive breakthroughs grant ecstasy. We also provided the example of a poststructuralist literary criticism—part Marxist, part phenomenological—that alighted on a preexisting New Criticism and performed the same set of (self-) problematizing operations: declaring this criticism to be closed to flows of meaning coursing beneath texts and opaque to the forms of literary production making them possible, thus ripe for the possibility of various kinds of revolutionary irruption and breakthrough. (Here we can indulge in a minor point of correction by noting that in this discussion of criticism it is not theory that is traced back to the Protestant “seminar of conscience”—as Jameson misparaphrases [p. 569]—but a particular kind of antitheoretical literary criticism personified in the Leavis school.)⁸

8. See Hunter, “The History of Theory,” pp. 104–5.

The essay presents these examples as claimed instances of a historical development in which poststructuralist theorizing emerged from the migration of the exercise of the *epochē* into an array of adjacent humanities disciplines on which it could work its problematizing powers. Needless to say, my academic vanity would be seriously wounded were Jameson or anyone else to show that the apparently common structure of the array of theoretical discourses did not arise from this migration of the phenomenological exercise and intellectual persona and that it came from quite other sources. Nonetheless, such disconfirmation would confirm what I take my account to be: a historical hypothesis about the emergence of a particular art of the self-as-theorist that is indeed susceptible to “further research,” rather than a faintly sinister cover for an antitheory ideological hatchet job.

2

Jameson’s reading of “The History of Theory” as a half-baked debunking of intellectuals as such—rather than as a historical characterization of a particular intellectual persona—is tied to his assumption that the point of the essay is to expose the idealism of theory. If the essay is uninterested in exposing idealism, however, then neither does it offer an account of intellectuals in general. The whole point of approaching forms of thought as activities or disciplined ensembles of arts—arts of calculation and thinking, rhetorics of persuasion and demonstration, techniques of observation and experiment, exercises in self-transformation and self-cultivation—is to constitute as a topic for historical investigation the multiple ways in which human beings have used their intellect. Among these ways, the uses associated with philosophical idealism—for example, the constitution of the intellect as an immaterial substance whose purification permits it to participate in the thinking or willing of pure ideas—are indeed an important topic of investigation within the history of university metaphysics.⁹ So too, though, are the uses associated with the formation of a variety of other intellectual personae, such as those mentioned above: the deconfessionalized juridical persona; the intellect and will groomed for the holding of magisterial office; and the Baconian intellect cultivated for its reception of experimentally generated phenomena and its disinterest in Aristotelian

9. See, for examples, Wilhelm Schmidt-Biggemann, “Metaphysik [Leibniz],” in *Die Philosophie des 17. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Helmut Holzhey, Schmidt-Biggemann, and Jean-Pierre Schobinger, 4 vols. (Basel, 1998–2001), 4:1064–79; Walter Sparr, “Kant’s Doctrine of Atonement as a Theory of Subjectivity,” in *Kant’s Philosophy of Religion Reconsidered*, ed. Philip J. Rossi and Michael Wreen (Bloomington, Ind., 1991), pp. 103–12; and Hunter, “The Morals of Metaphysics.”

essences and system. It is misguided and misleading to unify such diverse deployments of arts of reasoning as so many expressions of reason in general, least of all by putting them in a general relation of (mis)recognition to a level of social materiality that supposedly makes them all possible.

Applied to the history of philosophy more narrowly, my approach to intellectual history leads to what might be called a regionalization of philosophy and the philosopher. It treats what counts as philosophy and what it means to be a philosopher as something varying with the deployment of arts of thinking valorized as philosophical within a particular historical context or cultural region.¹⁰ In Europe and America the immediate context for the cultivation of the philosophical arts and persona has typically been the university, which, because of the attachment of these arts to religiously fractured political entities, has resulted in a regional or geo-intellectual distribution of philosophical styles. This, to take one of the more obvious instances, is the reality lying behind the ascription of the geo-intellectual term *continental philosophy* to European transcendental phenomenology. Needless to say, this approach to philosophy via its regional self-understandings and styles of cultivation is radically opposed to and by those approaches that view philosophy as the form in which a universal human reason becomes conscious of its own structure and operation. It does not matter whether this reason is thought of as something to which philosophy accedes through an exemplary act of intellectual reflexivity—as in Descartes's meditative recovery of first principles—or as something with which philosophy has a historical rendezvous as the result of reason's (Hegelian or Marxian) evolution towards the moment at which it becomes conscious of itself.

Jameson can ascribe a half-baked theory of intellectuals to "The History of Theory" only because he imagines himself in possession of a fully cooked one. On this classic Marxist account, intellectuals are determined by their anomalous position in the relations of production, which sees them stranded between the productive class they have left behind and the ruling elite that refuses them full admittance (see p. 570). According to this model—which Jameson applies not just to "Hunter" but also to E. P. Thompson, Richard Rorty, and, in a long excursus, Pierre Bourdieu—it is their interstitial class position that both permits intellectuals to see through the idealist ideology of the bourgeoisie and prevents them from reflexively grounding their own thought in the level of material produc-

10. On this, see Schobinger, foreword, and Holzhey, "Der Philosoph im 17. Jahrhundert," *Die Philosophie des 17. Jahrhunderts*, 1:xxxix–lvi, 1:3–30; and Condren, Gaukroger, and Hunter, "Introduction," *The Philosopher in Early Modern Europe*, pp. 1–16. See also *Philosophie und Regionalität*, ed. Karol Bal, Volker Caysa, and Pirmin Stekeler-Weithofer (Wrocław, 1999).

tion from which they have been deracinated. The poor things can't help being intellectual renegades of late capitalism; they have been born into a time when the relations of production have not yet driven human reason to its rendezvous with self-consciousness in the mind of a universal class. It can be scarcely their fault then that they are condemned to oscillate between a barren empiricism and their own unacknowledged idealism, finally falling into an antitheoretical positivism whose real agenda is the destruction of Marxism on behalf of the state and big business. Yet Jameson finds it in his heart to blame them nonetheless.

In the essay, I engage this set of issues only via a brief discussion of Terry Eagleton's elaboration of the Marxist model within the idiom of culture and cultural studies.¹¹ In Eagleton's own foray into the history of theory it is theory itself that is symptomatic of human reason's historical unripeness; the integration of culture within the productive machinery of late capitalism both provides intellectuals with heightened theoretical insight into culture and blocks access to its material conditions, leaving its theorists confined to formalism, idealism, and relativism. (Another small correction: it is not me but Eagleton who accuses Rorty of relativism, in the throes of his nostalgia for the good old days of Leninism and Aristotelianism.) The point of identifying this pattern of thought in Eagleton is not to single out Marxism for attack. On the contrary, it is to treat Eagleton's elaboration of it as one among the larger array of theoretical discourses formed via the philosophical colonization of various fields of knowledge. It was to this end that I cited Foucault's genealogy (from *The Order of Things*) according to which the human sciences emerged from a Kantian interrogation of the positive sciences that asks how consciousness can emerge from the otherwise material structures of language, life, and labor.¹² Rather than viewing it as part of an *episteme* or virtual discursive structure from which historical theoretical discourses emerge—thereby following Foucault to the letter—I treat this kind of interrogation in a different way: as a contingent act of intellectual problematization carried out in fields of knowledge via the cultivation of a certain kind of intellectual disposition towards the objects of those fields. This is what makes it possible to treat such aporia as that between transcendental consciousness and empirical being—or that between the idealism of reason and the materiality of its social production—as themselves voluntary modes of intellectual problematization associated with the cultivation of a certain kind of intellectual persona. Such is the persona who feels compelled by the nontransparency

11. See Hunter, "The History of Theory," pp. 79, 85–86, 93.

12. See *ibid.*, pp. 89, 93–94.

of reason to its own material or historical conditions to suspend the given objects of reason (ideology) and seek for these conditions. They are located in the far utopian distance, at the end of the protracted dialectical reconciliation of the ideal and the material, in the historical moment when consciousness finally becomes reflexive to its own material conditions or else fails to do so owing to the tragic unripeness of history.

3

Jameson rightly regards my treatment of dialectical philosophical history—as the instrument of a voluntary (or pedagogically imposed) practice of intellectual self-problematization and grooming—as the point of maximum difference between our respective historiographies (see p. 572). In fact, faced with the unexpected and unwelcome thought that the artefactual character of man as an “empirico-transcendental doublet” might transform the divisions of the dialectic into instruments of a regional intellectual regimen, Jameson reacts with Ptolemaic incredulity and a sudden recourse to the transhistorical, neurobiological, and finally universal structure of thought and reality:

Doublet indeed! Have we really solved this problem, which runs from the mind/body dilemma through Cartesian and Spinozan dualisms all the way down to base and superstructure if not the mechanical-materialist mirage of the cognitive brain itself? The traces of this metaphysical raw nerve are to be found in all the dualisms in human history. . . . The only truly original solution, which does not claim to resolve anything but rather to incorporate the dilemma of oppositions and binaries into its very structure and method, remains the dialectic, which posits a permanent gap between subject and object within all our thoughts as well as in reality itself (herein lies its kinship with Lacanian analysis as well as its foundational and inextricable relationship with Marxism itself). [Pp. 574–75]

The issue of course is not whether this problem has been solved but how it has been created, and continuously re-created, as the instrument of a long-standing art of intellectual self-problematization and transformation. In order to put the brakes on Jameson’s headlong descent from the Cartesian and Spinozan dualisms through the brain and out into the universal structure of thought—and in order to indicate the history and pertinence of a nondialectical historiography—we can observe that even at their initial appearance there was a historiography that treated these dualisms as voluntary assumptions of a particular philosophical culture. Drawing on his father Jacob’s historiography of philosophy and theology, the early mod-

ern political jurist Christian Thomasius thus listed the following set of doctrines as historical sources of “sectarian philosophy” and most of the philosophical sects:

These doctrines are: (1) that God and matter were two coeternal principles; (2) that God’s nature consists in speculation and thought; (3) that the nature of spirits consists in thought; (4) that the nature of man consists in reason [*Verstand*] and that on its perfection depends the happiness of the whole human race; (5) that man is a single species and that what is good for one [person] is good for another; (6) that the human will is improved through the reason; (7) and that in this way—that is, through the improvement of thought—it is very easy to attain wisdom and virtue.¹³

According to this historiography, the dualism of thought and matter arose from the Greek philosophical distinctions between form and chaos, intellect and prime matter. This gave rise to the fundamental doctrine of metaphysics—that the meaning of the world (being) is the product of the forms in which it is intelligized—and also to the basic forms of dualistic and monistic metaphysics, such as those found in Descartes and Spinoza. Dualistic metaphysics was thus subject to a certain kind of historical problematization in part through its incompatibility with the radical monism of Christian *ex nihilo* creation, which allowed Greek philosophy to be treated as the intrusion of an alien pagan culture, but also through the latest techniques of humanist critical philology, which allowed the new historians (Jacob Thomasius, Isaac de Beausobre, and Johann Lorenz Mosheim) to expose the anachronisms by which the church fathers had fabricated apostolic origins for Neoplatonic and neo-Aristotelian metaphysics.¹⁴

Needless to say, it is my intention not to endorse the account of the relation between Greek philosophy and Christian doctrine found in this historiography—for this we can turn to the remarkable studies of Peter

13. Christian Thomasius, *Cautelen zur Erlernung der Rechtsgelehrtheit*, vol. 20 of *Ausgewählte Werke*, ed. Werner Schneiders (1713; Hildesheim, 2006), p. 113.

14. For more on this, see Ralph Häfner, “Jacob Thomasius und die Geschichte der Häresien,” in *Christian Thomasius (1655–1728): Neue Forschungen im Kontext der Frühaufklärung*, ed. Friedrich Vollhardt (Tübingen, 1997), pp. 141–64 and “Das Erkenntnisproblem in der Philologie um 1700: Zum Verhältnis von Polymathie und Aporetik bei Jacob Friedrich Reimann, Christian Thomasius, und Johann Albert Fabricius,” in *Philologie und Erkenntnis: Beiträge zu Begriff und Problem frühneuzeitlicher “Philologie,”* ed. Häfner (Tübingen, 2001), pp. 95–128; and Hunter, *The Secularisation of the Confessional State: The Political Thought of Christian Thomasius* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 61–73.

Brown and J. G. A. Pocock¹⁵—but to clarify what happened to metaphysics when it was first historicized. In removing Greek philosophy from Christian truth, the early modern historiography of philosophy also removed it from the sacred history in which that truth would be realized in time with the second coming of Christ. Greek philosophy was thus relocated in a purely profane or pagan temporality in which history did not represent the temporal unfolding of transcendent ideas but consisted wholly and solely of human activities and their consequences, particularly their civil consequences. (With the shrinking of eschatology, this profane temporality could later stake a claim to be history as such.) This protocontextual historiography thus suspended the truth-claims of metaphysics by viewing it as (what we would call) a concrete historical activity, typically in terms of the teaching activities of the ancient or modern schools. It thus opened a space in which philosophy could be described in terms of its effects, in the first instance, on the personalities of its practitioners and then, second, on civil society.

The philosophical dualisms that Jameson ascribes to the structure of human thought, and thence to the dialectical motor of history, have thus long been viewed as contingent scholastic teachings by a nondialectical historiography. This nondialectical historiography was indeed driven by a combative cultural-political agenda. It was fashioned to undermine the claims of metaphysics to offer a philosophical or “natural” explication of Christian theology, which, in the era of ecclesial fragmentation, had given rise to rival philosophical theologies whose conflicts were incapable of resolution and yet a powerful source of intolerance and persecution. This contextualizing historiography may thus itself be treated as the instrument of a particular kind of spiritual exercise, a means of suspending the non-negotiable truth-claims of transcendent philosophies by historicizing them. Its aim is the grooming of a persona capable of grasping philosophies in a detached and relativistic spirit, as just so many teachings of the sects and schools. It is no accident then that Thomasius insisted on including this historiography of philosophy in the training of his law students; he regarded it as the key means of allowing them to detach themselves from their own metaphysical and confessional commitments and to view the law in a deconfessionalized manner.

Despite its combative and programmatic motivation and its evident “regionality,” however, we should not assume that this antimetaphysical

15. See Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York, 1988) and *Authority and the Sacred: Aspects of the Christianisation of the Roman World* (Cambridge, 1995); and the first three volumes of J. G. A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, 4 vols. to date (Cambridge, 1999–2005).

historiography is incapable of descriptive neutrality. Needless to say, this neutrality is not founded in any kind of transcendental objectivity. It finds its grounds only in the contingent capacity to withdraw from irreconcilably conflictual transcendent philosophies and to relocate them within a noneschatological temporality, where they are viewed in terms of their personal and civil effects. It is not the case that in claiming a capacity for true (falsifiable) description this historiography “finds itself fatally rationalizing its own disciplinary position as a place of truth . . . which surely betrays a philosophical commitment to system rather than a theoretical refusal of it” (p. 575). The point of the exercise is not to proclaim a new philosophical truth but to transform the intellectual disposition in which such truth will be acceded to, from apodictic to fallibilistic, as we shall discuss below. The antimetaphysical historiography thus does not itself claim to be yet another recovery of human reason that sweeps the entire cultural field into modernity, only to be a combat-discipline making available a particular capacity for metaphysically neutral historical description. Its “foundations” lie not in the kind of knowledge to which it gives rise, but in the forms of sectarian adherence that it was designed to overcome. This is why it remains intrinsically contestable, especially by those who have been disposed to seek for a true metaphysical foundation for knowledge, as can be seen from the present exchange.

4

I have suggested elsewhere that Cambridge school intellectual history might be regarded as a modern inheritor of this early modern antimetaphysical historiography of philosophy.¹⁶ This applies especially to that school’s insistence on treating forms of thought as activities—speech acts—thereby suspending their truth-claims and seeking to interpret them in terms of what discourses do in a particular historical context.¹⁷ For Jameson, in lacking a proper historical ontology, this kind of historiography is forced to give primacy to local interests and to conflicts lacking any overarching order or direction, thereby reducing history to a vast conspiracy theory, a triumph of “cynical reason” (p. 580). In this regard, Jameson’s critique of my adaptation of Cambridge school historiography converges uncannily with Charles Taylor’s critique of the primacy of conflict in

16. See Hunter, “The History of Philosophy and the Persona of the Philosopher,” *Modern Intellectual History* 4 (Nov. 2007): 591–92.

17. See Quentin Skinner, “Interpretation, Rationality, and Truth,” *Visions of Politics*, 3 vols. (Cambridge, 2002), 1:27–56.

Quentin Skinner's contextual hermeneutics.¹⁸ Despite the fact that they appeal to different historical ontologies—Taylor to a neo-Thomist ontology of natural law, Jameson to a neo-Marxist ontology of production relations—they agree in insisting that discursive truth must be grounded in man's historical becoming rather than tied to the outcomes of entirely contingent battles over what he should be. Neither thinker considers the possibility that the modern capacity to treat forms of thought as instruments of conflicting cultural interests might itself have been the prize of a partially successful historical battle: that waged by the antimetaphysical historiographers against the early modern moral ontologists, including of course the Thomists. The instrument and outcome of that battle is a historiography that views history not in terms of laws governing what we must become but in terms of contingencies that make us what we happen to be.

In order to evoke his moral or political ontology of history, Jameson returns to the source, citing Marx's famous dictum: "Morality, religion, metaphysics, and all the rest of ideology as well as the forms of consciousness corresponding to these" arise from the fact that "men, developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter . . . also their thinking and the products of their thinking. It is not consciousness that determines life, but life that determines consciousness" (p. 573). Apparently the old verses still scan, as Jameson uses them to determine the partially successful dimension of "The History of Theory"—its own putative "sociology of ideas"—as well as its apparent fundamental failure: its incapacity to ground this sociology in anything other than academic scuffling. In discussing the rise of theory in terms of "cultural-political battles in the humanities academy," the author of this essay cannot answer the question, "battles for what?" as he lacks the historical ontology that would allow him to understand these battles for "social prestige" in terms of the "will to climb higher on the ladder of social class" (p. 577).

On the one hand, this hapless author should not be blamed for this; the intellectualizing of "material production" associated with "late capitalism" prevents intellectuals from having an organic Gramscian relation to the productive classes. This leaves intellectuals organic only to the university, from which they try to break via an impotent anti-intellectualist ideology that fails to penetrate the late-capitalist materiality that it serves. On the other hand, such intellectuals are to be blamed for this anti-intellectualist polemic, "carried like a virus within the attacks on theory," because its

18. See Charles Taylor, "The Hermeneutics of Conflict," in *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and His Critics*, ed. James Tully (Princeton, N.J., 1988), pp. 218–28.

disengagement from the progressive motor of history turns them into “objective traitors,” the unwitting agents of an “essentially probusiness agenda” that is driving the privatization of universities, reducing the critical potential of humanities theory, undermining academic Marxism, and even playing to the populist and anarchist sympathies of today’s “younger intellectuals” (p. 569). The putative anti-intellectualism of empirical historiography is thus an unintelligent political strategy in America, although this might not be understood by provincials hailing from what Jameson quaintly calls “commonwealth countries” with social democratic traditions.

What would make us think, though, that morality, religion, and metaphysics arise from the forms of “material production,” that “life determines consciousness,” or, conversely, that “consciousness determines life”? I don’t mean this as a rhetorical question. I mean: how has it come about that a certain kind of intellectual should be driven to assert that the entirety of culture and politics arises from the forms in which men struggle to become conscious of the materiality that determines their consciousness? After all, is it plausible to suggest that the assertion “life determines consciousness” (or “consciousness determines life”) is a statement capable of being verified (or falsified) in some particular discipline on the basis of some scannable array of evidence? The statements’ insusceptibility to (dis)confirmation does not make them meaningless, however; it is only a prompt to force us to look for the register in which their meaning and significance resides. In this way we withdraw from the battles to verify and falsify these statements—the remorseless quarrels between materialism and idealism—and turn them into objects of a historiographic inquiry into what it is that is done by the making of these statements. How did it come about that intellectuals of a certain kind began to define themselves in terms of the problem of winning consciousness from its material conditions, and what has been at stake in their doing so?

In “The History of Theory” I suggest that Foucault’s “archaeology of the human sciences” begins to answer this question by providing an account of the historical emergence of the problem, treating it as the outcome of a Kantian interrogation of the category of labor that converts production relations into conditions of consciousness. I also suggest that Foucault’s account needs to be supplemented and transformed in two ways: first, by an account of the Kantian interrogation that treats it as grounded in a spiritual exercise designed to transform the individual’s mode of acceding to truth (much in the manner we have outlined for Husserl’s *epochē*)¹⁹ and,

19. For some relevant arguments, see Hunter, *Rival Enlightenments: Civil and Metaphysical Philosophy in Early Modern Germany* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 274–316 and “The Morals of

second, by an account of Kantianism as a “regional” combat-metaphysics originating in Protestant northern Europe and operative at the level of academic problematization, “entrism,” and colonization.²⁰ Along with several other scholars I have developed these arguments in other studies and will not attempt to rehearse them here, only their consequence for our present concern: if the interest of 1960s humanities theorists in recovering consciousness from its material conditions arose from the Kantian problematization of an array of positive knowledges, then this needs to be investigated in terms of the particular intellectual disposition formed by Kantian philosophy and by the cultural combat for which this philosophy was fashioned.

One of the lesser known but (in the event) crucial fronts on which Kant honed his intellectual weaponry was that of historiography. In his *Reflexionen* on the history of metaphysics, Kant formulates the need for what he calls a “philosophical history of philosophy” in order to combat the prevailing *Geschichte der Gelehrsamkeit*, the history of learning or erudition.²¹ In fact the history of learning was the eighteenth-century form of the early modern antimetaphysical historiography of philosophy discussed above.²² In attacking this historiography for reducing philosophy to a series of “facts” occurring in time, Kant renewed the earlier metaphysical conception of history as the medium in which transcendent reason unfolds itself in the temporal register, which means that the history of philosophy must

Metaphysics”; George di Giovanni, *Freedom and Religion in Kant and His Immediate Successors: The Vocation of Humankind, 1774–1800* (Cambridge, 2005); and Sparr, “Kant’s Doctrine of Atonement as a Theory of Subjectivity.”

20. We gain some sense of the geo-intellectual regionality of Kantianism not just from the placing of several of his works on the Catholic Index during the nineteenth century but more generally from the neo-Thomist attack on the formative consequences of Kantian spirituality. This lasts into the present in the work of Alisdair MacIntyre and the “communitarians,” but also more formally, for example, in Désiré Mercier, “The Two Critiques of Kant,” *Cardinal Mercier’s Philosophical Essays: A Study in Neo-Thomism*, trans. and ed. David A. Boileau (Herent, Belgium, 2002), pp. 137–50. For important pointers to the manner in which Kantians entered and conquered the law, philosophy, and theology faculties of the University of Jena, see *Der Aufbruch in den Kantianismus: Der Frühkantianismus an der Universität Jena von 1785–1800 und seine Vorgeschichte*, ed. Norbert Hinske, Erhard Lange, and Horst Schröpfer (Stuttgart-Bad Cannstatt, 1995).

21. See Immanuel Kant, “Lose Blätter zu den Fortschritten der Metaphysik,” *Kants Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin et al., 29 vols. (Berlin, 1902–1980), 20:341–43.

22. See Frank Grunert, “Die Pragmatisierung der Gelehrsamkeit: Zum Gelehrsamkeitskonzept von Christian Thomasius und im Thomasianismus,” in *Kultur der Kommunikation: Die europäische Gelehrtenrepublik im Zeitalter von Leibniz und Lessing*, ed. Ulrich Johannes Schneider (Wiesbaden, 2005), pp. 131–53.

be an account of reason's coming to consciousness of itself.²³ This was the historical circumstance in which Kant invented dialectical philosophical history. If reason could not have direct access to its objects—owing to the recessive character of the noumenal thing in itself—then it could nonetheless progress towards this impossible moment, driven by the inevitable conflict between its tendency to identify the *noumenon* with ideas (rationalism) or with sensory experience (empiricism). It only took Hegel to transpose this dialectic into the history of human institutions (preeminently the state) and Marx to ground it in a philosophical anthropology of labor for us to arrive at Jameson's conception of history as the dialectical struggle to recover consciousness from its material conditions of possibility.

5

We have already noted that in combating university metaphysics, the nondialectical historiography of philosophy targeted the sectarian disposition that metaphysics was held to form. According to Thomasius, this disposition arises from the fact that metaphysics posits a single source of intelligibility for the world—in the form of the transcendent ideas or forms that shape its materiality—which means that in principle there is a single true way of acceding to these ideas and a single master or school to be followed.²⁴ Further, because knowledge of intelligible being is thought of as mediated by a privileged part of man's own being—his intellect or reason—those who fail to accede to being in the correct way are not just making a cognitive mistake; they are failing to realize that part of their being that makes them human and are thus betraying the vocation of humanity. Metaphysics thus fosters sectarian contempt for those regarded as falling away from the true path.

The antimetaphysical historiography of philosophy sought to deal with this problem via two convergent strategies: it used fideism and skepticism to deny that there is a single transcendent source of intelligibility for the world, and it denied that man's knowledge of the world arose from his rational being. It treated knowledge instead as the inherently fallibilistic product of the historical (empirical) and philosophical (ratiocinative) disciplines through which man worked up information delivered by his senses.²⁵ Thomasius was almost completely ignorant of the new seventeenth-century natural philosophy, but he knew enough to treat its

23. For a historical discussion of this moment, albeit one written from inside the fishbowl, see Lucien Braun, *Geschichte der Philosophiegeschichte*, trans. Franz Wimmer (Darmstadt, 1990).

24. See Thomasius, *Cautelen zur Erlernung der Rechtsgelehrtheit*, chaps. 1, 6, and 12.

25. See *ibid.*, chap. 5.

experimental character as a further contribution to the “fallibilization” and pluralization of knowledge, as it too was a means of blocking attempts to deduce knowledge from transcendent concepts and systems. The point of this “eclectic” reconstruction of knowledge was that there should be no single way of acceding to truth that might form the basis of a compulsive or sectarian philosophy and no rational humanity from which those who failed or refused to accede to this truth might be excluded as moral renegades.²⁶

Seen from this perspective, a central problem with the Marxist metaphysics informing Jameson’s response is that it reinvests truth in being. Intelligible being has shifted its locus of course—from an intellectually informed materiality to a materially formed intellect—yet continues to be presented as the single path to a metropolitan truth, namely, the dialectical path that must be followed if consciousness is to recover knowledge of its own material determination. The sectarianism accompanying this materialist metaphysics is clear enough in Jameson’s treatment of those who do not follow this path—the apostates of antitheory—as not just academic duffers but political and moral renegades who betray humanity’s path to self-consciousness on behalf of big business and its governments. This is a pointer to a threatening tendency in Marxist theorizing of this kind, namely, the will to tie politics to its metaphysics of the recovery of consciousness from the historical realization of man’s social being. Not only does this mean that the political order is envisaged as the instrument of man’s social recovery of his true form—thereby returning politics to its confessional role as the instrument of a true metaphysics—but it makes those who do not accept this metaphysics into political traitors. In requiring intellectuals to be better than they could be, Marxist metaphysics ends by making them worse than they are.

The detranscendentalizing of knowledge effected by early modern antimetaphysical historiography went together with a striking secularization of politics. If the truth of man’s moral being lies beyond fallible knowledge and if man can govern his conduct in civil society without access to such truth, then the state has no capacity or right to enforce it.²⁷ In fact it should get out of the truth business altogether and confine itself to provision of social peace through the governance of external conduct. The proper attitude of the state towards the rival metaphysical teachings and

26. See Ulrich Johannes Schneider, “Eclecticism and the History of Philosophy,” in *History and the Disciplines: The Reclassification of Knowledge in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Donald R. Kelley (Rochester, N.Y., 1997), pp. 83–101, and Horst Dreitzel, “Zur Entwicklung und Eigenart der ‘Eklektischen Philosophie,’” *Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung* 18, no. 3 (1991): 281–343.

27. See Hunter, *The Secularisation of the Confessional State*, chaps. 4 and 5.

moral communities that it houses is to tolerate them all—to the extent that they renounce mutual persecution—which means that the state must not itself attempt to enforce a metaphysical ideology.

In observing that some modern states have indeed imposed Marxism as a repressive ideology with a view to realizing man's true being and consciousness, it would be extravagant and misleading to treat Jameson as some kind of apologist for these modern versions of the confessional state. In fact it would be almost as extravagant and misleading as it is of him to treat me as an anti-intellectual stooge for a malign probusiness agenda that is blocking humanity's passage to its utopian future. Context is everything, and Jameson and I live in states that insist on tolerating both our positions, within the limits already mentioned. That said, there is something that Marxist theory shares with other confessional metaphysics that makes it available for use as a repressive state ideology, namely, its teaching that the theory itself is the single path by which man can accede to his true being and that if politics is to facilitate this accession then it must aim at something higher than ensuring civil peace and flourishing for rival moral or ideological communities.