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Introduction

WHAT IS IT THAT we want out of philosophy? In considering their discipline, whether in historical or contemporary terms, few philosophers have raised the question, other than at a perfunctory level, of what the point of philosophy is, what it sets out to achieve. Part of the problem has been that the history of philosophy has been treated as a story of progress, with Thomas Stanley, in the first history of philosophy in English (1655), describing his project as looking 'down to the bottom from which philosophy first took her rise', so that we might see 'how great a progresse she hath made'.[1] Yet difficulties arise once one tries to identify such progress. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, Stanley's predecessor Francis Bacon remarked that whereas science began slowly and then over a long period gradually came of age, philosophy burst onto the scene and delivered its most profound insights immediately, and has been inexorably in decline ever since. Two centuries later, Kant, in the Preface to the *Critique of Pure Reason,* offered an equally deflationary account, remarking that the history of philosophy had not been one of continuous progress, but rather a cycle of dogmatic assertions followed by sceptical

refutations. And as regards the contributions to learning and wisdom that philosophy can currently take credit for, scientists for one have often been sceptical. The physicists John Barrow and Frank Tipler write that whereas many philosophers and theologians (a worrying association for many philosophers) 'appear to possess an emotional attachment to their theories and ideas which requires them to believe them, scientists tend to regard their ideas differently . . . leaving any judgement regarding their truth to observation'.[2] The geneticist Francis Crick is even more dismissive: 'If you ask how many cases in the past has a philosopher been successful at solving a problem, as far as we can say there are no such cases.'[3]

Before we can ask whether philosophy has made any progress, we need to be able to identify properly philosophical problems. There is an assumption among philosophers that, throughout its history, philosophy has engaged a number of perennial substantive questions. Daniel Stoljar, in a recent attempt to establish progress in the history of philosophy, has, for example, identified a number of what we might term core philosophical issues, not necessarily issues that every species of philosophical enquiry will concern itself with, and not necessarily exclusive, but representing a common conception of what issues philosophy deals with: the mind–body problem; free will and determinism; the basis and scope of human knowledge; the nature of morality; the existence of God; and 'the roots of being', that is, metaphysics and ontology.[4]

But can we assume that these questions capture perennial concerns, that the various contextualizations that enable us to go beyond labelling do not in fact yield something quite different from one another? Is there really a continuity between classical, early modern, Enlightenment, and modern analytic notions of the nature of the mind, or the nature of knowledge, or morality? Properly contextualized, not only does the labelling

of questions fall apart in many cases, but we need to understand what prompts particular worries to arise, what allows their translation into philosophical problems, what counts as their resolution, and what constraints are operative: for example, whether a successful account of the mind has to secure the possibility of personal immortality; whether it is appropriate for an account of the mind to consider only an idealized healthy mind; whether moral philosophy should account for courage, humility, loyalty, or friendship as central virtues. Whether one of the aims (and one of the criteria of success) of metaphysics should be to rationalize religious beliefs, or whether it should be reconciliation of science and common sense; whether an account of free will must provide a basis for the understanding of morality; whether the paramount aim of ethics should be to induce us to behave morally: whether philosophy should prepare us for death; whether it should prepare us for life. At the same time, we need to clarify what progress, and failure, might consist in. Otherwise progress, particularly in the case of a university discipline, will just be a matter of the value that the practitioners of that discipline—theologians, cultural theorists, philosophers— place on it. After all, it is not as if theologians and cultural theorists, for example, are any less able than philosophers to point to a sequence of questions and answers, to what they identify as lasting results, and to their ability to constantly go beyond what their predecessors have achieved.

Accordingly, in what follows, we shall not be concerned with the progress or otherwise of philosophy as such. I cannot see that this is a well-formed question, a worry reinforced by Stoljar's statement that 'the level of progress in a field such as physics is extremely high by any standard',[5] for I cannot imagine that there could be such a standard or, if there were, how we would be able to judge the progress of physics against it.[6] But the deeper worry is that physics is being made the

measure of all things, a wholly unexamined view that underlies much modern analytic philosophy. And of course it is the tendency in analytic philosophy to assume that it can model itself on the sciences that allows it to imagine itself to be closer to a path of progress than other disciplines in the humanities. By assimilating philosophy to science, philosophers blithely assume that they have done enough to take the question of the value of philosophy out of the realm of mere self-assessment, at the same time significantly lessening the relevance of any understanding of its history.

By contrast, we shall be using its history to problematize philosophy, and since this is an enquiry into the failures of philosophy, it will be helpful to clarify from the outset what I mean by failures and what I mean by philosophy. The kind of 'failure' with which we shall be concerned involves not just the collapse of a substantive philosophical project, but the consequent replacement of a philosophical approach to the questions by something different. That is, we shall be concerned with cases where the issues at stake are considered sufficiently basic that, if philosophy has shown itself unable to solve them, something else needs to take over. We shall be looking at the failures, in this sense, of three major philosophical projects. The first is the attempt of philosophy in antiquity to provide an account of the good life, which we shall see is the defining project of classical philosophy. We shall be exploring the collapse of such attempts and their replacement by a theological—Christian— account which provided what was widely considered to be a more satisfactory non-philosophical treatment of the worries that had motivated philosophical enquiry. The second, which derives from a re-purposing of philosophy, is the attempt to devise a metaphysics that is able to stand over all other kinds of account, including accounts of natural phenomena, and offer a rationale and assessment of these. The collapse of this

project took several different forms in the mid-eighteenth cen-
tury, and this is especially interesting because the proposals
that were offered for its replacement were very different from
one another: a form of common sense in Hume, a translation
of philosophical problems into medical ones in France, and an
abandonment of philosophy in favour of literary forms in Ger-
many. Here we witness a general agreement on both the failure
of philosophy and the need for its replacement, but no consen-
sus on what was needed to replace it. The third failure is the
attempt of Kant and his immediate followers to a construct a
philosophical 'theory of everything', renouncing metaphysics
as traditionally conceived, but uniting epistemology, aesthet-
ics, morality, science, religion, and law into a single 'transcen-
dental' philosophy. Despite its unparalleled combination of
rigour and imagination, this project collapsed more quickly
than the other two, and it was replaced by a scientific theory of
everything, which has subsequently become well entrenched.
But rather than spelling an end to philosophical enquiry, it
transformed the nature of philosophy, which was now turned
into a metatheory of science, a shadow of its former self.

The other preliminary question concerns the 'philosophy'
that underlies these three different substantive enterprises.
Given their individual projects are so different, what is it that
makes them all philosophy? Philosophy is generally taken to
be essentially a 'second-order' exercise, something that trans-
forms questions into a philosophical form through a process
of abstraction. This characterization certainly fits the kinds
of issue that we shall be concerned with, but we need to say
more: we need to explore, within the philosophical projects
themselves, how the commitment to abstract investigation
arises, what its advantages over other forms of enquiry were
conceived to be, and what problems it engendered. How the
commitment to abstraction arises in the first place, and how

it defines philosophical enquiry in antiquity, are explored in some detail in chapter 1. It is a crucial part of the exercise that our understanding of 'philosophy' derive from the specific projects themselves, not from some prior assumption about what constitutes philosophy, for in that case we would face the intractable problem of steering a path between fiat (e.g., by ruling out anything that fails to match current philosophical concerns) and allowing anything at all (Scientology, New Age philosophy) simply on the grounds that it styles itself philosophy and can be considered an abstract probing of conceptual issues on natural and human questions, however manifestly misguided this probing might be.

In short, we shall be pursuing a historical enquiry into philosophical programmes in terms of specific self-identified goals, examining their successes and particularly their failures to achieve those goals. The combination of the identification of particular substantive questions and a specific kind of abstract approach whose origins and rationale we can trace, limit the subject matter of this book to 'Western philosophy'. This is not the only way in which to explore the question of the point of the philosophy. We can, for example, look at the way in which abstract philosophical ideas have permeated national cultures, how they have provided, or failed to provide, fruitful vehicles for addressing or promoting local issues of social, political, and religious concern.[7] At the other end of the scale, we could compare philosophy in the West, from Plato to the present, with non-European forms of reflection, and ask what this comparison reveals about the nature of philosophy. The route that I shall be following is different from either of these. It is designed to investigate the aims and development of what has been identified as philosophy in the West, and to ask what the point of the exercise has been. The argument will be that the point has in fact changed on a number of occasions, partly

in response to new challenges, but also in response to collapses in the philosophical enterprise provoked by other forms of discourse offering something more satisfactory than philosophical enquiry.

The failure of philosophical enquiry at crucial stages in European history tells us a great deal about what philosophy is. But such an investigation conflicts with the prevailing assumption among philosophers, that there are no intrinsic weaknesses in thinking philosophically, that any weaknesses can only be weakness of particular philosophical viewpoints or theories, and as such can be resolved within philosophy, by moving to a different philosophical viewpoint or theory. On such a view, philosophy has no 'outside', as it were: it is the most abstract discipline possible, something under which any form of reflection can be subsumed. It is effectively the canonical form of reflection on the world. One consequence of this is that reflective thought outside the West is always automatically a form of philosophy, because it couldn't be anything else. The fact that such thought invariably turns out to be relatively impoverished compared to mature Western thought, which might lead one to question the point of placing it in a tradition that is in many respects alien to it is instead taken to indicate the primitive and misguided nature of many of its forms. There is a clear risk here in holding up one's own activity as the model, and this prompts the question as to whether there is something fundamentally wrong with incorporating other forms of enquiry under the rubric of philosophy.

Justin Smith offers a more considered exercise in his *The Philosopher: A History in Six Types*.[8] The explicit aim is to provide a model for the investigation of practices that have not been carried out under the banner of philosophy, yet are, in other cultures, analogous to it, having developed autonomously. To this end, he distinguishes a number of what might

be termed philosophical archetypes. The 'Curiosus' is someone interested in everything, whether empirical or conceptual. The 'Sage' is a model of the philosopher that is the most long-standing notion of the philosopher in the West, but also fits Indian philosophy particularly well. Third, there is the 'Gadfly', like Socrates, someone who wants to replace ill-conceived beliefs without necessarily proposing any of his own. Fourth, there is the 'Ascetic', common in Western medieval philosophy, but also in Buddhism, for example. Fifth there is the 'Mandarin', based on the Chinese elite class of bureaucrats. Mandarins are characterized as highly professionalized groups of elites who jealously guard disciplinary boundaries, among whom Smith identifies a number of modern elites, notably the French system of *normaliens* and the system of Oxbridge/Ivy League education, out of which the great majority of successful careers in philosophy take shape. Finally, there is the 'Courtier', in its modern form the public intellectual.

If one's aim is to ask to what extent forms of reflection outside the Western tradition, or prior to it, can be counted as philosophy, then there is much to be said for this approach, asking where philosophy fits into reflective enquiry in a way that brings no unwarranted assumptions about how easily various ways of tackling the issues can be assimilated to those of Western philosophy. But my aim in what follows is something that engages entirely different kinds of question. Restriction of the category of philosophy to the Western tradition is designed to reflect the fact that philosophy, as conceived in the West, is not some universal form of wholly abstract thought oblivious to the circumstances in which it has emerged, something that would automatically be attractive to, or even make sense to, thoughtful people anywhere. Rather, it comprises culturally specific modes of engaging with the world which have their own unique difficulties and weaknesses, and their own unique achievements.

Philosophy is a distinctive way of engaging the issues, and my aim is to identify and explore this distinctiveness by localizing the traditions of Western philosophy, so that their distinguishing features can be opened up to examination. And the plural form is especially important here, because we shall see that radical shifts in the aim of philosophy, between classical antiquity and the modern era for example, throw into question the extent to which there is sufficient affinity between philosophical movements throughout the history of Western thought to establish a substantive common project, something that goes beyond just a commitment to abstract enquiry, for example.

Examination of the history of philosophy provides a crucial tool here. Exploration of the fissures that its history reveals is the best way to expose the soft underbelly of philosophy. The history of philosophy, properly carried out, is its most powerful and dangerous tool, and the sign reportedly on a Princeton philosopher's door—'History of Philosophy, Just Say No'—reveals a more troubling warning than its author could have realized. To get a sense of the issues, consider the contrast between two opposing ways of thinking about what the history of philosophy reveals. On the first, it is assumed that the developments in philosophy since its beginnings in classical antiquity are the result of an evolution of the discipline towards ever deeper understanding. On the second, it is a case of philosophy failing to live up to different sets of historical promises, the victim of takeovers by other disciplines showing themselves to be demonstrably better at doing what it was trying to do, and philosophy, at crucial junctures, having to close down and start with a new set of aims. This un-nuanced contrast is sharper than is needed, and it does not exhaust the issues, but it does give one a sense of the magnitude of what is at stake.

Centrally in question is how the aims of philosophy have been thought of at different periods, how philosophers have

set out to achieve these aims, and how failure in this regard has resulted in philosophical enquiry simply disappearing and being replaced by something with different aims, which in some cases has nevertheless retained the name 'philosophy' or been resumed in a different form as a self-styled 'philosophical' exercise. That is to say, we shall not simply be assuming a continuity in philosophy from antiquity to the present, but will rather be concerned to identify cases where philosophy has failed to deliver the goods, as it were, and has collapsed as a result, and to explore what has happened in the wake of these failures. Such an approach conflicts with the prevailing view, according to which philosophy is the most abstract discipline possible, something under which any form of reflection can be subsumed. If, on the contrary, we make no such assumptions, then we can engage the specifics of developments in the Western 'philosophical tradition' and reveal discontinuities that show up the limits of philosophical enquiry.

In particular, we are going to be concerned with something that histories of philosophy egregiously fail to notice, namely the drawbacks of thinking philosophically about a question. We shall encounter a number of historical cases of this, on the nature of the relation between mind and body, for example, and on the nature of scientific enquiry; but it is ethics that stands out. Philosophy is formed in the first place, as we shall see, not through reflection on metaphysical, natural-philosophical, or epistemological questions, but on questions of morality and virtue. In the origins of philosophy in Plato, ethics is constitutive of philosophical enquiry. Getting ethics right, so to speak, and getting people to behave accordingly was the whole point of the philosophical exercise. It was what drove the philosophical project in its origins, and it has always remained central to philosophy. Yet throughout its history, the complaint has been raised that philosophy is actually useless

as far as morality is concerned, and the reason lies in the abstract nature of philosophical enquiry. Unlike, say, religion or literature, which can move us to reflect on our behaviour and act morally as a result, philosophy has no practical effects of this kind. Its abstraction has caused it to be disengaged from the very behaviour that it has set out to describe and evaluate. This is despite the fact that philosophers from classical antiquity onwards have been fully aware that ethics is not like other parts of philosophy (with some exceptions for theories of scientific method): it is supposed to have some impact on the way we behave. There is no point in a form of reflection on morality that does not, or could not, have consequences for behaviour. Philosophers have occasionally grappled with this question, with the sentimentalist philosophers of the eighteenth century such as Smith and Hume, for example, attempting to get to the core of the problem by renouncing abstract considerations in moral motivation. But whatever the strategy, there is no doubt that there is here something that raises problems for the abstract, second-order nature of the discipline of philosophy. Is philosophical enquiry actually well suited to dealing with such questions; and more generally, is philosophy by its very nature as a second-order discipline an inconsequential exercise?

In what follows, we shall be directing attention to something that histories of philosophy generally refuse to recognize, namely the way in which philosophy keeps encountering the limits of a second-order enquiry. It is only with Hume that these limits are recognized as such, at least in any sustained way, but in treatments of Hume the issues have been sidestepped and neutralized by treating what is actually a fundamental insight as a form of tired old scepticism: assimilating it, in a tried and tested philosophical way, to a species of problem that one knows all about and hence need not worry about. In this way, a pressing fundamental problem about the nature

and scope of philosophy is accommodated into the philosophical repertoire, de-fanged so that it can be considered as yet another episode in the continuous history of the discipline.

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It is an important element in what follows that the contextualization I shall be pursuing is one that is designed to bring to the surface the non-philosophical factors that lie behind particular intellectual positions. In particular, whereas histories of philosophy set out what might be termed the doctrines of philosophers, we shall be equally concerned with what, at different times, shapes the discipline of philosophy: with the question of what it is to think philosophically about a question. The project can also be described in another way. Many philosophers have construed the history of Western philosophy as making a gradual progress towards current concerns. By contrast, many historians of philosophy have now largely abandoned such a genealogical approach. This prompts the question as to just what kind of historical development philosophy exhibits. Hegel, one of most committed defenders of the intrinsic progress view, brought sophisticated historiographical considerations to bear, enhanced by his ability to draw on a deep understanding of historical and cultural questions. There is no such level of sophistication in modern advocates of this approach, who typically see the development of philosophy on purely internal lines, very much on the model of how they think that science develops. The most cursory investigation of the linear progress view reveals its inadequacy, but such investigation does not tell us what an adequate account might look like; still less does it offer a historiographical understanding.

It is such an understanding that I am proposing to offer, and there are three core questions on which everything else

hinges. These are the question of the nature of philosophy, that of how to identify and assess both its successes and its failures, and the question of the appropriate periodization of philosophy for this project.

The first topic is that of what philosophy is. This is a pressing question for us, because a core part of the project is to argue that the goals of philosophy, goals that shape the direction of philosophical enquiry, change so significantly that tracing a continuous philosophical heritage becomes fraught. We cannot assume from the outset that there is a perennial philosophical tradition that stretches from antiquity to the present in any substantive sense. More specifically, we cannot assume that there is a form of activity beginning with the Presocratics which, by being continuously reworked—having the weeds removed, as it were, and the new shoots gradually cultivated—has led to current forms of philosophical enquiry. On the other hand, this in itself should not incline us in favour of a Hegelian account of the history of philosophy, despite Hegel's emphasis on the successive rise and decline of philosophical systems. What marks his teleological approach out from ours is that it is central to Hegel's conception that there is an overall philosophical goal that regulates the succession of systems, and the new developments that follow a decline are thought of as a rebirth or renewal of the broader project. Once we abandon Hegelian teleology, the main motivation for seeking some overarching, supra-historical form of philosophical enterprise disappears. We can treat the rise and fall of particular projects in their own terms. And, importantly, although these projects may use some of the resources of older ones, such as particular styles of reasoning, and may trace a genealogy to older projects, we are not obliged thereby to proceed as if these were part of the same continuous enterprise. Nevertheless, deciding between continuity and discontinuity is not an end in itself.

The point is rather that, if it turns out that the projects are significantly discontinuous, this has consequences for our understanding of the nature of philosophical thought, and we will need to enquire to what degree philosophical thought is not something that embodies perennial concerns, but rather is subject to historical contextualization.

What is at issue here are the aims of philosophy, and the task is to identify fault lines that generate fundamental changes in these aims. Classical, Hellenistic, and Roman philosophers, for example, had considered the ultimate aims of knowledge to be wisdom, happiness, and well-being. But Christianity transferred such aims into a purely spiritual realm, so that they could only be attained in a union with God, with the result that, in incorporating it into Christian teaching, they believed philosophy finally realized its true standing. When an autonomous form of philosophy re-emerged, from the thirteenth century onwards, this required a major realignment of the goals of philosophical enquiry. Despite an attempt to revive the original conception of philosophical understanding by Renaissance humanists, knowledge had been transformed in the process of Christianization, and the notion that, in pursuing philosophy, one was pursuing wisdom and happiness now had a decidedly naive and unworldly ring to it. Indeed, in the wake of Francis Bacon's criticism of a purely contemplative conception of philosophy, this came to be seen as the result of a profoundly mistaken understanding of what philosophy should be doing. Philosophy could no more produce wisdom and happiness than could mathematics or medicine. It was not that wisdom and happiness were not worthwhile goals, nor even that they were not the ultimate human goals, but rather that they were not to be realized through philosophy.

There is a crucial, if largely unappreciated, point here. These philosophical aims, and changes in philosophical aims,

do not in themselves take the form of philosophical doctrines.
In a crucial respect, they are extra-philosophical: they work
at the level of shaping what one does with philosophy, how one
pursues it, and how one conceives of what it is to be a philoso-
pher. Investigating them tells us something about the disci-
pline, about the point of the exercise. Particularly in an era in
which philosophy has become subservient to science in many
respects, there is a pressing need to stand back in order to
understand the point of the exercise.

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On the second question, that of success and failure of phi-
losophy, it is absolutely crucial that we distinguish between
the questions that motivate a philosophical programme on
the one hand, and, on the other, the philosophical arguments
used to realize the aims of that programme. Analytic philos-
ophy in the twentieth century increasingly became a matter
of resolving self-generated problems, so that motivation col-
lapsed into the philosophical programme itself, as the exercise
became increasingly remote and fruitless, and increasingly
removed from effective engagement with concerns outside its
own quasi-Platonic realm. But this is not how philosophy had
traditionally proceeded. Throughout its history, it has dealt
with pressing problems generated outside philosophy and sub-
jected them to philosophical enquiry as a means of clarifying,
reformulating, and resolving them. Coming to terms with the
issues this raises is a distinctive feature of the approach we
shall be taking. These issues are complex, but without address-
ing them, we cannot begin to identify the successes and fail-
ures of philosophical programmes, for these are successes and
failures in achieving goals, which means that we must iden-
tify the goals, and this will only make complete sense if we

understand what they derive from and why they arise in the first place.

The crucial point here is that success can be a matter of meeting extra-philosophical goals and imperatives. The most pressing problem is how we decide what resources we draw on in order to identify such extra-philosophical goals, and under what conditions we can rely on them. It is rare to find any recognition of these questions in histories of philosophy, and without this one proceeds as if it were simply a question of whether, taking goals as given, the premises and arguments based on them can successfully deliver these goals. On the other hand, to explore the extra-philosophical goals that motivate such arguments—and in the process determine what kinds of answers are going to be satisfying and compelling, something that philosophical questioning is not necessarily able to circumscribe—cannot involve bypassing the arguments entirely and substituting new questions. To the extent that we are dealing with *philosophical* projects, what gives these projects their philosophical identity is the nature of the arguments deployed. This leaves two questions. First, what resources do we have for exploring the extra-philosophical goals of philosophical programmes? Second, can we deploy these in a way that preserves the philosophical character of the programmes?

A good example of the difficulties is provided by the work of Pierre Hadot on 'ways of life' and 'spiritual exercises' in Hellenistic and Neoplatonist philosophy.[9] Hadot developed these ideas from Wittgenstein's idea of 'forms of life', and construed different philosophical programmes on the model of different forms of life. Rather than looking at the doctrines of the philosophical programmes in antiquity, he examined what can broadly be considered the training of the philosopher in these different programmes, under the rubric of 'spiritual exercises': what it was that one had to do to be a philosopher,

how one had to behave. One valuable aspect of this approach is the elaboration of a conception of philosophy according to which there is a way of engaging intellectual, cultural, moral, scientific, and aesthetic problems which is not only distinctive, marking out the philosophical treatment of these problems from that of the theologian or statesman or the artist, for example, but one whereby the philosopher is someone who has a particular standing, a particular claim to be heard. Although the scientist has now usurped much of this role from the philosopher, in historical terms such questions were shaped around the philosopher, and questions can still be asked of the philosopher. The overriding issue here is: on what does the standing of the philosopher depend? Hadot's approach provides us with a crucial resource in understanding the shifting personae of the philosopher, for these correlate directly with the shifting nature of the philosophical enterprise. At the same time, it allows us to think through the way in which initially non-philosophical goals are translated into a philosophical form, especially in those cases where there remains something that cannot be accommodated in the philosophical formulation, but where the success of the enquiry depends on its ability to provide a comprehensive account. We shall see that ancient philosophy becomes wholly eclipsed by Christianity, for example, due to the inability of the philosophical notion of the 'good life' to provide something sufficiently meaningful, as we move from classical into Hellenistic and Roman culture. Hadot's approach is useful here, but it quickly becomes less secure as we move away from its original Neoplatonist context. Analysing philosophical movements in terms of 'spiritual exercises', he brings them under the rubric of communities with shared values. This something that is characteristic of philosophy in the late Hellenistic period, in the theological nature of the Neoplatonist doctrines that flourished then and the form

that adherence to those doctrines took. But it was certainly not typical of philosophy after that period, or even before it, and the danger lies in treating the philosopher in terms of a culturally or socially defined group which has no philosophical identity as such. The distortion that such an approach engenders means that the value of Hadot's work does not lie in trying to think through various philosophical enterprises in terms of 'spiritual exercises'. Its contribution is more modest, though none the less instructive for that. It opens up a window on some of the ways in which extra-philosophical concerns shape what philosophers do, and how they conceive of themselves, and I shall be taking such considerations seriously in what follows.

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The third feature of our approach derives from the first two. It concerns periodization. The standard periodization of the history of philosophy, one immediately familiar to every student of the subject, derives from the nineteenth-century neo-Kantian/neo-Hegelian philosopher Kuno Fisher.[10] Fisher identified what he considered to be a change in the concerns of philosophy, from metaphysics to epistemology, in the seventeenth century. On his reading, the metaphysical dichotomy between Platonism and Aristotelianism was replaced by an epistemological one, between advocates of the idea that all knowledge derived from the exercise of reason, the 'rationalists', and advocates of the idea that all knowledge derived from sensation, the 'empiricists'. The distinctions have proved problematic to serious scholars working on seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophy. Spinoza, Leibniz, and arguably Berkeley, were as much metaphysicians as any of their predecessors. The founding figure of rationalism, Descartes, was

about as empirical a philosopher as one is likely to find in the history of the discipline, devoting large amounts of his time to lens-grinding and to anatomical dissection. Moreover, the idea that there is a continuity of fundamental approach between Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz is belied by the rejection by the latter two of what has usually been identified as Descartes's distinctively rationalist procedure, scepticism. The rationalism/empiricism model was devised in the context of the belief that Kant had identified and solved the major problems that rationalism and empiricism encountered, a claim that Kant himself had encouraged, even though he did not formulate it in quite those terms. And indeed philosophy from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards does have a Kantian tenor, including the idea that the form of purely conceptual investigation that it offers provides the only path for philosophical enquiry.

The historiographical schema that I shall be following is not that which identifies as distinct stages Greek, medieval, modern, Kantian, and post-Kantian/contemporary philosophy. Despite its serious defects, I am not advocating a general model to replace this, because I doubt that there is any adequate all-purpose model. Periodization is relative to questions. What I shall be trying to offer is something that grows, organically as it were, out of the developments distinguished as we proceed, mirroring what I identify as the points at which philosophy collapses and is replaced by something else. Three such points are identified. The first comes at the end of the Hellenistic period, and it derives from the failure of classical and Hellenistic philosophy to provide a satisfactory account of the good life, which with the Hellenistic schools becomes tantamount to an undisturbed life. Building on Neoplatonism, Christian theologians offered something that seemed to satisfy what the philosophers had been seeking, and they were then able to incorporate selected elements of earlier philosophies

into a wholly theological account, philosophy losing any autonomy in the process.

The second episode comes with the emergence of an autonomous role for philosophy with Aquinas, who envisages a form of metaphysics, subject only to the dictates of reason, as a means of reconciling discordant claims of natural philosophy (science) and Christian teaching. Such a model, as we shall see, is that which dominates much early modern philosophy, above all that of the immensely influential work of Descartes. This idea of metaphysics, now pursued via epistemology, as the epitome of reason, was subsequently discarded on three independent but simultaneous fronts: with Hume, with the replacement of philosophy by medicine in France, and with the rise of a broadly-based form of intellectual enquiry replacing metaphysics in Germany. Here philosophy collapsed for a second time, losing all authority as the highest form of reflection, as something that could stand over and judge all claims to understanding.

The third episode comes with Kant, at the end of the eighteenth century. Hume had set out the limits of metaphysics, and philosophy more generally, showing why it could not possibly achieve what it claimed. Following Hume, Kant argued that the failure of philosophy resulted from a failure to grasp its limits, but he proposed that a philosophical understanding of these limits was possible. Philosophical enquiry could not only be kept within strict limits, but could also provide insight into what lay beyond those limits, for example on matters of morality and religion. Kant offered what was in effect an attempt to provide a theory of everything, in the process defining what a successful philosophy would be like. This was reinforced in the 'all or nothing' approach of Kant's idealist successors, and the problem was that the failure of this programme led to the second option: nothing. In spite of, and in

many respects because of, the efforts of Kant's idealist successors, the idea of philosophy as the theory of everything crumpled under its own weight. This paved the way for the third collapse of philosophy, as its aspirations were taken over by something that deployed completely different resources from the second-order conceptual enquiry characteristic of philosophy. Philosophy was replaced by empirical science, with the claim that if there was anything that could not be grasped scientifically then it could not be known by any discipline, and was permanently unknowable. Science now became the theory of everything, not so much because of some internal trajectory within science itself, but because philosophy had built up expectations about what comprehensive understanding consisted in, and science was the only (non-religious) alternative when the philosophical theory of everything collapsed.

The Kantian and German idealist 'all or nothing' claims for philosophy were now transferred to science, and this opened the door to the fourth episode in our story, the emergence of new forms of philosophy whose primary aim was accommodation to science. Among the forms this took was a series of attempts to pursue philosophy on the model of science, to translate its concerns and procedures into as scientific a form as possible. Here, philosophy loses autonomy in crucial respects, and has little if anything in common with the historical philosophical projects from which it seeks legitimacy as the paradigm form of enquiry.

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