29. See Meditations 34 and 35 of *L’Etre et l’événement* for a full explanation of Cohen’s method.

**CHAPTER 1**

**Philosophy and desire**

This philosophical investigation begins under the banner of poetry; thus recalling the ancient tie between poetry and philosophy.¹

Rimbaud employs a strange expression: ‘les révoltes logiques’, ‘logical revolts’. Philosophy is something like a ‘logical revolt’. Philosophy pits thought against injustice, against the defective state of the world and of life. Yet it pits thought against injustice in a movement which conserves and defends argument and reason, and which ultimately proposes a new logic.

Mallarmé states: ‘All thought begets a throw of the dice.’ It seems to me that this enigmatic formula also designates philosophy, because philosophy proposes to think the universal – that which is true for all thinking – yet it does so on the basis of a commitment in which chance always plays a role, a commitment which is also a risk or a wager.

*The four-dimensional desire of philosophy*

These two poetic formulas capture the desire of philosophy, for at base the desire of philosophy implies a dimension of *revolt*: there is no philosophy without the discontent of
thinking in its confrontation with the world as it is. Yet the
desire of philosophy also includes logic; that is, a belief in the
power of argument and reason. Furthermore, the desire of
philosophy involves universality: philosophy addresses all
humans as thinking beings since it supposes that all humans
think. Finally, philosophy takes risks: thinking is always a
decision which supports independent points of view. The
desire of philosophy thus has four dimensions: revolt, logic,
universality and risk.

I think that the contemporary world, our world, the
world that we strive to think and transform, exerts an
intense pressure upon these four dimensions of the desire of
philosophy; such that all four dimensions, faced by the
world, find themselves in a difficult and dark passage in
which the destiny and even the very existence of philosophy
is at stake.

To begin with, as far as the dimension of revolt is
concerned, this world, our world, the ‘Western’ world (with
as many inverted commas as you want), does not engage in
thought as revolt, and for two reasons. First, this world
already decrees itself free, it presents itself as ‘the free world’
– this is the very name it gives itself, an ‘isle’ of liberty on a
planet otherwise reduced to slavery or devastation. Yet, at
the same time – and this is the second reason – this world,
our world, standardizes and commercializes the stakes of
such freedom. It submits them to monetary uniformity, and
and with such success that our world no longer has to revolt to
be free since it guarantees us freedom. However, it does not
guarantee us the free use of this freedom, since such use is in
reality already coded, orientated and channelled by the
infinite glitter of merchandise. This is why this world exerts
an intense pressure against the very idea that thinking can
be insubordination or revolt.

Our world also exerts a strong pressure on the dimension
of logic; essentially because the world is submitted to the

profundely illogical regime of communication. Communication
transmits a universe made up of disconnected images,
remarks, statements and commentaries whose accepted
principle is incoherence. Day after day communication
undoes all relations and all principles, in an untenable
juxtaposition that dissolves every relation between the
elements it sweeps along in its flow. And what is perhaps
even more distressing is that mass communication presents
the world to us as a spectacle devoid of memory, a spectacle
in which new images and new remarks cover, erase and
consign to oblivion the very images and remarks that have
just been shown and said. The logic which is specifically
undone there is the logic of time. It is this processes of
communication which exert pressure on the resoluteness of
thinking’s fidelity to logic; proposing to thought in the latter’s
place a type of imaginary dissemination.

As for the universal dimension of the desire of philosophy,
our world is no longer suited to it because the world is
essentially a specialized and fragmentary world; fragmented
in response to the demands of the innumerable ramifications
of the technical configuration of things, of the apparatuses of
production, of the distribution of salaries, of the diversity of
functions and skills. And the requirements of this specialization
and this fragmentation make it difficult to perceive
what might be transversal or universal; that is, what might
be valid for all thinking.

Finally, we have the dimension of risk. Our world does not
favour risky commitments or risky decisions, because it is a
world in which nobody has the means any more to submit
their existence to the perils of chance. Existence requires
more and more elaborate calculation. Life is devoted to
calculating security, and this obsession with calculating
security is contrary to the Mallarméan hypothesis that
thought begets a throw of the dice, because in such a world
there is infinitely too much risk in a throw of the dice.
The desire for philosophy thus encounters four principal obstacles in the world. These are: the reign of merchandise, the reign of communication, the need for technical specialization, and the necessity for realistic calculations of security. How can philosophy take on this challenge? Is philosophy capable of such a challenge? The answer must be sought in the state of contemporary philosophy.

The present state of philosophy

What are the principal global tendencies in contemporary philosophy if we consider it from a bird’s eye point of view?

I think it can be said that three principal orientations can be distinguished in philosophy today. These orientations correspond, in some measure, to three geographical locations. I will first name and then describe them. The first can be called the hermeneutic orientation, which historically goes back to German romanticism. The best-known names attached to this orientation are Heidegger and Gadamer, and its historical site was originally German. Then there is the analytic orientation, originating with the Vienna Circle. The principal names connected to it are those of Wittgenstein and Carnap. Despite its Austrian origin, it now dominates English and American academic philosophy. Finally, we have what can be called the postmodern orientation, which in fact borrows from the other two. It is without doubt the most active in France, and includes thinkers as different as Jacques Derrida and Jean-François Lyotard. It is equally very active in Spain, Italy, and Latin America.

A hermeneutic orientation, an analytic orientation, and a postmodern orientation: there are, of course, innumerable intersections, mixtures and networks of circulation between the three, but together they form the most global and descriptive geography possible of contemporary philosophy.

What then interests us is how each orientation designates or identifies philosophy.

The hermeneutic orientation assigns philosophy the aim of deciphering the meaning of Being, the meaning of Being-in-the-world, and its central concept is that of interpretation. There are statements, acts, writings, and configurations whose meaning is obscure, latent, hidden or forgotten. Philosophy must be provided with a method of interpretation that will serve to clarify this obscurity, and bring forth from it an authentic meaning, a meaning which would be a figure of our destiny in relation to the destiny of being itself. The fundamental opposition for hermeneutic philosophy is that of the closed and the open. In what is given, in the immediate world, there is something dissimulated and closed. The aim of interpretation is to undo this closure and open it up to meaning. From this point of view the vocation of philosophy is a ‘vocation devoted to the open’. This vocation marks a combat between the world of philosophy and the world of technique since the latter is the accomplishment of closed nihilism.

The analytic orientation holds the aim of philosophy to be the strict demarcation of those utterances which have meaning and those which do not. The aim is to demarcate what can be said and what it is impossible or illegitimate to say. The essential instrument of analytic philosophy is the logical and grammatical analysis of utterances, and ultimately of the entire language. This time the central concept is not interpretation but the rule. The task of philosophy is to discover those rules that ensure an agreement about meaning. The fundamental opposition here is between what can be regulated and what cannot be regulated, or what conforms to a recognized law assuring an agreement about meaning, and what eludes all explicit laws, thus falling into illusion or discordance. For the analytic orientation, the aim of philosophy is therapeutic and
critical. It is a question of curing us of the illusions and the aberrations of language that divide us, by isolating what has no meaning, and by returning to rules which are transparent to all.

Finally, the postmodern orientation holds the aim of philosophy to be the deconstruction of the accepted facts of our modernity. In particular, postmodern philosophy proposes to dissolve the great constructions of the nineteenth century to which we remain captive – the idea of the historical subject, the idea of progress, the idea of revolution, the idea of humanity and the ideal of science. Its aim is to show that these great constructions are outdated, that we live in the multiple, that there are no great epics of history or of thought; that there is an irreducible plurality of registers and languages in thought as in action; registers so diverse and heterogeneous that no great idea can totalize or reconcile them. At base, the objective of postmodern philosophy is to deconstruct the idea of totality – to the extent that philosophy itself finds itself destabilized. Consequently, the postmodern orientation activates what might be called mixed practices, de-totalized practices, or impure thinking practices. It situates thought on the outskirts, in areas that cannot be circumscribed. In particular, it installs philosophical thought at the periphery of art, and proposes an untotalizable mixture of the conceptual method of philosophy and the sense-orientated enterprise of art.

The common themes of the three orientations of philosophy

Do these three orientations – so summarily described – have anything in common? Does anything allow us to say that, despite this diversity, features can be found which signal a unity of contemporary philosophy? I would suggest that there are two principal features that the three orientations, hermeneutic, analytic and postmodern, have in common. It is these common features which signal that the three orientations of philosophy are all contemporary, and that however different they may be, their destiny is joined: they do not simply provide one possible division of thought but rather provide three expressions of the same demands that our epoch makes on philosophy.

The first of these features is negative. All three orientations hold that we are at the end of metaphysics, that philosophy is no longer in a position to sustain its locus classicus; that is, the great figure of the metaphysical proposition. In a certain sense, these three orientations maintain that philosophy is itself situated within the end of philosophy, or that philosophy is announcing a certain end of itself.

We can immediately give three examples. It is clear that for Heidegger the theme of the end is the central element of his thinking. For Heidegger our time is characterized by the closure of the history of metaphysics, and thus of an entire epoch going back to Plato, an entire epoch of the history of being and thought. This closure is first realized in the distress and dereliction of the injunction of technology.

No philosophy could be further from Heidegger’s than Carnap’s. Yet Carnap also announces the end of any possibility of metaphysics because, for him, metaphysics consists of nothing more than utterances that are non-regulated and devoid of meaning. The aim of analytic therapy is to cure the metaphysical symptom; that is, to cure the patient of utterances whose analysis shows that they cannot give rise to assent because they are devoid of meaning.

If we take Jean-François Lyotard, one of his central themes is what he calls ‘the end of the great narratives’ – the great narratives of the revolution, of the proletariat, and of progress. Once more we have an ‘end’; the end of the great narratives being the end of the great configurations of the
subject and history that have been associated with modern
metaphysics.

We find then a theme common to the three orientations,
which is the theme of an end, of a drawing to a close, of an
accomplishment. This theme can be articulated in another
way: the ideal of truth as it was put forth by classical
philosophy has come to its end. For the idea of truth we
must substitute the idea of the plurality of meanings. This
opposition between the classical ideal of truth and the
modern theme of the polyvalence of meaning is, in my
opinion, an essential opposition. We might say in a
schematic, but not inexact way, that contemporary
philosophy institutes the passage from a truth-orientated
philosophy to a meaning-orientated philosophy.

In each of these three principal orientations, contempo-
rary philosophy puts the category of truth on trial, and with
it the classical figure of philosophy. That is what these three
orientations have in common on the negative side. What
they have in common on the positive side - and this is
crucial - is the central place accorded to the question of
language. The philosophy of this century has become
principally a meditation on language, on its capacities, its
rules, and on what it authorizes as far as thought is
concerned. This is clear in the very definition of the
orientations I have been talking about: the hermeneutic
orientation, in a certain sense, always consists of the
interpretation of speech acts; the analytic orientation
consists of the confrontation between utterances and the
rules which govern them; and the postmodern orientation
promotes the idea of a multiplicity of sentences, fragments,
and forms of discourse in the absence of homogeneity.
Language has thus become the great historical transcen-
dental of our times.

To recapitulate, contemporary philosophy has two
fundamental axioms, common to all three orientations.

The first is that the metaphysics of truth has become
impossible. This axiom is negative. Philosophy can no
longer pretend to be what it had for a long time decided to
be, that is, a search for truth. The second axiom is that
language is the crucial site of thought because that is where
the question of meaning is at stake. Consequently, the
question of meaning replaces the classical question of truth.

The flaws in contemporary philosophy

My conviction is that these two axioms represent a real
danger for thinking in general and for philosophy in
particular. I think that their development and their
ininitely subtle, complex and brilliant formulation, as
found in contemporary philosophy, render philosophy
incapable of sustaining the desire which is proper to it in
the face of the pressure exerted by the contemporary world.
These axioms cannot give philosophy the means to sustain
its desire under the quadruple form of revolt, logic,
universality and risk.

If philosophy is essentially a meditation on language, it
will not succeed in removing the obstacle that the
specialization and fragmentation of the world opposes to
universality. To accept the universe of language as the
absolute horizon of philosophical thought in fact amounts to
accepting the fragmentation and the illusion of commu-
nication - for the truth of our world is that there are as
many languages as there are communities, activities or kinds
of knowledge. I agree that there is a multiplicity of language
games. This, however, forces philosophy - if it wants to
preserve the desire for universality - to establish itself
elsewhere than within this multiplicity, so as not to be
exclusively subordinated to it. If not, philosophy will
become what in one way it mostly is, an infinite description
of the multiplicity of language games.
Or else, but this would be even worse, philosophy might elect one particular language, claiming that the latter is the only one that can save it. We know what this leads to. Heidegger explicitly upheld the thesis of the intrinsic philosophical value, first of the Greek language, and then of the German language. He said: `Being speaks Greek.' He said that the German language was, in a way, the only language in which thought could sustain the challenge of its destiny. And there is an ineluctable connection between this election of a language and the political position that resulted in Heidegger's commitment to German nationalism in the criminal form given to it by Nazism.

As for analytic philosophy, it is absolutely clear that it accords a unilateral privilege to scientific language as the language in which rules are both explicit and the most adequate to the subject of the language. This is clear in the way in which sense and non-sense are differentiated by presenting the distinction in the guise of a rule, as can be seen in mathematics and scientific language in general. But this privilege is itself philosophically dangerous because it leads directly to a contempt for all sites and spaces which rebel against the configuration of scientific language. And the privilege accorded this language isolates a figure of rationality that is ineluctably accompanied by disdain or contempt or the closing of one's eyes to the fact that even today the overwhelming majority of humanity is out of reach of such a language.

On the other hand, if the category of truth is ignored, if we never confront anything but the polyvalence of meaning, then philosophy will never assume the challenge that is put out to it by a world subordinated to the merchandising of money and information. This world is an anarchy of more or less regulated, more or less coded fluxes, wherein money, products and images are exchanged. If philosophy is to sustain its desire in such a world, it must propose a principle of interruption. It must be able to propose to thought something that can interrupt this endless regime of circulation. Philosophy must examine the possibility of a point of interruption — not because all this must be interrupted — but because thought at least must be able to extract itself from this circulation and take possession of itself once again as something other than an object of circulation. It is obvious that such a point of interruption can only be an unconditional requirement; that is, something which is submitted to thought with no other condition than itself and which is neither exchangeable nor capable of being put into circulation. That there be such a point of interruption, that there be at least one unconditional requirement, is, in my opinion, a condition sine qua non for the existence of philosophy. In the absence of such a point, all there is is the general circulation of knowledge, information, merchandise, money and images. In my opinion, this unconditional requirement cannot be solely supported by the proposition of the polyvalence of meaning. It also needs the reconstruction or re-emergence of the category of truth.

We are subjected to the media's inconsistency of images and commentaries. What can be opposed to this? I do not think that anything can be opposed to it except the patient search for at least one truth, and perhaps several; without which the essential illogicism of mass communication will impose its temporal carnival.

Philosophy also requires that we throw the dice against the obsession for security, that we interrupt the calculus of life determined by security. But what chance has philosophy of winning, except in the name of a value that would ordain this risk and give it a minimum of consistency and weight? Here again I believe it is vain to imagine that in the absence of a principle of truth, one can oppose an existential gamble to the calculus of life, a gamble that could give rise to something that could be called liberty.
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Given the axioms of contemporary philosophy, can the desire for philosophy be maintained in the world such as it is? Can we maintain the four dimensions of revolt, logic, universality and risk against the four contemporary obstacles: merchandise, communication, technical division and the obsession with security?

I submit that this cannot be done within the framework of the hermeneutic, analytic or postmodern orientations of philosophy. In my opinion these orientations are too strongly committed to the polyvalence of meaning and the plurality of languages. There is something in them that goes too far in reflecting the physiognomy of the world itself. They are too compatible with our world to be able to sustain the rupture or distance that philosophy requires.

Towards a new style of philosophy

My position is to break with these frameworks of thought, to find another philosophical style, a style other than that of interpretation, of logical grammarian analysis, or of polyvalence and language games — that is, to rediscover a foundational style, a decided style, a style in the school of a Descartes for example.

Such a position can be supported by two ideas, both simple, but in my opinion both preliminary to the development of philosophy. The first idea is that language is not the absolute horizon of thought. The great linguistic turn of philosophy, or the absorption of philosophy into the meditation on language, must be reversed. In the Cratylus, which is concerned with language from beginning to end, Plato says, ‘We philosophers do not take as our point of departure words, but things.’ Whatever may be the difficulty or obscurity of this statement, I am for philosophy’s revivifying the idea that it does not take as its point of departure words, but things. Needless to say, it must be acknowledged that a language always constitutes what can be called the historical matter of truth and of philosophy. A language always gives what I would call the colour of philosophy, its tonality, and its inflexion. All these singular figures are proposed to us by language. But I would also maintain that this is not the essential principle of the organization of thought. The principle that philosophy cannot renounce is that of its universal transmissibility, whatever the prescription of style or colour, whatever its connection to such or such a language. Philosophy cannot renounce that its address is directed to everyone, in principle if not in fact, and that it does not exclude from this address linguistic, national, religious or racial communities. Philosophy privileges no language, not even the one it is written in. Philosophy is not enclosed within the pure formal ideal of scientific language. Its natural element is language, but, within that natural element, it institutes a universal address.

The second idea is that the singular and irreducible role of philosophy is to establish a fixed point within discourse, a point of interruption, a point of discontinuity, an unconditional point. Our world is marked by its speed: the speed of historical change; the speed of technical change; the speed of communications; of transmissions; and even the speed with which human beings establish connections with one another. This speed exposes us to the danger of a very great incoherency. It is because things, images and relations circulate so quickly that we do not even have the time to measure the extent of this incoherency. Speed is the mask of inconsistency. Philosophy must propose a retardation process. It must construct a time for thought, which, in the face of the injunction to speed, will constitute a time of its own. I consider this a singularity of philosophy; that its thinking is leisurely, because today revolt requires leisureliness and not speed. This thinking, slow and consequently rebellious, is alone capable of establishing the fixed point,
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whatever it may be, whatever its name may be, which we need in order to sustain the desire of philosophy.

At base, it is a question of philosophically reconstructing, with a slowness which will insulate us from the speed of the world, the category of truth – not as it is passed down to us by metaphysics, but rather as we are able to reconstitute it, taking into consideration the world as it is. It is a question of reorganizing philosophy around this reconstruction and giving it the time and space that are proper to it. This supposes that philosophy will no longer be in pursuit of the world, that it will stop trying to be as rapid as the world, because by wanting to be as rapid, philosophy dissolves itself at the very heart of its desire, no longer being in a state to maintain its revolt, to reconstitute its logic, to know what a universal address is, or to take a chance and liberate existence.

The world questions philosophy

Evidently the problem is one of knowing if, in the world as it is, there is the slightest chance for such an enterprise to flourish or be heard, or if what is proposed here is yet another vain invocation. There is no doubt that philosophy is ill. As always, the problem is knowing whether this illness is mortal or not, knowing what the diagnostic is, and knowing whether the proposed remedy is not in fact, as is often the case, exactly what will finish off the patient. Truth is suffering from two illnesses. In my opinion, it is suffering from linguistic relativism, that is, its entanglement in the problematic of the disparity of meanings; and it is also suffering from historical pessimism, including about itself.

My hypothesis is that although philosophy is ill, it is less ill than it thinks it is, less ill than it says it is. One of the characteristics of contemporary philosophy is to elaborate page after page on its own mortal illnesses. But you know, when it is the patient who says he is ill, there is always a chance that it is at least in part an imaginary illness. And I think that this is the case, because the world itself, despite all the negative pressures it exerts on the desire of philosophy, the world, that is the people who live in it and think in it, this world, is asking something of philosophy. Yet philosophy is too morose to respond due to the morbidity of its own vision of itself.

Four reasons make me believe that the world is asking something of philosophy.

The first reason is that we now know that there is no chance that the human sciences will replace philosophy. The awareness of this seems to me to be fairly widespread since the human sciences have become the home of the statistical sciences. The human sciences are thereby themselves caught up in the circulation of meaning and its polyvalence, because they measure rates of circulation. That is their purpose. At base they are in the service of polls, election predictions, demographic averages, epidemiological rates, tastes and distastes, and all that certainly makes for interesting labour. But this statistical and numerical information has nothing to do with what humanity, nor what each absolutely singular being, is about. Everyone knows that the singular is always, in the final analysis, the true centre of any decision which counts, and that all truth is first presented in the form of the absolutely singular – as can be seen in scientific invention, artistic creation, political innovation or the encounter that comprises love. In every place where, in some way, a truth is pronounced on existence, it is founded on a singularity. Averages, statistics, sociology, history, demography, or polls are not capable of teaching us what the history of a truth is. Philosophy is thus required by the world to be a philosophy of singularity, to be capable of pronouncing and thinking the singular, which is precisely what the general apparatus of human sciences does not have as its vocation. That is the first reason.
The second reason is that we are witnessing the ruin of the great collective enterprises that we once imagined carried within themselves the seeds of emancipation and truth. We know now that there are no such great emancipatory forces, that there is neither progress, nor proletariat, nor any such thing. We know that we are not caught up by such forces and that there is no hope for us of sustaining our desire by simply incorporating ourselves into such a force, or by being a member of such a force. What does this mean? This means that each of us, and not only the philosopher, knows that today, if we are confronted with the inhuman, we must make our own decision and speak in our own name. One cannot hide behind any great collective configuration, any supposed force, any metaphysical totality which might take a position in one’s stead. But in order to take a position in one’s own name when faced with the inhuman, a fixed point is needed for the decision. An unconditional principle is needed to regulate both the decision and the assent. This is what everyone calls today the necessity of a return to ethics. But let us not be mistaken. Philosophically, the return to ethics necessitates the return of an unconditional principle. There is a moment when one must be able to say that this is right and that is wrong, in light of the evidence of the principle. There cannot be an infinite regression of quibbling and calculating. There must also be utterances of which it can be said they are unconditionally true. We know very well that when a position on a given question and an agreement on that position are demanded, as a last resort it is necessary to find a position which will be unconditionally true for everyone. Thus one cannot say that each of us must take a position in his or her own name once faced with the inhuman, without re-engaging philosophy in the dimension of truth. And this is required by the world as it is, and this is required of philosophy.

The third reason is connected to the recent rise of reactive or archaic passions; that is, the rise of cultural, religious, national and racist passions. These historically observable phenomena have also given birth to a demand upon philosophy. Confronted by these passions once again, philosophy is urged to speak about where reason lies, for these passions are the contemporary figures of irrational archaism and they carry with them death and devastation. Philosophy is required to make a pronouncement about contemporary rationality. We know that this rationality cannot be the repetition of classical rationalism, but we also know that we cannot do without it, if we do not want to find ourselves in a position of extreme intellectual weakness when faced with the threat of these reactive passions. We must then forge a rational philosophy in this sense of the term; that is, in the sense that philosophy must reiterate, under the conditions of the times, what it has already resolved.

The fourth and final reason is that the world we live in is a vulnerable, precarious world. It is in no way a world stabilized within the unity of its history. We must not allow the global acceptance of the themes of liberal economy and representative democracy to disseminate the fact that the world the twentieth century has given birth to is a violent and fragile world. Its material, ideological and intellectual foundations are disparate, disunited and largely inconsistent. This world does not announce the serenity of a linear development, but rather a series of dramatic crises and paradoxical events. Take two recent examples, the Gulf War and the fall of bureaucratic socialism. Add to these the war in Bosnia and the Rwandan massacres. But do not be mistaken; these events are only the first in a long series. Philosophy is required to ensure that thought can receive and accept the drama of the event without anxiety. We do not fundamentally need a philosophy of the structure of things. We need a philosophy open to the irreducible
singularity of what happens, a philosophy that can be fed and nourished by the surprise of the unexpected. Such a philosophy would then be a philosophy of the event. This too is required of philosophy by the world, by the world as it is.

**A new doctrine of the subject**

What is thus demanded of us by the world is a philosophy of singularity, a philosophy of contemporary rationality, and a philosophy of the event. This is a programme in itself. To accomplish this programme we must go beyond the three principal tendencies of philosophy I have described. We need a more determined and more imperative philosophy, but one that is, at the same time, more modest, more remote from the world and more descriptive. A philosophy which is a rational intertwining of the singularity of the event and of truth. A philosophy open to chance, but a chance submitted to the law of reason; a philosophy maintaining unconditional principles, unconditional but submitted to a non-theological law.

This will allow us to propose a new doctrine of the subject – and I think this is the essential objective. We will be able to say what a subject is in terms other than those of Descartes, Kant or Hegel. This subject will be singular and not universal, and it will be singular because it will always be an event that constitutes the subject as a truth.

In view of this programme, it can be said, it’s true, that the metaphysics of truth is ruined and classical rationalism is insufficient. But in a way the deconstruction of metaphysics and the contestation of rationalism are also insufficient. The world needs philosophy to be re-founded upon the ruins of metaphysics as combined and blended with the modern criticism of metaphysics.

I am convinced, and this is the reason for my optimism, that the world needs philosophy more than philosophy thinks. Philosophy is ill, it might be dying, but I am sure that the world (the world, neither a God nor a prophet, but the world) is saying to philosophy: ‘Get up and walk!’

**Note**

1. Translator’s note: This paper was given in Sydney in 1999. Its original title was ‘The desire of philosophy and the contemporary world’. In French, the phrase ‘le désir de philosophie’ is ambiguous as to the syntactic status of ‘philosophie’. In the objective sense of the genitive, it is philosophy which is desired. However, in the subjective sense, it can also be said that it is philosophy which desires, or that there is a desire which traverses philosophy.