As a provisional conclusion, I would say that from a Heideggerian perspective, we need to remember the meaning of Being and to recognize that this meaning is the dissolution of the principle of reality into the manifold of interpretations, precisely so as to be able to live through the experience of this dissolution without neurosis and avoid the recurrent temptation to "return" to a stronger (more reassuring and also more threatening and authoritarian) sense of the real. Once again, if one thinks of the popularity of so many forms of fundamentalism even in the late-modern society of the West, this philosophical task will not appear otiose. On the ethical plane, and without going deeply into the matter, it appears obvious that a weak ontology will have to take up the teaching of Schopenhauer—who was, as we know, the model for Horkheimer in his last period; and perhaps less obviously, of Adorno; and of Heidegger, too, if we ponder his text on *Gelassenheit*.[6]

Naturally this whole image of the *Ge-Schick* of Being as oriented toward the weakening of the cogency of the real, of subjectivity, of objectivity, is in turn not an objective metaphysical description but an interpretation. Hermeneutics, to give it its proper name, is not a metaphysical theory giving a supposedly veridical account of the interpretive essence of Being. It is already, always and inevitably, an answer that accepts and interprets a *Schickung*, a call and a sending.

Very well. But as Nietzsche would say: And so?

2. Philosophy and the Decline of the West

"The decline of the West" to which the title of this chapter alludes does not precisely coincide with the meaning Spengler had in mind when he used these words. For me the decline of the West signifies the dissolution of the idea that there was a unitary significance and direction to the history of mankind. In the modern tradition, this idea supplied a sort of permanent foundation of western thought, which considered its own civilization as the highest degree of evolution attained by mankind in general and which, on that basis, felt itself called upon to civilize, as well as to colonize, convert, and subdue, all the other peoples with whom it came in contact. The idea that history progresses in one direction—in other words that by more or less mysterious routes down which it is directed by a providential rationality, it is approaching ever closer to a final perfection—has been at the core of modernity; we may even say that it constitutes its essence. For my part, I have proposed[1] to define modernity as the epoch in which, more or less explicitly and consciously, being modern is seen as the most basic value—a definition that may appear tautological but that actually proves in my view to be the only one capable of capturing the fundamental traits of the modern spirit. Being modern can be thought of as a value (and

being reactionary, backward, and conservative as inversions of value) only if time is essentially moving toward emancipation: the farther along we are on the line of history, the closer we are to perfection. The very notion of the avant-garde in the arts—which has quite properly fallen into a state of crisis in recent decades—is itself impregnated with faith in progress.

The decline of the West, meaning the dissolution of the ideas of progress and unilinear historicity, is a complex matter, more social and political than philosophical. In philosophy it manifests itself in what Heidegger called the end of metaphysics—which today seems indeed to coincide with the end of philosophy itself. It is a process of dissolution that had already been characterized with precision by Wilhelm Dilthey in an essay from early in the twentieth century entitled *The Essence of Philosophy*.[2] Dilthey observed that in every epoch of the history of ideas there have occurred moments of profound transformation, in which it was no longer possible to comprehend the altered conditions of existence from within the prevailing systems; at such moments there arise nonsystematic, more free and "subjective" forms of thought, which Dilthey called "philosophies of life." He did not mean that they were characterized by a vitalistic metaphysics, as the philosophy of Spengler ultimately was, but rather that these forms of reflection were closer to lived experience, more mobile, similar to the wisdom of the Stoics and the Epicureans and the disillusioned moralism of Montaigne and, nearer to our own time, the aphoristic thought of Nietzsche or the visions of existence expressed by writers and poets like Tolstoy, Carlyle, and Maeterlinck.[3] Dilthey had previously set forth (and did not disavow here) a more radical position in the second book of his *Introduction to the Human Sciences*[4]: metaphysics, even when presented in systematic form, as in Hegel, Schopenhauer, Leibniz, and Lotze, is never anything more than the expression of a subjective vision of the world, a sort of autobiography of its author, but formulated in terms more abstract than those of poetry. Thus there is no real opposition between the two positions Dilthey took: during periods of "transition," philosophy becomes aware that it is only the formulation of a subjective *Weltanschauung*; that is all it ever is, but the rest of the time it does not know it. We have come to realize that this is the nature of philosophy precisely because we are living in a time of transition, or in what we have now learned to call postmodernity. Reading certain pages by the great contemporary American philosopher Richard Rorty,[5] an outstanding figure for many reasons, but especially for his ability to bring the results of postanalytic Anglo-American thought and the existential and hermeneutic thought of continental Europe together in his stance, we encounter a vision of philosophy that picks up Dilthey almost to the letter: Hegel and Nietzsche, exactly like Proust, are the authors of novels, since all philosophies are no more than extended redescriptions of the world on the basis of a system of images and metaphors, forms of subjective expression similar to literary creations. So Proust, according to Rorty, is superior to Hegel and Nietzsche in one point at least: he was aware that he was writing a novel, whereas the other two, even Nietzsche, wanted to proclaim truths. They were still putting forward metaphysical claims.

No doubt we are taken aback to find philosophers like Hegel and Nietzsche, and for that matter Plato and Aristotle, placed on the same level as a novelist, even a great one like Proust. Our reluctance to go along unprotestingly with this "reduction," or whatever you want to call it, cannot be explained merely by the rooted conviction that philosophy is not the same thing as poetic and literary creation. It can also be explained in more objective and "neutral" terms as respect for the texts in front of us. Can we really suppose that we understand the pages of Hegel, Nietzsche, and Aristotle if we start by not taking

seriously the principal aim that these authors had, the aim of writing philosophy (truths shored up by argument, "scientific/scholarly" truths, in intention at least) and not pure poetry or fiction? (Rorty would probably not accept this objection because he would see it as falsely neutral: to view Hegel as a novelist makes us uneasy not because we know that in so doing we are not respecting his intentions, but because we are victims of the prejudice that sees philosophy as metaphysics, as objective, truthful discourse—the very thing that today we can no longer do). This is not the place to undertake a thorough discussion of Rorty's theses. I mention them solely in order to highlight, in a particularly revealing case, a conception of philosophy that seems to me to be fairly widespread these days and, more than that, one that corresponds to the practice of many philosophers. Other philosophers, even ones who do not theorize this practice explicitly, do philosophy as poetic discourse rather than as rational argumentation. This is the case, for example, with the work of Jacques Derrida—a thinker for whom I have the greatest admiration and devotion and to whom I feel very close, as for that matter I do to Rorty, yet in regard to whom I nonetheless experience some reasons for dissatisfaction. Derrida's discourse is poetic, in my opinion, not because it is expressed in poetry, novels, or stories, but because, in defiance of what seems to be an essential prerequisite of philosophy, he refuses programmatically to begin with any "introduction" whatsoever. Derrida never explains his reason for choosing the themes he takes up; he offers the most brilliant meditations on terms and concepts that are loaded with philosophical history, which he reconstructs in an illuminating manner, yet without ever theorizing the "logical" necessity of taking up those topics in particular.

The positions of Derrida and Rorty, despite their differences, represent a typical stance of modern, postmetaphysical philosophy. Not all of contemporary philosophy can be related to this stance, of course. The texts of Dilthey that I have cited are therefore of interest because they allow us to bring the other ways chosen by modern philosophy into the picture as well. The philosophies that resist being categorized as what Dilthey called philosophies of life, or poetical and literary activities, are today mostly developing in the other direction—gnoseology and the theory of knowledge—that Dilthey himself preferred and aimed to practice. At a time when all forms of metaphysics have become, or have been revealed as, purely poetic and subjective redescriptions of the world, an authentic and rigorous philosophy, if it is not to give way entirely to the relativism of all the various *Weltanschauungs*, has only one way out: to become a sort of typology of the various subjective metaphysics. Today we use different terms: we speak of the cognitive sciences, or the philosophy of mind, or logic and epistemology. These are the areas in which philosophical work is being done by those who are not committed (as Rorty and Derrida are) to continuing down the path opened up by Nietzsche and Heidegger. These philosophies still see themselves as "rigorous sciences," and they continue to pursue the goal that Dilthey, with greater historical awareness perhaps, was also pursuing: that of surpassing the pure relativism of the multiple redescriptions by erecting them into a sort of general, and to some degree systematic, theory; or striving, in the manner of Kant, to ascertain the transcendental conditions of possibility; or, more in the manner of Dilthey himself, attempting to construct a reasoned panorama of the forms that the latter have assumed in the history of thought. Such an inventory of types can never be regarded as complete and definitive, but the intention behind it is still that of approaching ever more closely to a "total" knowledge of the world, of which the different metaphysics have offered different "personal" versions, none of them exhaustive.[6]

One would like to be able to put to Dilthey the same question that comes to mind when one ponders Rorty's theory of the redescriptions: If every philosophy is a redescription of the world, then is the theory of the redescriptions itself only one redescription among many? Is the gnoseology, or psychology, or typology of Dilthey one kind of metaphysics among many, or does it present itself as a metatheory that, for that very reason, demands to be taken straight—as metaphysics, with the claim to be definitive and systematic that that entails? It is true that Derrida's position does not appear to fit easily into the picture sketched so far, but that is only because it is a mixture of both of the philosophical attitudes that we have just identified in relation to Dilthey. In its nonfoundational style, it seems to be one of the kinds of metaphysics that merely express a *Weltanschauung*, but to the extent that it is a deconstructive activity, it has rather the air of a metatheoretical position, much like the "gnoseology" and psychology of the visions of the world. A sentence like this one, which occurs near the end of the essay *The Essence of Philosophy*, may quite properly be applied to Derrida (and even more so to Rorty): "The last word of the mind which has surveyed all these Weltanschauungen is not the relativity of each but the sovereignty of the mind over against every single one of them, and also the positive consciousness of how in the various attitudes of the mind the one reality of the world exists for us."[7] Although the last words quoted are not very Derridean—but after all, does the world really amount to no more than an interweave of textuality and interpretations, even for Derrida?—it is certain that deconstruction is thought and justified, implicitly at least, as a form of emancipation, and thus of sovereignty, vis-à-vis all the supposedly evident truths of the metaphysics of the past, of common sense, of the surfaces that pretend to be seamless but that turn out to be riven, right from the start, by the crack of *differance*.

In Dilthey's sentence, words like "sovereignty" and "mind" certainly do not sound very Derridean either. And yet, or so at least it seems to me, they do indicate a stance not entirely remote from that of Derrida or Rorty, and if that is the case, it means that even the philosophies now presenting themselves as postmetaphysical and postmodern, in sum post-Western, still remain to some extent within the horizon of metaphysics and do not truly correspond to the event of the decline of the West that, in many senses, they proclaim.

At this point it would seem that we can define the problem before us with a little more precision; let us now formulate it thus: What would a philosophy that really accepted the decline of the West and conformed to it fully, without equivocation or reservation, nostalgia or metaphysical relapse, look like? The persistence of a metaphysical—and thus, sovereign—stance is evident in the positions that explicitly codify themselves as gnoseologies, epistemologies, or logics, and that conceive themselves as universally valid discourses in the most classical sense of the philosophical tradition (and here I obviously include the communicative neo-Kantianism of thinkers like Habermas and Apel). But it appears that even the neopragmatism of Rorty and Derrida's deconstructionism cannot dispense with a renewed spirit of sovereignty, either because they present themselves as metatheories (as with Rorty) or because, implicitly at any rate, they legitimate themselves, like deconstruction, as deliverance from the error of what Derrida calls metaphysical logocentrism.

Metaphysics, said Heidegger in a famous essay in which he discussed the problematic possibility of "overcoming" it, cannot be sloughed off the way one removes a suit.[8] Readers of Heidegger know that he tried to solve the problem of the impossible overcoming of metaphysics—that is, the sovereignty of the spirit, that is, the supremacy of the West—by elaborating a problematic notion that in German is called "*Verwindung*"[9]:

not surpassing (*Überwindung*) but twisting, resignation, ironic acceptance. Of what? Of precisely the heritage of metaphysics, and thus once again of the West and its supremacy and the notion of universality.

What I intend to say is that philosophy, to "correspond" to the decline of the West—that is, to speak of our own experience and not drift off into evasive discourse—has to come to terms with the "universalistic" heritage of thought, neither pretending to link up with it, as though nothing had happened in the meantime, as though Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, and Heidegger had never lived, nor assuming that the problem has been liquidated by the appearance of manifold visions of the world or deconstructive liberation. Rorty and Derrida urge us not to speak any longer of Being, but Heidegger dedicated all of his thought precisely to remembering the oblivion of Being into which the metaphysics of the past had fallen. The relevance of Heidegger's striving to remember is proved by the fact that the question of universality is coming to the fore today, in the wake of the decline of the West: it returns like a sort of phantasm, in just those thinkers who believe they have got free of it, and looms large outside the bounds of philosophy proper, in the existential problems with which late modernity finds itself having to deal. I will cite just a few aspects of these problems, not because I am ultimately in a position to point to solutions, but merely to expose to full critical awareness the questions to which philosophy ought to be trying to respond better than it is doing today.

The background to these questions is obvious to all: the collapse of the centrality of the West and its political hegemony has set free numerous cultures and visions of the world that no longer submit to being considered as moments or parts of an overarching human civilization, with the West as its curator. Even when the supremacy of the West is reduced to historical or anthropological or psychological awareness, in the manner of Dilthey and the modern human sciences, it always manifests a hegemonic claim, most obviously in the philosophies that descend directly from Kant and put themselves forward as theories of the conditions of possibility of the multiple cultures. On the other hand, simply to affirm that there exist many different visions of the world in the style of Rorty, or to review and deconstruct them in the style of Derrida, seems not to take sufficiently seriously the fact that the manifold visions of the world do not peacefully coexist like a collection of artistic styles and lifestyles in an imaginary museum. They give rise to conflicts, claims of validity, and assertions of belonging, and philosophy is expected to supply some indication of rational criteria to keep these differences from degenerating into outright wars between cultures. One cannot fail to see that the philosophy of today is not fulfilling these expectations. This may well depend on the fact that philosophy has quite rightly scaled back the claims it makes for itself and that politics, in its various forms, has ceased, again quite rightly, to think of itself as the application of a rational program endowed with universal philosophical validity. The result is that despite a certain popularity promoted by the permeability and the omnivorous hunger of the mass media in many national contexts, the contribution of philosophy to the rationalization and humanization of our existence in late industrial society is slight. The philosophers who do continue to practice foundational discourse—the line that pursues the transcendental thought of Kant—seem to us to live in a world that isn't ours, ignoring the theoretical and practical-political aspects of the decline of the West, while, on the other hand, the philosophers who celebrate the dissolution of the universalistic pretensions of reason seem to participate in this dissolution all too easily, and we suspect them at bottom of reducing philosophy and rationality to a pure esthetic game.

What if we let the idea of decline act as our beacon, without (to repeat) inclining in the least toward Spengler and his biologism? "Occident," the Latin word for "the West," does after all mean the place where the sun "goes down." Perhaps we should link this term to others that (intuitively more than logically) go with it: secularization, weakening, nostalgia, for example. The beautiful title of an essay by Benedetto Croce, *Perchè non possiamo non dirci cristiani* (Why we cannot not call ourselves Christians),[10] could perhaps be adapted to read "why we cannot not call ourselves western."

In speaking of "decline" and the other terms to which I propose to link it, what I mean to say is that philosophy can contribute to a rethinking of the existential problems of late modern society by taking upon itself the heritage of the West and its decline, or rather the West in its decline. The two philosophical attitudes that I sketched above, following Dilthey, are oblivious to the spirit of decline either because they pursue metaphysical universalism as though it had never undergone any crisis or because they consider it dead and buried and accept the existence of many different visions of the world as a fait accompli (an acceptance still ineluctably tied to the spirit of sovereignty, though). What philosophy would seem to require today is the reconstruction of an idea of universal rationality that, if I have to distinguish it from rationalism and metaphysics, I can do no better than describe as weak and secularized. Secularization—in the sense of the word deriving from the experience and the historical existence of religion—is the model to keep in mind. Here again the title of Benedetto Croce's *Perchè non possiamo non dirci cristiani* is helpful, as an expression of our secularized relationship to the Christian tradition and/or the West. We know that modernity would be unthinkable (as Max Weber was the first to show us clearly) without the active presence in it of the heritage of Christian dogma and ethics. Acknowledging this does not, for many of us, mean deciding to return to medieval religiosity or at any rate to the orthodox faith and discipline of the Church. But it does mean rediscovering a linkage, a provenance, a family tree. The secularization that has washed over the Christian tradition of dogma and ethics in modernity, consuming it without destroying it, is the model for the whole future of the West, and not just in terms of religious faith. This is the most important and radical meaning of Max Weber's discovery regarding the origins of capitalism (and modern social rationalization) in the Calvinist ethic, and earlier still in Judaeo-Christian monotheism. The West, we might say, is declining because decline constitutes its historical vocation. Or, to put it differently, the only way the West is able to conceive of history and live it out is as the history of secularization. Thus one of the fathers of modern historicism, Giambattista Vico, conceives the meaning of the evolution of human civilization as the passage from the age of the gods to that of the heroes to that of mankind. And note that Vico was not an atheistic thinker but professed himself a faithful Christian. Hegel himself, as we know, constructed his own system on this model of progressive appropriation of the world on the part of man but viewed it as a "divine" history. In all of modern historicism, the emancipation and perfecting of mankind entail a move away from the sacral horizon of the beginnings. This is not necessarily the extirpation of religion; indeed it is often perceived as a revelation of the most authentic truth of the divine—most authentic because profoundly related to the human (Christ is God incarnate). If we recall the role Christianity has played, even contrary to the explicit positions of the churches, in the modern invention of democracy, equality, and social and political rights, we can form an idea of how the idea of secularization might be generalized, along the lines laid down by Max Weber for economic structures. It is neither absurd, nor perhaps blasphemous, to maintain that the truth of Christianity

is not the dogmas of the churches but the modern system of rights, the humanization of social relations (where it has come about), the dissolution of the divine right of all forms of authority, even the Freudian discovery of the unconscious, which deprives the voice of conscience (which is also the voice of the most sanguinary kinds of fanaticism) of its supposed ultimacy, its unquestionable sacrality.

What does philosophy gain by thinking of the West in terms of decline and secularization? To start with, the "crisis of reason" and the dissolution of metaphysics and foundational thought can and should be thought of as phenomena of secularization in the broad sense used here. The first consequence of seeing things this way will be the awareness that with the end of metaphysics we are not attaining a truer vision of reality—that would be another metaphysics. Nietzsche had already perceived that belief in God cannot be replaced by belief in an objective truth capable of disproving religion and setting us free from the errors and lies of the priests. This truth more true than the God of the priests would then be the true God, even more dangerous and unacceptable than the one of ecclesiastical tradition. If the end of metaphysics is a phenomenon of secularization and not the discovery of the real truth that confounds the lies of ideology, then the problem of rationality can be looked at afresh (and not in the despairing terms of relativism). The history of the dissolution of metaphysics, and in general of the reduction of the sacred to human dimensions, has its own logic, to which we belong and which supplies us, in the absence of eternal truths, with the only guide we have for arguing rationally and orienting ourselves in the matter of ethical choice. Our belonging to the history of the West as secularization is not something we can be convinced of by proofs, it does not have the inner necessity of metaphysical truths, but it is not like arbitrarily deciding to join a club, either, or drawing up an agreement to use a certain artificial language. Let us call it destiny—not in the sense of fate, but in the sense of the destination toward which we are (already) headed by the very fact that we exist. As we do with our own forebears and our own past, we may adopt differing positions vis-à-vis this destiny, but always within a circumscribed limit and on the basis of criteria that flow from our interpretation of our own provenance and not from any outside source (like eternal, unhistorical truth). When Croce says that "we cannot not call ourselves Christians," he expresses all this and indicates—though not necessarily in the sense I maintain here—how rationality might be reconstructed without recourse to metaphysics or relativism.

To assume the heritage of the West in the spirit of Croce's expression would, for example, entail an *explicit* acceptance of the world now as mixture, crossbreeding, a site of weak identities and evanescent and "liberal" dogmatisms (religious, philosophical, and cultural). This is something more than a spirit of generic tolerance, which is usually just a cloak for indifference or minimalism and actually leads to a kind of apartheid, with everyone expected to stay at home undisturbed, since we all have the same rights. A philosophy of secularized and weakened universality does argue, debate, "disturb," precisely because its criteria are those of weakening and secularization. If, as many signs appear to suggest, there is a widespread tendency in the modern world to react to Babel and postmodern pluralism by recuperating strong identities (ethnicity, religion, and class, even lobbies and political cliques of various kinds), the philosophy of decline furnishes no arguments for worshipping these rediscovered and closely bounded identities—or for deconstructing all of them from some lofty standpoint either. It reminds us that we all belong to the West and that westernization is a destiny that even the "other" cultures that have freed themselves from colonial status and the label of primitive are unable to escape. The West in the form in which it is spreading over the surface of the globe at

present is unwelcome to the former colonial peoples, but westerners themselves do not like it either. It is a type of civilization and, more than that, a condition of the spirit from which in many respects we would like to escape but with which we have to reckon: we the indigenous westerners, but equally all those who find themselves being rushed into westernization because of the spread of technology, markets, and consumerism. The philosophy of secularization accompanies this weak westernization of the world, trying to locate within it some yardstick for not passively accepting every aspect of it, for distinguishing things that are "okay" from ones that aren't, however vague the expression may sound. The revival of fundamentalism of every sort is a cogent example: it is indeed one aspect of the late-modern secularized world, but, measured by the yardstick of secularization as weakening and the reduction of sacrality, it can be roundly criticized and rejected. In general, a philosophy that recognizes the vocation of the West for decline and the weakening of strong identities can help us to conceive the inevitable westernization of the world in terms that we may venture to call light, mellow, and soft. As a concrete example, this would mean accepting international limits to growth instead of making a fetish of competition as the only way of promoting it. (I am thinking of issues that sometimes make the headlines and that will be doing so more and more, like the destruction of the Amazon rain forest and other patrimonies of nonrenewable natural resources; the West has developed by consuming these resources to the point of threatening to destroy the planet; now it is asking so-called third-world countries not to go down the same road. Obviously this is an indecent request if it doesn't entail the acceptance of limits and the sharing of costs on the part of the industrialized countries.)

This is probably the only conclusion (and a provisional one at that—but not negligible) to be drawn from the views I have set out on philosophy and the West in the present situation. Philosophy follows paths that are not insulated or cut off from the social and political transformations of the West (since the end of metaphysics is unthinkable without the end of colonialism and Eurocentrism) and "discovers" that the meaning of the history of modernity is not progress toward a final perfection characterized by fullness, total transparency, and the presence finally realized of the essence of man and the world. It comes to see that the emancipation and liberation that mankind has always sought are attainable through a weakening of strong structures, a reduction of claims, and that implies, in general terms, that quality counts for more than quantity, that listening to what others have to say counts for more than measuring objects with precision. In all fields, including science, truth itself is becoming an affair of consensus, listening, participation in a shared enterprise, rather than one-to-one correspondence with the pure hard objectivity of things: this objectivity is only conceivable as the outcome of a social labor that binds humans to one another rather than to the "reality" of objects. (This is one of the meanings, or the core meaning, of the passage from consciousness to self-consciousness in Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Spirit.*) I would even say that this movement could be encapsulated by referring in Christian terms to a passage from *veritas* to *caritas.*

In the face of the transformations of the West and the social and political problems of today, this philosophy of weakening does not cling to a neutral or purely deconstructive position. It suggests that, whereas hitherto in the course of the maturation of modernity, political choices and the collective mentality have been dominated by the idea of development at any cost, especially at the cost of quality of life and often at the cost of the very lives of individuals, communities, and entire peoples, today this logic should no longer be accepted. It is curious to note that in order to mitigate the (maybe sometimes excessive) fears that we

all feel when faced with the problems arising from the globalization of the economy (with the threat of widespread unemployment that hangs over the West), free-market economists struggle to prove that the crisis through which we are living is no different from many others that the capitalist economy has known and weathered in the cyclical course of its development. Of course, they say, many jobs will be lost in certain parts of the world, but just as many and maybe more will be created in others. In the long run, they promise, the invisible hand of the market will reestablish acceptable conditions of equilibrium and a higher level for everyone.

Faced with reasoning like this, philosophy discovers with a certain pride that it is not a science but only the expression (formalized, to be sure) of the "lifeworld," with its needs, expectations, hopes, and its demand for rights. The idea that the invisible hand will restore equilibrium at the cost of unhappiness for the many who will in the (long or short) term lose their jobs is a typically metaphysical idea, of the kind from which twentieth-century philosophy has set us free. To realize everyone's entitlement to a meaningful existence, or, if you like, their right to "happiness," is the goal that philosophy is striving to attain by finding the meaning of history not in quantitative development but in a generalized intensification of the meaning of existence, implying solidarity rather than competition and the reduction of all forms of violence rather than the affirmation of metaphysical principles or the endorsement of scientific models of society.

As the reader will see, all this puts philosophy—at any rate, philosophy willing to shoulder the responsibilities that derive from the decline of the West—much closer to religion than to science. This closeness has been forgotten by many philosophers; to recall it and develop its implications is perhaps the main task of thought today. In this sense too, as Croce said, "we cannot not call ourselves Christians."

3. Ethics of Provenance

There are many people who are asking (themselves) about ethics and asking for ethics, and if there is one thing on which one might hope they would agree, it is the expectation that ethics will yield binding "principles," an answer to the question: "What (ought we) to do?" "Duty," perhaps the most frequently recurring word in any discussion of ethics, appears to take on meaning only in relation to some "principle" from which the logically consequent answer "follows"; not to conform to it would amount to a revolt against reason itself—practical reason, though not so easily distinguishable from the theoretical kind. Indeed, from the perspective of the intellectualism that has dominated much philosophical ethics, it is hard to understand why anyone would balk at acting rationally (that is, in conformity with principles). The explanations advanced for such "irrational" behavior include the passions, the interests, all the drives originating in the sphere of what the scholastics used to call "concupiscence." Antagonists of rationality, these drives are linked to the least noble part of the human being, the body, which is destined to crumble into dust, whereas the soul has an essence like that of the eternal ideas, and it is there that reason has its seat.