The Triumph of Uncertainty

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Published by Central European University Press

Tauber, Alfred I.
The Triumph of Uncertainty: Science and Self in the Postmodern Age.
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I have an unusual philosophical tale to tell, for I did not train as a philosopher, but rather as a scientist. However, I became a scientist for philosophical reasons and the questions provoking my interest seem to me to be the questions of our era. Specifically, I searched for certainty in a world that I increasingly recognized as anything but certain. I grew up with a sense of assurance that a prescribed way of thinking—rational and methodical—conferred the best strategy of achieving the best outcome, if followed faithfully, whatever the issue and whatever the circumstance (albeit acknowledging the contingencies of circumstance and the fallibility of judgment). Faith in an ordered universe—natural and social—underpinned this attitude. Drawing from a religious wellspring of divine providence, a variant of such belief informed science’s own aspirations. As Alfred North Whitehead observed a century ago, this basic metaphysical position justifies the assumption that because we believe the universe is ordered, we are justified to proceed with a reasoned-based approach to query nature and, by extrapolation, organize human affairs (Whitehead 1925). Adjoining empiricism with rationality, science would minimize, if not eliminate, uncertainty. More, having the potential of achieving clarity, Truth would be found, not by revelation, but by the tools of objectivity and neutrality obtained by the confident work of the autonomous ego.

This quest launched modern philosophy, when René Descartes pondered how to escape the skepticism about fundamental categories of being: How could he know anything for certain? The existence of God was a central concern, but even more fundamentally, who, indeed, was this self-conscious ego

“Thinking too has a time for ploughing and a time for gathering the harvest.”

– Ludwig Wittgenstein (1980, 28e)
that might ask such a question? And as he followed the logic of inquiry, Descartes decided that his only basis for building a world—a universe in which he could know the world, himself, and the divine—rested upon the certainty of his own self-conscious thought: “I think, therefore I am” thus became the countervailing motto to Montaigne’s skepticism, “there is no other certainty, but uncertainty” (Montaigne 1976, 392). Based on the (putative) certainty of Descartes’s own self-consciousness, his assurance of himself as a thinking thing, he built an epistemology. This construct became the basis of modernity—a knowing agent, whose mind, independent of the material world, could confidently examine nature’s workings. The ensuing four centuries debated this schema and by the early twentieth century the “thinking thing” underlying modernity has been disassembled, deconstructed, and discarded. And with Cartesian conviction dismissed, the very foundations of modern philosophy cracked and crumbled. The ramifications have seeped into every crevice of our millennial culture.

When viewing the Cartesian project as the history of modernity, the primary “actor” of this drama is the scientist. Her original goals and prospects have been discounted, and in some cases abandoned, in recognition of science’s epistemological conceits. That is the story of deciphering the philosophical infrastructure of experimentation and interpretation, a chapter of intellectual history that forms the backbone of this narrative. But a deeper theme pertains to how science itself has revealed the limits of prediction while measuring the uncertainty at the core of reality. Indeed, uncertainty has attained a novel standing not only because of a massive cultural shift governing social principles, but also due to the probabilistic character of knowledge. From physics to systems biology, from economics to psychology, stochastic descriptions approximate, with varying degrees of certitude, the dynamics of complex systems. As a result, we live with renewed respect for the embedded limits of even the most methodical scientific conclusions. That modesty in turn has generated a deeper skepticism about critical analysis lacking the epistemic power of the laboratory.

Obviously, the continuum stretching between certainty and uncertainty is a cultural meter that has fluctuated throughout history. In our era, the needle is pushing towards the region of doubt. The ambiguities of the future are not the

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1 Similar wording is found in other essay by Montaigne, e.g., “How our mind hinders itself,” (Montaigne 1976, 463), and parallel comments scattered throughout his writings, e.g., in “Of Presumption” (ibid., 481). For the intellectual and historical relation of Montaigne and Descartes, see Toulmin 1990, chapters 1 and 2.
issue, for unpredictable change is constitutive of human life. However, a novel kind of caution has appeared in recognizing a new paradox: With increasing scientific insight, the borders of knowledge appear more clearly. In other words, with scientific advances, uncertainty is better defined. And, despite the sophistication of our collective reliance on critical analysis, we have come to more modest expectations about our tools of thought—Reason and Objectivity—that grounded Enlightenment ideals and guided notions of progress. And with the reassessment of those values and methods, modernity has been challenged.

During my formative years, the values of science and its accompanying ideals were the prevalent cultural markers that guided my aspirations and framed my own sense of who I might become. Deliberate decisions had to be made as I planned my future. Coming of age in the 1960s proved challenging as the social winds of uncertainty were sweeping across the cultural landscape. Who could ignore the political turbulence of cities burning, political assassinations, disputed wars, and disruptive assaults on “establishment” authority and mores? During this unrest, my assumed values and motivations were challenged. I had expected that my own good sense would orient me, and a new order would steady the rocking boat of my psyche. However, without a compass I was tossed about on churning seas. Confusion did not abate, and then the most obvious default position took hold, an assumption of sorts: The world was an ordered universe, so I must be the problem. Of course, I suffered adolescent perplexities, but that bewilderment was aggravated by the tempest of the times.

Little did I comprehend that my own disorientation was but a miniature mirror of vast historical forces at work. Only later did descriptions emerge that assigned conceptual categories to the shifts I witnessed. Following the Paris protests of 1968, the French postmodernists sang a refrain I would eventually understand: Reason imperiled, bequeathed relativism; social structures deconstructed, revealed society as a force field of vying power; the contingencies of language left a system of shifting signifiers; the ego defrocked, placed moral

2 The common reading of the 1950s as a period of convalescence and social ennui is belied by the turbulence and innovation in the literary, musical, and visual arts following World War II. Although barely making a ripple in the common discourse, the artistic innovations of this period threw off the remaining strictures of structure and representation that foreshadowed the radical political re-evaluations of the 1960s. For a global overview of the mid-1940s to early 1960s artistic culture, see Menand 2021. The literature addressing this period in terms of social change, political upheavals, and cultural experimentation is immense, but well chronicled by Gitlin 1987. And for a startling review of the momentous political and social disruptions of 1968, specifically, see Kurlansky 2005.
agency in limbo. At the time, I did not appreciate the implications of these
descriptions of a world turned up-side down. Indeed, I doubt they had even
penetrated my consciousness. Instead, I understood the vast cultural storm in
which I was living in political terms. Those were apparent; philosophical dis-
cernment followed much later.

The year I graduated from high school (1965) Bob Dylan sang, “you don’t
need a weatherman to know which way the wind blows” (“Subterranean Home-
sick Blues”), or for that matter that a gale was raging. The second half of the ’60s
confirmed his prediction. The disassembly of values and standards profoundly
altered expectations. Indeed, most of my cohort walked unsteadily into the
future as existential uncertainty enveloped us. I appreciated the relativism of
“reality,” both as lived socially and politically; the values governing behaviors
were hardly universal. If a country could go mad, as did Nazi Germany, what
conferred rationality? In the middle of the Vietnam War, what were the “right”
choices? With whom would I stand? These questions, and a host of others,
formed around an irritant that would pester me wherever I went: Who am I?
One didn’t need a philosophy course in ethics to understand that identity
emerged at the point where one stood on the moral landscape. And that was
determined by how one sees reality. Choices were required, and passivity was
not an option.

I failed to perceive the deeper currents at work that were later defined in
terms of the profound re-orientations that had emerged with postmodernism.
After all, with the attack on modernity’s foundations, “all that is solid, has
moved beneath our feet like a crust over a fluid.” The intellectual framework
only appeared later. So, as explained below, during college, I made a fledgling
attempt at sorting out the perplexities as best I could. That effort took the form
of defining my own identifications: Would I remain attached to the hermeneu-
tical ways of thinking characterizing the arts, literature, and history, or, alter-
natively, would I seek the apparent steadiness of a career in science, based on an
austere objectivity? Sorting out the apparent conflicted relationship of these
ways of knowing ended in frustration. When I renewed that project twenty
years later as an academic, I discovered how my original search for such a syn-
thesis had a long, unresolved history. How I understood this apparent conflict

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3 The literature on this bevy of issues is seemingly endless. Useful introductions include Best
and Kellner 1991; Jacoby 1999; Thorne 2009; Rodgers 2011. In terms of the larger context of
the emergence of postmodernism, see DeKoven 2004.

4 Charles Darwin, describing the earthquake in Concepcion, Chile. February 20, 1835 (Darwin
2010, 124).
is the narrative backbone of this story, a tale that exposes the tension between Two Cultures (science and the arts/humanities) and the fault lines within modernity. I witnessed the surface of a crisis in the standing order, but my confusions originated in this much larger contest about the legitimacy of the subjective in a world seemingly dominated by the stark objectivity of the sciences.

I was hardly unusual in regarding scientific thinking as the ideal modality by which to deal with the indeterminate. This had become an enduring tenet of the Enlightenment in which the cognitive ideals of certainty, completeness, and necessity were instantiated through association with the scientific enterprise. Later critical assessments left such promises as ideals, essentially unattainable. However, such revisionary understanding lay well beyond my horizon as I was about to choose a profession. I saw the question of certainty in the social terms of the times and as a personal psychological matter. To the extent that I placed my confusions in an intellectual context, I put science, the arts, and the interpretive disciplines in opposing corners and then allowed the combatants to battle for my soul. With whom would I identify? Eventually, after many ambivalent deliberations, I pursued a career in biomedicine as an academic physician. I did so, at least in the early stages of adapting to that choice, with an eye attuned to how science might be understood philosophically. It was a way of holding both ends of the stick—biology at one end and epistemology at the other.

ON CERTAINTY

This essay is not a historical study of the birth of science and its development, a topic garnering a vast literature, but rather a reflection on one of its prominent underlying aspirations, namely, the search for certainty. Of course, science may be characterized in many ways, but as already mentioned, looking for certainty captures much of my own early motivations for entering the laboratory. Indeed, an irony underlies this tale, for my initial assumption that science would provide me with a way of achieving certainty proved innocent of complexities beyond my naïve experience. What emerged instead was a better understanding of how science defines and measures uncertainty.

My youthful ideas about achieving order and predictability originated (at least in my socio-educational stratum) with a narrow idea of science that had

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5 These epistemological ideals may be traced back to the ancients, but Kant encoded (some would say, enshrined) them in his Critique of Pure Reason (1787; see Kaufmann 1980, 186–87).
percolated throughout advanced Western cultures. The success of this form of
applied Reason to conquer nature and enrich human industry seemed self-evi-
dent. Society’s contract with the scientific establishment had reaped huge
rewards: nuclear physics had terminated World War II; laboratory-based med-
icine enjoyed spectacular advances; space travel was no longer a fantasy; mega-
agriculture had begun. Moreover, irrespective of achievements as assessed by
the benefits of derivative technologies, a more fundamental ethos penetrated
cultural norms. Science, in its positivist modality—its logic and empirical
basis—had become the paragon of knowledge and its acquisition.

I had not anticipated revisions of these core ideals, for I did not appreciate
the profound metaphysical shift that science itself brought to these assump-
tions. Complex systems (physical, biological, and social) are governed by non-
linear dynamics and thus chance leads to a spectrum of outcomes and even to
irreducible indeterminacies. My appreciation of the larger philosophical con-
sequences of this general scientific characterization of systems qua systems
began with my own laboratory research. As explained below, my studies of the
biochemistry of inflammation revealed a cascade of interactions that defied
simple mechanics and designated outcomes. The wider the cast of immune
actors, the more complex their roles appeared. Remedy was sought in delving
to smaller and more restricted inspections. But in going more microscopic, the
“big picture” receded ever further from clear definition. Within my own
research community, the theoretical issues underlying this general matter did
not command much interest, so I looked elsewhere for guidance.

Two tributaries of thought coalesced around the question of certainty. Both
pertained to science, one regarding a new awareness about complexity and the
embedded probabilities that characterize studies of biological systems. The
second concerned the very nature of how reality is depicted by the scientific
time.

1) When I began to think about these matters in the late 1980s, the science
of complexity enjoyed a resurgence of interest. At the time, many entry points
might have been chosen to learn about chaos theory and self-organization
(Gleick 1987; Bonner 1988; Yates et al 1987; Langton 1989; Welch and Clegg
1985; Welch 1985; Keleti and Ovadi 1988), but I chose to re-acquaint myself
with new theories of evolutionary biology that highlighted the probabilistic
character of biological phenomena. This diversion into an utterly new disci-
pline proved to be the inflection point of my career. I had no conscious inten-
tion of leaving the laboratory, but I soon became absorbed in the philosophical
implications of studying modalities of causation radically different than the
simple linear sequences invoked to model my own investigations. An awakening occurred when attending a symposium on neo-Darwinism organized by my Boston University colleague, Sahotra Sarkar. There I was introduced to the underlying concepts of population dynamics and new views of evolutionary genetics, where probabilistic thinking was prominent. I soon became a sightseer in this territory, and while I never contributed to the field, viewing biology from that vantage fundamentally challenged many of my own unacknowledged philosophical commitments. And here, at the apparent conceptual chasm between the biochemistry of immune reactions and the vast play of evolutionary forces, philosophy of science beckoned. As explained in later chapters, soon thereafter I embarked on an entirely new intellectual venture, one that led to a radically revised understanding of the scientific enterprise, one at odds with my underlying assumptions about the quest for certainty.

2) The second line of inquiry began with studies of the ways scientific knowledge is accrued. The entry into philosophy built upon my own experience as a practicing biochemist and cell biologist. I found that my experimental research defied a simplistic positivist philosophy. For positivists, “genuine” knowledge (knowledge of anything that is not true by definition) is exclusively derived from experience of natural phenomena and their properties and relations as derived from objective and neutral data. These findings in turn are assembled in models and theories putatively free of subjective contaminants. This philosophy holds that the observer must become a “subject-less subject” to produce a universal “view from nowhere” (Fox Keller 1994; Nagel 1996). Strict positivism never seemed quite right to me. My own laboratory experience showed that the so-called Standard View not only distorted the way science is conducted, but it set standards that were simply wrong. Fortuitously, a compelling literature challenging that depiction had established an alternate understanding. Led by Willard Quine, Thomas Kuhn, Stephen Toulmin, Michael Polanyi, Paul Feyerabend, and many others, positivist ideas were critiqued and then shed.

Thus, a second aspect of the certainty/uncertainty axis concerned the very nature of scientific discovery and the views of reality derived from its methods. A confluence of historical, sociological, and philosophical characterizations of science converged on a singular conclusion: The rationality underpinning scientific discovery and theory failed any prescribed methods. Instead, scientific investigation was a pragmatic process without formal order and drew from var-

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6 “Founders of Evolutionary Genetics, March 6, 1990.” Those lectures were later expanded and published (Sarkar 1992).
ious human cognitive and social resources. When the study of nature and the study of society were perceived as inexorably linked—not only interwoven in a trivial social sense but locked together at their deepest roots—a novel picture of science emerged.

In a rare display of arcane philosophy spilling into the public sphere, debate over the truth claims of science ignited a far-flung battle over the extent scientific facts are “constructed,” as opposed to “discovered.” Indeed, when radical constructivists extended their positions to the point of relativizing scientific findings, polite philosophical disagreement grew into wide-spread polemics of the so-called Science Wars of the 1990s. After all, Truth and Reality had been placed in jeopardy, at least as assessed by those holding a positivist view of the world. Fortunately, my arrival to the halls of philosophy coincided with this controversy. An auspicious setting for my initiation, these were the issues that had originally caught my adolescent attention and pestered me throughout my scientific career.

I aligned with the revisionists by which my assessment of the scientific enterprise shifted from the positivists’ Standard View (research governed by strict neutrality of the observer; logical progression set by Objectivity to arrive at some idealized Truth) to a very different understanding: Science is constructed through negotiation of its practitioners at various levels of discourse and pragmatic concerns, and rather than holding to a rigid fact/value distinction, a set of varying epistemic and non-epistemic values determine what is chosen as evidence and how it is interpreted. Some would regard this “fluid” characterization of science as “postmodern,” but it hardly appeared as a new development. After all, the antecedents of this revision originated in the romantic reaction to the positivist conceits of the late nineteenth century. That story, a faintly disguised self-revelation of my own romantic affinities, proved to be the “hinge” of my own scholarship (further explained in chapter 10).

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7 Epistemic values pertain to cognitive success, i.e., true knowledge or justified belief (e.g., parsimony, coherence, predictability); non-epistemic values, so-called “contextual values,” are derived from social, historical, linguistic, ideological, and philosophical determinants. Grossly, epistemic values are “internal” to scientific knowledge, while non-epistemic values are regarded as “external” or secondary.

8 Note, Romantic and Romanticism capitalized refers to the various movements in the arts, literature, philosophy of the first half of the nineteenth century, which also includes that period of science (biology, in particular) in which the irreducible character of organic processes supported notions of vitalism. Romanticism with a small “r” refers to the sensibilities akin to those of that period. As discussed in chapter 8, despite the taint of such views, I embraced certain aspects of romantic biology, albeit drastically refined to accommodate contemporary theory. My early publications reveal this orientation (e.g., Tauber 1993).
My intellectual inquiry began with a historical-philosophical examination of my own scientific experience that set the stage for a broader interpretation of post-Kuhnian science studies. As a practicing laboratory investigator, I had confidence in the truth claims I published. And precisely because I was an experienced researcher, I sided with those who argued for a more circumspect view of scientific method, theory construction, and interpretation. So, when I launched my own examination of immunology’s theoretical development, I drew from both camps.

**Scholarship as Self-knowledge**

This essay narrates the sources of my interpretations and thus situates my analysis both as a scientific practitioner and as a critic. I have been able to fulfill my early aspirations to link the science-humanities divide by exercising an interpretive evaluation of the research enterprise. Instead of science insulated from other forms of knowledge, I have come to appreciate how the disciplines of philosophy, history, and sociology offer a powerful means for understanding the scientific endeavor in its broadest intellectual and social contexts. On this basis I recognized that the Two Culture separation imposes a false division, when, in fact, a rich crosstalk is not only possible, but important both to understand science and to enrich the disciplines that are charged to study Western history and the institutions that constitute our culture. I would contribute to that dialogue and thus found the pathway to pursue my neglected interests.

My professional inflection occurred during my early forties, when I began a formal transition that took me from Boston University’s School of Medicine, where I was a hematologist investigating basic mechanisms of inflammation, to the Department of Philosophy, where I was eventually tenured. While maintaining a small clinical practice, I initially held an ‘interim’ appointment as Director of the Center for Philosophy and History of Science, which to my surprise lasted 17 years (1993–2010). My studies first centered on immunology (my scientific expertise), which were then broadened from discerning issues about biological identity to considering epistemological models of the knowing agent. The scholarship proceeded in discernable steps: the theoretical development of immunology around the concepts of identity and individuality; physician character determined by moral responsibility; the disputed standing of the knowing agent conceived in positivist terms; the history of the self in philosophy. Underwriting each of these enquiries was the quest to define and to understand personal identity refracted from different conceptual points of view.
Introduction

*The Triumph of Uncertainty* presents the genesis of the ideas that have guided my scholarship and how they took form. I have assumed this narrative style to show how temperament and subjective needs framed my pursuits. Indeed, if philosophy is a way of life, then the personal must claim its legitimate place. In a sense, my scholarship has been an exercise of self-knowledge and this essay summarizes those endeavors as a *romance* with all the markings of true passion. Part expository, part literary, this is a romance as Oscar Wilde characterized "uncertainty," a pursuit with open borders and an undefined terminus.\(^9\) He was referencing the erotic; I am referring to the erotic as well, as Socrates described philosophy: the ascension of Eros's ladder.\(^{10}\) The metaphor captures the origin of philosophy in the emotional substratum with the attainment of insight and enlightenment through the exploration of ideas—their origin and fate in deliberate discourse. Eros is a means for attaining human perfection that ends with philosophy. So raw passions are tempered by character and sublimated by directing the affections to the love of wisdom. Accordingly, *The Triumph of Uncertainty* is the story of a "philosopher's desire" (Egginton 2007).

That desire focused on discerning the relationship of different kinds of knowing. As I faced the normal existential issues of adolescence, I gravitated towards the humanities for "answers." However, dissatisfied with the vagaries of interpretation accompanying literature, art, and music, I turned to the laboratory for what I thought were more "solid" forms of knowledge. These intellectual contrasts reflected my own reactions to conflicted identifications.

\(^{9}\) In *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Wilde wrote, "The very essence of romance is uncertainty." He also opined there, "The truth is rarely pure and never simple," again an apt reflection for this venture.

\(^{10}\) Plato’s *Symposium* begins at a dinner party, where each guest is asked to deliver an encomium (a speech) in praise of Eros (Love). As expected, the discussion begins with the sexual basis of the erotic, and then progresses up a metaphorical ladder, where at each stage Eros represents another aspect of human yearning for union: Eros promotes virtue; fosters learning and the exchange of ideas; expresses a primordial desire to find and then merge with one’s own (metaphorical) missing half. Dissatisfied with these explanations, Socrates relates how Diotima (a priestess) had taught him that Eros is a spirit that mediates desire, "the perpetual possession of what is good." Obviously physical love is one manifestation, as are the other longings, but a higher object trumps all the others: For Socrates, the love of wisdom, literally, *philosophy*, is the highest rung of the erotic ascent. The pursuit of wisdom fulfills a primary desire, namely, to recognize true Reality. Everyday reality is only a refractive of the Ideal, i.e., the Forms (Beauty, Justice, Truth, etc.) represent the absolute and divine. "Platonic love" then is a spiritual trajectory towards divinity. Accordingly, Eros is a means for attaining human perfection that ends with philosophy, where raw passions are tempered by character and matured into directing the affections to the love of wisdom.
Who would I be? What kind of knowledge would I seek? What kind of intellectual compass would I employ? I sought an anchor to reality. I craved certainty. Science, I thought, was the paragon of truth. Could that ideal organize my own journey? Only later did my emotional valences change to allow a reassessment that centered on acknowledging the limits of positivism and the evanescent character of certainty. Subjectivity made its just claims and objectivity found its rightful place in my personal universe, but not on the original terms assigned during my youth.

My later scholarship reflected a re-assessment of contemporary science that replaced discarded positivist aspirations with a more nuanced, socially inflected depiction. I came to understand how the interpretive plays a constitutive role in scientific thinking. How scientific discovery draws on personal (a critical distinction from the subjective) elements to achieve its creative insights is a story that has been well documented. I will review that history to explain how I trekked from the Enlightenment through the Romantic reaction, into modernity and finally, postmodernity. Science has played a central role in this trajectory. After all, beyond the mastery of nature and the wonder accompanying scientific discoveries, the findings of natural science have profoundly influenced how we understand ourselves as human creatures, moral agents, and existential seekers. This is the humanistic dimension in which meaning becomes the métier of experience. Seemingly set far from the laboratory, this nebulous locale of ideas, emotions, and values represents a stage upon which the influence of scientific mores are translated into the humane domain. After all, knowledge follows communal rules and standards; experience is multifold and private. The real is composed of both. And the ways in which this compounded reality has been parsed and valued is a key chapter in the history of Western thought. We do well to consider that history, organized here as a commentary on how objective knowledge frames our worldview and how the personal plays its own constitutive role in the scientific endeavor as well as framing the personal view of reality.

This commentary on science, a tale told in an autobiographical voice, explains the origins and development of a set of intellectual commitments. While I am not offering a psychological study or a confessional, elements of my emotional make-up, motivations, and character are self-evident. My self-revelation is deliberate. Autobiography captures such “extra-curricular” elements to serve as an expository device of philosophy, one that follows a well-trodden path—beginning with Augustine, extending to Rousseau and becoming a popular genre in our own era (Schuster 2003; Wright 2006; Mathien and Wright,
There may be various motivations, but for me autobiography is a tool to probe a philosophical puzzle, where

more than an act of personal revelation; it is a mode of philosophical exposition. The act of recording life events and expounding upon meaning of those events is a philosophical exercise: a process of revelation in which a particular image of oneself emerges as a result of one’s ontological views of the self and in response to the rhetorical forces shaping self-representation. (Wright 2006, 3)

In other words, I am exploring and illustrating ideas about personal identity through the intimacy of a self-revelatory account as a means to knit together different ways of knowing and, in tandem, different ways of being.

This thematic interest draws upon the ancients. With “Man’s character is his fate” (fragment 119), Heraclitus made both a metaphysical and moral observation. Accordingly, personality and intelligence determine habitual choices, patterns of behavior, and the way consequences receive their due. Indeed, one’s identity is in large measure the collected display of values and adherence to whatever comprises the normative for an individual. We call this character, which asserts that the underlying determinant of life’s choices (given the contingencies of life’s events) “is not in the stars but in ourselves.” In other words, moral agency transforms chance into fate. Why this claim still

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11 In English, such works by European (Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, Karl Popper), British (Bertrand Russel, R. G. Collingwood, A. J. Ayer), and American (Willard Quine, Mortimer Adler and Paul Feyerabend) philosophers are widely read. These self-examinations have, by and large, addressed two audiences – professionals and non-specialists. Often, those directed to colleagues serve as an opportunity to further justify the positions advocated in the more technical essays. Such reflections may also provide a congenial way to fillet opponents and settle grudges, personal and professional. And regarding the second audience, to the extent the author’s philosophy is further popularized by a more intimate account, so much the better. After all, autobiography offers special charms and insights.

12 Kahn 1979, 261. The more literal translation of the fragment, “Man’s character is his daimon,” refers to a divinity, which signifies one’s destiny. “The gods of Heraclitus, the immortals who live our deaths and are dead in our lives, can only be the elemental powers and constituents of the cosmos, from which our life comes and to which it returns” (ibid.). Thus, the character of man, the human soul, is comprised of one’s daimon, spirit, the “elemental equivalent of a given moral and intellectual character” (ibid.). This interpretation is supported by several fragments, e.g., “man is stamped as infantile by divinity, just as the child is by man” (Frankel 1974, fragment 79, 214). As to the ethical understanding of the fragment, Hölscher (1974, 237) suggests that the fragment is “not a precept of practical morality but an existential proposition: ‘For man, character is his destiny.’"
holds currency in our own postmodern era is the key theme leading to the terminus of this narrative.

In conclusion, I have endeavored to explain the sources of my own inquiry and the fate of an idea that has twisted and turned as it moved through the pathways of my mind. Composing such an autobiographical account inescapably imposes a template to outline an inner logic and purpose to my journey. Notwithstanding distorted memory and the strictures of order, I nevertheless remain confident that this philosophical tale began in typical fashion with misplaced questions and confused identifications. A nascent awareness of a philosophical problem, an inarticulate intuition—not even posed as a specific inquiry—was eventually transformed into a body of scholarship. That trajectory demonstrates how emotional components derived from experience and organized by personality are inextricable from the philosophical questions asked and the answers found. Such considerations bring analyticity to life and, moreover, showing philosophy-at-work provides a much-needed perspective on the authority of even our best tempered conclusions.