The Triumph of Uncertainty
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Conclusion

“If art is an image of the world seen through temperament, then philosophy may be called a temperament seen through its image of the world.”

Ludwig Lewisohn (1932, 331)

In our era, certainty has been defaulted and as a result truth, ethics, modes of knowledge have each undergone radical re-appraisal and transformation. The resulting guises of uncertainty have been considered here as the tug of war between different ways of knowing and their claims for legitimacy; the character of moral agency; the stakes at risk in the ascendancy of a postmodernism that challenges Enlightenment ideals of Truth; and, finally, the limits of philosophy, or more specifically, the limits of thought itself. The loss of foundations sits at the core of these perplexing predicaments of modern life, where limited self-knowledge governs one’s intellectual exercises and ethical commitments. Each of these faculties draws upon the subjective, and, more particularly, the emotional well-spring of the psyche. Efforts to subtract the affective denies its stubborn presence and subtle guidance. Plato famously argued the point in The Symposium. There, the affective is placed as the original ‘motor’ of philosophical discourse. Love ascends the erotic ladder from passion to love of wisdom. Simply, philosophy is sublimated desire (Solomon 2004). My desire has been declared here. To share the excitement of exercising what has been called, “the philosopher’s desire” seems to me the abiding value of the Socratic enterprise (Egginton 2007). And the time for such reflection seems particularly auspicious, for we live in a time of great transitions, if not crisis.

The Triumph of Uncertainty has focused on the contemporary configuration of the problematic self, whose agency goes to the core of social and political life.

1 See Introduction, footnote 10.
Indeed, each of us has been subject to the cultural undercurrents that are changing Western identities, and these have wide ramifications. How one thinks of personhood determines criteria of personal responsibilities and obligations; standards of truth require understandings about self-knowledge and the application of objective ways of knowing. Self-reflection and emotional maturity depend on recognizing both the depths of self-knowledge and its limits. Conceptions of selfhood penetrate every aspect of human life, and if the parameters governing personhood are in question, the entire social edifice shakes with uncertainty. What else might one expect, given the metaphysical airs we breathe? Indeed, we do well to consider that

in every age the common interpretation of the world of things is controlled by some scheme of unchallenged and unsuspected presupposition; and the mind of any individual, however little he may think himself to be in sympathy with his contemporaries, is not an insulated compartment, but more like a pool in one continuous medium—the circumambient atmosphere of his place and time. (Cornford 1965, viii)

Cornford asserts, correctly I believe, that some underlying supposition is at work that determines our governing metaphysics by which we understand the world and ourselves within it. However, identifying that “medium,” composed of presuppositions closed to further analysis or revision, is hardly obvious (Collingwood 1940). The notions of personal identity and the metaphysics that define the universe in which we live are only faintly perceived, if discerned at all. While fish don’t know they are wet, humans comprehend to varying degrees that they are “swimming.” The challenge is to recognize the currents and depths of those waters and search for the coordinates to a safe harbor.

Cornford pondered such a metaphysics in the context of his study of Greek philosophy’s emergence from mythical thinking. We might well pose the same set of questions again in our own confusing milieu of transitions to whatever is coming next. Specifically, how do different kinds of thought—broadly understood as the subjective and the objective—find their rightful standing? How do the various perspectives offered by science and hermeneutics converge on understanding our very selves? What might one know? And those seemingly fundamental questions then point to an even deeper inquiry that orients a response to Cornford’s observation: What is the “circumambient atmosphere” of our own place and time as we experience it personally?
Tracking the transformation of idealizing epistemological certainty to accepting constitutive uncertainty has comprised much of my own journey through modern philosophy. Note, I came to my initial understanding from science, not philosophy. Beyond the insights obtained from revisiting the natural sciences, other trains of thought converged on appreciating the limits of knowledge and the psychological constraints on decision making and rationality more generally (Tauber 2013d). And when the net of issues is cast even wider, the cultural upheavals that generated distrust of major institutions and instigated changes in personal mores and social standards could only reinforce this underlying seismic shift in expectations about the surety of knowledge, writ large. Once those lessons derived from multiple sources were internalized, I could accept that the certainties I sought in normal life represented an innocent, misconceived desire. And here uncertainty appears in its distinctive postmodern garb, a particular costume of our cultural moment.

The Triumph of Uncertainty has reported how I changed my own attire in the context of sorting out different ways of knowing, both their conflict and their fragile coexistence. In juxtaposing the calls of the scientific and hermeneutical strategies by which the world is understood, I have endeavored to show their shared metaphysics of uncertainty. I must admit that the certainty/uncertainty division is much like how one might view the proverbial cup as either half full or half empty. Given my temperament, I am most interested in the vacant spaces. Others may justifiably view the matter with a more affirmative attitude. The issue is not one of right or wrong; there is no settlement at stake. The matter reflects a mindset, perhaps a carriage of feelings about oneself and the world in which one inhabits. No defense required. So, I close with admittedly highly personal reflections on the “the circumambient atmosphere” I have breathed (Cornford 1965, viii), the metaphysics of chance that begat the uncertainties described in this narrative.

Beyond being privileged to witness the deliberations at the center of philosophical debate about the character of science, I did find “answers” of a sort. Not the ones I originally conjectured, but responses both far more expansive and problematic than those expected. While I thought my goal was Certainty, I found myself, after unavoidable delays and unanticipated meanderings, at the Temple of Uncertainty. There I now reside with my fellow seekers. They comprise a provocative assembly and, fortunately, a most congenial lot! These include Ananke, the Greek goddess of necessity, and Tyche, the goddess of chance. Ananke is a primordial deity whose power over fate and circumstance was respected by mortals and the gods, themselves. As to Tyche, she presides
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over fortune, good and bad, especially when cause is not evident. An interesting philosophical point then arises. For the ancients,

chance as Fortune is the entity that chooses when no one (no attributable human subject) does it. Human finality is replaced by a divine intention, even if the god is blind, or whimsical. Yet the preliminary philosophical definition should be kept free of any substantialization. Chance as an absence of finality cannot be an authority of choice; chance does not choose, because it does not exist as an agent. It is rather, in its purely conceptual form (Aristotle, Darwin, Cournot), the status of an event without finality or intentionality regarding on what it has an effect. Chance is not what chooses when nobody does, but the characteristic of an event that does not show a finality. Strictly speaking, there is no “chance” as a substantive referring to a thing. There are only effects or phenomena of chance. (Morizot 2012, 57)

These mythic personifications turn chance into an acting subject. According to anthropomorphic cognitive habits, to make something happen, someone or something must cause it. Chance thus becomes an agent that acts when no attributable subject does. So, just as the immune self serves to organize complex phenomena around a recognizable human construct, so too does Theodon, a newly contrived god who has recently appeared to personify reality and uncertainty. Yes, perhaps we need a new deity to account for the unsettling of what we see but do not understand.

The vapors of uncertainty have escaped from ruptured foundations and swirl around the confounding predicaments of modern life. Not to be glib, postmodernism up-turned Descartes’s geometric (i.e., ordered) depiction of reality with an altogether different vision. Twentieth-century art shows us the seismic changes pictorially: abstraction distilled the real; space flattened; perspective became ambiguous; surrealism asserted the irrational; cubism fractured objects (and human subjects) into disparate parts; abstract expressionism (e.g., Jackson Pollock) created “happenings”—both chaotic and oddly ordered; and then “pop art” collapsed art itself into the ordinary, where “meaning” becomes radically individualized, if not trivialized. If the artist truly rep-

2 Theodon appeared on the internet without attribution to ancient sources, but is cited as the fatherless child of Nyx (the embodiment of night), whose siblings include Nemesis (goddess of fortune and vengeance), Thanatos (death), and Apatē (personification of deceit) (McKibban 2014).
resents the reality in which we live, then these various portrayals are not invented, but rather offer reflections (perhaps, refractions) of the world in which we live, but now stripped of modernist conceits, foremost the sanctity of Reason and a given Reality. We have insight about the cognitive web in which we now live, and we even have some comprehension as to why we are caught in its strands. However, disquiet reigns. We seek new articulations as we mumble a language that fails to fully describe our predicament. From whence will we behold clarity?

I pause. I swear that upon completing the last sentence, my computer froze and would not permit me to compose again until I shut it down and re-started. Apparently the ghost in the machine had sent me a message: “You seek clarity? Another form of certainty! You have been explicating for over 300 pages how knowledge originates with irresolvable uncertainty and how subjectivity, individualized and dynamic, yields to no order other than one’s own negotiated settlement with the Real. Understanding and accepting the limits of the analytical is the issue at hand. It’s always been an issue for you. So just say it as best you can and finish this treatise!”

I thought to retort with Walt Whitman’s celebrated “Do I contradict myself?/Very well then I contradict myself,/I am large, I contain multitudes” (Whitman [1855] 1973b, 88). Instead, I merely whispered, “Okay.” Yet, I hasten to add why I linger in the modernist camp. Let me offer an image to explain. Imagine Rodin’s dramatic sculpture, The Thinker, placed on a river raft. The boat has no bulwarks and is lurching about in rough waters. The lines holding the flimsy craft to shore were first loosened by philosophers and then some were completely untied by culture critics. If the Raft of Reason loses its moorings, The Thinker will inevitably fall into the waters. I know he sits firmly on terra firma at sites all over the world. Indeed, I myself have seen him in Paris, Zurich, Montreal, Venice, New York, Washington, Baltimore, San Francisco, Pasadena, and Buenos Aires. However, I can’t shake the picture of him rocking on that raft. Already, the halyards from a make-shift mast holding him upright groan from the strains of the tossing vessel. I fear his time for rescue is growing shorter. I watch bewildered and alarmed. I wonder about our fate if, in fact, the raft is set lose and he tumbles over-board.

Perhaps the Enlightenment is but a blip on history’s course. That cultural ideals have shifted is undeniable. The question I ponder is to what degree the pendulum will swing back from the arational pole to the more rational one. I ask what is the role of philosophy in righting the destabilized raft holding
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Rodin’s masterpiece? To what extent am I satisfied with the lessons learned during my travels across the intellectual landscape described here? At the very least, I note that Prudence has raised his hoary head. Yes, I have relinquished foundations and formal systems, but I still think *The Thinker* should be secured. In that sense, *clarity* illumines the way to a new equilibrium.

Coda

Although experienced with varying degrees of concern, few academics in the humanities have not contemplated their place in the titanic historical movements of science’s ascendance and the humanities’ retreat. Most lament the shift in values (and corresponding resources and rewards) that have demoted the importance of a liberal education and the place in which the “human condition” is seriously considered. Much of this cultural inflection has been laid at the door of the technological revolution, but I regard those developments as accompanying rather than causing the cultural shifts we are witnessing.

While we are amidst huge technological innovations that will have their own massive effects, a century ago, reality was transformed. We are still adjusting to those seismic changes. During that epoch, now stretching into our own, new languages arose (e.g., Kandinsky, Woolf, Joyce) and new pathways built in traditional landscapes: art (abstraction), music (Schoenberg), myth (Frazer), self-knowledge (Freud), religious existentialism (Dostoevsky), agency (Heidegger), analytical tools (Wittgenstein), and so on. And perhaps most singularly, physics—relativity and quantum mechanics—radically changed our very concepts of time, space, and causality. I see this period as the hinge between a Before and After. Philosophy’s inflection during this era became my focus of study when three domains—epistemological, moral, and existential—seemed to coalesce around how to understand uncertainty, whose metaphysics reach all the way down the Chain of Being. And I am not referring to only the quantum universe or the dynamics of complex biological systems, but most directly in terms of confidence in knowing *who I am*. After all, the metaphysics of uncertainty is felt no more intimately than in terms of personal identity and its inescapable shadow cast by the stranger within.

With the postmodern deconstruction of the self, notions of self-understanding have undergone a sea-change. Caught in those tides, I sought the intellectual answers that would serve to buoy me in the swirling currents. And

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3 See chapter 6, footnote 13.
while my academic studies organized my explorations, I now recognize that the intellectual insights have not adequately carried the weight of my queries. And the reason seems evident now: subjectivity as such is not easily tackled by philosophy. I find this omission ironic, for the psychological, qua the subjective, has come to define Westerners’ sense of self-identification.

On reflection, I should have read Jean-Jacques Rousseau at an early point in my studies. That oversight became apparent when I met one of his most insightful critics, Jean Starobinski, who would clarify the terms of the “Search for Me” (Starobinski 1988). Rousseau had described his acute self-consciousness and accompanying isolation as an existential condition. However, more directly, he fashioned himself out of step with the world he inhabited. Certainly, the notoriety surrounding his exploits confirmed his own originality, or some would say, idiosyncrasies. Rousseau’s various social predicaments became a model for the sensitive romantic souls who followed, where an acute self-consciousness became a mode of being. And the hallmark of those self-reflections, seemingly based on a valorization of the personal and the unique, displayed the truth of one’s own individuality.

Rousseau, Romanticism’s godfather, asserted that authenticity of selfhood is fashioned by the very search of identity. The fundamental error committed by “self-discovery” was the presupposition that such a self exists as a thing. “Who am I?” may be answered by various social refractions, but that approach skirts the matter at hand, at least as posed by those who seek an introspective endpoint. To apply the method of objective investigation to subjectivity is a profound category error. Instead, as famously described by Kierkegaard, the self is that which reflects upon itself, what he called “a relation that relates itself to itself” (see chapter 14; Kierkegaard 1980, 13–14). As reiterated here in various contexts, one’s personhood is an endless recursion; there is no entity, there is no core, no essence, there is no objectification of personal identity, there is only self-reflection—a self-consciousness that splits me into a subject inquiring about oneself (Tauber 2006d). Of course, since there is no object to be found, objectivity does not apply. Characterization of an entity with definition, boundaries, or any criteria applied to descriptions of a natural object simply does not apply to the self-examined me. Instead, a self-image is composed during the search and, according to Rousseau, that process is the ultimate creative act.4

4 Although I have cited some of the psychoanalytical literature devoted to this crucial recognition in previous chapters, I have not fairly represented my indebtedness to Lacan here, whose
Both Heidegger and Wittgenstein placed the subject in the world. In that move, self-consciousness is eclipsed as an object of thought. After all, subjectivity cannot be object-fied.

For a postmodernist, a theory of subjectivity does not describe anything. It produces a version of subjectivity from elements available in the culture, projects it out into the world, and seeks to establish it through one or more of the legitimating discourses accepted by that culture, for example, science, religion or psychology. Each culture then, and within each subculture, makes certain modes of subjectivity possible and renders others difficult to maintain or even invisible. The meaning of experience is constituted in particular discursive frameworks, and each such framework has legitimizing and normative strategies for creating (and enforcing) effects such as “necessity,” “illusion,” “psychological health,” or “nature,” as well as “self,” “individual, and many others. Thus, any description we give of subjectivity is no more and no less a story than any other. (Fairfield 2002, 73)

I agree, albeit some stories are far better and others far worse, but the point is well-taken and a re-conformation of the modernist notions of personal identity follows:

1. In the culture of my youth, I “learned that to be was to be a cohesive self” (ibid., 94). Not only is the modernist singularity a limited description of agency, another fact belies any such conceit. I am a multiplicity of identities living in a multi-dimensional culture and situated in diverse values and configurations of others.
2. Seeking insight into me, my story, constantly shifting its focus and drawing different interpretations, in the end, is a narrative composed to fulfill needs of cohesion and minimizing conflict. Indeed, an “account of my subjectivity is itself an aspect of my subjectivity, [for] while I can never stand fully within myself, I can never stand fully outside myself either” (ibid., 93).
3. I claim psychic unity in the sense that I assume responsibility for my actions. This tenet adheres to a strict ethical understanding of the subject, in which me and I, to the extent that such designations are a something, must be construed as moral constructs.

These modest guidelines place us far from the original Cartesian destination. But the fantasy of an attainable ideal, a theory that would account for the causal and inferential network of propositions that underlie knowledge, was a vain dream. Although Descartes sought a foundational epistemology, the introspective investigation failed to find such an underpinning. And with that outcome, the putative groundwork of certainty he built collapsed. With Cartesian conviction dismissed, much else fell aside as well, with ramifications stretching from epistemology to ethics. The corollaries of those postmodern disruptions have seeped into every crevice of our culture. Indeed, the consequences of our revised metaphysics are staggering.

Nevertheless (despite the accuracy of Kierkegaard’s phenomenological description and the cogency of Wittgenstein’s advocacy for perspicuity), the ego (“the thinking thing”) remains ensconced in Western culture. It testifies to a hard-won battle against skepticism, for with the repository of the ego, Descartes established modernist philosophy with ramifications in every conceivable formulation of identity and agency. Herein lies the substratum of my own exploration—the crisis growing from the larger culture-wide confusion of how we conceive ourselves as persons in a period in which “all that is solid melts into air.” Marx’s famous quip is prescient well beyond its prognostications about capitalism, for he diagnosed the crisis of modernity itself (Berman 1982, 15). Upon this unsteady platform, my greater theme points to the consequences of lost foundations, none of which are more evident than in the sphere of the personal. It is there that the triumph of uncertainty most clearly finds expression.

Psychological uncertainty resonates with the culture of doubt so plainly expressed in literature and the visual arts over the past century. What we know, both about the external world and most immediately about ourselves, and how that understanding influences conceptions of the subject have radically shifted over a short period of time. We need not be Freudians to recognize the irrationality of much of how we live, the hidden prejudice of emotion, the bias conferred by experience, the seductions of ignorance where we assume knowledge. At the center of a destabilized understanding of agency, doubt-ridden legitimacy of the truth claims derived from self-inquiry has displaced the confidence of the self-knowing ego. Indeed, acknowledging how unconscious motivations and lost (repressed) memories conspire to make us strangers to ourselves bestows unrequited doubts about our very identities, our very identities.

The quest for me is truly the never-ending story. But rather than regarding that search perjoratively, a sign of immaturity or neurosis, I see the exploration as an ethical venture, for (as explained) such self-cognizance is the basis of...
moral agency. And if that position is followed, we then must recognize that the uncertainties spawned by postmodernism is, above all else, an expression of a moral crisis. On this view, the clarity we seek is in response to the opacities constitutive to our very identities configured by an enveloping skepticism. On that note, I return to Nietzsche of my youth, who, as “the Physician to Culture” so clearly diagnosed our condition.

A long time ago, at about age 15, I discovered Nietzsche’s works at the back of a drug store in a swivel bookcase full of all kinds of titles. For some reason, I picked this short anthology, and although I had little understanding of what I read, a message of promise had been transmitted. My teenage soul, beset with confusions and torment, heard a voice that evoked hope and maybe even inspiration. And then, much later as I proceeded along the Philosophical Highway, I felt Nietzsche’s shadow hovering over my shoulder. I had not escaped his provocation; responses were demanded. My discovery began with the very first lines of his *The Will to Power*, “Nihilism stands at the door: whence comes this uncanniest of all guests?” (Nietzsche 1967, 7). He diagnosed nihilism as the sickness of the West and the imprint of his aphorisms provoked by that over-riding theme remains indelible and vital. His urgent and dire challenge seem as relevant to me now as when we first met. Although I admit trepidation in even approaching the question of nihilism, I see no escape. Such a guest, invited or not, is present and must be seated or ushered out. Whatever our fate in dealing with him, he cannot be ignored. His very presence demands a response. Indeed, if he is only a visitor, as I believe Nietzsche hoped, then he will pass if confronted.

The challenge is an ethical endeavor requiring a commitment to search for meaning boldly and creatively, whether aesthetic, spiritual, moral, or emotional. Yet, “talking about meaning and meaninglessness is one of the last taboos. The question of meaning makes us uncomfortable” (Ford 2007, xv). In the sense Dennis Ford is referring to meaning, one is hard-pressed to find serious consideration among contemporary philosophers. Certainly, meaning described in terms of personal significance is not easily defined, and at least in the context of my analytic explorations, meaning and reference refer exclusively to problems in philosophy of language. So, we must turn to poetry, aesthetics, ethics, and religion, areas of discourse that Wittgenstein called, “nonsense,” namely, topics placed well beyond philosophy’s borders. So, if philosophy fails to engage the sickness of nihilism, the pursuit must follow other pathways.

Following Dewey, one might regard the re-vamping of philosophy advocated by Wittgenstein and Rorty as another bifurcation of philosophy’s road (Dewey
1910, 19). One fork leads to continuing the trajectory as a critical pursuit, while another route (one also followed by Heidegger and Levinas under different guises) leads to a place where, at some point, one may contentedly leave analysis and arrive at “the end of philosophy” (Baynes, Bohman and McCarthy, 1987; Hutto 2006; Thomas-Fogiel 2011). Others designate that terminus, “peace” (Wittgenstein 1968, 52e). The respite resides in appreciating how philosophy has failed, although failure is not truly the correct category for assessing the pursuit that so absorbed me. After all, philosophy is about discerning how to live a good life and to the extent that the tradition informs, so much the better. No, the collapse is strictly an in-house affair, a peculiar kind of finale: The deflationary view shows that something other than critical thinking is required to address the questions most firmly embedded in the soul. They cannot find analytical ‘solutions.’

By temperament, I rest easily at this juncture, but that does not mean I have completed my inquiries. I know, better than anyone, the limits of my own understanding and the psychology that refracts it. Such circumspection only acknowledges the recurrent tension highlighted in this narrative between subjective and objective ways of knowing. So, I close with comments on temperament to explicitly declare (and celebrate!) the implicit psychology underwriting this essay. I am admitting to a widely shared sentiment among fellow travelers in the territories I have traversed:

[As] soon as there is a question of explanation, of interpretation, of appreciation, though the special method of the historian remains valuable, the personal element cannot be ruled out, that point of view which is determined by the circumstances of his time and by his own preconceptions. Every historical narrative is dependent upon explanation, interpretation, appreciation. In other words, we cannot see the past in a single, communicable picture except from a point of view, which implies a choice, a personal perspective. (Geyl 1968, 15)5

I had read this passage in college and filed the message away for later consideration. I appreciate Peter Geyl’s comment in ways I could not imagine more than 50 years ago. I now realize that the underlying philosophical attitudes that lie at the seat of my analyses appear again and again to guide my critical writings.

5 This quote is from the Dutch historian, Peter Geyl, whose study of Napoleon’s standing showed a strong correlation between the historian’s view of Napoleon and the political context in which the work was composed.
Clearly, the question of immune selfhood drew my attention not only for its philosophical interest and the opportunity to contribute new scholarship, but as a problem framed by the issue of personal identity, an emotional affinity that pulled me to the topic. And as amply elaborated, the questions of identity were hardly contained by the scientific problem originally presented as I went well beyond immunology in my pursuits of the beguiling self. Here, at the crossroads of philosophy and psychology, the recurrent theme of temperament raises its shy head.

The boundaries separating philosophy and psychology are not only easily crossed, but they witness heavy traffic. Of course, philosophy is not psychology, but each approach should take account of the other. Their strict division ignores not only the empirical evidence that psychology and cognitive science provides philosophy (on rationality, motivation, unconscious processes, etc.), but denies the voice of character that is so instrumental in every respect of a philosopher’s labor—the choice of the problem, the way it is developed, the conclusions drawn. William James got it just right: philosophy is an expression of what he called, “temperament.”

The history of philosophy is to a great extent that of a certain clash of human temperaments…. Of whatever temperament a professional philosopher is, he tries, when philosophizing, to sink the fact of his temperament. Temperament is no conventionally recognized reason, so he urges impersonal reasons only for his conclusions. Yet his temperament really gives him a stronger bias than any of his more strictly objective premises…. Yet in the forum he can make no claim, on the bare ground of his temperament, to superior discernment or authority. There arises thus a certain insincerity in our philosophic discussions: the potentest of all our premises is never mentioned. (James 1987b, 488–89)

James did not dismiss the logic, argument, or analytic interpretation of philosophical discourse, but rather he acknowledged that underlying the most sophisticated presentations, the expression of character whispers loudly. From a similar position, Nietzsche denigrated philosophical posturing where

what essentially happens is that [philosophers] take a conjecture, a whim, an ‘inspiration’ or, more typically, they take some fervent wish that they have sifted through and made properly abstract—and they defend it with rationalizations after the fact. They are all advocates who do not want to be
seen as such; for the most part, in fact, they are sly spokesmen for prejudices that they christen as “truths” … (Nietzsche 2002, 8)

Nietzsche joined James in tracking the source of philosophical machinations to the philosopher’s underlying character:

I have gradually come to realize what every great philosophy so far has been: a confession of faith on the part of its author, and a type of involuntary and unself-conscious memoir; in short, that the moral (or immoral) intentions in every philosophy constitute the true living seed from which the whole plant has always grown. Actually, to explain how the strangest metaphysical claims of a philosopher really come about, it is always good (and wise) to begin by asking: what morality is it (is he—) getting at? Consequently, I do not believe that a “drive for knowledge” is the father of philosophy, but rather that another drive, here as elsewhere, used knowledge (and misknowledge!) merely as a tool…. [Th]ere is absolutely nothing impersonal about the philosopher; and in particular his morals bear decided and decisive witness to who he is—which means, in what order of rank the innermost drives of his nature stand with respect to each other. (ibid., 8–9)

Some might say that with the introduction of the psychological, the bounds of philosophy are broken. I disagree. The “temperament” orientation only broadens our comprehension by showing how a question is approached and developed as the outcome of the underlying disposition of the philosopher. More, I reject the rigid separation of the subjective from the analytical that takes form and expression from the well of the personal. To separate ideas from their psychological origins is to miss much of the philosophy itself. More than argument and analyticity, James and Nietzsche are embracing philosophy as a way of life. And in that comprehensive view, the psychology is implicitly initiating and directing the course of thought. Yet this interplay is not often explored. The reticence is easily explained: the topic falls in the cracks separating psychology

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6 Despite this agreement, little else connected Nietzsche and James; the German reminded the American (“half the time”) “of the sick shrieking” of a “dying rat” (James 1987a, 42).

7 The Romantic Conception of Life (Richards 2001), a work that assiduously conjoins Romantic philosophers’ personal life and psychology to the philosophy they developed, is one of the best counterexamples to Thomas Nagel’s assertion that the work of a great philosopher “is extracted from a flawed and messy self so that it can float free, detached from the imperfect life that produced it” (Nagel 2001, 31). Ironically, the biography of Bertrand Russell that Nagel reviews is a fine case study of exactly the opposite judgment.
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and philosophy. More, it violates the pride of analyticity. Philosophers like to
think of themselves as driven by compelling argument, and yet motivations
(pertaining to what is addressed) and emotion (the timbre or tilt of the argu-
ment) clearly impact their writings. In other words, as already noted through-
out this essay, philosophy weakly addresses the subjective.

Perhaps official philosophy resists recognition of its dependence upon
resources that it draws from the mind’s affective life. Certain areas of phi-
losophy systematically tend to eschew a number of difficult questions on
the grounds that they are peripheral or not quite to the point; obtruding
emotional issues, in fact, are usually ‘described’ as tangentially connected
to truth claims, insufficiently clear, unfocused, inappropriately articu-
lated, excessively controversial or sub-rational. According to Le Doeuff [Le
Doeuff 1989], since the activity of separation and division is philosophi-
cally productive (as the proper ‘field,’ or Kantian island, is created by its
exclusions), philosophy ultimately creates itself through what it represses...
(Fiumara 2001, 5)

The pursuit of knowledge is hardly a neutral pursuit. The tradition of Plato, Spi-
noza, Hume, and Nietzsche showed that the affects must be accounted in the
philosophical calculus.

The affective effects on judgment are well-known, and one might well ask
what the “fragility of pure reason” portends.9 If an irreducible a-rationality
lies at the core of Reason, then identifying the knowing subject’s blind spot
(undetected emotional effects) is critical for knowledge assessment. Indeed, if
reason is not self-inclusive, then its claims, even within its own province, are
undermined (Fiumara, 2001, 12). At base, the critique hinges on how to regard
the philosophical enterprise. Following Rorty, traditionally philosophers
have sought to “break out of the world of time, appearance, and idiosyncratic
opinion into another world—into the world of enduring truth” (Rorty 1989b,
29). However, if a skeptical view of such efforts is adopted and one seeks a
more inclusive understanding of rationality than what the customary logic of
analytics can offer, then a more comprehensive formulation of Reason—one
that factors the emotions and everyday experience—must be sought. The

8 For a more thorough critique of Kant’s orientation, see Schott 1988.
9 For a sampling of the literature see relevant essays in Solomon 2004 and Johnson-Laird 2006,
72ff.
affective is inescapable, and with that claim I would repair the rift between the subjective and the objective by recognizing the continuum of different kinds of knowing. Certainly, as testified by this autobiography, emotional elements must be accounted to explain the origin, pursuit, and, finally, resolution of the philosophical questions posed here. On this general view, my engagement with philosophy is then simply my story told through multiple dimensions of my ‘me-ness.’

Introducing an account of temperament might well be construed more of a literary effort than analytic. Is that truly an indictment? The art of philosophy draws from many sources including the passions, and how the rational and emotional mix strikes me as integral to understanding a philosopher’s intent and multiple dimensions of his imagination. When I read Goethe, Kant, Schopenhauer, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Wittgenstein with an ear attuned to their temperament, I hear their voices more clearly. Their ideas grow from the psyche, the inner temperament, so even in the skewed perspective of the first-person narrative, a more complex, multi-dimensional presentation of ideas emerges. Obviously, such a correspondence has limits, but engagement, at least for me, “goes all the way down,” for the source of philosophical inquiry originates from personal experience, particular circumstances, and the murky depths of the subjective.

Acknowledging the subjective as integral to philosophy’s analytics (e.g., Hume, James, Nietzsche, Johann Fichte) does not denigrate the logic, argument, or analytic interpretation of philosophical discourse, but rather admits that underlying the most sophisticated presentation, philosophy expresses the intimate voice of the philosopher. Emotional components derived from experience and organized by personality are inextricable from the philosophical questions asked and the answers found. Note, I have made little effort to formally discuss how philosophy and psychology relate to each other, but I am satisfied that The Triumph of Uncertainty illumines the “temperament thesis,” as a case study if you will, and in the process, provides a distinctive kind of philosophical exercise. In sum, to separate ideas from their psychological origins is to miss much of philosophy itself. And I make a stronger claim: to identify temperament becomes a philosophical exercise, inasmuch as such inquiry is constitutive to the basic precept of philosophy as self-knowledge. This hardly can

10 A case study is a tried and proven method drawn from my clinical experience. Such individual examples do not qualify as evidence in the sense a randomized trial does, but they are used as a provocation, a stimulus for inquiry and further study (Taavitsainen and Pahta 2000; Nissen and Wynn 2012; 2014).
Conclusion

be taken as a radical notion. After all, Socrates repeatedly exhorted his students with the divine Delphic command—*gnothi seauton*, “know thyself.” And so here I end my story.

If I were to picture the tale of my intellectual journey, it would follow the Chinese linear landscape tradition and depict an elderly man sitting on a wagon drawn by twin oxen. They slowly wind up a mountain trail with switchbacks and dips, and after a long trek, the wanderer rests at a spot where a magnificent panorama opens and new vistas summon. The path continues but its terminus remains shrouded in clouds.

This story of explorations, begun in childhood bafflement and renewed in adult dread, tells a pilgrim’s tale about confused identity, philosophical dispute about knowledge, and, finally, reflections on moral agency and self-knowing. The passionate sources have been exposed, and although philosophy is not often presented in a personal voice, for me the abstractions of the mind only find their rightful place in the depths of the soul. There, philosophy draws its vitality. I cannot claim being finished, for the matters described here inevitably remain open. So, the end of this romance is a bit premature, but I have directed enough time and effort to capturing the past. The future again beckons.