Preface “a” was spun from fragments of a review of Pierre Hadot’s What Is Ancient Philosophy? written for Philosophical Practice (Bendik-Keymer 2008). Thanks to that journal for permission to use fragments of my review. Lauren Tillinghast, then the book-review editor, helped me think through the concepts of a practical study as well as that of relational reason. Lauren helped me come up with some of the concepts that I most use today.

“The ideas start in the kitchen” first arose as a parallel inquiry to students at American University of Sharjah working on a self-portraiture project of their own in 2006–2007. It was first written in spells: April 3–May 13, 2007 in Sharjah, U.A.E., and June 20–July 3, 2007 in Modesto, California.

In 2005, students remarked in office hours that they had not found a space outside of class to talk intellectually in the way that they wanted. So began the extra-curricular conversation circle of 2005–2006 on the steps of the main building Tuesday evenings. The conversations from those steps inspired me in Spring 2006 to propose a class addressing them — Modern Identity. Students in the U.A.E. wanted at that time to work out the contradictions and potentials of “being modern.” The
class I constructed to stage their questions ended with “identity portfolios,” hybrid response papers to core modern ideas—abstraction, liberty, equality—alongside self-portraits engaging with these ideas. The power of these portfolios synthesizing and opposing the personal with the systematic led me to mention them over email to Breena Holland when I was staying at the Cité Universitaire in the summer of 2006. She suggested I contact Theodore Zeldin and his Oxford Muse Project. Mr. Zeldin was enthusiastic and agreed to work with a group of my students from Sharjah. These were: Hesam Ziaei, Stephanie Mahmoud, Sidra Shahid, Alia Al-Sabi, Ayla Qadeer. In some ways, this book is the end of my parallel process with them and with the image of a humanist that Mr. Zeldin allowed me to glimpse for a brief, important moment in my mid-30s. This book could be seen as my “modernity portrait.”

I want to thank the late Richard Gassan, who was killed by a negligent driver in the U.A.E. while biking—his desert love. Richard was one of the few faculty to participate almost every week in the conversation circle of 2005–2006. He was loved by his students, and he was a friend. He would have read this book and busted my balls. “The ideas start in the kitchen” is dedicated to him.

“I don’t want to be thoughtless” first appeared in a much more normal format (although not that normal), as “Species extinction and the vice of thoughtlessness: the importance of spiritual exercises for learning virtue” in a special issue of the Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics, guest edited by P. Cafaro and R. Sandler, Winter 2010. That article grew from a paper I presented at Human Flourishing and Restoration in an Age of Global Warming, a workshop at Clemson University, September 2008, co-organized by Allen Thompson, Breena Holland, and myself. It has been greatly changed here.

“Orchard in the mind” is an expression from Sidra Shahid, one of the students from Sharjah: “the orchard in
the mind beneath the mind.” Sidra is working on her Ph.D. in Philosophy at the University of East Anglia after earning two masters degrees—one in gender studies and another in philosophy. She read Seutonius and Spinoza by herself at a library in Kuwait growing up.

Intermixed into the scientific jumble of the neighbor are some important yet still poorly understood things about mass extinction. For a grasp of them, I thank members of the Colgate Mass Extinction workshop I co-organized with Paul Pinet, especially Bill Erwin of the Smithsonian Museum and my colleague Christopher Haufe.

Finally, I want to thank Steve Vogel for emphasizing the value of collective, human work. You can hear my engagement with his *Thinking like a Mall* in parts of the discernment exercise. Steve’s work was also influential to me as I revised “We are a storm in wondrous hunger.” I can’t hear *we* in that study without hearing his emphasis on the loss of *we* in our alienated political economy. It was surprising to me, who agreed with his position from my college days on, to see how my thinking could drift away from the simple politicization of the environment as a collective achievement of *us*. Steve’s work is a much-needed corrective to neo-liberalism now, including in environmental philosophy.

“I was in the open then” first developed in *New Word Order*, a workshop on revision taught by Nate Pritts at the Downtown Writer’s Center at the YMCA, Syracuse, NY. I presented an early form of it as “53rd & Kimbark: a poetics of extinction” at the conference *Geoaesthetics in the Anthropocene* at Salisbury University, with thanks to James Hatley. I want to thank Nate for helping me rearticulate poetry after more than a decade of professional philosophical denial of it.

There are too many people in the poem to thank properly. I hope that they recognize themselves and remember the time we shared. But I want to thank especially Lars Helge Strand—who makes an appearance or
two—Dima Ghoneim, who was in some sense behind the texto poem, Antoine Lacronique, Mari-Ann Kucharek, Flannery Hysjulien, Janine Schiavi, Megan Craig, Stephen M. Rich, Christopher Boerboom, Rick Furtak, Elaine M. Wolf, Amir Berbic, Zlatan Filipovic, the late Shoaib Nabi Ahmad, and Roderick Grant—all of whom influenced poems. Finally, my stay in France would not have been possible without the LeFebure and the Facq families especially and without the support of the Rotary Clubs of Rouen and of Utica, New York.

“I want to meet you as a person” is modified substantially from “Kierkegaard as an Enlightenment thinker,” originally a talk for a conference on Kierkegaard’s journals organized by Gordon Marino at St. Olaf College. I decided I did not want my scholarship to go in that direction and never gave the talk.

In many ways, the subject of that essay, which is central to this book, comes from conversations with Anne-Christine Habbard. One day in early 1991, she read me Kant’s “What is enlightenment?” out loud while I was in the bathtub. As with so many preoccupations in my intellectual history, the conversations I had with Christine cored central ideas in my mind, or even soul. After all, my dissertation at Chicago—Conscience and Humanity—was in many ways an attempt to conceptualize what I’d learned from her, and perhaps to hold on to a different experience of philosophy than what I suffered at Chicago.

“I carried my teeth in my heart” is a modified line from a poem I wrote in Nate Pritts’ seminar that was subsequently published in a triptych for H_ngm_n #12, 2010. The poem is called “Ethos,” and a different part is a longer version of “I can be philosophical . . .”

The earliest material of the entire poem series published here is from 1989, a fragment of an unpublished poem written in my dorm room at Yale College. There is a substantially reworked fragment of “A Night Tale,” The Yale Literary Magazine, Fall 1990, and the

“We are a storm in wondrous hunger” first appeared as a blog called 365 Earth Thoughts between 2009 and 2010. I explain further its relationship to The Ecological Life in aphorism 364. The many people who commented on the process as it unfolded—in line with one of the rules of the askesis—are cited properly in the bibliography and in-text cited in the actual study. As I’ve mentioned, too, Steve Vogel’s work was on my mind during the revision, as was Andrée Boisselle’s attention to indigenous experience.

There are too many people to thank for the study, which took place over a year. Mostly, I want to thank Isaiah.

“The practice of ethics” is the talk given as credited. Thanks to the Case Western Reserve University Department of Philosophy, especially Colin McLarty. It draws on a trip to the Dhaka Project, Bangladesh, by students from A.U.S. Thanks to Nour Merza, Eva Fernandes, the students and local staff of the Dhaka Project (April 2008), and to the anonymous woman in the burn ward who allowed me to take her picture.

In most cases, photos were taken by me using a variety of cameras from a SONY Cyber-shot digital camera (2006–2008) to a Blackberry Bold cell phone camera (2008–2010). At least one photo in “The ideas start in the kitchen” was taken on a Nikon FG 35mm film camera. Thanks to Amir and Isak Berbic for discussing the format of images and to Zlatan Filipovic for advice on the Cyber-shot. More recent photos were taken by me on an iPhone 5S and modified using basic Instagram filters and refinement tools.

Thanks go to those who read the first draft of the project, The Book of Becoming: John Levy Barnard, Sara Marie Blakely, Lynne Huffer, Elaine Hullihen, Dan & Sandra Scheinfeld, Alex Shakar, Arielle Zibrak, and Rachel Zucker.
For compiling many first drafts of the book to be sent to readers, I want to especially thank Renee Holland-Golphin.

My students from the Rancière seminar at Hamilton College, Spring 2014, led me to do a partial revision and to extrapolate my criticism of Plato’s Ἀκαδήμεια. Thanks to Mercy Corredor, Sean Fujimori, Jackson Graves, Grant Meglis, Chip Sinton, Jesse Voremberg, and Kim Wang. This book would not have come to take this form without our luminous and unforgettable seminar, for which I am still grateful.

Thanks go to Shannon Lee Dawdy, who encouraged me to put this book out until a publisher discovered it, and to Sarah Gridley, who co-led a seminar-across-two-seminars-in-correspondence called *The Literary Mind: a Challenge to Philosophy* (mine) and *Poetry as Philosophy* (hers).

For reading the penultimate draft of this project, I wish to thank Esther Ann Bendik, Kaitlyn Marie Conners, Ryan Johnson—who also deserves thanks for recommending Punctum to me—Sean Martin, Susan Neiman, and Amy Seymour. For reading the last draft, I wish to thank Andrée Boisselle, whose understanding of decolonization taught me something. For weighing in on titles at the eleventh hour, I want to thank a whole bunch of folks.

Thanks to James R. McSweeney and to Colleen M. Coakley for helping me understand some of the central relationships behind this book. The same goes to Stephen M. Rich, Mattuck Meachum, and Mark Pedretti.

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The publishing house

Punctum did a bang up job. It is the kind of publishing platform and collective we need now. I am proud to have published with them and urge established scholars to join its babbling up. Thanks go to Chris Piuma for constituting this book in print and for his patience with my process; Arthur and Jules Russell for Shaker Square Farmer’s Market title talk; and Eileen Joy for walking the talk. Again: theirs is the kind of publishing philosophy we need in the world now.

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The dedication

Solar Calendar began to come together during a divorce. But as I compiled, rewrote, and integrated this book, seeing it grow alongside me, I became aware of how much of it is indebted to my time in Rouen, France as a Rotary exchange student in 1988–89, befriending, reading and philosophizing outside the classroom. To the entire Lacronique family — thank you for welcoming me into Paris. Malka Espaignet, wherever you are, thank you for being a teacher who saw and believed in my possibility. On n’est pas sérieux quand on a dix-sept ans, et qu’on a des til-leuls verts sur la promenade.