From Modern Roots to Postmodern Rhizomes

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It has been commonplace to maintain of the phenomenon that occurred during classical times, the change from relying on myth to trusting in reason: (1) that the emergence of philosophy from myth was marked by an abrupt discontinuity; (2) that mythical thinking was left behind once philosophy was invented or discovered; and (3) that the ancient Greeks were the agents of this miracle. This paper suggests that the so-called "Greek miracle" was, in fact, a miracle *manqué* and, more importantly, that close examination of this failed miracle offers valuable insight into the philosophical crisis facing the world today.

Part I of this paper examines philosophy's claim to have established an order of explanation and justification different from that of myth. I hope to show that Greek mythology's preference for genealogical explanation was based on an unacknowledged assumption that philosophy did not reject: what I call the Myth of the Root, the belief that genealogy explains *only because and when* it terminates in a supernatural source, that is, only when an explanation (the temporal sequence, in this case) is grounded – rooted – in something supernatural. Philosophical explanation, beginning with Anaximander, Socrates, and Plato, replaced only the "form" of explanation: from listing a series of "begats" to stating the *explanandum's* essential definition. Modernity then added to the concept of explanation the principle of deducibility from general laws and initial conditions, but continued to share with mythic thought and earlier philosophy the belief in the Myth of the Root: philosophical explanations explain only because they can be logically traced to first principles, which in turn explain because they ground phenomena in the nonphenomenal. As such philosophy did not discard the myth restricting ultimate explanatory power to the root that "hits pay dirt" in the divine.

My second claim is the following: Once foundationalism is aban-

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doned, postmodernists – whether John Barth, Jorge Luis Borges, or Michel Foucault and his genealogies – rethink the role of narrative, of the storyteller. They rethink, that is, the role time and context play in both *explananda* and *explanantia*. In announcing that foundationalist philosophy is dead and thereby rejecting the history of philosophy, from Plato through Modernity, the Nietzsches, Foucaults and Rortys of today are in fact "returning philosophy to its main subject" (Barth, 1984, p. 73) and thus continuing – not ending – the enterprise begun almost thirty centuries ago.

The story I am about to tell could be told differently: one version would focus on the inherently *intentional* (in the philosophical sense of the word) character of the mythical world; go on to chronicle the manner in which rational thought claimed to be able to provide a thorough extensional and reductionist explanation of reality (which was conceived, accordingly, to be real only on one ontological level); and end with postmodernism's return to an enlarged notion of intentionality – and its concomitant multi-layered reality (Margolis, 1989, p. 91).

The story I'll be telling here, on the other hand, is the story of what philosophy, despite protestations to the contrary, retained of mythology. My story is about how the Greek "philosophers" and their heirs retained the assumptions underlying the genealogical explanations characteristic of their myths. The moral to be drawn is that the Greeks should have discarded what they kept and kept what they discarded. Today's postmodernism has taken up precisely that job. Admittedly, my account requires some selective memory: I concentrate on Plato and the authors of Modernity (Descartes and his followers) while ignoring Aristotle and the Medievals who, one could object, allowed that matters pertaining to, for example, ethics, law, and medicine, were irreducibly contextual and historical, and thus had to be explained or justified *pros ton kairon*, as the occasion requires. But neither Plato nor Descartes would have any of that: explanation is atemporal and acontextual, or it is not explanation at all. Since Plato and the Moderns won the day to the extent that a turn away from foundationalism is often said to be the end of Philosophy *tout court*, I am, I believe, justified in my selectivity.

I

What concept of explanation is found in Greek mythology?

Herodotus says of the Egyptians that "they didn't know until

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recently the origins of things." According to Dale Sinow (1989) "the intellectual tendency of the Greeks was always to look back." In the vocabulary of myth, authority and legitimacy are established temporally and historically. Explanation and justification, that is, are genetic or genealogical: to legitimate *is* to trace the *explanandum's* temporal connection to an origin, to discover and uncover (*aletheia*) one's roots, in the sense of ancestral origin. It is because they do so that, for example, the ubiquitous genealogies found in classical Greek literature function as explanations.

Four specific modes of explanation – all of which are fundamentally genetic – can be discerned in Greek myths: 1) a hero's authority is typically established by tracing his ancestry to a god; 2) a city's legitimacy derives from some extraordinary feature of its founding; 3) cosmology *just is* theogony; 4) the authority of the epic narrator.

A Hero's Authority

The aristocratic view of predemocratic times relied on pedigree and genealogy to explain and justify individuals and circumstances. *Iliad* 3 speaks of older men as the source of *nomos*; ancestors "were far greater than we are" *because* they are closer to the Golden Age, when things were right because gods and men mingled freely. Hesiod, in *Theogony* (p. 53–71), notes that through the Muse(s) the singers reconnect the audience with the past, allowing the audience to partake in divinity by listening to the chorus in the person of the poet. According to Kirk, "the first information one needed to know about anyone was who his ancestors were and whether he was ultimately descended from a god" (Kirk, 1974). In contrast to the democratic man, whose virtue consisted in skilled discourse, the mythic hero's claim to authority was based on "elements of the extraordinary linked to his birth and his childhood" (Morford & Lenardon 1985, p. 295). In *Iliad* 2:558.40, for example, Ajax justifies the role of the Achaians by saying that it is "we who can show of all the longest lineage." One finds echoes of this even in the mythic conception of weapons: the truly lethal and effective weapon is so because of its origin: Achilles' shield, Polyphemus's wooden stake, and so forth.

Cosmology as Theogony

It is sometimes said that the Greeks did not really provide an explanation of the cosmos. Hesiod's *Theogony* is, for the most part, genealogy. To the request "tell me how first gods, earth, rivers, –

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the boundless sea . . . the shining stars, and the wide heavens above came into being," (Th, 107–110) Hesiod answers with a series of begats. "First Chaos came to be," (116) from which was born, among others, Gaia (the Earth), who in turn, with one of her offspring, Uranus, begets the Titans, the youngest of which is Cronos, whose child-eating propensities are cut off by his son, Aeus, and so on. Zeus, Hesiod remarks, having overpowered his father "ordained/ to the immortals all rights that are theirs,/ and defined their stations" (p. 885–886). In so doing Zeus establishes the universe as a *cosmos* subject to the rule of natural law. The point here, of course, is that the cosmos, the phenomenal world to be explained, can be understood by tracing its origin to a founding by a divine source, Zeus. So, too, with the Prometheus story, to whom mankind owes – in addition to fire, sense, and mind – numbers, domesticated animals, seamen's vessels, medicine, and foresight. Each of these phenomena is explained by linking it to a supernatural source. The source is explanatory precisely because of its divine character, and the epic tale explains because of its ability to trace a contemporary phenomenon to its originary root.

Justification of Temporal Authority

Bronislav Malinowski (1955) was among the first to argue for a close connection between mythology and social organization. He speaks of the importance of "charter" myths, whose purpose is to explain the origin of social practices, and to establish the society's ruling authority."* Charter myths are common in Greek mythology. Their formula, for the most part, consists in a city's legendary founder doing to some monster what it has been doing to the hapless residents of the area. Cadmus kills the serpent and the armed men who sprang from the serpent's teeth; Pelops dispatches the suitor-slaying Oenomaus; Perseus (who founds Mycenae) slays the Gorgon; Theseus rids Attica of the Brigands Peripheter, Sciron, Cercyon, Anteus, Procrustes, the robber Sinis, a man-eating sow, and the bull of Marathon, not to mention the Amazons, the Centaurs, and the Monotaur.

The specific local identification of gods who give birth to humans was equally important for the ancient Greeks, and for precisely the same genealogical reason. Athens belongs to Athena, Argos belongs to Hera, and Hephaistos is associated with Lemnos,

*This persists, e.g., Hannah Arendt's identification of political authority with revolutionary founding.

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as is Apollo with Delos and Delphi, Aphrodite with Cythera and Cyprus, and so forth. The founder's extraordinary accomplishments and, derivatively, the authority of the city are thus justified by their divine ancestry.

So to justify *just is* to show that, because a hero's or a city's divine roots can be firmly established, its authority is thereby firm and entrenched. The quote from Ajax mentioned above ends with the clause "and who alone among Greeks have never changed our dwelling." The noble family of Thebes traced its ancestry to Cadmus and Harmonia, daughter of Ares and Aphrodite. (The citadel of Thebes was called the Cadmeia, in memory of the city's legendary founder.) Both Agamemnon and Clytemnesetra of the House of Atreus were descended from Zeus (the former via Pelops, the latter out of Leda). Theseus, spokesman for Athenian democracy, traced his lineage to Erichthonius, the autochthonous founder of that city. Even the Greek defeat of the Trojans might appear a foregone conclusion considering that the latter's ancestry wasn't as illustrious; it had no gods.

In each of these cases we see, then, that "first" also means "divine." This implicit identification of "earlier" with "closer to the divine" is what, for the ancient Greeks, really makes genealogies explanatory. Temporal regression is identical with ontological ascendancy, as evidenced by the Ages of Man: Golden, Heroic, Bronze, and Iron. Humans today are "less" than their ancestors of the Golden Age, who in turn were less than their Divine ancestors.

Authority of the Storyteller

Not only does myth explain and justify events genealogically; the telling of the tale is itself justified in the same fashion. Divine inspiration authorizes the bard's song. Hesiod begins his *Works and Days* by intoning, "Muses, who from Pieria give glory through singing/ come to me . . . " The *Iliad* invokes: "Sing, Goddess . . . "

And yet there is a curious tension here: although the singer claims to be inspired by the gods, it is clear that he alters the epic tale with each telling to suit the particular audience. That the story can be significantly re-created – not just represented – with each telling makes the bard not just an uninvolved reporter of the events but their co-creator. *Mythic society thus lived in a participatory universe.* The implicit recognition of the contextual and temporal features of meaning – and therefore of explanation and justification – which a participatory world implies is lost with the rise of philosophy.

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II

Thales is usually classified as the First Philosopher because of his attempt to provide a naturalistic answer to cosmological questions: eschewing all appeals to the Greek pantheon, he suggested that the fundamental constituent of reality is water. But Thales is perhaps not as revolutionary as he first appears: his *explanans*, water, explains by identifying the source, the origin, from which everything else comes. Admittedly, the origin is now natural, not a god, but the manner of explanation remains the same, genetic. No change in explanatory form has taken place in this supposed transition from mythology to philosophy: to explain is (still) to trace something temporally to its root.

With Anaximander "human reason asserted itself," Guthrie claims (Guthrie, 1960, p. 29). The fundamental principle of the universe, Anaximander argues, is neither a personalized pantheon nor another element but the *apeiron*, the "boundless," an undifferentiated mass out of which the definite characteristics by which we know the universe are condensed or rarefied. In a mythic economy, Okeanus, Zeus, and Agamemnon are on the same logical footing: *explanandum* and *explanans* do not differ logically, only temporally. By postulating a characterless *apeiron*, Anaximander is usually thought to have been the first to distinguish between the phenomenal cosmos itself, the *explanandum*, and the explanatory principle, the *arche*, which had been used in the past (e.g., by Hesiod) "with an exclusive temporal meaning" (Jaeger, 1967, p. 14). The explanatory principle now is logically distinct; henceforth inquiry into the explanatory principle governing the *apeiron* constitutes a mistake of category. To explain is to trace something logically to its root.

But according to Guthrie, Anaximander's *apeiron* was an indeterminate mass "in which no distinctions of separate component parts, or elements could be observed." (Guthrie, 1960, p. 27). From this amorphous stuff opposites separate out: hot and cold, wet and dry, and so forth, and from these, in turn, develops the furniture of the world. In the Boundless "the antagonistic elements or [the] properties [of the phenomenal world] were not yet distinct, though it contained them as it were in a latent or potential form" (ibid.).

Anaximander's departure from mythology is thus only relative. It is true that unlike Hesiod's Chaos, which despite its role as primordial *explanans* was itself said to have a beginning, Anaximander's Boundless has no beginning; it is the eternal, unchanging root source from which the phenomenal world

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emerges. Nevertheless, according to Guthrie, Anaximander still thinks of the *apeiron* as stuff which, although indefinite, undifferentiated and characterless, is a "first state of matter" from which subsequent states emerge. Aristotle claims that even though it may have had no beginning (and to that extent constitutes a conceptual innovation), the *apeiron* is itself "the beginning of everything else" (Phys iii. 4, 203b6). As the first state of matter, Anaximander's Boundless still functions, I maintain, as the originary non-phenomenal (because characterless and therefore neither tangible nor perceptible) source out of which the differentiated characteristics of the phenomenal world emerge. Explanation in Anaximander is still genealogical, but now the explanatory source is indefinite, indeterminate, unchanging, and itself without beginning, eternal. To explain by tracing logically to its root reduces to tracing temporally to an eternal, unchanging, undifferentiated root.

Philosophy, in other words, kept the Myth of the Root – explanation explains because the root, the explanation, whether temporal or logical, makes contact with the now atemporal and non-phenomenal Origin (later understood as the divine). It is precisely because it is eternal and undifferentiated that the Source, the *arche* is explanatory and on a different logical plane. What philosophy discarded was the role of embeddedness in time and context in explanation. Both philosophers and scientists have tended to claim to be detached observers of reality, whose essential features are acontextual and atemporal – and unchanged by the observation.

For Anaximander, then, as for Hesiod and Homer, the manner of explaining phenomena remains genealogical. To explain x is to ground x. (It is noteworthy that that verb can equivocally signify either the temporal origin of something or its logical basis.) Only now the source is unchanging and eternal. *The temporal and contextual is to be explained by (genealogically) tracing it back until it can be rooted in the atemporal and acontextual.*

Socrates/Plato

In the *Symposium* Socrates chides the previous speakers for not providing a definition of Love. What had they done instead? Both Phaedros and Agathon are explicitly genealogical (the former claims Love is the oldest of the gods, the latter that he is the youngest); Pausanias speaks of the parents Heavenly Love and Common Love; and Aristophanes, notably, even provides the audience with the tale of the myth of the three sexes, a genetic

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explanation if ever there was one. What makes Socrates a philosopher is precisely his insistence that to provide an explanation is to provide an essential *definition*, not to trace the subject matter's genealogy. In so doing Socrates apparently changed the concept of explanation implicit in ancient Greek thought: explicit genealogies are henceforth disqualified from being explanatory.

As an aside we should note that even the explicitly temporal genealogies contained in mythic explanations did not die quickly. Even today (cf. the order of definitions in the Oxford English Dictionary), definitions often refer to etymology in justifying priorities of meaning. Related to that is the common tendency to favor "argument by etymology." (Whatever one may think of his basic points, David Bohm is a telling case [Bohm, 1980].) The most fundamental (primary) meaning of a word can be extracted (note the word!) from the linguistic root out of which it was formed. A concept's basic cognitive content is found in its sources. To explain is to temporally trace linguistic usage. Here too, definition collapses into (linguistic) genealogy. And insidiously: because there is a subtle equivocation between the word that is doing the explaining and what the word is about.

For Plato an explanation consists in offering a linguistic description that "reflects" the Form in which the *explanandum* partakes. Plato's Forms have not only an explanatory function; they have ontological and epistemological roles as well. Understanding and knowledge, according to Plato, exist in proportion to our "grasp" of the Forms. There is only conjecture and belief – right opinion, at best – where this grasp is lacking. The Forms explain by serving as the ontological, as well as explanatory and logical, ground of whatever derivative ontological reality the phenomenal world possesses: the relationship between the sensible and the intelligible domains is such that the former "partakes in" the latter. Essential definitions explain because they make contact with the ontologically primary. To explain is to trace something ontologically to its root.

What changed from mythology to Socrates/Plato? In the case of the earlier poets, genealogy justifies doubly. (1) Since they were inspired and taught to sing by the Muses, their songs and tales had authority because of their origin: divine inspiration. "What I'm singing is so because the Muse speaks through me." The Muse allows the storyteller to tinker with the story, to be co-creator in a participatory universe. In addition, (2) the content of the tales itself is given a genealogical explanation. The reason the Achaians win is

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that they "can show of all the longest lineage." With Thales the first type of genealogical justification is discarded: divine inspiration of the bard no longer serves as justification for the explanation he offers. Anaximander thinks he drops time in favor of logic, but he doesn't quite. From Plato onward, explanations must contact the ontologically primary.

The form that explanation takes also changes in the transition from mythology to philosophy: from a narrative sequence of events to definition. Anaximander's genealogical tracing of phenomena to the *apeiron*, as well as mythic "begats," are eliminated; only the former's emphasis on an eternal, unchanging source or root remains. There was a high price to pay for this change. Unlike symbolic logic or essential definitions, narrative form is unavoidably temporal and contextual. For Plato, however, the temporal and contextual *explanandum* is to that extent "unreal": the only thing that counts as an explanation is a linguistic definition that identifies the temporal and contextual *explanandum's* atemporal and acontextual Form.

By transferring to language and definition the crude explanatory power that genealogies once had, Socrates lays the foundations for future philosophical difficulties by failing to recognize the presupposition on which his call for definition is based: the assumption that linguistic definitions must be capable of being transparent to the Real. Having discarded the belief in divine inspiration, but having kept the belief that to explain is to root the natural in its origin in the supernatural, the phenomenal in the non-phenomenal, philosophy had to assume that language and reason can ultimately be grounded in the real.

We have here once again the Myth of the Root (roots nourish only insofar as they are grounded in a source of nutrients other than themselves but with which they are commensurable), and in this regard Socrates is no different from his predecessors. Divine inspiration having been discarded, ever since Socrates and Plato the goal of philosophy has been to find *the one* correct methodology that could penetrate below the surface of illusory appearances and, by hitting pay dirt in the Real, serve as an accurate source of Truth. Secondary roots (praxis, cultures, traditions, etc.) were considered just that, secondary. They ultimately could and would be explanatorily reconciled in the main taproot. All seemingly discordant codes, traditions, beliefs, practices, and so forth, would converge in the master "dictionary" that would provide *the* correct meaning

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and explanation of the phenomenal. Giving up context, while continuing to rely on the explanatory power of the divine (i.e., eternal), non-phenomenal ground, paves the way for the rise of Modernity twenty centuries later. So let us skip a few hundred years to the seventeenth century.

With the victory by the Cartesian moderns over the Aristotelian medievals, who insisted that universal, foundational principles cannot be applied to, for example, practical matters such as law, medicine, and ethics (Toulmin, 1990), philosophy definitively models itself after the tuberous root: to explain was to find *the one* correct taproot (philosophical method, code of ethics, religious practice) that could provide an accurate probe of Truth – which was unseen yet served as the ground on which explanation was rooted.

Adherents to this model claim to *know* reality by having discovered a *final vocabulary* in terms of which all descriptions can be formulated and reconciled. The plant's root and the ground on which it feeds are, in this model, conceptually and factually distinguished: signifier is distinct from signified; descriptions, formulations (language) merely capture a univocal reality that is already there. The implicit assumption here, once again, is that reason can somehow make direct contact with that reality, which the perfect language will faithfully map. In order to do so successfully, adequation between the map (language, philosophical method) and the terrain must be presupposed. Hence the correspondence theory of truth! In Kuhnian language, there must be commensurability between root tip (explanation) and source of nutrients (ontology), for the plant whose root is functionally deficient dies.

But (somewhat stretching the metaphor), although there is a presumed adequation between root tip and nutrition, this is not obvious to the modern botanist. Because a plant's nutrition originates underground and out of sight, the plant task of the expert – read the hermeneut – is to discover the mechanism. Signs, in other words, are not a transparent medium, according to this view. The thinker's task is to discover and describe the process correctly (and there is only one correct description; hence all the efforts expended on taxonomy!). Correct taxonomy captures nature's natural kinds. Common nouns capture ontological essences – Platonic Forms. This brings to mind all the discussion in Foucault's *The Order of Things* (1970) on the changes that took place in the practice of hermeneutics: during the medieval period signs were taken to be transparent to the signified. Coincidental with the rise of anatomy

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and botany, which looked to answers *inside* the organism (and thus hidden from view), the modern period, on the other hand, considers that signs conceal their (true) meaning!

The philosophers of Modernity, from Descartes to Hume, were convinced that whether in innate ideas and deductive logic on the one hand, or sense impressions and their interrelationships on the other, philosophy was well on its way toward capturing the language of nature and had learned the discipline necessary to translate that language perfectly. Philosophy thus sought to be "the mirror of nature" (Rorty, 1977); its task was to continuously polish the neutral meta-language that would, when fully polished, faithfully record the transactions of nature. Assuming the transparency of its method and language to the Real, modern philosophy shared with pre-Socratic philosophers the belief that nature was a "work": a locus of determinable, determinate meaning somewhat like a Newtonian particle or a Platonic form. Since congruence was assumed to exist between code and medium, on the one hand, and reality on the other (explanations mirrored the real), Knowledge and Truth were possible. The products of philosophy were, therefore, also works, independent of, but making contact with, the reality they described but did not alter (Toulmin, 1990).

III

What happened to this comforting picture? In the eighteenth century Kant exploded the belief that Language and thought can be fully transparent to the Real. In the nineteenth, Darwin revealed the inadequacy of an atemporal, acontextual frame to account for, for example, biological and social phenomena. We discovered, in other words, that, unfortunately, "the world does not speak. Only we do" (Rorty, 1989, p. 6). Or to put it more technically: Theory is always underdetermined by data (Kuhn 1962, Quine, 1970). That is, there is always more than one theoretical framework compatible with a given set of data. And worse: the data themselves are always "theory laden," never, as scientific method claimed clear and "theory free" (Popper, 1958).

But the belief in the possibility of a description that could make contact with reality did not die easily: in the early twentieth century, Anglo-American logical positivism attempted, once again, to recover an adamic language by postulating "atomic facts" whose logical structure mirrored reality. But a theory about the relation-

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ship between language and the world is reflexively paradoxical. The limits it sets *for* language are transgressed by describing them *in* language. Instead of embracing the self-referential character of linguistic theory, Wittgenstein counsels that once it is recognized we must "climb up beyond [it]" (Wittgenstein, 1961, 6.54.) and rest content with what can be shown but not said. But logical positivism's foundational criterion of meaning, the verifiability criterion, when applied to itself similarly denies itself. This unacceptably paradoxical consequence brought on by applying the foundational concepts *of* the theory *to* the theory itself dooms logical positivism.

When language is no longer believed to be the transparent glass which mimetically records an external reality without altering it, this reality loses its status as a univocal "work" just waiting to be read. Pure presence eludes us. There are no pure facts, no pure signifieds independent of their signifiers (Lawson, 1985). All languages are languages-in-use, context-sensitive and therefore culture-constituted. Wittgenstein's earlier *Tractatus* (1961) gives way to the later *Philosophical Explanations* (1969). Once philosophy recognized that its project as mirror of nature had become exhausted, language, which since the time of Socrates had served as the silent medium of philosophy, suddenly became its subject-matter.

The common temptation at this point is simple to deny the commensurability among language games and "to privilege some one among the many languages in which we habitually describe the world or ourselves" (Rorty). We have seen this happen with contemporary culture's near idolatry of science and technology. A culture that privileges the language of science relegates the humanities and the social sciences to the realm of subjectivity and epiphenomena. But even this attempt to keep the myth of the root alive turns out to be only a stop-gap measure. Quantum physics itself recognizes that the observer cannot be neatly separated from the observation. And, as the wave/particle duality conundrum points out, science itself can produce irreducibly incommensurable descriptions.

Some, such as C.P. Snow, were willing to grant a measure of autonomy and legitimacy to religion, the humanities, and the social sciences, and thus divided the world into various language games or cultures. The vocabulary of each culture, one could then argue, captures (or should capture) the essential or intrinsic nature of that domain. Hence, for example, the claim that whereas ethical norms cannot be derived from facts ("you can't logically derive an

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'ought' from an 'is'"), ethics has its own methodology (intuitionism, etc.) as does metaphysics (phenomenology) and science (experimentation) for making contact with and discovering the truth of that reality. We confront a fascicular world.

But in the end the faith in fascicular roots shares with the belief in tuberous ones the conviction that roots are ultimately "grounded." Both such theories insist that there is a ready-made world out there waiting to be discovered. The only difference is that those believers of the tuberous persuasion believe that reality is univocal, whereas those with fascicular tendencies claim it is multiple.

Postmodernism – beginning more or less with Nietzsche – finally dared to ask, What if there is no ground at all? What if the tips of roots, instead of burrowing in the ground, just intertwine with other roots? What if the world we inhabit is a world of rhizomes, of adventitious roots? Look up a word in a dictionary; it's defined in terms of – other words. The most elementary units of signification are not words but sentences, which in turn derive their meaning from their functional embedding in a (Wittgensteinian) language game. And there are as many language games as there are cultures. Because both language and the self are human creations, not discoveries, they exhibit an irradicable contingency. There can be no final vocabulary because each language must be decoded according to the unique (cultural and natural) context in which it is embedded. Within language games phenomena can be explained, but one cannot explain across language games.

This realization forced us to conclude, therefore, that there is no one taproot, no final and absolutely transparent vocabulary commensurate with a univocal reality. The myth of the root collapsed as we suddenly realized that there is no way to ground the root in an objective, univocal reality. "The very idea that the world or the self has an intrinsic nature . . . is a remnant of the idea that the world is a divine creation . . . To drop the idea of languages as representations . . . would be to de-divinize the world" (Rorty, 1989, p. 21). But we are horrified by the thought of a deracinated epistemology.

Where *does* language make contact with the outside world? The conviction that it must if any significance or truth value is to be preserved is, once again, evidence that the myth of the root is at work. Where *does language* contact reality? Many postmodernists' answer: nowhere. To have a meaning is only to have a place in a network, a system of language: Derrida's "il n y a pas de hors texte."

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This solipsistic conclusion is a mistake, I believe. Acknowledging that science, philosophy, and literature are embedded in culture and time does require that we accept that we are embedded in a universe not of *works*, but of interpretive *texts* (Barthes, 1977). A text is not a static thing but a hermeneutical (and therefore a temporal and contextual) process *of* a temporal, contextual process. Both *explananda* ad *explanantia* are embedded in time and culture.

Adventitious roots draw their nourishment, not from nothing, as some postmodernists seem to suggest, but from their environment. Explanation doesn't need to be grounded in ontology: it needs to be embedded in time and context. Philosophy needs to take seriously Aristotle's warning in *Nicomachean Ethics* (Book I 1094b12): "Our discussion will be adequate if it has as much clearness as the subject matter admits of, for precision is not to be sought for alike in all discussions." Ironically, time and context were precisely those aspects that were banned from cognition and explanation in the move from mythic narrative to philosophical reason. Explanation doesn't take place by means of a more or less accurate *description* of a universal, ready-made, univocal reality in a language more or less adequated to that reality. Reality, far from being there, ready-made and awaiting discovery by language, is truly constituted, co-created by us in language. Quantum physics and postmodern philosophy are simultaneously rediscovering what the mythic storyteller knew: that we live in a participatory universe.

In giving up the narrative form of myth, the Western world forgot that there can be no final, necessary vocabulary because each language will be decoded according to the unique (cultural and natural) context in which it is embedded. It also forgot that language and culture – and philosophical explanations – are themselves essentially historical, temporal phenomena. It took the very discipline whose awesome successes contributed to that forgetfulness to awaken *us* from our dogmatic slumbers. Within science itself, not just quantum physics but, more recently, the discoveries of complex dynamical systems (G. Nicolis & I. Prigogine, 1989), self-organizing dissipative structures (I. Prigogine & I. Stengers, 1977), and the chaotic structures that emerge out of non-linear, recursive iterations (Bleick, 1987) have led to the recognition that irreversibly temporal and contextual embeddedness is a fundamental feature of nature. Because of the theory of evolution, and the discovery of far-from-equilibrium, non-linear thermodynamics, time and context can no longer be ignored.

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Philosophical explanation either hits pay dirt in reality or should be consigned to the flames. The perplexity that the failures of the "linguistic turn" left in their wake parallels the reaction within science to the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum physics: many philosophers simply concluded that philosophy is inevitably imprisoned in a sort of linguistic idealism, and so the end of philosophy is at hand. Rorty claims that it would be difficult to imagine calling anything philosophy that was not attempting to be foundational (Rorty, 1980). But John Barth knows better: "An artist doesn't merely exemplify an ultimacy; he employs it" (1984, p. 68.). Philosophy can and must employ its deracinated condition and by so doing transcend "what had appeared to be [its] refutation" (ibid., p. 71).

Philosophy embarks on that path first of all by telling the tale of philosophy. And in fact, many of the works of Nietzsche, Foucault, and Derrida (and, ironically, Rorty himself), that are critical histories of previous philosophers, do just that. Telling a tale within a tale indirectly refers to the frame story *as* itself; embeddedness thus becomes self-reference, which explodes the frame by making the frame the content of a new tale. The subject of the tale within a tale is the dynamic, reflexive relationship between the recording instrument (philosophy) and the outside world. Whereas *works* possess the properties of a substance, a *text* "is experienced only in an activity, a production" (Barthes, 1977, p. 75.).

By debunking the myth of the Root we are left not with relativism, or subjectivism, or solipsism, but with an expanded understanding of both reason and reality as socially and historically embedded. The only form of explanation adequate to that understanding is some form of hermeneutics. From this perspective, semantic components derive their meaning from the context in which they are embedded, which in turn is created by the components (Gadamer, 1985; MacIntyre, 1988). Meaning, which is never univocal or ultimately decidable, is found not at either the level of type or of token but in the irreversibly dynamic, changing relationships between levels of description.

In other words, when, as a result of Kuhn's Darwinism, philosophy turns self-consciously historical and evolutionary, philosophy becomes the (hermeneutical) story of a sequence of stories, to be judged by which hermeneutical account tells the "best story about the evolution of the story of philosophy." "Best" can no longer be judged in terms of "predictability," "deducibility," and so forth.

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"Best" must now mean something closer to "rings true" or "adequated" – with all the contextual, historical implications those concepts carry.

And so philosophy's newly rediscovered main subject is the Heraclitean, messily reflexive, non-linearity of process. Philosophy is just now learning to deemphasize the Platonic *eidos* and rediscover the dialogue in the *Dialogues*. Philosophy of science, too, is beginning to take context seriously (Fuller, 1989), as is philosophy of law (Dworkin, 1986). Unlike the foundational paradigm, but like mythology, this perspective takes not only context but also time and causality – and thus creativity and emergence – seriously.

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