

§ 2. *The necessity of a radical new beginning
of philosophy.*

Thus far, Descartes. We ask now: It is really worth while to hunt for an eternal significance belonging to these thoughts or to some clarifiable core that may be contained in them? Are they still such thoughts as might infuse our times with living forces?

Doubt is raised at least by the fact that the positive sciences, which were to experience an absolutely rational grounding by these meditations, have paid so little attention to them. To be sure, the positive sciences, after three centuries of brilliant development, are now feeling themselves greatly hampered by obscurities in their foundations, in their fundamental concepts and methods. But, when they attempt to give those foundations a
 <46> new form, they do not think / of turning back to resume Cartesian meditations. On the other hand, great weight must be given to the consideration that, in philosophy, the *Meditations* were epoch-making in a quite unique sense, and precisely because of their going back to the pure *ego cogito*. Descartes, in fact, inaugurates an entirely new kind of philosophy. Changing its total style, philosophy takes a radical turn: from naïve Objectivism to transcendental subjectivism — which, with its ever new but always inadequate attempts, seems to be striving toward some necessary final form, wherein its true sense and that of the radical transmutation itself might become disclosed. Should not this continuing tendency imply an eternal significance and, for us, a task imposed by history itself, a great task in which we are all summoned to collaborate?

The splintering of present-day philosophy, with its perplexed activity, sets us thinking. When we attempt to view western philosophy as a unitary science, its decline since the middle of the nineteenth century is unmistakable. The comparative unity that it had in previous ages, in its aims, its problems and methods, has been lost. When, with the beginning of modern times, religious belief was becoming more and more externalized as a lifeless convention, men of intellect were lifted by a new belief, their great belief in an autonomous philosophy and science. The whole of human culture was to be guided and illuminated by