Continental philosophy in recent times has tended to become highly cerebral — and often esoteric in the sense of being addressed and accessible only to a narrow circle of fellow academics. Only rarely do recent works in that genre make an effort, or are able, to appeal to a broader audience, including practitioners in the "human sciences". A prominent exception to this general tendency is Calvin Schrag whose writings combine philosophical depth with social political relevance and thus manage to transgress the customary boundaries separating philosophy from the social sciences, from literature, and from the public at large. Articulated in lucid style and free from academic jargon (especially the jargon often marring the Continental genre), Schrag's writings yet refuse to compromise philosophical integrity by courting the favor of popular fashions or consumer tastes. To this extent his work makes a serious contribution to a reflectively sustained public discourse and a communicative praxis linking (or rather reconnecting) philosophical thinking with the concerns of the public sphere. Schrag's commitment to such a linkage is not of novel origin, but can be traced through his major publications during the past two decades, including *Radical Reflection and the Origin of the Human Sciences* (1980) and *Communicative Praxis and the Space of Subjectivity* (1986). More recently, Schrag has come forward with a new book which provides ample food for thought to philosophers, human scientists, and concerned citizens alike: *The Resources of Rationality: A Response to the Postmodern Challenge* (1992). My comments here will be mainly restricted to this book.

Schrag's new study offers a penetrating and far-ranging exploration of our refracted intellectual landscape: the terrain marked by the intersections of metaphysics and postmetaphysics, of modernity and postmodernity, of representation and deconstruction. Thus, Schrag inserts himself squarely into the "thick" of contemporary philosophical and public debates. Moreover, as the title indicates, the book is designed as a "response" to present-day dilemmas, thus illustrating and testifying plainly to the author's commitment to
philosophical communication and responsiveness. Still, one cannot ignore another feature announced in the book’s title: its intended function as a rejoinder. Schrag does not associate or identify himself with postmodern initiatives (whatever their specific content may be), but prefers to situate himself on the outside or across the border of postmodern contention – in a move which is bound to exert pressure on the book’s argumentative strategy. Yet – one needs to recognize immediately – the book’s strategy is not one of bland dismissal or disdain. Schrag is willing to treat postmodernism as a serious challenge to ingrained habits of thinking, and not simply as an aberration or a leap into the abyss of nonsense. In fact, postmodernism is treated in the book as an interlocutor worthy of a sustained response.

In seeking to counter or ward off postmodern provocations, Schrag appeals to the “resources of rationality” – which turn out to be resources of a special and unusual kind. As invoked by Schrag, rationality does not refer to the classical-Aristotelian legacy of “logos”; nor does it involve a Cartesian cogito or a Kantian-style transcendental consciousness. Instead, the book’s aim is to marshal the potential of a “transversal logos” or “transversal rationality”, a logos which stands ajar to, or relates transversally or diagonally, to both the metaphysical logos-tradition and the “anti-logos” of postmodern modes of deconstruction. Whereas the logos-tradition sought to ground reason vertically in a substantive metaphysics, postmodernism is said to dismiss foundations in favor of an horizontal cavalcade of signifiers. To this extent, Schrag’s intent in his book is to stake out a middle terrain between contending factions, that is, to “split the difference” between modernity and postmodernity, and also between the philosophical tradition and the postmodern break with tradition. As he writes (p. 166):

The task is to stand in a critical relation to the tradition. It is thus that our project, simplified possibly to the extreme, comprises an effort to split the difference between the vertically grounded conceptions of reason and the horizontality of the postmodern anti-logos of becoming. We split the difference by calling upon the transversal logos.

The benefits to be derived from this splitting operation, in Schrag’s presentation, are impressive in both intellectual and existential-human terms; in fact, their description sometimes sounds lyrically exuberant. Here is a quote (p. 174):

Neither dissensus nor consensus, neither agonistics nor an unbroken communitarianism, provide the proper ends of human discourse and action. The transversal time-space of our communicative practices yields an interplay of dissent and consent, occasioning shared understanding and cooperative endeavors, but only against the background of a recognition of the integrity of the thought and action of the other.