The Enlightenment and the Intellectual Foundations of Modern Culture

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Preface

Stunned by the attacks on September 11, 2001, I wondered if there was any purpose in writing about the Enlightenment at a time that so brutally seemed to announce the end of its values and ideals. It later dawned on me that the events of that fatal day might not be unrelated to the subject of my reflections. I do not mean, of course, that Islamic culture is or was "unenlightened." It flourished well before that of the Christian West and for centuries surpassed it. But Islam never had to go through a prolonged period of critically examining the validity of its spiritual vision, as the West did during the eighteenth century. The doubt and anxiety that accompanied the West's reassessment of its past have marked the rest of the modern age. Since then Europe has known its own horrors, causing us to question the adequacy of the Enlightenment's answers as well as the effectiveness of its solutions. But it permanently inured us against one thing: the willingness to accept authority uncritically. The particular merit of the Enlightenment did not consist, as some have claimed, in abolishing moral or religious absolutes. Indeed, the loss of moral absolutes, whether caused by the Enlightenment or not, lies at the root of the inhumanity of the past century. But the need to question has advantageously distinguished our culture from others. Islamic culture has, of course, known its own crises, none more painful and less deserved than the loss of its status in the modern world, yet it was never forced to question its traditional worldview. The

Enlightenment was a Western phenomenon that defined the future of the West. In this book I intend to study its implications.

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Introduction

This book had its origin in the surprise I experienced many years ago when considering the fundamental change in thinking and valuing that occurred during the period stretching from the second half of the seventeenth century until the end of the eighteenth. Curious to know what the intellectual principles of modern thought were, I made a study of the beginnings of modern culture before turning to the critical epoch that forms the subject of the present book. It soon appeared that no direct causal succession links the humanism of the fifteenth century with the Enlightenment. When Max Weber described modernity as the loss of an unquestioned legitimacy of a divinely instituted order, his definition applies to the Enlightenment and the subsequent centuries, not to the previous period. We ought to avoid the mistake made by Jacob Burckhardt in *The Civilisation of the Renaissance in Italy,* and often repeated in the twentieth century, of interpreting the Renaissance as the first stage of the Enlightenment. It is true, though, that the early period introduced one fundamental characteristic of modern culture, namely, the creative role of the person. Yet that idea did not imply that the mind alone is the source of meaning and value, as Enlightenment thought began to assume. To investigate what is new in the basic concepts of this later period of modernity and to find out how it has affected our own culture has been the purpose of this study.

The Enlightenment enjoys no high regard in our time. Many consider its

thinking abstract, its feeling artificial. To its modern critics, the very term evokes form without substance, universality without particularity. They are dismayed by the claim that the Enlightenment, concluding centuries of darkness and superstition, introduced a new age of freedom and progress. The condescending attitude of the "enlightened" toward the rest of our species impresses them as arrogant. Certainly the French philosophes felt little respect for the herd they were so confidently leading to truth. They also tended to exaggerate the significance of their achievements. Baron Grimm, a friend of Diderot who issued a bulletin about cultural life in Paris, cast an ironical eye on the pretenses of his age: "Il me semble que le dix-huitième siècle a surpassé tous les autres dans les éloges qu'il s'est attribué lui-même. . . . Je suis bien éloigné d'imaginer que nous touchons un siècle de la raison."[1]

Rarely did the Enlightenment attain true greatness in the visual arts. Some painters have left us major works. Watteau, Chardin, La Tour, Tiepolo, Reynolds, and Gainesborough immediately come to mind. But the eighteenth century lacked the explosive creativity of the preceding two centuries. This holds true even more for sculpture: we remember most of the works only because of the models they portrayed. The case of literature is more complex. French, English, and German prose attained classic perfection during that period. The works of Hume, Johnson, Fielding, and Gibbon in Britain, of Voltaire, Rousseau, and Fénelon in France, and of Wieland and Lessing in the German lands continue to serve as models of elegant, precise, and powerful expression. But little memorable lyrical poetry appeared between Milton and Wordsworth. Or between Ronsard and Lamartine. Dramas were better performed than ever, particularly in England, which also produced excellent comedies. But few major tragedies were written between Racine and Schiller. Music and architecture enjoyed a glorious season. Yet some of its greatest composers — Handel, Bach, Haydn — still drew their inspiration from the spiritual impetus of an earlier age. Significantly, we refer to eighteenth-century composers as Baroque artists. The splendid architecture of the time also, by large part, continued to build on earlier foundations. In Spain, Bavaria, and Austria, the Baroque style culminated in the eighteenth century, while English and French classicism continued to be inspired by Renaissance principles.

In contrast to the often mediocre quality of its artistic achievements, the Enlightenment displays a veritable passion for ideas. The second half of the seventeenth century and the first one of the eighteenth witnessed the breakthrough of modern science and the establishment of new scientific methods. Newton changed not only our world picture but our very perspective on reality. There is hardly a field in which his influence does not appear. The historical works of Montesquieu, Voltaire, Gibbon, and Herder form the ma-

jestic entrance to modern historiography. Equally striking is the sudden emergence of major philosophers: Spinoza, Leibniz, Locke, Berkeley, and Hume. Kant, the most gifted thinker of the period and the one who brought its ideas to a synthesis, largely defined the course of philosophical reflection for the next two centuries. The very contrast between the Enlightenment's stunning accomplishments in history, science, and philosophy and the lesser ones in the fine arts (again, with the exceptions of music and architecture) highlights its intellectual orientation. It was first and foremost a breakthrough in *critical consciousness*. Those who criticize its one-sidedness are unquestionably right. But they ought to remember that they attack the movement with the very weapon forged by the object of their attack: that of critical reflectiveness.

In this book I intend to analyze some of the guiding ideas of the Enlightenment, in particular those that have been instrumental in shaping our own assumptions, attitudes, and values. By tracing them to their origins we may hope to gain some insight into principles we had long taken for granted but have recently come to question. The catastrophic wars fought during the twentieth century, its social upheaval, and the environmental predicaments caused by the very technology responsible for that century's greatest triumphs force us to reexamine its moral foundations. Because of their problematic consequences in our own time, many now reject the assumptions of the Enlightenment. My own assessment will be more favorable and my critique less radical. One severely oversimplifies the nature of eighteenth-century thought in dismissing it as rationalism. The rationalist tendency did indeed exist, but so did others pointing in the opposite direction. One might just as well describe the Enlightenment as an era of sentimentality. In disregarding the variety of these currents we risk projecting our own aspirations and aversions upon a self-made image of the past. To understand our relation to the Enlightenment we must attempt to describe it as it understood itself, even while trying to understand its role in shaping the present.

The starting date of this study, 1648, marked the end of the Thirty Years' War and the beginning of a restructuring of Europe's political powers. The half-century that followed shaped the scientific ideas of the modern age. Thinking became simpler, more rational, and more methodic. Religion and morality continued to be primary concerns, but they became subjected to a critical examination. The year 1789, the end date of this book, witnessed an event that shook the political and cultural foundations of Western Europe. The excesses of the French Revolution introduced a strong reaction against the ideals of the Enlightenment, but it did not bring the movement to an end. On the contrary, the French armies spread its ideas to the more remote parts of Europe. The ideals, however, underwent a mutation.

This book is not intended to be an intellectual history of the Enlightenment. Rather have I attempted to draw an intellectual portrait of a crucial epoch in European history with particular emphasis on the development and interaction of those ideas that most contributed to the formation of our own spiritual identity. This ought to explain why some writers receive more attention than others who were perhaps equally significant yet less representative of the movement or less influential in its effect on the present.

In referring to my sources I have as much as possible quoted from readily available editions. Translations are mine except when explicitly attributed to others.

A number of thinkers have influenced my approach. If I had to mention names, they would be those of Ernst Cassirer, Henry Gouhier, and Hans-Georg Gadamer. They taught me that it is possible to understand how the past shaped the present without being reduced to it.

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what is not contain within itself the reason for its being? He himself questioned the theory in the dialogue that ironically bears the name of the great thinker who inspired it—*Parmenides*. Later, his most illustrious disciple so radically criticized Plato's theory of the Ideas that it rarely reappeared in its original form. Yet Aristotle did not question the principle itself. He, no less than Plato, distinguished the reason for a thing's existence from that existence itself. This in fact is why the notion of causality assumed such an importance in his thought. In Enlightenment philosophy that distinction received what may well have been its strongest formulation in the principle of sufficient reason: everything must have a reason why it should be rather than not be. Many consider that the essence of rationalism. But the axiom that the real is rooted in an ideal principle does not imply that the human mind is necessarily capable of justifying it. The latter is a rationalist position that the Greeks never held.

Greek philosophy of the classical age incorporated three areas of reality that modern thought has divided into the separate domains of cosmology, anthropology, and theology. Gods and humans were included in an all-comprehensive nature, the *physis* of the Presocratics, the *cosmos* of Plato and Aristotle. Both gods and cosmos had always existed. Hence, the former did not justify the latter. Neither did Plato's Demiurge explain the existence of the world. The myth of the *Timaeus,* according to which some semidivine being composed the cosmos, does indeed attempt to justify the nature of reality, not, however, through its origin, but through an analysis of its metaphysical components. Aristotle might have called this analysis a search for the formal cause of nature. The Semitic teaching that a God created the world justified the world's existence through a transcendent origin. The Creator of the biblical story belongs to a different realm of reality than creation itself.

Despite this opposition between the Greek and the Hebrew-Christian interpretations, Christians started using Platonic concepts for expressing the intimate union between Creator and creature. In and through the human person all creation participated in the divine realm. The doctrine of the Incarnation, according to which God had become part of the world, seemed to facilitate the union. In fact, a profound opposition separated the two views. In the Greek synthesis, an immanent necessity ruled the cosmos. In the Jewish and Christian traditions, a free act of God stood at the origin of all other reality. Inevitably, the classical-Christian synthesis ran into major difficulties. As nominalist theologians began to attribute the origin of all things to the inscrutable will of God, they abrogated the link of intelligibility that connected the source of reality with its created effect. As a result, by the beginning of the modern age reality had ceased to be intrinsically intelligible and God no longer provided

the rational justification of the world. Henceforth meaning was no longer embedded in the nature of things: it had to be imposed by the human mind.

The Second Wave of Modernity

It has been written that modernity has reached us in waves. The first wave arrived in the fifteenth century, as the effect of two causes: the collapse of the intellectual synthesis of ancient and Christian thought and the rise of a new humanism. When Descartes, who died in 1650, succeeded in overcoming the skepticism that had resulted from the nominalist crisis by transferring the source of intelligibility to the mind, he brought the first stage of modernity to a close. In establishing self-consciousness as the one point of absolute certainty from which all other certainties could be deduced, he initiated a new stage in philosophical thought. Its validity seemed confirmed by the success of the mathematical method in the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century. The new trust in the power of human reason was to inspire the culture of the Enlightenment, the second wave of modernity. Still Descartes's restoration of the authority of reason remained incomplete. A lingering nominalism surrounded his notion of truth. (It is by divine decree, he had argued, that mathematical conclusions are true!)

In fact, all subsequent rationalism continued to bear unmistakable traces of nominalist dualism in the way it separated the universal from the particular. The synthesis of the universal and the particular, established by ancient philosophy and surviving until the end of the Middle Ages, had come under severe strain in nominalist philosophy. That strain only increased in rationalist thought. It may seem far-fetched to link modern rationalism to a medieval position with which it had so unambiguously broken. Did the rationalist concept of reason not imply a rejection of nominalist particularism and a return to classical sources? In fact, the rationalist universal differed substantially from the ancient one. For Aristotle as well as for Plato, things owed their identity to a universal form that *included* all particular determinations. The Enlightenment concept of the universal, to the contrary, was a rational a priori void of any particular content, a category of thought imposed upon the real, rather than expressive of it. Its formalist character shows a surprising similarity with the universal names that, in nominalist philosophy, the mind imposes upon reality in order to gain purchase on a chaotic multiplicity.

To be sure, post-Cartesian thought, in which the mind alone establishes truth, differs from nominalist theology in which the will of God does so. But that distinction does not weaken a fundamental relation between the two. Social factors also presented a powerful incentive for stressing the primacy of

universal concepts and values over particular differences. Regionalism and sectarianism had turned Europe into a thirty-year bloodbath. The restoration of peace in 1648 required that the destructive forces of political and religious particularism be neutralized. To the "enlightened," the differences that had caused the strife were no more than superstitious quibbles or nationalist prejudices. Did the entire cosmos not obey a single law of reason? Did humans, however different from each other, not share a common nature? Destined to live under the rule of reason, they would never attain this goal, according to Voltaire and Gibbon, unless religious particularism was abolished altogether. The Christian religion that had so bitterly divided Europe had to be subordinated to the rule of universal reason.

The Enlightenment's confidence in the powers of reason, its often-naive optimism, as well as its contempt for tradition were too one-sided to remain unchallenged. The excesses of the French Revolution and the rationalist principles that supported it caused a return of the authority of tradition and a revival of much that rationalism had suppressed. The period that followed the revolution introduced a third wave of modernity. It was at first mostly a reactionary movement, yet in time it developed a new, more comprehensive humanism that reincorporated many of the positions established by the Enlightenment while integrating them within a more complex idea of personhood. In Great Britain and in the German lands the transition was gradual: romantic trends had existed all through the Enlightenment.

I assume that the Enlightenment was indeed a distinct epoch in modern culture. Yet this assumption does not entail that there was no continuity in the flow of modern thought nor that it was a homogeneous movement. The Enlightenment remained a project; it never became a full achievement. It continued to question the past and to anticipate the future, but various groups and individuals held different views concerning past and future. It has become increasingly common to exclude traditionalist thinkers such as Vico, Malebranche, Burke, and Herder from the Enlightenment as if they belonged to what Isaiah Berlin has called the Counter-Enlightenment. Yet these writers were not reactionaries. They held modern, though different views concerning their epoch's relation to past and future, and they may have exercised a deeper influence upon future thought than radical critics like Voltaire or Condorcet did. To be sure, in many ways they disagreed with their more radical contemporaries. But those contemporaries in turn found it necessary to respond to their challenges. This dynamic exchange, rather than the static rationalism with which is often identified, characterizes the Enlightenment. It was essentially a dialectical movement.

Finally, conditions and attitudes differed enormously from one area to another. In Western Europe the Enlightenment was mainly a movement of urban intellectuals; in the American colonies, of landed gentry.[2] Nowhere are these differences more visible than in the field of religion. While in France the battle against "superstition" was reaching its pitch, in Bavaria and Austria the Counter-Reformation and Baroque still flourished. French philosophes mostly rejected Christianity; German thinkers consistently sought a compromise with it. In Britain rationalists and anti-rationalists appear to have lived rather peacefully, though often incommunicatively, side by side.

I have restricted my investigation in this book to the *ideas* of the Enlightenment, leaving their economic, social, and political applications to social historians. The battles over the identity, direction, past, and future of a culture are, Husserl claimed, fought by "men of ideas"—philosophers, scientists, theologians, and intellectual historians. Of course, ideas are never born in a vacuum. In an earlier study (*Marx's Social Critique of Culture*) I attempted to show that they originate in, and remain intimately linked to, the immediate practical concerns of society. Yet the influence moves in both directions. For ideas in turn change the social concerns to which they owe their origin. As one distinguished intellectual historian put it: "Ideas powerfully act upon, often decisively shape, the very culture from which they have emerged."[3] My focus here resembles in this respect the eighteenth century's own. Still, a reflection on the ideas of an epoch raises a philosophical problem. Ideas possess by their very nature a timeless quality. We assume that they will last forever. Yet they are conceived in, and form an integral part of, a particular historical conjunction. How can what is essentially transient and historically conditioned have a permanent significance? All thought, including all philosophy, originates in a particular place at a particular time and reflects the concerns of that time. Nonetheless, philosophers, while expressing those concerns, move beyond these limitations and raise them to a universal level.

In an insightful passage R. G. Collingwood describes the dialectical relation between the historical and the eternal roles of ideas. "In part, the problems of philosophy are unchanging; in part they vary from age to age, according to the special characteristics of human life and thought at the time; and in the best philosophers of every age these two parts are so interwoven that the permanent problems appear *sub specie saeculi,* and the special problems of the age *sub specie aeternitatis*. Whenever human thought has been dominated by some special interest, the most fruitful philosophy of the age has reflected that domination; not passively, by mere submission to its influence, but actively, by making a special attempt to understand it and placing it in the focus of

philosophical inquiry."[4] We inevitably think and judge with the categories, schemes, and metaphors of our own time, however critical of them we may be. At the same time we believe that ideas are bound to be permanent.

This confronts us with the question: How can ideas conceived for coping with the problems of one time remain meaningful at a later epoch? If indeed a rigid line divides the necessary and eternal from the historically contingent, as rationalist philosophers assumed, then the particular events, achievements, and ideas of an earlier generation hold little meaning for a later one. But the meaning of an epoch lies not only and not even primarily in the "universal" ideas it produces. The significance of a culture exceeds that of the "eternal" ideas we may extract from it. A philosophical reflection on the past differs in this respect from the way mathematics, logic, or the positive sciences reach their conclusions. Past thinkers showed little concern about the question of how their ideas originated. But a reflection on the meaning of a particular age requires more than lifting certain ideas out of the cultural complex in which they were conceived. Each culture possesses an ideal identity within which these ideas have their place and, as Ernst Cassirer pointed out, the task of the philosophy of culture consists in seeking to understand how the elements that compose it form a system, an organic whole.[5] Cultures, like living beings, possess a unity of their own. This unity enables successive generations to build up a collective identity.[6] Over a period of time the various symbolic processes of science, art, religion, and language coalesce into a comprehensive unity.

Premodern metaphysics had neither a need nor a place for a philosophy of culture. The epochs of history may yield lasting results, but their coming or going belonged to a realm of historical contingency that fell outside a reflection on true reality. In modern philosophy, however, the human subject plays a central part in the constitution of meaning. The fact that this subject exists and thinks in time thereby assumes a philosophical significance. Nor is this significance restricted to the individual consciousness. A philosophical reflection on the temporal nature of the subject must take what Ricoeur calls "the long detour around the *selves'* objective achievements in history" and focus on the symbols human consciousness has left us in its various cultural achievements. Only through history do we acquire a true knowledge of ourselves. "What would we know of love and hate, of moral feelings and in general of all that we call *self,* if they had not been brought to language and articulated by literature?"[7]

The primary function of culture is to provide a society with the norms, values, and means needed for coping with the conditions of its existence. Through their various engagements with nature, humans subdue nature's otherness. The domestication of nature begins when humans start naming

and Kant, was more self-consciously reflective than either the French or the British. The French Enlightenment may well have been more influential, both because of the impact of its writings (especially the *Encyclopédie*) in a language common to educated Europeans and because of its radical conclusions. But its simplified concepts and radical break with tradition made it also the more controversial one. In this respect it differed not only from the German but also from the English Enlightenment that proceeded at a gradual pace, without causing an abrupt break with the past.

It should be observed that, beside the diversity of expressions of the Enlightenment in different regions, there was also a considerable difference in the degree to which its principles were accepted. Even those who regarded the mind as constitutive of meaning did not necessarily consider its contribution sufficient. Philosophers like Malebranche, Berkeley, and Leibniz grounded the mind's constituting activity upon a transcendent basis—as Descartes himself had done. For all of them, God remained the ultimate source of truth. Nor were rationalists always consistent. A blind belief in progress often conflicted with their thesis of the unchangeable laws of nature. The inconsistency was particularly striking among such materialists as d'Holbach and La Mettrie. Also, men and women of the Enlightenment did not live more in accordance with the rules of morality and reason than their ancestors. One needs only to remember Saint-Simon's reports on life at the French Court, Rousseau's abandonment of his children, Casanova's memoirs of his philandering, and de Sade's account of his sexual gymnastics. People's everyday lives are rarely ruled by reason, despite their frequent appeals to it. Far less than their predecessors in the seventeenth century did men and women of the Enlightenment period submit their passions, feelings, and emotions to the control of reason. The Enlightenment was not so much an age of reason as an age of self-consciousness. People became more reflective about their feelings, their social positions, their rights and duties, the state of religion, and all that touched them near or far. They also became more critical than any previous generation, and this self-consciously critical mentality induced them to question tradition.

The battle against unexamined tradition has continued ever since Kant's declaration of war against it. A social-economic variant of it appeared in Marx's critique of ideologies. The term "ideology" originated in the eighteenth century, and its meaning initially pointed in an opposite direction. When the French aristocrat Destutt de Tracy first used the word in a paper read at the Institut National des Sciences et des Arts, *idéologie* referred to scientific rather than metaphysical knowledge of human nature. Later he expanded the concept, using it against any kind of social prejudice.[15] Soon the critique turned against ideology itself. Napoleon felt that those social theorists whom he

contemptuously called "les idéologues" had been responsible for the French Revolution. With Marx the term came to stand for ideas uncritically accepted by most members of a society, even though they merely reflect the interests of the ruling classes. Ideologies serve to confirm the prejudices and interests of those classes. Later commentators qualified Marx's attack on ideologies. Thus Louis Althusser argued that they consist mainly of the unproven assumptions that form an indispensable part of every social structure, not necessarily one that supports the interests of one class. All groups need to hold on to a number of unproven ideas, myths, or representations to preserve their identity. The task of the social critique consists not in destroying those assumptions but in rendering them conscious.[16]

In our own time the controversy about the Enlightenment's attack on prejudices has resurfaced. In his great work on hermeneutics, *Truth and Method,* H. G. Gadamer argued against the Enlightenment's critique of prejudice. He may appear to repeat Edmund Burke's defense of political prejudice: "Instead of casting away all our old prejudices, we cherish them to a considerable degree, and, to take more shame upon ourselves, we cherish them because they are prejudices."[17] Burke assumed that a healthy community, like any normal organism, needs no external interference to overcome its problems. It is capable of correcting itself. Criticism, Gadamer argues, must be guided by a return to the roots of one's tradition rather than by an alleged rule of absolute "rationality." The rationalist critique of the Enlightenment failed to recognize the unproven assumptions on which it rested.

The limitation of the human mind excludes the possibility that it should ever be free of prejudices. Indeed, prejudices constitute an essential part of human reasoning. The Enlightenment's fight against them stemmed itself from a prejudice and followed the Cartesian methodical rule that no position ought to be considered intellectually "justified" before it was proven. Of course, the mind must remain critically conscious of its unproven assumptions and free itself from demonstrably false prejudices. But the rule that traditional authority must in all instances be submitted to the critique of reason is impossible to maintain and hence unjustified. According to Gadamer, the ongoing dialogue among the members of a society should suffice for eradicating those assumptions that would harm a society's rational development.[18] Others have questioned whether a critique based upon the very principles of the tradition it criticizes can ever be effective. On that ground Jürgen Habermas has defended the critical principles of the Enlightenment. If the movement failed, he maintains, it was not because of them, but because they were abandoned before having had the time to prove their effectiveness. I shall consider his argument in the next section.

Ever since Kant described the Enlightenment as an intellectual and political emancipation, we have come to consider freedom the dominant idea of the age. Of course, the idea of freedom, no less than that of reason, had long been a primary concept in Western thought. But with Kant it acquired a more intellectual content. He regarded no act as truly free unless it was based on reason and promoted the rule of reason. Good and evil depend on the law of reason: they are constituted in and through that law. Moreover, freedom came to be viewed primarily as an emancipation of the *individual*. The emphasis upon individual freedom had been implied in the modern theory of the subject, which assumed that the source of value is the human subject itself.

The anthropocentric orientation of Enlightenment culture also affected aesthetic theories. Since the early Renaissance, Western artists had continued to pay homage to the classical ideal of form. Painters had traditionally interpreted it as consisting in simplicity of composition, harmony of color, and clarity of design. What distinguished the eighteenth century "classicist" style was the rigorously rational, at times geometrical way in which these qualities came to be understood. Even Jacques Louis David, the great classicist painter, has been called "puritanically rational."[19] Compared with the dynamic style of the Baroque, much art of the Enlightenment era impresses us today as static and cold. Artists were torn between two conflicting tendencies. On the one hand, they favored a form *idealized* in accordance with rational norms of simplicity, clarity, and harmony. On the other hand, a rational concern for literal truth required that reality be painted *as it is,* however far removed from that formal ideal. Thus the representation of ordinary life and the expression of passions and emotions, foreign to classical art, entered the art of the Enlightenment.

At the same time and due to the same subjective source that had affected the notion of freedom, aesthetics was developing a far more radical theory, which did not have its full impact upon the creation of works of art until the next century. According to this theory, art, rather than imitating or idealizing a given form, had to be in the first place expressive. The new idea entered gradually and not without a major struggle, as we shall see. Artists and even the more progressive theorists continued to repeat the adage that art had to imitate nature. Yet, eventually "imitation" came to be understood in a manner that had little to do with a realistic or idealized representation of nature, but everything to do with nature as a symbol of the artist's inner self. This interpretation differs substantially from that of ancient and even early modern aesthetics. Whereas both had placed the ideal beyond the mind, advanced Enlightenment aesthetics located it *within* the mind. The expressive theory did not reach full maturity until the era of Romanticism. In this instance also,

Romanticism rather than being a mere reversal of the principles of the Enlightenment fully developed their implications.

The Crisis of the Enlightenment

None of the changes described in the preceding profile warrant speaking of the Enlightenment as a cultural crisis. Taken singularly the shifts were rarely abrupt or disruptive, but together they fundamentally altered the direction of Western culture and some major thinkers have regarded this change as a crisis. In a lecture delivered in Prague, entitled "The Crisis of the European People" (1935), Edmund Husserl argued that modern rationalism had moved away from the Greek idea of reason and deviated from Europe's spiritual destiny. According to the founder of phenomenological philosophy, the rationalism of the Enlightenment transformed the Greek concept of reason that had ruled European thought since its beginning. A narrowly objectist idea of reason had deflected Western culture from its original development "in the direction of an ideal image of life and of being, moving toward an eternal pole."[20] Husserl's diagnosis is all the more remarkable in that his own philosophical goal had been to reform philosophy into a "rigorous science."[21] Now he dismissed the modern objectivism implied in that project as a betrayal of the principle of rationality to which it continued to appeal.

While Husserl referred to an intellectual crisis caused by the slide into objectivism, Hegel in a well-known passage of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* had described the Enlightenment as a general cultural crisis. Significantly, in doing so he attributed to a particular historical period the full responsibility for a change in the ideal development of mind. All through the *Phenomenology* he inserts cryptic allusions to historical figures and events, such as ancient skepticism, the coming of Christ, monastic life, the French Revolution, and Napoleon. The Enlightenment Hegel mentions by name, as if it were a historical interruption in an ideal process. That particular event raised consciousness to the universality of reason, enabling it to view reality as expressive of itself.[22]

Not before reality appears as the objective expression of mind, does civilization become *culture*—a Western concept with a uniquely spiritual connotation. Those intent on attaining culture must abandon their natural, self-centered attitude and assume a universal, spiritual one. This change requires effort and denial. Hegel therefore referred to culture as an *alienation* from one's natural self. Beyond this subjective alienation required by the process of education, there is also an objective one inherent in the nature of culture itself. It directly corresponds to what others have called the "crisis" of the Enlightenment. Having intended to build a culture expressive of, and appropriate to,

reason, the builders of the Enlightenment had to confront the melancholy fact that culture leads a life of its own, escapes control, and fails to correspond to their intentions. This estrangement has caused a rupture within the modern consciousness. Two tendencies emerge. One uninhibitedly criticizes any content in which the mind does not fully recognize itself; the other, solicitous to avoid reducing mental life to a mere critique without content, projects its essential content into an otherworldly realm where it will be safe from the assaults of critical insight. Hegel refers to this latter attitude as *faith*. Enlightenment for him consists neither in the critical rationalism of pure insight nor in the conservative one of faith, but in a constant struggle between the two.

This esoteric account of the Enlightenment contains two important ideas. One, the very notion of culture belongs to a particular stage of Western consciousness—one that, as Freud was later to confirm in *Civilization* [a more accurate translation would be *Culture*] *and Its Discontents*, imposes severe demands upon the natural consciousness and may degenerate into antinatural perversions. The second idea directly bears upon the concept of the Enlightenment as a cultural crisis. The view of culture as the mind's "own" expression inevitably leads to a split (*entfremdet* [alienated]) consciousness. On the one hand, the mind knows culture to be an expression of itself. On the other hand, once it is objectively established, it begins to lead a life of its own with many restrictions and limitations that make it increasingly difficult for people to recognize it as a self-expression. That sense of alienation from the traditional culture reached a critical point during the Enlightenment.

In addition, Hegel first grasped a crucial feature of the Enlightenment that had been ignored by his predecessors and was often neglected by his followers, namely, that it was essentially a *dialectical* movement. At no point did that movement ever develop into a simple rationalism or an unambiguous anti-rationalism. Without the simultaneous presence of, and the productive struggle between the two currents, it remains unintelligible how the Enlightenment could ever have resulted in Romanticism. In all chapters of this book, therefore, I have given attention to anti-rationalist thinkers (often misnamed "Counter-Enlightenment" thinkers), such as Herder, Shaftesbury, Rousseau, and Fénelon.

This dialectical principle also explains the considerable part religion, the main target of the critique, occupies in this work. Both the critique and the resistance to it have been responsible for the way the Enlightenment has reached us. Even such spiritual movements as Quietism and Pietism that never came to grips with the rationalist critique but instead took refuge in a secluded interiority at a safe distance from the intellectual currents of the time, played a significant role within the culture of the Enlightenment. They initiated a search

results in political repression. I hope to show the presence and influence of those abstractions in philosophical texts, practical attitudes, literary works, and artistic criticism.

I must postpone a critical assessment of Enlightenment culture to the conclusion of this book, but not without at least raising the fundamental question which so much preoccupies us today: Is the Enlightenment project still valid? Habermas, in his *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity,* claims that its movement toward human emancipation was diverted from its critical course. New oppressive modes of thought, pseudo-religions he calls them, gradually reoccupied the place from which the Enlightenment had evicted the old religion. Thus he turns Hegel's critique of the Enlightenment against Hegel's own theory of the Absolute Spirit. This all-including pseudo-religious category allowed no outside criticism because there was no "outside." In its frozen system of reality the call to emancipation was lost altogether. Habermas therefrom concludes that the valid program of the Enlightenment had been prematurely abandoned.

In contrast to this conclusion, I believe that the problems of the Enlightenment are due not to a subsequent deviation from the original plan, but rather to an inadequate conception of that plan, which later thinkers attempted to remedy. The principle of rationality that lies at the core of the Enlightenment project was undoubtedly legitimate. Its origin goes back to the Greek beginnings of Western thought. The Enlightenment, much to its credit, attempted to restore that principle to its full force. Yet by making reason an exclusive construction of the mind, it fundamentally transformed its nature. The Greeks had conceived of reason as an ordering principle inherent in reality. The mind possesses the unique ability to understand its inner structure and consciously to pursue its immanent designs. Modern thinkers, however, reversed the relation and submitted all reality to the structures of the mind. They imposed the rules of the one science that the mind could indeed claim full authorship of and which depended on no external content, namely, mathematics. The mind thereby acquired an unprecedented control over nature, yet it ceased to be an integral part of it.

The transformation did not occur all at once. The culture of the Renaissance had fully asserted the mind's creative role in the constitution of meaning, yet the mind itself had remained part of a single, hierarchical order of reality that depended upon a transcendent source of power. We find a remnant of this dual creativity in Descartes's epistemology, where the mind alone constitutes meaning yet truth ultimately depends upon the will of God. The Enlightenment drew far more extensive conclusions from the modern premises. Its thinkers detached the subjective principle from the given order. At first this was a

purely methodical issue: for all we know, meaning originates in the subject. Of other sources we remain scientifically ignorant and hence they ought not be introduced into the process of knowledge. Later some denied the very existence of an order that apparently contributes nothing to our knowledge of the world. The Frankfurt philosopher Max Horkheimer considered the disconnection of the link with a transcendent source a crucial moment in the new conception of reason: "The divorce of reason from religion marked a further step in the weakening of its objective aspect and a higher degree of formalization, as became manifest during the period of the Enlightenment. The neutralization of religion . . . contradicted its total claim that it incorporates objective truth, and emasculated it."[26] What first was neutralized ended up being discarded from the concept of reason.

Two consequences followed from the transformation of reason. One, the subject, now sole source of meaning, lost all objective content of its own and became a mere instrument for endowing an equally empty nature with a rational structure. Two, since reality thereby lost the inherent intelligibility it had possessed for the ancients and the Schoolmen, the nature of *theoria* fundamentally changed. Thinking ceased to consist of perceiving the nature of the real. It came to consist of forcing reality to answer the subject's question or, as Kant put it in his famous comparison, of compelling a witness to respond to the judge's inquiry. Contemplation, for the Greeks the highest end of life, became an instrument in the hands of, and for the benefit of, an all-powerful subject. This explains the utilitarian streak of the Enlightenment. Reason ceases to be an ultimate good. Henceforth it functions in a system where everything has become both end and means. It has ceased to be an ultimate goal. Yet, as we saw, that was only one current in the dialectic of the Enlightenment. A countermovement, intent on saving the traditional content of reason paralleled this functionalism. It rarely spoke with the eloquence and confidence of the rationalist voice. Moreover, it fell back upon a tradition that was under fire and whose advocates seldom possessed the critical weapons needed to defend it. Nonetheless, those who so lacked the critical power of the Enlightenment may in the end have achieved much toward broadening the Enlightenment's concept of reason. They helped to restore the spiritual content of that subject which had come to occupy a central place in the modern concept of reason. During the time of the Enlightenment the two remained mostly opposed. Yet they were to become, at least in part, reconciled during the subsequent Romantic era.

2

A Different Cosmos

During the Enlightenment the concept of power that had dominated ancient and medieval physics underwent a profound transformation. Previously thought to derive from a source beyond the physical world, it came to be viewed as immanent in that world and eventually as coinciding with the very nature of bodiliness. Aristotle's theory that all motion originated from an unmoved mover had continued to influence Scholastic theories throughout the Middle Ages. For Jewish, Muslim, and Christian thinkers, the impact of divine power went beyond motion and extended to the very existence of finite beings. According to the doctrine of creation, the dependence of nature on God was intrinsic and total. The defining quality of finite being was absolute contingency. Scholasticism supported this claim of contingency with Aristotle's principle of generation and corruption. All that has a beginning must come to an end, and for Jewish, Christian, and most Muslim thinkers, the universe did have a beginning. A contingent thing's existence is not justified by the nature of its being, nor does that nature ensure its continued existence in the future.

Late medieval thought strengthened this creaturely contingency by undermining the certainty, rooted in the idea of divine wisdom, that beings would continue to be and to act in accordance with invariable laws. When nominalist theology shifted the emphasis from God's wisdom to God's absolute power, everything became dependent on an inscrutable divine decision. Creation itself

became a discontinuous act to be renewed at each moment of a creature's existence. Thus, the doctrine of divine preservation implied in the act of creation now became one of constant re-creation. Much of this nominalism survives in Descartes. He strongly asserted the dependence of each being on a constantly renewed creation. Other tendencies in Descartes's philosophy, however, qualify this voluntarist notion of contingency, among them a confidence that the divinely instituted laws of nature follow an invariable mathematical pattern.

For Spinoza, contingency did not exist. Within the one, all-inclusive substance, nothing is contingent because nothing depends on another substance. Finite modes share the necessity of the infinite substance. No external influx of power is needed: the drive to be (*conatus essendi*) coincides with the very nature of a thing. "Everything, insofar as it is in itself, endeavors to persist in its own being" and that endeavor is "nothing but its actual essence" (*Ethica*, bk. III, 6 and 7). Once a being exists, it will continue to do so until destroyed by a cause outside itself (III, 4). The power to continue one's being requires no divine intervention: it is inherent in the nature of being itself. Spinoza's substance acts as a center of power, but the effect of that power remains *within* the cause.[1] The notion that the substance is a center of power became one of the leading ideas of the Enlightenment. We shall encounter it in many forms.

Mechanism: The Newtonian Revolution

British scientists remained to a great extent faithful to the principles established by Francis Bacon, according to which science is essentially practiced by means of induction based on observation and ought to yield practical results. Newton himself shared this practical orientation. Michael J. Petry has called him "the most distinguished proponent of the idea that nature was to be mastered in the practical interests of man through the application of the Baconian inductive method."[2] Nor did Newton assume that the course of nature necessarily and in all respects follows mathematical laws. His diffidence with respect to an absolute mathematical a priori may be traced to the nominalist belief that God's absolute power overrules the normal, "ordained" exercise of that power and may, at least in principle, interrupt it at any time. The contingency of nature implies the possibility of exceptions in the normal order. Indeed, for nominalist thinkers, though less for Newton, exceptions constituted an integral part of the normal.[3] Our experience that nature follows a rational course does not allow us to consider that an a priori, necessary principle. Modesty as well as intellectual probity requires the mind to test its calculations by actual observation. If in the end Newton's method in physics won out

over Descartes's, it was at least in part due to his refusal to take the mathematical nature of the universe for granted. Therein lies, I think, the primary meaning of his famous declaration "Hypotheses non fingo." He did in fact construe hypotheses but avoided doing so independently of observation.

At the same time Newton's investigations moved him in a direction that eventually undermined the traditional idea that motion results from a constantly infused divine power. Motion and rest have an equal status: a body does not change from motion to rest or from rest to motion unless an external force impels it to do so. Hence if we assume it to be originally *moving,* no additional input of power is needed to keep it in motion, though motion may decrease under the impact of external resistance. This principle of *inertia* obviously contradicts the Scholastic theory, according to which motion had to be constantly induced by a transcendent source. It rather corresponds to Spinoza's axiom that a thing perseveres in being until a cause outside itself forces it to change. The fourth definition of book I of Newton's *Principia mathematica* reads: "Perseverat enim corpus in statu omni novo per suam vim inertiae" (A body maintains every new state it acquires by its force of *inertia*). So, not motion was to be explained, but the change from one state to another.

No less significant was the fundamental change the new philosophy introduced in the notion of causality. In classical and Scholastic philosophy the term "cause" had referred to various modes of dependence of one being upon another — one of which was that of extrinsic, efficient causality. More intimate forms of causality had been the *formal* one whereby a being participates in that on which it depends, and the *final* one that directs it toward a goal. Descartes and all mechanistic philosophers who came after him had conceived of nature as essentially static and affected only by the so-called efficient causality that induces motion from without. Mechanistic philosophers considered any appeal to final causes pure speculation, an undesirable intrusion in a self-contained structure. Newton himself avoided using teleological arguments, not in the first place because they interfered with mathematical deduction, but because they escaped observation.

Yet another change ought to be mentioned: The concept of *matter,* even as that of nature, had received a meaning that differed from the one it had in Aristotle and the Scholastics. For them, it had been a metaphysical principle. Giordano Bruno had first described it as the very essence of physical nature and its immanent center of power. Like Descartes, Newton defines matter as extension. Yet he adds other, empirically observed qualities to it: impenetrability, hardness, and mobility (rather than motion).[4] In addition, he distinguishes extension from space. Attraction, though a universal quality of our world

space, absolute motion requires the existence of absolute space. In the transmission of motion from its source to any given object, this particular motion presupposes a more comprehensive motion, which in turn presupposes a more comprehensive space. They again presuppose a more comprehensive motion and space, and so on to infinity. Kant, who criticizes this argument, agrees that the idea of an absolute space that synthesizes all relative spaces within a single unit may be essential to mathematical physics, yet he considers its reality both unnecessary and unjustified.[12]

The *General Scholium* at the end of book III conveys a theological meaning to the metaphysical concepts of infinite time and space. In the preceding argument Newton had claimed to be incapable of justifying the cause of gravity within a closed mechanical system. At the conclusion of his work he attributes it to a source that lies outside the mechanical order. "This is certain, that it must proceed from a cause that penetrates to the very centres of sun and planets, without suffering the least diminution of its force" (*General Scholium,* p. 446). He also concludes that other mechanically unexplainable facts, such as the "diversity of natural things which we find suited to different times and places," could not result from "a blind metaphysical necessity which is certainly the same always and everywhere" but must be the work of an infinite, perfect mind and will (ibid.). Yet the transition from an infinite Creator to a finite universe requires a being that mediates between the infinite and the finite. At the same time, Newton assumes that God is directly present to creation: only a substantially present force can be causally effective in a mechanistic system. He attempts to overcome the apparent discrepancy by postulating that God's primary expression must be infinite, as God himself is, yet able to mediate with a finite creation. Only an absolute space and an absolute time, he thinks, would make it possible for God to be present in all places at all times. "He endures forever and is everywhere present; and by existing always and everywhere, he constitutes duration and space" (p. 445). In Query 28 of the *Opticks* Newton writes: "And these things rightly dispatched, does it not appear from Phaenomena that there is a Being incorporeal, living, intelligent, omnipresent, who in infinite Space, as it were in her Sensory, sees the things themselves intimately, and perceives them and comprehends them wholly by their immediate presence to himself."[13]

The question of absolute space and time had a long history. Aristotle had attacked the idea of a void existing beyond the cosmos: neither place nor void could exist outside the heavens.[14] Nor did he believe the cosmos to be infinite in space and time. Yet the Stoics held that an infinite void was needed to include an infinite cosmos. Aquinas in this dispute sided with Aristotle. Nominalist philosophers (specially Thomas Bradwardine), judging that a space

restricted to the cosmos itself would unduly limit God's creative power to this universe (excluding a greater or a smaller one), had concluded that only an infinite space would allow God's omnipotence to create a universe of any size He pleased.[15] This void, infinite as God himself, was a purely negative space that shared none of the qualities of experienced space. One might possibly interpret it as the emptiness within God, a precondition for the possibility of creating otherness within the divine fullness.

Newton's conception of absolute space and time appears to have been influenced by some of these earlier discussions. Specifically the Cambridge theologian Henry More, whom Newton admired, may have inspired the concept of an extended void-space. More had argued that extension itself could not exist without the substratum of an infinite, incorporeal space. This spiritual space constituted both the medium within which God creates and, for nature, the condition of its being and operating. For Newton also, God had to be present everywhere: within and outside creation. Was this outside "void" a real, three-dimensional space as we normally conceive ours to be? Clarke appears to have understood Newton as affirming that it was, if I read his assertion correctly: "By void space, we never mean space void of everything, but void of body only."[16]

One may find Newton's argument very "hypothetical" indeed! But we should remember that it appears in the concluding *General Scholium* of the *Principia,* where, at last, he feels free to express his deeply held conviction without being constrained by the self-imposed restrictions of mechanical physics. His theological speculation merely provides additional support for the idea of absolute space and time established by his physical theory. Bishop Berkeley was to object: either that infinite time-space is God, or it must be a reality beside God that nevertheless possesses divine attributes since it is eternal, infinite, immutable, and uncreated.[17] But Newton's absolute time and space merely constitute an empty infinity *within* which God creates. They do not "precede" God's creative act yet accompany it. Newton calls it the divine *sensorium* in analogy with the sensory apparatus in and through which a remote object becomes present in perception. Theologians considered the name not wholly appropriate, since, unlike sense perception, divine knowledge does not depend on a pre-existing object. For God, knowing an object consists of creating and sustaining it.

It appears, then, that serious tensions lurk at the heart of Newton's theory. One was between the nominalist and the Platonic elements of his theory. All power comes from God. Yet in the nominalist version, divine power does not become immanently present as it does in Neoplatonic thought but is imposed from without. God's causality is total yet remains external. Divine power,

rather than consisting in the divine presence within the world, becomes *mediated* through the laws of nature. Mechanism functions as a closed system impervious to any influence from outside, even though all that occurs within it results from a transcendent source of motion. In the Neoplatonic version, the effect participates in the divine cause. Moreover it is endowed with a divine teleology that enables the higher spheres to communicate power to the lower ones. Mechanical philosophy replaced the classical and medieval teleological order by a nonhierarchical world of nature.[18]

Newton's philosophical adversaries objected to the absence of meaning or purpose in a cosmos that had no higher end than remaining in motion. The American theologian Jonathan Edwards uses the favorite mechanistic comparison of the world to a gigantic clockwork against him. If the only purpose of the clock is to have parts that assist one another in their motions, the clock itself is worthless. Similarly, if the world has no higher end than to allow its parts to support one another, the world as a whole serves no purpose. "It is nonsense to say of a machine whose highest end is to have one part move another, for the whole is useless."[19] Neither does a consistent mechanical theory have room for freedom—which Newton never questioned. Materialists attempted to rid the mechanical system of its inconsistencies by eliminating any extrinsic source of power and conceiving of it as an autodynamic, self-generating system of reality.

Mechanism had begun as a scientific theory. It soon became a controlling concept for the interpretation of all reality, including life and, with some, of the mind itself. Thus it developed into a worldview, an ambitious attempt to capture all reality within a comprehensive, undifferentiated system ruled by identical laws. This worldview implied an all-encompassing determinism that threatened the very possibility of freedom.[20] It assumed that the mind, being the single source of meaning, is able to capture all reality within a single vision. That assumption, as Heidegger has shown in an essay bearing the same name, belongs exclusively to the modern age. Descartes and Newton, who had restricted mechanism to a scientific interpretation of the physical universe, were, of course, not determinists. But for materialists, nature was a single, homogeneous system that tolerated no exceptions. The naturalism underlying this concept was to survive long after the mechanistic theory had been abandoned. Romantic opponents of Enlightenment culture rejected the mechanist worldview (none more vehemently than Blake). But many retained its subjacent naturalism, including the idea that humanity becomes crushed by nature. Individuals may resist, but in the end nature smothers their futile efforts.

The introduction of mathematical physics drastically changed the knowledge of nature. Instead of conforming the mind to a pre-existing reality, it

defined the mind's ideal relation to that reality. In Newton's time mechanistic thought had already begun to penetrate popular culture in England and France. Poets hesitated whether they ought to welcome it. Some considered it the ultimate key to the universe. In "A View of Death, or The Soul's Departure from the World," the poet John Reynolds (1666–1727) looks forward to death when the scientific mysteries of the universe will be fully revealed and the mind will understand that Newton's attraction is God's love operating in matter! Others distrusted the ambitious science. Thus Matthew Prior (1664–1726), in his lengthy poem "Salomon," wonders:

> Can thought beyond the bounds of matter climb?
> Or who shall tell me what is space or time?
> In vain we lift up our presumptuous eyes
> To what our Maker to their ken denies.[21]

From Mechanism to Materialism

Two diverging theories claimed Newton's authority. One used his mechanistic principles as foundation for a philosophical determinism. The other developed the concept of active forces into an organic theory of nature. Eventually the two converged in a dynamic materialism. Newton's definition of inertia as the force that keeps a body in its present state, "whether it be of rest, or of moving uniformly forward in a straight line" (Third Definition), disposed of the traditional belief that rest is a body's natural state while motion must be externally induced. If one assumes that the universe never had a beginning (a position which even Aquinas considered not refutable on rational grounds) and has always been in a state of motion, no external cause is needed to justify the beginning of motion. For eighteenth-century materialists, this proved to be a sufficient ground for overturning the millennia old adage, *Quidquid movetur ab alio movetur* (Whatever moves must be moved by another), on which Scholastics had based one of their arguments for the existence of God. Combining a dynamic concept of matter with an organic concept of nature, materialists attributed to matter a developmental power that accounted for the emergence of plants, animals, and even humans. But even those dynamic materialists never abandoned one of the basic principles of the mechanistic system itself. They denied that even organic nature required the kind of teleology which nonmaterialists like Buffon and Leibniz granted her. To them, nature was a dynamic force, but a blind one, not directed toward any particular goal.

All materialists, dynamic as well as mechanistic ones, agreed that reality was homogeneous and to be explained through material forces alone. The

physician Julien Offray de La Mettrie in his two books, *Histoire naturelle de l'âme* (1745) (which led to his banishment from France) and *L'homme machine* (1748) (which earned him a second exile, this time from Holland), attempted to achieve a more consistent mechanism than either Descartes or Newton had conceived. He reduced Descartes's two kinds of substances, body and mind, to one material substance and thus overcame the previously unexplainable cooperation of two heterogeneous functions that produced a single effect. According to La Mettrie, nothing prevents matter from exercising the functions commonly attributed to the mind. "Man is a machine and in the whole universe there is but a simple substance variously modified."[22] In his theory of the body, Descartes had already conceded half the mechanistic thesis. Had he not declared animals to be no more than material substances? But the distinction between humans and animals consisted merely in a higher complexity of motion. Animals also feel and remember. They even possess some primitive moral sense. The dog shows shame or remorse after having broken rules it was trained to observe. It is sad when its master leaves and happy when he returns. The lack of instincts made language a necessity for humans, which their physiology allowed them to develop. Without speech they would have remained below the level of apes. Psychic capacities depend entirely on anatomical and physiological endowments. Thinking, willing, and feeling consist of motions of the brain: "L'âme n'est qu'un principe de mouvement ou une partie matérielle du cerveau."

La Mettrie astutely perceived that the deists' concern was not with the existence of God as such, but with their need of a transcendent support for physics and morality. A consistently materialist theory rendered that support superfluous. He grounded his materialism in a sensationalist theory of knowledge. Knowledge originates in sensations that follow mechanistic principles. Hobbes had earlier defined them as endeavors inward followed by endeavors outward. "All mutation or alteration is motion or endeavour (and endeavour also is motion) in the internal parts of the thing that is altered."[23] Thus the sensation of seeing, for instance, is nothing but a motion first produced in the eye, thence transmitted to the optic nerve, and from the nerve to the brain.[24] The higher functions of thinking, remembering, and judging are developed from primitive forms of imagining—which itself is no more than structured motion. "Pourquoi diviser le principe sensitif qui pense dans l'homme?" Why indeed, if one regards all questions concerning the distinction between "sensing" and "thinking" (which merely demands *plus de génie*) as meaningless.

Diderot's more dynamic materialism succeeded far better in synthesizing mechanism with organic being. To La Mettrie's "dead" mechanism he opposed a concept of matter that possessed creative powers capable of exceeding

molecules to be to some extent "endowed with the powers of thought and feeling."[28] "If faith did not teach us that animals sprang from the hands of their Creator just as we know them, . . . might the philosopher not suspect, having given himself up entirely to his own conjectures, that the particular elements needed to constitute animal life had existed from all eternity, scattered and mixed with the whole mass of matter; that these elements happening to come together, had combined because it was possible for them to do so?"[29]

It had long been assumed that all organic beings were built in accordance with a common form and function. The idea of a form that, in a variety of ways, strives toward perfect expression prepared the acceptance of a natural evolution from a single primitive one to a multiplicity of developed forms. The prototypical form had to be conceived as a living force. "When we see the successive metamorphoses of the prototype's outward appearance, whatever it may have been in the first place, bring one kingdom gradually and imperceptibly nearer to another kingdom and people the boundaries of those two kingdoms . . . with uncertain, ambiguous beings stripped to a great degree of the forms, the qualities, and the functions of the one and taking on the forms, qualities, and functions of the other, is it not difficult to resist the belief that there was never more than one first being, a prototype of all other beings?"[30] The purpose of Diderot's rudimentary hypothesis of a spontaneous evolution of the species was inspired by philosophical reasons rather than derived from scientific observations. He merely wanted to show that the creative power might well reside *within* the universe—like a divine world soul—rather than above it.

Still the origin of mental life posed special problems. In three dialogical essays, "Conversation with d'Alembert," "D'Alembert's Dream," and "Conclusion of the Conversation" (written in 1769 but not published during his lifetime), Diderot moves from a theory of universal motion to one of universal sensation. The difference between dead matter and sensitive matter is one of degree, not of presence or absence. In nonorganic matter sensation remains an inanimate force, but it becomes animated in plants and animals. That it can pass from one state to another, Diderot presumed to be established by the transformation of inanimate into living matter in metabolic and genetic processes. "Do you see this egg? With this you can topple every theological theory, every church or temple in the world. What is it, this egg, before the seed is introduced into it? An insentient mass. And after the seed has been introduced into it? What is it then? An insentient mass. For what is the seed itself other than a crude and animate fluid? How is this mass to make the transition to a different structure, to sentience, to life? Through heat. And what will produce that heat in it? Motion."[31]

To derive consciousness from this sensing matter Diderot had to overcome the basic Cartesian distinction between *res extensa* and *res cogitans*. Crucial for this transition was the role of memory—the power to hold on to a past sensation. Diderot simply postulated it through an analogy of covibrating chords that allow a sensing organism to retain past sounds and to recombine them with present ones. At no point does this process move beyond matter. Nor does it require any divine intervention for the creation of a "soul." Diderot's idea of a natural evolution was based on a hunch that acquired traits are inheritable, which Lamarck soon afterward developed into a scientific theory. "Imagine a long succession of generations born without arms; imagine their continued efforts and you will slowly see the two ends of this pair of pincers grow longer, longer still, cross over at the back, grow forward again, perhaps develop fingers at their ends, and create arms and hands once more."[32] With this argument Diderot thinks he has accomplished his goal of uniting the mechanistic theories of Descartes and Newton with a sensationalism derived from Locke and thus of having eliminated the separation between material and mental principles of reality.

Diderot's friend and coeditor of the *Encyclopédie,* d'Alembert, resisted such hazardous generalizations. Like Newton, he opposed metaphysical speculation. He even refused to define the primary properties of matter; he was interested only in how they functioned. "The purpose of philosophy is not to become lost in the universal properties of being and of substance, in useless questions about abstract concepts, in arbitrary divisions and eternal nomenclatures: it is the science either of facts or of chimeras."[33] By means of definitions philosophers merely generalize particular phenomena in order thereby to make them appear universal and necessary. In fact, the complexity of nature defies comprehensive description.[34] The creation of abstract universals obstructs rather than favors the possibility of subsuming experience under mathematical laws. D'Alembert, an eminent mathematician, abstained from construing general philosophical theories on the basis of particular phenomena.

Observation never results in apodictic truth, but if duly repeated and formulated into law, it asymptotically approaches mathematical certainty.[35] In the end the very possibility of a universal science of "nature" can be no more than a postulate. Cassirer confirms d'Alembert's doubts: "Where is the guarantee, the decisive proof, that at least this general system of phenomena is completely self-contained, homogeneous, and uniform?"[36] More orthodox mechanists were not happy with d'Alembert's methodic asceticism. In his funeral oration for d'Alembert, Condorcet regretted that the great mathematician had pushed the demands of mathematical rigor too far. "He may have imposed too narrow limitations upon the human mind. Too accustomed to truths demonstrated

and formed by simple, precisely defined ideas, he may have been insufficiently aware of truths of a different order that have more complex ideas as their object, for the discussion of which we may even need to articulate definitions and, so to speak, new ideas, because the words employed in these sciences taken from ordinary language and used in common parlance have only vague and indeterminate meanings."[37]

Paul-Henri Dietrich d'Holbach's *Système de la nature* (1771) stayed closer to Diderot's views, except for its peremptory dogmatism. In this work, published anonymously, the German baron, who in Paris kept an open house for scientists, philosophes, and radical thinkers, construed a coherent materialist system of the universe and of all it contains. Matter is an all-comprehensive, eternal substance that, with the sole support of motion, accounts for the entire scale of the real—from mineral to mind. The author combines a naive reductionism and a simplistic determinism with an impressive erudition and an occasionally incisive critique of established positions. He lacks any *esprit de finesse,* but his passionate eloquence against "superstition" carries the weary reader along through a dense brush of learning and bias. Single-mindedly intent on proving the truth of atheistic naturalism, he borrows from any source likely to provide ammunition for his unholy war. Empedocles, Epicurus, and Lucretius appear side by side with Descartes and Newton, whose theories he thoroughly distorts. "Descartes asked but matter and motion: diversity of matter sufficed for him; variety of motion was the consequence of its existence, of its essence, of its properties."[38] As matter moves, it determines bodies in different modes of being and they result in different modes of action. D'Holbach claims to follow the "rules" of the *Principia,* but his own theory of creative vital forces moves far beyond what Newton's principles allow. In fact, he superimposes Leibniz's dynamic theory of substance upon Newton's mechanism. He also appeals to Leibniz's identity of indiscernibles—two individuals even of the same species can never possess identical qualities—in order to show the infinite fertility of a nature, which he defines as bound by rigorous, mechanistic determinism (I, 9, 60).

Nature is "the great whole that results from the assemblage of motions which the universe offers to our view" (I, 1, 15). Endowed with the attributes of a transcendent principle, d'Holbach's Nature is eternal, comprehensive, organizing, and the sole source of motion. Typical of the baron's breezy way of marching through an argument are his far-reaching equations. Attraction and repulsion are identified with Empedocles' love and hatred (I, 4, 29–32). Physical motion rules the internal functions of willing and thinking. Intelligence results from a particular combination of matter that produces unique modes of action, called "reflection" and "decision." Everything happens necessarily

and forms part of an uninterrupted chain of cause and effect. "Chance" and "freedom" merely describe series of events where we fail to perceive the causal link. D'Holbach ascribes unlimited powers to nature. It suffices to consider matter to be animated by motion, rather than dead and inert, to understand the entire order of nature as self-produced (I, 5, 38).

A secret theology has wormed its way into his deterministic system. Nature becomes personified, endowed with divine attributes, and invested with a capacity to act in view of self-chosen ends. "It is part of her [Nature's] plan, that certain portions of the earth shall bring forth delicious fruits, whilst others shall only furnish brambles and noxious vegetables: she has been willing that some societies should produce wise men and great heroes, that others should only give birth to contemptible men" (I, 12, 113). But Nature is indifferent to human life, d'Holbach had asserted in a lyrical passage reminiscent of that earlier rhapsodist of an all-inclusive nature, Giordano Bruno. "Suns encrust themselves and are extinguished; planets perish and disperse themselves in the vast plains of air; other suns are kindled; new planets form themselves, either to make revolutions round these suns, or to describe new routes; and man, an infinitely small portion of the globe, which is itself but an imperceptible point in the immensity of space, believes it is for himself this universe is made" (I, 6, 46).[39] Despite the apparent indifference to human life of d'Holbach's matter, the emergence of forms of being follows a strict hierarchy from the inert to the intelligent, as if mental life were its anticipated goal.

Is matter able to produce new species and to make old ones disappear? D'Holbach does not doubt it. Only the shortness of human life prevents us from seeing species emerging or vanishing. An organic nature constantly transforms itself into ever more complex forms of life, in accordance with climatic and geographical conditions (I, 6, 44). "Everything seems to authorize the conjecture that the human species is a production peculiar to our sphere, in the position in which it is found: that, when this position may happen to change, the human species will, of consequence, either be changed, or will be obliged to disappear" (I, 6, 45). This admission of a possible extinction of the human race is exceptional in d'Holbach's system. Most of the time his concept of nature was inspired by an eighteenth-century belief in progress rather than by biological evidence. Not the struggle for survival nor "mutational" accidents determine the process, but Nature's teleological orientation toward the highest form of life. Once civilization appears it becomes a powerful instrument for the preservation and improvement of the human species.

For all their learning and passion, d'Holbach's tomes failed to impress his fellow philosophes. In his *Correspondance littéraire* about cultural developments in France, the sarcastic Grimm writes: "I find no other danger in them

than that of boredom: all of it becomes exceedingly repetitious. The earth keeps on turning and the impact of the most daring opinions equals zero." Grimm's remark cautions us not to exaggerate the esteem d'Holbach enjoyed even in the minds of his enlightened contemporaries. The baron's goal was not scientific but ideological: to justify materialism and theories of progress by sweeping but unproven statements about physics and biology. D'Holbach's originality consisted in popularizing the scientific conclusions of arguments presented by others and in transforming them, well beyond what their scientific support warranted, into tools for a social program. His work may have enjoyed little authority among scientists and even among philosophers, but it effectively served a social project.

His materialism prematurely brought to completion what by its very nature must remain an asymptotic process. The project of scientific research never ends since the gap between thinking and reality never closes. The idea of progress is inherent in the scientific enterprise itself.[40] Although we assume that science comes ever closer to its ideal, it will never succeed in fully justifying why the world continues to appear different from what our accumulated knowledge proves it to be. The materialist resolves this permanent tension between subject and object by simply assuming that subjectivity itself is a mode of the known or knowable object. Once this thesis is accepted the possibility of an exhaustive knowledge is in principle attained. Further progress then consists merely in filling in the details.

The Organic View of Nature

BUFFON

By the middle of the eighteenth century even such loyal apostles of mechanism as d'Alembert, Diderot, and La Mettrie had begun to attribute forces to nature that exceeded Descartes's and Newton's concepts of motion. Buffon and Leibniz's organic theories of nature broke away from mechanism altogether. George-Louis Buffon, a noted mathematician and in his early years an orthodox mechanist, attempted to apply Newton's principles to the organic world. But even the introductory *Discours* to the first volume of his enormous *Histoire Naturelle* spells trouble for the theory. To reduce the order of living organisms to a single homogeneous order, he writes, is an exercise that can satisfy only "the mind of those who know nature poorly." The Creator has dispensed "an infinite number of harmonious and contrary combinations, as well as perpetual destructions and renewals."[41] Buffon even objects to his great contemporary Linné's classification into genus, species, and subspecies.

as remnants of species that have ceased to exist. Some of those shells reappear in continents now separated from each other. What we today would count as clear signs of genetic mutations remained merely an intriguing phenomenon for one who persisted in his belief that animal species are fixed. Even so, the evidence Buffon produced was sufficient to alarm Newtonians as well as theologians. Voltaire dismissed the seashells on the mountains as remnants of travelers' picnics or as relics of shell-bearing pilgrims crossing the Pyrenees or Alps on their way to Compostella.

A crucial step in overcoming mechanism was the different conception of form that emerged from the new life sciences—biology, botany, and zoology. The issue first came up in a dispute about the nature of organic species. Are natural forms continuous so that any classification, though useful for purposes of investigation, must be artificial? Or are species distinct steps in the hierarchy of nature, as Linné thought? Since Trembley's discovery of the *zoophyte hydra,* the issue of continuity ceased to divide the scientific community. Henceforth it centered on the question of whether in a continuous system forms might be classified as permanent. Ever since Newton's theory of force the idea of form as a dynamic, teleological principle had been working itself to the surface. It definitively broke through in Leibniz's philosophy.

LEIBNIZ

The scientific study of nature presupposes a trust that all the pieces of the puzzle somehow fit together and that the various lines of investigation converge at a center. Around this assumption of a universal harmony Leibniz built an all-inclusive system of reality. But rather than reducing all things to a single substance, as Spinoza had done, he started from an irreducible plurality of substances. Each one, except the simple divine substance, contained a spiritual core, a simple "monad" surrounded by a cluster of subordinate "monads" that made the substance receptive to outside influences. This radical departure from the mechanistic concept of reality remained a mere hypothesis until the mechanistic thesis had, at least in principle, been falsified by the empirical evidence on which it claimed to be based. Buffon and other naturalists of Leibniz's time had begun to show that animals and plants followed other laws than the mechanistic one of action and reaction.

Leibniz's thought, the most comprehensive and one of the most original of the Enlightenment period, requires a more detailed analysis than appears in this chapter. (More will be said about him in a later one.) Here I shall discuss only his remarkable alternative to mechanist philosophy. Crucial thereby was the restoration of the notion of form, once the determining category of Western thought. The philosophies of Descartes, Hobbes, and Locke all

had replaced it by the concept of substance.[46] Substance soon became so all-encompassing as to lose its distinct meaning. Descartes had identified the entire physical nature with extended substance, and Spinoza, anxious to eliminate the absolute dualism between extension and thought, equated substance with the totality of the real. Hume subsequently showed how easily one could dispense with such a broad category altogether.

In an article in the *Journal des Savans* (in June 1695) Leibniz justified his reviving what had fallen into such a profound disrepute.

> I realized that it is impossible to find the principles of a *true unity* in matter alone, since everything in it is only a collection or mass of parts to infinity. Now multitude can only get in reality from *true unities* which come from elsewhere and are quite different from points (it is known that the continuum cannot be composed of points). Therefore to find their real unities I was compelled to have recourse to a formal atom, since a material being cannot be both material and perfectly indivisible or endowed with true unity. It was necessary, hence, to recall and, so to speak, rehabilitate the *substantial forms* so decried today, but in a way which would make them intelligible and which would separate the use we should make of them from the abuse that has been made of them.[47]

By interpreting Newton's notion of force in the sense of Aristotle's goal-directed form principle (the *entelecheia*), he hoped to reconcile the mechanistic with the dynamic theories of matter while at the same time relinking the new physics to the ancient metaphysics. "I grant that the consideration of these [substantial] forms is of no service in the details of physics and ought not to be employed in the explanation of particular phenomena."[48] But if Descartes's collapse of all material substances into one and Spinoza's universal monism were to be avoided, the notion of substance had to be defined in a more specific manner than "that which is in itself and is conceived through itself." The universe contains a multiplicity of qualities, some of them conflicting with others. They cannot be attributed to a single substance without logical contradiction. The differentiating note of form would prevent this.

By the same token Leibniz excluded Descartes's equation of material substance with extension. If forces are an essential feature of the mechanic system, material substances had to consist of more than extension, which is not even an objective quality but a concept needed to describe continuity among material substances.[49] The phenomenon of extension, far from defining the essence of material substance, results from the mind's tendency to equate what is merely similar and continuous. Material entities do indeed share a common passive quality. But, as Newton had shown, a mechanistic system also contains active forces. They require the presence of the spiritual principle of form.

Leibniz disagreed with Newton's theory of physics on one fundamental issue. He rejected the notion of absolute space as an abstraction that freezes into a single, static reality the dynamic relations that all coexisting things in the universe entertain with one another. "I hold it [space] to be an *order of coexistences,* as time is an *order of successions*. For space denotes, in terms of possibility, an order of things which exist at the same time, considered as existing together, without inquiring into their particular manner of existing."[50] Newton's absolute space is independent of the objects in it and hence indifferent with respect to the position of the objects. This means that objects could occupy any other position than the one they actually occupy. But then no reason could be given why things are where they actually are, a thesis that directly conflicts with Leibniz's principle of sufficient reason. "The fiction of a material finite universe, moving forward in an infinite empty space, cannot be admitted. For, besides that there is no real space out of the material universe, such an action would be *without* any design in it."[51] A spatial vacuum exists neither outside the universe nor inside it. The concept of *space* refers to the phenomenal order of coexistence in which objects are related to one another. Leibniz excluded the very possibility of a void surrounding the universe by assuming that it is infinite. ("It does not appear reasonable that the material universe should be finite.")[52]

Time also refers to a relation, rather than to an independent being as it did for Newton.[53] Since time is no more than the appearing order of succession, Leibniz needs no idea of an absolute infinite time surrounding the duration of the cosmos. A substance may last eternally but there is no such *thing* as an eternal duration.[54] Nor could the world have been created "sooner" or "later": time originates with the world, being nothing but the order in which existing realities relate to one another. A time before the world would be "a thing absolute, independent of God; whereas time must coexist with creatures, and is only conceived by the *order* and *quantity* of their changes."[55] Moreover, the idea that God would create the world at a particular segment of an absolute time conflicts with the principle of sufficient reason: Why at this moment rather than at another when in an infinite empty time no moment would have an ontological priority over any other?

Surprisingly, Leibniz holds that duration, in contrast to extension, must have a beginning. "If it is the nature of things in the whole, to grow uniformly in perfection, the universe of creatures must have had a beginning. And therefore, there will be reasons to limit the duration of things, even though there were none to limit their extension."[56] Yet the fact that time has a beginning does not prevent it from stretching out indefinitely into the future. Leibniz's position may have been inspired by a theological concern that if the world had

always existed, the divine act of creation would have been jeopardized. But does creation imply more than an absolute dependence of all finite being upon an absolute being? What then is time for Leibniz? An ideal concept resulting not from a single perception but from "a train of perceptions [that] awakens in us the idea of duration."[57] The synthetic concepts of time and space possess an *ideal* truth, though not a real one: they condition our ability to perceive phenomena in an orderly, connected series.

On one other critical issue Leibniz disagrees with Newton, namely, the need for God's occasional interventions to redress the small deviations from the regular concentric orbits the planets describe. In the *Opticks* Newton had written: "'Tis not possible it should have been caused by blind fate, that the planets all move with one familiar direction in concentric orbs; excepting only some very small irregularities, which may have arisen from the mutual actions of the planets and comets one upon another; and which 'tis probable will in length of time increase be anew put in order by its Author."[58] Leibniz objected to such shoddy workmanship that required the Creator "to wind up his watch from time to time."[59] If the order can be repaired, what prevented God from making it perfect from the start? Does the principle of perfection not require that everything made by a perfect Creator must be as perfect as it can possibly be? This principle of perfection, as all Leibniz's principles, follows from the comprehensive rule of sufficient reason.

That principle most radically formulates the rationalist assumption that the real must be rational in all respects. All that exists or occurs must be justified by a reason for its particular existence or occurrence. That principle also implies that substances must be continuous with one another. Gaps or abrupt transitions in the line of being cannot be rationally justified. It further requires that each substance qualitatively differ from all others, since the existence of a substance that is in no way distinct from another would have no reason for existing. It suffices not for a substance to occupy a quantitatively different position, or to have a different "weight." If simple substances were without differentiating qualities, reality would be totally homogeneous.

The *Monadology,* Leibniz's last major writing, may be read as his final response to mechanistic philosophy. For Leibniz, as for all rationalists, the ultimate condition of rationality is simplicity. Thought operates on the basis of a small number of principles and this implies, according to them, that the real itself may be broken down into simple elements.[60] Leibniz called simple substances *monads* rather than *atoms,* because physical atoms remain subject to division.[61] "Physical points are indivisible only in appearance; mathematical points are indivisible only in appearance; mathematical points are exact, but they are only modalities; only metaphysical or substantial points (constituted

by *forms* or souls) are exact and real."[62] Each substance, then, even the complex physical one is built around a simple spiritual core. Contrary to the materialist notion of atoms, these spiritual monads are not moved by external forces but exclusively by their own internal teleology.

Each monad expresses a unique perspective on the totality of the real. All complement one another and, indirectly, influence each other by their greater or smaller power of expression.[63] "Activity belongs to the essence of substance in general."[64] In a letter to the Dutch philosopher De Volder, Leibniz writes: "I believe that our thought of [material] substance is perfectly satisfied in the *conception of force* and not in that of extension. Besides, there should be no need to seek any other explanation for the conception of power or force than that it is the attitude from which change follows and its subject is substance itself."[65] In describing the material substance as an expressive force directed by an inner teleology, Leibniz contradicts mechanism on the most fundamental level. The dynamic qualities that mechanism had reserved to God and humans, he predicated of all substances: "Substance is a being capable of action."[66]

Leibniz even attributes perception, though not apperception (i.e., fully conscious perception) to all beings. The principle of perfection excludes a sudden break between the organic and the inorganic, the mental and the corporeal. Perception is an expressive act and because each substance, even the lowest in the hierarchy of being, is a center of expressive power, each substance must be perceptive. Each reflects in its own way the state of all others with which it is united in a universal harmony.

In declaring power to be the essence of substance — not the kind of causally induced power of mechanistic philosophy but *spontaneous power* that originates within the substance — Leibniz laid a new foundation for the harmony between mind and body. All physical reality is ontologically linked to a spiritual core; in the case of humans, the mind is the spiritual core of the body.

Conclusion: Kant's Internalization of Nature

In Kant's thought empiricist and rationalist theories converged. From the former he retained that only empirical knowledge can convey reliable information about nature; from the latter, that knowledge to be scientific (and hence universal) had to be rooted in a priori principles to become necessary. A mere description of nature as the sum of empirical observations was inadequate for scientific as well as for philosophical purposes. In the *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* (1783), Kant replaces the traditional description of nature as "the totality of all objects of experience" by "the existence of things so far as it is determined according to universal laws."[67] These laws are

does not know itself. Kant's philosophy supported and strengthened this awareness of the mind's unique place in the order of reality. Not only does the mind know the universe; its knowledge constitutes it as ideal entity.

The change in the cosmological outlook caused both a feeling of disorientation and a new sense of freedom. Many felt lost in a universe that had ceased to provide a firm dwelling place. At the same time, others welcomed the liberation from a prefixed order that restricted all thinking and acting by clearly defined limits of space and time. Henceforth the mind itself was to determine the coordinates of its position. For the first time people, no longer confined to this earth, started speculating about a plurality of worlds. Other planets might be inhabited. Eventually this new worldview was to affect all other aspects of life—the person's view of himself or herself, the nature of religion, ethics, and aesthetics.

3

A New Sense of Selfhood

The success of the physical and mathematical sciences inspired a demand for a science of human nature. Not only would a systematic knowledge of the person round out the circle of sciences, but, as Hume understood it, such a knowledge would place all other sciences on a secure basis. "It is evident that all the sciences have a relation, greater or less, to human nature; and that, however wide any of them may seem to run from it, they still return by one passage or another. Here then is the only expedient, from which we can hope for success in our philosophical researches to leave the tedious lingering method, which we have hitherto followed and instead of taking now and then a castle or village on the frontier, to march directly up to the capital or center of those sciences, to human nature itself; which being once masters of, we may everywhere else hope for an easy victory."[1]

The science of the person was to provide the foundation for all others. Even Kant, so scrupulous about separating the principles of knowledge from the particulars of human nature, in a later writing declared the philosophical understanding of man the key to all philosophy. In the *Critique of Pure Reason* he had raised three questions: "What can I know? What ought I do? What may I hope?"[2] The three *Critiques* were to answer them. In the *Logik* he adds a fourth question: *Was ist der Mensch?* (What is the human person?) His answer states what had been one of the implicit assumptions of modern thought: "In

the end one might count all this [the content of the triple *Critique*] to be anthropology, because the first three questions all relate to the last one."[3] Thus philosophy rested on anthropology. But this knowledge of the self differed from the one to which the oracle of Delphi had summoned Socrates, namely, to understand his place in the whole of reality. For the moderns, the self *defines* that reality, rather than being defined by it.

The Modern Predicament: The Self, Subject or Substance?

From the beginning a basic ambiguity had adhered to the science of the self. The object of the investigation was at the same time the investigating subject. The self was both knowing *subject* and the *substance* to be known. The terms "subject" and "substance" were both translations of the same Greek term, *hypokeimenon,* the permanent base that supports the transient qualities of a being. Descartes uses the term "subject" rarely and never in the pregnant sense here described. The term "substance," originally no more than the permanent core that supports (*sub-stat*) all qualities of a being, had gradually come to refer to that being itself.[4] Early Scholasticism had referred to God, the soul, and the world, as substances. Descartes continued to apply that term to the conscious self (*res cogitans*), but because for him consciousness functions as the source of meaning of all substances, that denomination created a major problem. How can what constitutes meaning be, at the same time, a substance endowed with a meaning content of its own? How can there be an *objective* science of what is supposed to be the source of all objective meaning?[5]

The problem continues to haunt contemporary thought. Michel Foucault referred to it as the paradox of a "being such that knowledge will be attained in him of what renders all knowledge possible."[6] Paul Ricoeur has rephrased the two functions of the self while attempting to avoid the dualism involved in the terminology of subject and substance. He distinguishes the two modes of self-description by the Latin terms *ipse* (the meaning-giving function of the self) and *idem* (the quality whereby a self remains the same substance).[7] The self is both. Yet referring to it through either of those designations singularly is inadequate. If the self is defined only through its sameness (*idem*), it becomes quantitatively distinct from other objective entities, but nothing indicates its qualitative uniqueness. *Sameness* defines the self through bodiliness, which distinguishes it from any other substance but neglects its main quality, namely, to be the source of meaning and acting. The problem is equally serious, however, if I describe the self as a pure *ipse* or subject, the unique and unshareable center of consciousness. It allows no space for genuine otherness, beside that

of its own bodiliness. Nor does such a disincarnated self-consciousness possess a particular content to define its spiritual identity.

The problem of the self as subject and/or substance determined much of the theoretical discussion of personhood during the Enlightenment. Rationalist philosophers defined the self mainly as source of meaning, as Descartes had done. But Descartes had described the person as consisting of two substances, mind and body, and had thereby also occasioned a different, indeed an opposite trend. Materialists found in his philosophy some support for overcoming the spiritual dualism inherent in his view of the person. Had he himself not classified animal life as *res extensa,* that is, as part of a mechanistic universe? Extending this view to all living beings, they converted the French philosopher's position into a materialist one, the one he had most strongly attempted to avoid.

Kant brought this discussion to a head and resolved the ambiguity by distinguishing between the two aspects of the self: the transcendental subject or *ego* that constitutes all objective knowledge and, on the other side, the self that is aware of itself as an independent entity (a substance) but of which I have no objective knowledge. "I do not know myself through being conscious of myself as thinking." The *I* is not an object of thought, but a function of thinking. "In all our thought the *I* is the subject, in which thoughts inhere only as determinations; and this *I* cannot be employed as the determination of another thing. Everyone must, therefore, necessarily regard himself as substance, and thought as [consisting] only [in] accidents of his being, determinations of his state. But what use am I to make of this concept of a substance?"[8] Even introspection does not attain the core of selfhood. Our view of ourselves as well as the words in which we express it depend on cultural presuppositions transmitted through language. The child assumes this tradition when it learns how to speak, before even knowing the meaning of the words. To Kant, the issue was of crucial moral significance. As free beings humans are accountable for their actions. Yet as parts of an objective system they are subject to determinations over which they have no control (*KRV,* 448–49; B 476–77). How can the self be free in such a system?

In my opinion, Leibniz came closest to resolving the dilemma of the self as subject and the self as substance, though he did not directly discuss the issue. For him, there were neither pure subjects nor pure substances. *Each* substantial entity is a center of power that consists of a cluster of simple units (monads) acting together under the direction of one leading monad. In the case of the human self, the soul fulfills this leading function. The subordinate monads of the body stand in a subservient but not entirely passive position to the soul's

active power. Without body, the mind would not be able to function; without mind, the body would remain a random coalition of unorganized units. The cooperation of mind and body, then, required a different causal relation than that of the efficient causality that science had come to accept and which had resulted in either dualism (as it did in Descartes) or in materialism (as in d'Holbach). For Leibniz, their relation is determined by an inner teleology whereby the mind functions as the body's final cause. Mind and body operate in unison as a single center of power. Leibniz accepts Spinoza's principle that "the essence of the soul is to represent bodies," but he adds that the soul is more than the idea of the body. The body changes; the soul functions as the active principle, the *entelechy,* that determines the body's changes without changing itself.

In British philosophy the search for a coherent theory of selfhood took a very different form. Rather than speculating about what the self was in itself, empiricist thinkers analyzed how and what it *experiences*. They shied away from metaphysical concepts and instead attempted to describe, as accurately as possible, the total array of experience, passions and emotions as well as understanding. John Locke began by bracketing the question of the *substantial self* (referring to it as a *je ne sais quoi* principle of unity), and David Hume ended up denying its existence as an independent "thinking thing" distinct from its thought content. In Hume's words: "The mind is a kind of theatre where several perceptions successively make their appearance; pass, repass, glide away, and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations. There is properly no *simplicity* in it at one time, nor *identity* in different."[9] In addition, empiricist philosophers did not restrict introspection to a reflection on the process of thinking, as rationalists had mainly done. With equal interest they observed those emotional and sentimental states in which consciousness appears to coincide with itself rather than being outwardly directed as in intentional knowledge. I am what I *feel* myself to be.

Locke seldom ventured beyond the purely cognitive experience. His *Essay Concerning Human Understanding,* as the title indicates, professes to be no more than an inquiry concerning the modes of knowledge. But a full description of the ways of knowing ought to include all functions of consciousness. The *Essay* is in this regard rather disappointing. Locke disposes of the passions in one short chapter (*Essay,* II, 20). What prevented him from fully exploring the perspectives he had opened was, in the first place, his narrow conception of self-knowledge. If knowledge is a matter of sensation and reflection, the mind is left little creative originality. Leslie Stephen's unfriendly and ultimately unfair assessment of Locke's work contains some truth in its final clause: "Locke was a thoroughly modest, prosaic, tentative, and sometimes clumsy writer,

derived, was a purely physiological process. Dispensing with the qualifying paraphrases of his predecessors, Baron d'Holbach bluntly declared: "Man is a being purely physical. His visible actions as well as the invisible motion interiorly excited by his will or his thoughts, are equally the natural effects, the necessary consequences, of his peculiar mechanism, and the impulse he receives from those beings by whom he is surrounded."[18]

The writers of the *Encyclopédie,* like Hume, intended to construe a science of man. Yet the existing sciences were all of physical substances. Condillac's sensationalist epistemology enabled them to include the realm of consciousness within the physical sciences and thereby to overcome the disturbing gap between mind and matter. Humans are subject to the same laws as other animals and, indeed, as the entire physical universe. Descartes himself had described animals as part of the *res extensa,* the world of physical mechanism. When the physiologist Robert Whytt in 1751 showed that movement in animals and humans could be generated by stimulating the spinal cord, many materialists considered one of the final objections against the homogeneity of the organic and the psychic removed.[19] All materialists recognized that mechanical laws assumed a more complex form in beings who *consciously* reacted to motion, but for most of them, the greater complexity did not basically change the pattern of motion. Does not the mechanical system of a clock produce intelligible results by motion alone, La Mettrie wondered. "The soul is but a principle of motion or a material and sensible part of the brain which may be regarded as the mainspring of the entire machine having a visible influence on all its parts."[20]

Diderot, though he himself had once compared the person to *une horloge ambulante* (a walking clockwork), considered the sensationalist theory insufficient for explaining the birth of consciousness. Condillac had assumed that memory was the essential link between sensations and consciousness. But how did memory itself emerge from sensations? What causes them to be retained after they have ceased to be actually present? Attempting to answer the question on physiological grounds, Diderot, rather gratuitously, claimed that the organs of perception continue to "vibrate" long after the stimulus has desisted. They retain a past sensation while a new one is already entering the nervous system. Even as the vibration of one string of a musical instrument makes all others vibrate, the memory of an impression summons up a second, those two a third, those three together a fourth, and so on.[21] The real question, however, how the mind "stores" these impressions, remains unanswered. Diderot remained faithful to the materialist creed. The laws that determine the physical universe also govern the self. Passions may give us the impression that we act autonomously when we are in fact motivated by them. The feeling of

self-determination rests on an illusion. There are no holes in the web of physical determinism. Desire of pleasure and aversion of pain unfailingly carry out the dictates of the biological instinct for survival. In his *Généalogie des passions* Helvetius added to this instinct a drive for power: each living being desires not only to be, but to be powerful and thereby to enhance its chances for survival.

French materialists attempted to overcome Cartesian dualism by reducing mind to the bodily substance. Others followed the opposite road. The French zoologist Buffon held that the human body, contrived to serve as the mind's instrument, substantially differs from animal bodiliness. A famous description in his *Histoire Naturelle* presents human anatomy as reflecting a higher, nonmaterial principle. "He stands erect, his attitude exudes command; his head lifted up to heaven presents an august face imprinted with the mark of his dignity; the soul's image appears in his physiognomy; the excellence of his nature penetrates his material organs and animates his traits with a divine fire; his majestic posture, his firm and daring gait announce his nobility and rank; the earth he only touches by his most remote extremities; he only views her from afar seemingly holding her in low esteem; his arms are not given him as pillars of support for the mass of his body."[22] Still, in that same work Buffon describes animal bodies as purely mechanical, as Descartes thought them to be. His theory overcomes materialist reductionism, but not Cartesian dualism.

That dualism excluded any possibility of human evolution from a lower species. Buffon was familiar with a number of phenomena by which later writers were to support the transformation of species. He acknowledged a continuous ascending order among the animal species. But to him, the gap between these species and human nature appeared so deep as to render a leap from one to the other utterly impossible. "If the person belonged to the animal order, there would in nature exist a number of beings less perfect than humans yet more perfect than animals through which one would gradually, by almost imperceptible shifts, descend from man to ape. But they do not exist. We pass abruptly from the thinking being to the material one, from intellectual power to mechanical force, from order and design to blind motion, from reflection to appetite." Buffon does not even see an analogy between animal and human species. Humans are simply not in the same class as animals. He continues to view the animals, which he so knowledgeably describes, as Descartes had seen them — as *automata*.

In his later work Buffon yielded somewhat to the pressure of progress in the zoological science to which he himself had much contributed. He ended up admitting the existence of sensitivity, memory, and even dreams in animals. But the line that divides them from humans remains as rigidly drawn as before.

Herder, who started the hierarchy from animal to human from below rather than from above (as Buffon had done), defended a teleological move toward humanity. The ascending order of animals gradually prepared a finely tuned instrument for exercising mental functions. Yet neither Herder nor Leibniz, who had formulated the principle of continuity, were ready to embrace any form of biological evolution. Kant, in his review of books one to five of Herder's *Ideas for a Philosophy of History,* severely criticized even the alleged analogy between the organic structures of animals and those of humans.

This investigation of the ambiguity concerning the self as subject and/or as substance may seem a rather arcane philosophical problem, distant from common human concerns. Writers of memoirs and autobiographies, poets, and novelists focused their attention on the immediate states of consciousness that convey a different, more intimate awareness of selfhood. Nonetheless, on a more fundamental level, we detect a common concern. Both philosophy and literature display an awakened subjectivity. However different his moral outlook, La Rochefoucauld in his *Maxims* insists as much on pure intentions as Kant in his *Critique of Practical Reason;* Abbé Prévost's novels of irresistible passions find a justification in Hume's treatment of the same subject; Shaftesbury's discussion of feelings and intuitions echoes Pascal's knowledge of the heart. We now turn to those more immediate forms of self-awareness.

Passions, Feelings, and Emotions

We still to refer to the eighteenth century as the Age of Reason, yet a comparison of its views on reason, passions, and feelings with those current in the preceding century shows that the epithet more properly applies to the earlier period. Despite the persistence and development of rationalist trends, the Enlightenment could more accurately be described as an age of *self-consciousness*. The loss of the person's central position in the post-Galilean universe initiated a reflective mood. Lost in a planet of one of the innumerable solar systems, humans could no longer reasonably assume that the universe existed for their benefit or that they constituted its ultimate raison d'être. This insight released two seemingly opposite but actually concurring reactions. The first one was pointedly expressed in Hume's statement quoted at the beginning of this chapter in which he urges his contemporaries, now that admirable inroads have been made in the domain of the natural sciences, to focus on the human source of this knowledge. However minute a place the person may occupy in the general scheme of things, the human mind has nonetheless brought the entire universe into scientific subjugation. Hence the self presented a new, even more important field for scientific conquests. The other

reaction consisted in a withdrawal from the natural world in order to reflect on the interior life where all that really mattered to the person remained greatly unexplored. This inward move was supported by the spiritual trends of the time.

The interest in self-knowledge that suddenly increased during the late seventeenth century would be hard to imagine without the practice of daily self-examination such as that recommended in Catholic spirituality (that of the Jesuits as well as of the Jansenists). Pietists and Puritans also felt the need to scrutinize their inner attitude and to search for signs of election. This unintermittent self-reflection has left its mark on spiritual as well as profane literature in Great Britain and, even more, in New England.[23] I shall analyze some of the sources of spiritual life in the Enlightenment in the final chapter, but here I must at least mention such remarkable works of introspective piety as Fénélon's letters of spiritual guidance, Jonathan Edwards's treatise on *Religious Affections,* and William Law's *The Spirit of Love.* As a French historian of ideas aptly put it: "Pietism is an intermediate phase in the process of a human consciousness on its way toward emancipation. The God of Pietism is the God who hides in the secret of the hearts."[24]

Among the secular sources of the trend toward introspection, Shaftesbury may well be the first name to mention. Convinced that there is more to selfhood than Descartes's and Locke's "punctual" self-consciousness, he dismissed the central *cogito ergo sum* as being no more than an analytic statement (*there is thinking*) that provides no information about the content of the self whose existence it asserts. He anticipated Hume's suspicion that one cannot even derive the existence of a single thinking substance from the *cogito.* Descartes's substantial identity is no more than an unproven supposition. Memory was supposed to link my experience of myself in the past to my present self-consciousness. But Descartes himself had admitted that memory may be deceptive. Indeed, Shaftesbury observed, the self I remember never coincides with the self I really was and even less with the self I am now. "Consciousness may as well be false as real in respect to what is past."[25] Shaftesbury himself never explains what he considers to be the content of the mind, but he emphatically denies that it consists in the capacity to generate clear and distinct ideas. Instead he seeks that content at the deeper, more obscure level of consciousness to which we refer as *feeling.* Self-knowledge, for Shaftesbury, consists first and foremost in an awareness of one's feelings. Others followed him in this direction. Rousseau argued that not reason, but the deeper, more diffuse self-awareness attained in feeling forms the core of mind. At the beginning of the *Confessions* he raises the question, "Qui suis-je?" and answers, "Je sens mon coeur." A far cry from *Cogito ergo sum!* The

popular playwright Nivelle de la Chaussée made the difference explicit in one of his dramas: "Plus je sens vivement, plus je sens que je suis." (The more acutely I feel, the more I feel that I am.)[26]

A third factor that affected the emotional climate of the eighteenth century was the nature and sudden success of the novel. It began in France. Originally a tale of adventure—either heroic or picaresque—the novel had in the seventeenth century taken an introspective turn. It became a reflection on the complex interaction of feelings, passions, and emotions in love. Mme. de La Fayette's *La princesse de Clèves* (published in 1678) set the tone for much of the subsequent narrative literature, not only in France but also in England. In this psychological novel few events occur. The story follows its course from private feeling to emotional struggle and moral victory. Having fallen in love with a man who loves her, the princess remains faithful to her husband, even after his death. Richardson's novels *Pamela* and *Clarissa* were soon to refine, if not to surpass, La Fayette's exquisite analysis of feelings. Those romances explored a more intimate layer of consciousness. Characteristic of the shifting interest was a change in the meaning of such terms as *sensibilité* and *sensibility*. Originally *sensible,* in French as well as in English, had referred to intellectual perceptiveness: the ability to sense or to reflect. By the eighteenth century it had become a substantive and acquired a strongly emotional connotation. It then came to mean, as the Oxford Dictionary explains, a power or faculty of feeling and, more specifically, a capacity for refined emotions, as Jane Austen's distinction between *sense* and *sensibility* shows. Such terms as "sensitive" and "thoughtful" likewise broadened their original, purely cognitive meaning.[27]

Philosophy had paid little attention to the emotional side of the self. Of course, Descartes's *Treatise on the Passions of the Soul* (1649) as well as Spinoza's quite different treatment of the same subject had appeared in the seventeenth century. But passions are not feelings. Moreover, with regard to the passions a change in attitude was taking place at the end of the century. Descartes had still unhesitatingly declared that no soul, however weak, is incapable of gaining total control over its passions.[28] Such had essentially been the Stoic position. Passions, though necessary, are to be subdued by reason. Descartes had somewhat qualified the negative Stoic judgment. In his theory passions fulfill a vital function; they assist the will in executing what reason commands. Still, passions originate in the body and disturb mental life until reason gains full control over them.[29] Spinoza also considered passions indispensable, but they need to be converted into active powers.[30]

Corneille's dramas reflect both these positive and negative traits. In the *Examen* that prefaces *Le Cid* Corneille writes: "The high virtue in a nature sensitive to these passions, which she subjugates without weakening them,

century. Madame de Sévigné raised this naive form of introspection to classic elegance in the almost daily warm and witty letters she exchanged with her daughter. In gossipy, occasionally catty, yet always fascinating reflections on the events around the Sun King's Court, the marquise discloses as much about her own feelings as about the objects of her ironical observation. Her elegantly phrased sentences move with the flow of private thoughts, emotions, and feelings rather than following the lines of logic and consistency. Other letter writers reveal an unexpected side of themselves. Voltaire, the confident author of sarcastic epigrams, cold dramas, and critical barbs against all people other than himself, exhibits a quite different persona in his letters. In some of them, we encounter a witty, warm-blooded yet vulnerable man, devoted to his Jesuit masters, loving of his friends, and fearful of his enemies (especially Rousseau). One may wonder, however, whether such epistolary self-disclosure may not be an easy means to hide or idealize one's true feelings. The suspicion is particularly strong in such a Protean figure as Voltaire. Dr. Johnson suspected that the personal tone of the letter as well as the writer's relation to his correspondent may tempt the writer to express rarely felt affections as if they were habitual ones. "There is indeed no transaction which offers stronger temptations to fallacy and sophistication than epistolary intercourse. In the eagerness of conversation the first emotions of the mind often burst out before they are considered; in the tumult of business interest and passion have their genuine effect; but a friendly letter is a calm and deliberate performance in the cool of leisure, in its stillness of solitude, and surely no man sits down to depreciate by design his own character."[37]

The knowledge of human nature was pursued on the generic no less than on the personal level. In France, a new literary genre of aphoristic observations on the mostly negative, common traits of human nature gained instant popularity. Among the numerous *moralistes,* as its authors were called, we remember mainly La Rochefoucauld, La Bruyère, and Vauvenargues. In his *Maximes,* the acidic Duke François de La Rochefoucauld (1613–80) dispenses searing observations on human vice and virtue, love and hatred, glory and envy, but even more on the petty motives that mostly inspire one as well as the other. Not a word about himself, his contemporaries, or the social conditions of his time. From the perspective of this seventeenth-century aristocrat's eagle's eye, "humanity" appears to consist of exchangeable persons, timeless *types*.

As the old nobility was slowly yielding its rule to the *noblesse de robe,* reflections became more personal. In his *Caractères* (1645–96), La Bruyère revived the psychological typology that Theophrastus, Aristotle's successor, had written to complement his moral theory. But the French *moraliste* turned

the Greek philosopher's gallery of ethical "types" into a series of portraits. His universal "characters" display individual features. They bear no names, but behind the sharply drawn models one senses the presence of contemporary faces. "The whole supremacy of La Bruyère's art, Lytton Strachey writes, consists in that absolute precision, that complete finish, that perfect proportion, which gives his *Characters* the quality of a De Hoogh, and his aphorisms the brilliant hardness of a Greek gem."[38] Indirectly, *La Bruyère* criticized the social and political environment of his models. He foresaw the collapse of a society in which peasants were living on "black bread, water, and roots." "Once the people start moving, one no longer knows how peace can return."

With the Marquis de Vauvenargues (1715–47) the tone becomes moralistic, occasionally sentimental, the language larded with such programmatic terms as *raison, liberté, nature*. The young Vauvenargues, an unusually generous person himself, introduced a note of *suspicion* that was to sound ever more loudly in the later period of the Enlightenment. Whereas La Rochefoucauld had explored the universal qualities (especially the bad ones) of human nature, and La Bruyère its social conditionedness, Vauvenargues preromantically focused on the disproportion between human aspirations and their chances of being fulfilled. The *moraliste* reflections, though derived from introspection as much as from observation, lacked the personal touch of memoirs and autobiographies. The quintessential portraitist of character was the duc de Saint-Simon (1675–1755).

Opinionated in the extreme, incapable of doubting his own prejudices, ferocious in his hostility, and always on the barricades, he succeeded, despite his vices, or possibly because of them, in capturing the irreducible singularity of his subjects. For the jaundiced duke, no types exist, only individuals. In his mind, he alone possesses the insight to perceive the hidden motives behind people's actions and the courage to confront them with his superior knowledge. The expression, "I looked him straight in the eyes" constantly returns in his *Memoirs*. He regards himself as the absolute witness, to whom nothing escapes and who is endowed with an infallible judgment. Though himself uninterruptedly implicated in intrigues, he reserves his sharpest barbs for other intriguants. Watchdog of the old aristocratic order, he is merciless for those who ascend the social ladder without having ancient "blood." His resentment goes in the first place to Madame de Maintenon, the king's morganatic wife, who, like an evil stepmother, has wormed herself into an undeserved proximity to the king. Saint-Simon's attitude to Louis XIV reflects the kind of ambiguity a son feels for a father: he hates his autocratic authority, yet he feels filial devotion and, above all, a protective hatred for all intruders into his privileged intimacy. His portrait of Madame de Maintenon, as well as those

of General Vendôme, of finance minister Pontchartrain, and of the duc de Noailles, are classics of vituperative literature. Yet he was hardly less severe for other aristocrats whom he considered degenerate members of his own class. In the first place, Monsieur, the king's lascivious brother, and even more Monsieur's granddaughter, whose marriage the duke himself had helped to arrange and who turned out to be "a fat, nasty, self-indulgent drunk." His white-hot, unmitigated hatred for those traitors of their class knows no limit. Some have interpreted the scarcity of his loves and the multitude of the hatreds as projecting the ambivalence that marked the early relation with his parents.[39]

His rare admirations remain rarely unmixed. While praising his gentle father figure, the duc de Beauvilliers, and his friend, the equally high-minded duc de Chevreuse, both of whom Saint-Simon genuinely loved, he refers to the latter as a naive optimist, more given to talk than action, and to the pious Beauvilliers as being "narrow" in his principles. Nor does the spiteful duke relent after the death of his victims. His necrology of one Madame d'Hendicourt begins with the words: "The court was delivered from a *familiar* [i.e., an informer] by the death of Mme. d'Hendicourt. . . . She had grown old and hideously ugly, but in her time no one was more agreeable or better informed, more cheerful, witty, and unaffectedly diverting. On the other hand, there was no one more gratuitously, continually and intentionally malicious, and therefore more dangerous, on account of her familiarity with the king and Mme. de Maintenon. Thus everyone, favorites, nobles, officers of State, ministers, members of the royal family, even the bastards, bent the knee to that old bitch, who enjoyed doing harm and never had the faintest wish to oblige. With her passing [Mme. de Maintenon] and the king lost a great source of amusement, but society at whose expense this was provided was immensely relieved, for she was a heartless creature."[40]

British character portraits (except for an occasional distychon by Pope) rarely approach the vitriolic acidity of Saint-Simon's portrayals. Addison's "Observations" in *The Spectator* and Samuel Johnson's sketches in *The Rambler* and *The Adventurer* were kinder but less probing. Yet they resembled the duke's characters at least in the respect that they depicted concrete individuals, not universal types, and also, particularly in Johnson's case, that they resisted any kind of social change. Carlyle has, not unfairly, called him the last Englishman who, with strong voice and wholly believing heart, preached the virtue of standing still, tenaciously clinging to "decaying materials for want of anything better."[41] Regarding human nature as unchanged and unchangeable, Johnson attributed the problems of his time to a tampering with the eternal social and religious foundations of human nature. His melancholy disposition gave the doctor a keen eye for other people's foibles. His sketches, intended as universal

moral lessons, bear the signs of personal spleen and mostly lack psychological depth. Only in his biographical explorations in the *Lives of the Poets* does he, with one stroke, attain unscaled critical and psychological heights.

Biographies have been written since Greek antiquity. But over the centuries their purposes have changed. Ancient ones, such as Plutarch's *Vitae* or Tacitus's *Life of Germanicus,* mostly pictured their subjects as models to imitate or to avoid. Medieval hagiographies served an additional purpose, for next to being *exempla,* they responded to the believers' need for the mediation of saints no less than to their obligation to imitate them. Even the best, such as Gregory's *Life of Saint Benedict,* follow universal models of heroic virtue. Except for the "miracles," they reveal so few personal traits as to be interchangeable. This pattern prevailed in the early modern lives of political heroes. Eighteenth-century biographers, however, by and large abandoned the ideal of a model for imitation. Instead, they showed the historical or cultural significance of their subject—good or bad. Such was certainly Samuel Johnson's primary motive for writing his *Lives of the Poets.* His essays penetratingly explore the psychic makeup of his subjects in order to discover the deeper meaning behind the poems, the hidden drives that attracted the author to one topic rather than another as well as to a particular way of treating it. Johnson introduced what later became a substantial part of literary criticism. His *Life of Pope* ranks in this respect as a masterpiece. While admiring Pope's genius with words, he mercilessly exposes the deviousness, vanity, and morbid sensitivity of his character, as well as the complexity of his relation with others. "He [Pope] frequently professes contempt of the world. . . . These were dispositions apparently counterfeited. How could he despise those whom he lived by pleasing and on whose approbation his esteem of himself was superstructured?—His scorn of Great is repeated too often to be real: no man thinks much of that which he despises.—In the Letters both of Swift and Pope there appears such narrowness of mind as makes them insensible of any excellence that has not some affinity with their own."[42]

Johnson's own hagiographic biographer was right: the man possessed a peculiar art of drawing characters "as rare as good portrait painting."[43] But Boswell himself surpassed his model in scrutinizing its own particularities. The slavish disciple obsessively wrote down every word, every deed, whether significant or trivial. Then he worshipfully arranged his master's *logia* in a loosely chronological order, faithfully reporting the sparkles of Johnson's vigorous mind as well as his equally vigorous prejudices, all in the same respectful monotone. In this relentless pursuit of a total portrait of an individual with all his quirks and mannerisms lies, in spite of its author's common intellect, the lasting fascination of Boswell's *Life of Johnson.* It soon surpassed the

popularity of its subject's own writings. Carlyle was enthralled by it. "In worth as a book we have rated it beyond any other product of the eighteenth century: all J's own writings, laborious and in their kind genuine above most, stand on a quite inferior level to it; already, indeed, they are becoming obsolete for this generation; and for some future generation may be valuable chiefly as prolegomena and expository scholia to this Johnsoniad of Boswell."[44] Macaulay, another countryman of Boswell, writing forty years after the appearance of his famous work when Romanticism had fully conquered the minds for the primacy of the individual, attributed the quality of the *Life* to the average mind of a biographer who, not knowing the difference between the significant and the insignificant, left us a "complete" picture of its subject. "Many of the greatest men that ever lived have written biography. Boswell was one of the smallest men that ever lived; and he has beaten them all. Others attained literary eminence in spite of their weaknesses. Boswell attained it by reason of his weakness. If he had not been a great fool, he would never have been a great writer."[45]

Boswell's devotion to his subject did not produce a hagiography. Repeatedly we hear him chiding his hero for not abiding by his own moral principles. Boswell's Johnson is not a universal model but a unique individual: a man of slovenly appearance with a rolling gait, extremely industrious yet at times immovably sluggish, a methodical scholar yet uncommonly irregular in his habits, benevolent and generous yet a harsh critic of others—an irreducible original. Boswell's biography of the man who so solidly belongs to the Enlightenment announces the quest of the individual so single-mindedly pursued by Rousseau and the Romantics. The eighteenth-century biographical portrait, even when totally particular and no model of perfection, still invites the reader to *compare* the subject with him or herself. Though the person whose story is told may surpass the reader in some respects, he or she appears quite ordinary in other respects. The relation between the self and the other has changed in modern biography. One might say that the subject is there not to be admired but to justify the reader's own existence.

We notice an analogous but even more pronounced egocentric trend in the autobiography. Earlier autobiographies had described the self in its relation to others. Augustine's had entirely consisted of a dialogue with God and Teresa of Avila's *Life* of her relations with superiors and fellow sisters. Yet during the Enlightenment the relation with others ceased to be a dialogue and instead displayed the controlling presence of the author. Modern autobiographies became increasingly self-centered and self-conscious. The certainty of self-consciousness that since Descartes had become the foundation of truth here becomes the ground of the indubitable truth about oneself. As each person possesses a strictly private, incommunicable awareness of him or herself, so

accounts with his enemies—Voltaire, Diderot, Grimm, d'Holbach, Hume, all of whom feared his searing attacks.

Despite his moral duplicity, Rousseau displays an unprecedented insight and honesty in reporting the hidden, often unflattering complexity of his motives. The account he gives of the theft of a silver ribbon that he had committed and of which he accused a young fellow servant may serve as an example. In scrutinizing the motives for a deed he considered "*affreux*" even at the time he committed it, he concludes: "Never was deliberate wickedness further from my intention than at that cruel moment. When I accused that poor girl, it is strange but true that my friendship for her was the cause" (*Confessions,* bk. II, *O.C.,* I, 86; Cohen, p. 88). Indeed, he suggests that he stole the ribbon in order to give it to her as a present. When the theft was detected, however, he accused her, the person closest to him. She was promptly dismissed. In his last work, the *Rêveries d'un promeneur solitaire,* he returns to this shameful episode, the guilt of which continued to haunt him all his life.

Obviously the center of selfhood has been replaced! Not Descartes's substantial *res cogitans* nor Hume's loosely coherent stream of perceptions are the subject of the *Confessions*. Rousseau regards all that as still objective. He aims at reaching the subjective core of feeling from which all specific acts of consciousness, ideas, passions, and emotions, emerge. His description owes more to the sentimental novels of his time than to philosophy. The first paragraphs remind us of the initial sentence of Abbé Prévost's *Mémoires d'un homme de qualité* (1728–31): "This story will be read if anyone finds it worth reading. I have written down my misfortunes only for my own satisfaction. I shall be content if as the fruit of my work I draw some tranquillity during the moments I shall spend writing it." Novels starting with this kind of confessional exordium had become common. The hero, reminiscing upon the events of his life, confesses his errors and weaknesses, "mes désordres et mes plus honteuses faiblesses" as the love-struck hero of *Manon Lescaut* puts it.[54] Rousseau had read Prévost as well as Richardson and a great many less illustrious writers of romances. He converted his autobiography into a romance of feelings.

In the *Confessions* Rousseau remembers expressions, gestures, and words too elusive to be fully captured at the moment of their appearance: the look of a stranger, the fleeting change in a familiar face, the unexpected move. Rousseau himself draws attention to the "secondary," reflective bent of his mind. "I can only see in retrospect (*Je ne vois bien que ce que je me rappelle*). It is only in my memories that my mind can work. I have neither feeling nor understanding for anything that is said or done or that happens before my eyes. . . . But afterwards it all comes back to me, I remember the place and the time, the tone of voice and look, the gesture and vibration; nothing escapes me" (bk. III,

O.C., I, 114–15; Cohen, p. 114). Only when interiorized in memory do past experiences disclose their significance. He may have been mistaken in their interpretation, he admits, or he may inaccurately have recalled them. What counts for him are the feelings connected with the facts *as he remembers them*. "I have only one faithful guide on which I can count; the succession of feelings which have marked the development of my being, and thereby recall the events that have acted upon it as cause or effect. . . . I may omit or transpose facts, or make mistakes in dates; but I cannot go wrong about what I have felt, or what my feelings led me to do; and these are the chief subjects of my story." (*Confessions,* bk. VII, *O.C.*, I, 278; Cohen, p. 262). Of course, one may be very wrong about the feelings one remembers: they are often no more than the ones present at the time of writing. In reflecting on past feelings one never merely recalls them. A feeling remembered may over time have increased or decreased in intensity, or even have changed its quality altogether. To remember one's feelings, then, is more than a reproductive act: it consists essentially in producing new feelings on the basis of old memories and thereby recreating the past.[55]

If feelings constitute the core of selfhood, as Rousseau thinks, the self never *is,* but continuously *becomes* and redefines itself. In remembering past feelings, however inaccurately, we link the past more solidly to the present than in recalling emotionally indifferent past events. We know that memory may distort or fully contradict the facts. Yet we do not distrust our past feelings because we experience them as an uninterrupted bond with our past. In feelings, the self appears, so to speak, as extended in time. To remember them is to link the time of their original experience to an indefinite future. Feelings remembered carry with them an unmistakable sense of self-recognition: I cannot doubt that I am the same person I was when I felt that way. In a masterly way Rousseau evokes this sense of self-identity through the recollection of past feelings.

A perceptive and knowledgeable student of his work, the Swiss psychiatrist Jean Starobinski has shown how Rousseau's autobiographical writing was born out of a desire to become fully "transparent," to others as well as to himself.[56] In his final *Les rêveries du promeneur solitaire,* Starobinski argues, the great writer at last recognized that the ultimate goal of his relentless introspection proved unattainable: no one ever becomes fully transparent not even to himself. In feeling one experiences oneself as *continuous* with oneself from one time to another. But full transparency would require a *coincidence* with one's past.[57] A self distended in time, never reaches complete reunion with itself, as Augustine had known. My past remains irretrievably separated from my present. The possibility of becoming transparent to others remains even

further out of reach. I may communicate my feelings to others. But such a communication can never be more than indirect.

Rousseau hoped to awaken in his readers a desire to scrutinize their own inner life and so to understand themselves.[58] To do so effectively required a language of utmost precision and simplicity that would draw all attention to the message, none to the expression. France's foremost critic of the past century, Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve, attributed most of Rousseau's enormous influence to his spare, lucid style. "The writer who brought about the greatest single change in the French language since Pascal and who ushered in, linguistically speaking, the nineteenth century, is Rousseau. . . . The day he bared himself wholly to himself, the century recognized in him the writer most capable of giving expression to the unformed ideas which had been agitating it, the writer best able to state them with originality, vigor, and impassioned logic."[59] Jean Paul in *Titan*, Benjamin Constant in *Adolphe*, Goethe in *Wilhelm Meister* and in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*, as well as countless romantic writers were to follow Rousseau in their search for the soul.

New Perspectives on Language

The intense interest in language that emerged in the eighteenth century shed new light on the problems of selfhood caused by the modern turn to the subject and the subsequent search for its place in the objective order of things. It proved impossible to give an adequate account of speech within the perimeters of a subject-object opposition. That speech was a given of human nature, evolved from animal expressiveness as French sensationalists claimed, was the first theory to be refuted. Yet the idealist position, according to which speech was a necessary part of the mind's expressive power independent of social environment and physiological structures, proved equally untenable. Further reflection on the nature of language showed how a dichotomous concept of selfhood (such as we encountered in the first section of this chapter) proved to be not only in principle but also in practice untenable. Language depends on an intimate cooperation between the subjective and objective aspects of selfhood, which excludes any description of it in terms of only one or the other. In speech, human expressiveness shows its unique creativity. Still, even that creative power remains dependent on such elementary objective data as physiological disposition, social conditions, and the existence of natural sounds—such as the cries of animals, the songs of birds, and the rustling of wind and rain.

As theories of human nature gradually changed from static to dynamic, problems of expression assumed an increasing significance. Linguistic studies

thereby moved to the center of cultural interest. In less than a century the Enlightenment succeeded in developing a complex theory of language. Locke defined the critical question: How does language relate to meaning? The relation between word and reality had remained relatively stable until the late Middle Ages. Augustine had described the word as *simillimum rei notae* (most similar to the thing known). That this similarity did not mean a "copy" appears from the clause he adds: *et imago eius* (and its image).[60] The image nature of language had theological roots. In the doctrine of the Trinity, the Word (*Logos, Verbum*) was the *image* of the Father. Similarly, the human mind is an image of the archetypal divine Word, and human words imitate God's expression. Yet only the *verbum internum,* that is, the mind, could be called a true image of the Word; not the *verbum externum,* the actual word we utter. Augustine thereby resumes a distinction, first made by Stoic philosophers and taken over by Neoplatonists, between the *logos endiathetos* (the inner word) and the *logos prosforikos* (the uttered word). In Augustine's view, only the revealed words of the Bible participate directly in the eternal Word. Ordinary words merely function as arbitrary instruments of the mind's *verbum internum*. As such they are mere signs, not images.[61] Aquinas and the many Scholastics who followed him conceived of the link between inner word and verbal expression as being more intimate. Inner knowledge does not reach completion until it is uttered in language. For Aquinas, truth requires verbal expression.

Those speculations lost much of their power in the nominalist theory of language at the end of the Middle Ages, which stressed the simple fact that words, whether spoken or written, are arbitrary signs that present no guarantee of truth but often lead the mind into error. They do so specifically in suggesting the real or ideal existence of universals. Yet nominalism played a significant role in the rise of modern theories of language by stressing its creative power. At the beginning of the modern epoch, then, three different conceptions of language competed with one another: the Neoplatonic tradition stressed the image quality of the spoken or written word; the nominalist tradition wherein words serve as signs; and the Aristotelian tradition, continued by the Thomists, adopted an intermediate position.

The nominalist theory may have inspired Descartes's idea of a *mathesis universalis,* a system modeled after mathematics that would integrate all knowledge within a universal system of signs. He assumed that as mathematical units are interrelated, so all segments of knowledge may be linked with one another if we refer to them by mathematical signs. The creation of such a comprehensive sign language presuppposes that we are able to break knowledge down into simple elements. But neither science nor philosophy had suffi-

ciently advanced to make a comprehensive analysis of knowledge possible. Leibniz, who had worked on a similar project, concluded that this difficulty was not prohibitive. If one started by attributing a characteristic number to each segment of knowledge, the system did not have to wait until all essential information on a given subject was available to complete the analysis. In fact, combinations of existing numbers would lead to new discoveries. The universal language would serve as a grid that could be filled in as science progressed and that would itself advance this progress.[62] Leibniz's metaphysics supported the possibility of such a universal language. As all things coming from the hands of a perfect Creator must be compatible and continuous with one another, a universal symbolism, a *characteristica universalis* had to be possible. The search for an ideal language that would overcome the ambivalence and confusion of common speech was yet another version of the age-old quest of the original, Adamic language wherein words had exactly corresponded to things.

Meanwhile, a less ambitious search for the common structure of ordinary speech was being pursued in linguistic studies proper. In their *Grammaire générale et raisonnée* (1660), grammarians of Port-Royal tried to compose a grammatical structure that would fit all languages. Those efforts, however flawed, nevertheless marked a significant step toward a symbolic conception of language. In assuming that concepts (expressed in language) and things are naturally related, the authors of the *Grammaire* do not imply that concepts bear a similarity to things, but rather that they render things *present*. In the *Logique* of Port-Royal that appeared two years later, they insisted that these representations constitute reality *as we know it*. "We possess no knowledge of what exists outside us, except through the intermediacy of the ideas that are in us."[63] Yet ideas become manageable and effective only as they are translated into words.

The preceding theories are all based on the assumption that thought precedes speech and that words bring preformed ideas to expression. They do not account for the fact that those allegedly private thoughts themselves owe their origin to verbal discourse. Not before Herder and Hamann in the second half of the eighteenth century does the notion that language conditions thinking as much as thinking conditions language make its appearance. Enlightenment thinkers reached that insight after a number of discussions concerning the relation between writing and speech, the symbolic nature of words, the relation between proposition and meaning, and, above all, the origin of language. To these we now turn.

The story begins with Locke's treatment of the relation between thought and language in the third book of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*

normal hearing uses gestures that are neither synchronic nor harmonious with the words they accompany. Diderot discovered this through his strange habit of stopping his ears in the theater while attending a play he knew well. He observed that few actors succeed in bringing gesture and mime to the same expressive pitch as the words they pronounce.

Nor does the sequence of verbal expression correspond to the logic of ideas, as Abbé Batteux had maintained when defending the Latin syntax as the most logical and hence the normative one. Diderot considers the logical order of speaking and writing highly artificial. The natural sequence of words rarely coincides with the logic of ideas. In sign language, the oldest form of communication, the first gesture articulates the principal idea, while subsequent gestures follow according to their relation to that primary one. In a logical structure all parts are presented at once, as in a painting. Language, however, has to break up into temporal segments what to the mind appears simultaneous. This may require an inversion of the logical order of words. Only the "natural" sequence effectively conveys ideas, emotions, and feelings in the order in which they impress us. Even the most theoretical discourse requires varying accents and degrees of intensity and rarely submits to any kind of a priori definable order.

In an article originally written for the *Encyclopédie* and posthumously published as a short book, Rousseau agrees with Diderot that originally humans did not express their meanings in words but in gestures. Yet he considers the impulse to speak wholly natural, as it is necessary to satisfy other human needs than those of the body. "If the only needs we ever experienced were physical, we should most likely never have been able to speak; we would fully express our meanings by the language of gesture alone."[70] What urges humans to speak is the moral impulse to express strong emotions like love, fear, and hatred. The most ancient words were emotional cries. Most important, Rousseau denied the assumed priority of ideas with respect to language, a priority that all British writers, including James Harris, had steadfastly maintained. In fact, we speak not to express previously conceived, articulated ideas: language serves as the indispensable means for articulating ideas. Before they acquired speech, humans had no ideas to express! In his early *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* Rousseau had argued, against the philosophes, that language could not possibly owe its origin to human inventiveness. To invent requires ideas, and ideas require language.

Still, though natural, speech is not an instinct, such as birds have for nesting or ants and bees for communicating. Precisely the virtual absence of instincts and the urge of a limitless *perfectibilité* forced humans to speak. The most specifically human trait is the ability to speak, both in gestures and in words.

With Rousseau, then, the problem of language shifts from one of origins and communicative needs, to one of progress and culture. Primitive human expressions consisted of vital cries, onomatopoeic more than articulate, sung rather than spoken. As humanization progressed, those animal sounds became transformed into fully articulate ones that enabled people to communicate beyond the limits of their immediate families. This progression marks the beginning of organized society. "The earth nourishes men; but when their initial needs have dispersed them, other needs arise which reunite them, and it is only then that they speak, and that they have an incentive to speak" (p. 39). In the pastoral stage, especially in mild climates, passion and feeling, more than utility, stimulate the development of language. In harsher climates, where the need to work is more urgent, linguistic development tends to follow a more utilitarian lead. Hence, Rousseau notes, the languages of the north became more articulate and those of the south more melodious.

Far less natural was the invention of writing. Practical needs alone were responsible for it, especially the need to establish commercial relations with distant partners. Writing removes language farthest from its original expressiveness. Letters substitute for the direct presence of the speaking person. Still, the language of passion or of feeling, even when written, conveys some sense of physical presence, as if speech had never totally yielded to writing. Poetry also, in prosody and rhythm, has preserved some of the directness of sound. Poems were meant to be sung or recited. One who only reads them loses much of their musical impact: the prosody of written verse is only a poor substitute for the more complex intonations of singing or reciting. What originally had been different sounds, writing reduces to weaker or stronger emphasis. For Rousseau, the transition from speech to writing indicates an increasing alienation from a natural state of being. Language itself, even the most primitive, already causes a rupture in the original state of oneness with nature. To one who speaks, life has left the immediate *now*. Discourse, as the term suggests, extends consciousness across time: it presupposes foresight and remembrance. Speech defers meaning to the very end of a phrase and often its full meaning does not appear before the end of a discourse.

What feelings and emotions lose in directness by being spoken, they gain in intensity. "As you watch the afflicted person, you are not likely to weep. But give him time to tell you what he feels and soon you will burst into tears. It is solely in this way that the scenes of a tragedy produce their effects" (p. 8). On the negative side, the separation from immediacy renders language manipulative. In his *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* Rousseau considers the acquisition of language the principal cause of social corruption. The more it becomes refined, the more means it acquires for being deceitful. Why, then,

one wonders, did Rousseau become a writer? In Jean Starobinski's interpretation, writing for Rousseau was a means of last resort: the only way of communication his alleged accusers left him to clear his name. He counted on posterity to avenge him, and in order to reach later generations he *had* to write. "The act of writing becomes a happy one for Rousseau only when he ceases to address it to an outsider."[71] Not before his final *Rêveries d'un promeneur solitaire* did Rousseau at last write for himself. His message to others had been delivered. His book to himself became his most honest one.

Inherited and enriched from one generation to another, language shapes the identity of a people no less than that of an individual. This idea became central to Herder's theory. He may have read some allusions to it in Rousseau, though probably not in the posthumously published essay. In Herder's *Essay on the Origin of Language* (1772), the various strands of Enlightenment linguistics coalesced into a coherent whole. From the start he opposes the thesis that language naturally develops from cry to speech: "While still an animal, man already has language."[72] Speech may have started as a cry of passion. But that cry was from the beginning articulate, and its passion is still audible in the rhetoric of even the most theoretical discourse. Like Rousseau, Herder rejected Condillac's theory, popular among the philosophes, that language is the outcome of an evolved animal instinct. But Rousseau had failed to draw the conclusion that therefore it had to be invented. Necessity drove humans to seek this essential means of survival. Animals need no more than the minimal expressiveness required for communication among members of the same species. Humans would be unable to survive without an extensive range of expressiveness present from the beginning. Nothing, then, would be more erroneous than to regard speech and reason as a "stepped-up potentiation of animal forces" (p. 109).

Herder attempts to stay a middle course between Condillac's evolutionary naturalism, on one side, and Süssmilch's theory (1766) that language is a divine gift to humanity, on the other. "With our course set for [the truth], we perceive to the right and the left why no animal can invent language, why no God need invent language, and why man, as man, can and must invent language" (p. 127). A full development of the human ability to speak requires from the beginning a different organization of *all* bodily powers, not just a particular physiological disposition of throat and mouth. In addition it needs a human environment: children that grow up wild do not learn how to speak. But that is not to say, as Rousseau wrote in the *Discourse on Inequality,* that speech is only potentially present. It belongs to the fundamental structure of being human. Humans have to invent language and to learn how to speak, but that ability to invent and to learn is "as natural to them as being human" (p. 112).

The basic question is not: How do humans form sounds? They collected their first vocabulary from the sounds of the world—the cry of animals, the noise of thunder, the rustling of leaves in the wind. But: "Whence comes to man the art of changing into sound what is not sound?" (p. 138). Primitive human sounds articulate only undifferentiated feelings. In that archaic *sensus communis* the awareness dawns that some things *look* the way others *sound*. Herder all too briefly justifies the human ability to express an unlimited variety of meanings through sound by arguing that all perceptions merge in feeling, hence that all forms of perception are related, and that one may be used in lieu of another. But the more fundamental question remains: What enables the mind to transfer meaning to sound? How does a distinct meaning emerge from an indistinct pool of meaningfulness? Despite this and other obscurities that cloud his theory, Herder discovered what had escaped his predecessors (even Rousseau), namely, that language, rather than bringing pre-existing meanings to expression, *creates* meaning.

Herder's friend, the cryptic Johann Georg Hamann, took Herder to task for not having recognized that speech is not "natural," as if humans had from the beginning an aptitude for creating it. That aptitude requires that someone first address them. This, according to Hamann, God did in revelation.[73] Humans are able to speak and to read in response to God's revelation in nature and Scripture and thus to decipher the mystery of reality (III, 301–3). With this far-fetched thesis about the divine origin of language, Hamann attempted to justify the metaphorical capacity required for the creation of language, which Herder had simply taken for granted. Moreover, the idea that all languages came from the same source shows an awareness of the common structure that underlies their irreducible diversity. Precisely this synthesis of universality and diversity makes translation possible. George Steiner has rightly observed: "To translate is to descend beneath the exterior disparities of two languages in order to bring into vital play their analogous and, at the final depths, common principles of being."[74]

Conclusion

Thinkers of the Enlightenment spent considerable, though mostly unsuccessful, efforts on closing the gap between the self as subject of meaning and the self as substantial reality, which the preceding period had opened. Some did so by placing all the weight on the subject; not only empiricist philosophers like Berkeley, but also preromantic writers like Rousseau and some novelists. On the opposite side stood those who viewed the self as a substance among other substances, though most endeavored to preserve its

spiritual identity. Both sides experienced major difficulty in giving that substance or subject a content of its own.

Both sides also found it hard to preserve genuine *otherness*. A self reduced to a meaning-giving function—a mere subject—loses its personal identity and, as a result, is no longer able to recognize the identity of the other. Ever since Descartes, the problem of solipsism has haunted the subjective conception of the self. Where reality becomes a function of the subject, the real ceases to be truly distinct from the self. Likewise, if the self is merely a substance, albeit it a distinct one, it becomes absorbed within an objective totality that admits no real otherness. For Descartes, any substance that was not a subject became an undifferentiated part of a *res extensa*. The preceding analysis has shown how difficult it was to preserve both aspects at once and even, for those who succeeded in doing so, to adequately integrate them with each other.

My conclusion concerning the absence of fully recognized otherness may appear to conflict with the well-known fact that the Enlightenment was a time of unrestricted exploration of ethnic differences, varying customs, and alternative moral systems. Indeed, the *experience* of otherness was abundantly present, but the ability to recognize and to justify it was missing. Cultural differences came to be interpreted against the horizon of a universal reason originating in the mind. As a dialectical tension with the *other* constitutes an essential part of selfhood, a weakening of the sense of otherness creates a major problem for self-understanding. The introspective literature of the time, which resisted the trend to conceive of the self as either subject or substance, gave the self a content that was more than functional and more than objective. I have mentioned the fictional, the autobiographical, the aphoristic writings of the *moralistes*. The practice of religious introspection also reasserted the self as a spiritual center in its own right. Above all, the new theories of language extricated selfhood from the narrow limits Descartes, Locke, and their followers had set to it. Reflection on speech laid the ground for a new concept of intersubjectivity that was to reach maturity in the next two centuries. Dialogue requires that in some way one abandons one's own position to enter into that of the other.[75] The more I give myself to the other, the better I know myself and the more I acquire a unique identity.

In the next chapter I shall consider concepts of art that paralleled the later theories of language in resisting the sharp subject-object division characteristic of modern philosophical anthropology. Ideas of beauty and harmony do not allow themselves to be explained in either of those terms, even though aesthetic theories kept hesitating between the two, leaning at first more to the objective and later to the subjective side. The division has continued to determine the modern idea of selfhood, resulting either in a naturalist or in an

thetic symbolism, Baumgarten and Kant raised the idea to the level of truth as symbolic disclosure, which is where it remains today.

Art as Truth: From Boileau to Shaftesbury

At the beginning of the seventeenth century a concern for truthfulness began to dominate aesthetics. Yet truth could be attained in different ways. Plato had described art as an imitation of nature. But since nature itself was no more than an imitation of the true, ideal reality, he considered it a lesser, derivative mode of truth. Aware of his criticism, later Platonists, from Plotinus to Michelangelo, concluded that art ought to imitate nature's ideal form. Hence art had to correct nature whenever it fell short of ideal perfection. The truth of art, then, consisted less in resemblance than in ideal abstraction, not in nature but in "nature beautified."

Boileau, the despotic arbiter of literary taste in France, decreed: "Rien n'est beau que le vrai, le vrai seul est aimable. Il doit régner partout, et même dans la fable" (*L'art poétique*). Literary truth, for him, consisted in verisimilitude of content, harmony of form, and strict observation of the rules of style appropriate to each genre. Pope, one of the few followers of the French rubric in England, echoed, "Those rules of old discovered, not derived / Are Nature still, but Nature methodiz'd" (*Essay on Criticism,* vv. 88–89). Classicist writers and artists appealed to Greek aesthetics. Yet instead of pursuing the Greek *idea* of perfection, as Renaissance artists had attempted to do, they were too often satisfied with observing formal rules they claimed to draw from ancient art and letters. Aesthetic truth thereby became restricted to what could be justified by well-established principles. In France, these principles, conscientiously followed and, in literature, enforced by the high authority of the royal Académie, produced an orderly art of little originality but considerable polish. Nor was this literature deprived of feeling. In fact, it became increasingly sentimental. But feelings themselves were not allowed to stray into irrationality or violence. They had their place in the harmoniously regulated universe of art. Poets and artists constantly appealed to classical sources. But they thoroughly domesticated the ancient models, gentrifying primitive Greek myths and ascribing Stoic and Christian virtues to wild ancient heroes. A rather instructive example of this appears in the libretto of Glück's opera *Orphée*. In the myth, Orpheus retrieves his beloved Euridice from the underworld, violates the prohibition not to look back, and loses her forever. This unhappy ending seemed unacceptable to the eighteenth-century sense of justice. So the artist has "Amour" restore the lovers to one another!

The question of truth assumed a crucial importance in biblical poems. In

Paradise Lost (1667) Milton attempted to preserve its veracity by maintaining the division between celestial and terrestrial space of the ancient cosmology, and by presenting the confrontation with the rebellious angels as a regular modern war on a battlefield. In fact, however, his literalism jeopardized the credibility of his poem. After Galileo, the division of the cosmos into a heaven above and an earth below, which had so effectively supported Dante's vision, lost its meaning in a universe of which all parts obey the same mathematical laws. Milton tries to save the image of two parallel realms by means of a theological analogy: "measuring things in heaven by things on earth" (VI, 893). But in a modern cosmology such an analogy had to exclude literal similarity. Milton's insistent realism resulted in a succession of absurdities. Even dim-witted terrestrials would know better than to wage an unwinnable "war" against the Almighty or to aim darts at immortal spirits. To render his vision of fighting angels at least minimally credible, the poet endowed the celestial rebels with bodies capable of physical pain. The faithful angels appear exempt from this encumbrance. The description of a heavenly battle fought with chariots, swords, and gunpowder has a comical rather than tragic effect. Milton gains little by committing himself neither to a geocentric nor to a heliocentric view. ("Whether heaven move or earth imports not" [VIII, 70–71]). The problem was not whether the sun or the earth was the "center" to the world" (VIII, 122–23), but whether the universe could still be conceived as consisting of two separate parts. The main difficulty stems from introducing a literal understanding of the Bible into a modern epic at the time when the biblical cosmology had simply ceased to exist. The nineteenth-century critic Hyppolite Taine wondered: "What a heaven God runs! . . . We have orders of the day, a hierarchy, exact submission, extra duties, disputes, regulated ceremonials, prostrations, etiquette, furbished arms, arsenals, depots of chariots and ammunition. Was it worthwhile leaving earth to find in heaven carriage-works, buildings, artillery, a manual of tactics, the art of salutations, and the Almanac of Gotha? Are these the things which 'eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath entered into the heart to conceive?' "[1]

Nor could the problems of literalism be solved by keeping the celestial figures away from time and space, as Klopstock attempted to do in his *Messias*. His strategy merely resulted in a bloodless, abstract poem, far inferior to Milton's masterwork. An epic requires characters of flesh and blood in a concrete, identifiable setting. Apart from the incongruities I have mentioned, the literalism of *Paradise Lost* also weakened the heroic quality indispensable in an epic poem. Louis Martz appropriately calls it an "anti-heroic epic."[2] Rather than imitating Homer's grand style or even Virgil's pathetic one, Milton, he claims, displays a surprising affinity with Ovid's ironic *Metamorphoses*.[3]

Milton may originally have been allured by the drama of the human race in its battle with evil (as some of the most beautiful passages suggest), yet the Bible's report of a prehistorical lapse from a state of happy innocence to one of guilt and pain induced him to move the action from earth to heaven. Thus the key figure of the heavenly "preface" to the story, Lucifer, came to replace Adam as central figure of the poem.

Paradise Lost illustrates the tension between realism and truth in the particular instance of the religious epic. Yet even when no biblical literalism was involved, the question of truth assumed a new importance in the fictional narrative to which the French referred as "roman" and the English as "romance." The learned Pierre Daniel Huet, later to become bishop of Avranches, in one of the earliest treatises on the subject, *De l'Origine des Romans* (1670), distinguishes novels from historical accounts as "fictional stories of amorous adventures, written in prose for the pleasure and instruction of the reader." The term *instruction* alerts the reader that he regards the roman as more than mere entertainment. Works of history, he clarifies, are for the most part true, whereas romans are fictional, yet they contain some truth. Indeed, the term "roman" originally referring to the language of Romanized Gallia (as opposed to Roman Latin), eventually became the name of historical reports written in that Vulgar Latin. As they began to be put in poetic form (for instance, in the *chansons de geste* surrounding Charlemagne's battle with the Muslims), more and more fictional elements entered the story until only a vague historical frame remained. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, novels assumed the fictional form Huet describes. In the process, however, they developed a new kind of truth. Well-composed novels, Huet maintained, made their readers aware of the richness and complexity of emotions and moral inclinations. Thus their historical falsehood was in fact what Augustine called a "significant falsehood," a figure of truth, like the parables in the Gospel narratives.

English writers proved marvelously equipped for successfully practicing the new literary genre. Instructed by French models, they no longer felt compelled to weave their stories around historical events or ancient legends. Neither did they, as French writers tended to do in the rationalist climate that had followed Cartesian philosophy, feel obliged to express universal truths. *Moll Flanders* and *Robinson Crusoe, Pamela* and *Clarissa, Tom Jones* and *Joseph Andrews,* with their particular characters and individual personalities, stand at the opposite side of the universal types that filled the French tragedies and novels of the classic century.[4] Individuals and events, not types and ideas, define British narrative prose. Nowhere had the nominalist stress on the particular in contrast to classical universalism been more visible than in the eighteenth-century English novel.

The search for veracity assumed several forms—Fielding differs both in style and intent from Defoe and Richardson—but all of them firmly believed that their stories had to reflect reality as it appears. Daniel Defoe came closest to interpreting this demand of veracity in a literalist sense. He thereby responded to the expectation of ordinary readers of his time who, familiar only with the Bible, had to assume that any report about a contemporary figure had to be "true" if its author was an honest man. Otherwise, why would it be in print?[5] Thus Defoe presented his famous *Journal of the Plague Year* (1722) as an anonymous eyewitness's account of the bubonic plague in 1665 (when the author himself was only five years old). It was in fact a unique mixture of journalistic reporting complete with casualty figures, medical observations, investigations of the causes of the disease, and an imaginative reconstruction of the total collapse of civilized life as a result of the plague. *Robinson Crusoe* and *Moll Flanders* also appeared as autobiographical writings. Defoe's success in presenting his work as historically truthful backfired. Readers charged the author with deceit when they learned that Robinson Crusoe had been a figment of the author's imagination. He responded by showing how seriously concerned he had been about the veracity of his imaginary reconstructions, as he had already suggested in the preface to his early *The Storm*. Eventually he seized upon the idea of *moral* truth, and in the preface to the third volume of *Robinson Crusoe,* he compares the truth of his work to the allegorical one of the popular *Pilgrim's Progress*.

In his masterpiece *Moll Flanders* (1722) Defoe pursues a more fundamental truth, namely, the difference between moral appearance and reality. In the guise of an edifying tale of sin and repentance Defoe ironically contrasts Moll Flanders's moral posturing with her venal conduct. Repentance comes to her only when one of her questionable enterprises fails, as when her partner in adultery suddenly calls the affair off. The novelist doubles the irony by taking his distance from the narrator as well as from the characters of the story, thereby erasing whatever moral import it might have possessed. Some readers still persisted in considering *Moll Flanders* a moral tale; others dismissed it as an immoral book. Of course, it is neither, nowhere less so than in the preface where Defoe expresses his "moral" intentions: "Throughout the infinite variety of this book, this fundamental [to expose vice] is most strictly adhered to; there is not a wicked action in any part of it but is first or last rendered unhappy and unfortunate; there is not a superlative villain brought upon the stage but either he is brought to an unhappy end, or brought to be a penitent; there is not an ill thing mentioned but it is condemned, even in the relation, nor a virtuous, just thing but it carries its praise along with it." In view of this noble goal the author recommends his book, from every part of which "some just

and religious inference is drawn by which the reader will have something of instruction." As Ian Watt wittily puts it: "The spiritual dimension is presented as a series of somewhat inexplicable religious breakdowns in the psychic mechanism, breakdowns, however, which do not permanently impair her healthy immorality."[6]

For Richardson, literary truth consisted in a faithful analysis of the feelings and attitudes of his characters. His novels betray the influence of Marivaux's masterly analysis of feelings and emotions in *La vie de Marianne*. Richardson improved the genre by writing his novels in epistolary form. This procedure enabled him to present the same events from various perspectives, as they were reflected in different minds. It allowed the reader to learn the characters' dispositions toward each other. Richardson handled this new stylistic device with such perfect competence that it became popular all over Europe. Yet Fielding questioned the truth of the noble feelings Richardson's heroines so edifyingly expressed in their letters. In *Joseph Andrews* he lampoons the prudish Pamela as a pioneer capitalist, a middle-class entrepreneur of virtue who used her chastity "as a commodity to be vended for the purpose of getting on."[7] Fielding himself was a moralist of a different kind. His target was hypocrisy and moral pretense. The picaresque Tom Jones parodies a code of sexual conduct universally professed yet rarely practiced. Fielding considered his works morally more truthful than Richardson's because he exposed the unsupported moral pretenses of his contemporaries. He even claimed "historical" truth for his stories. In *Tom Jones* (bk. IX, chap. 7) he insists that they "have sufficient title to the name of history," contrary to the romances of sentimental scribblers. His novels derive their historical authority not from actual events but from a study of the "book of nature." He claims to have acquired his skills through a direct acquaintance with the kind of people he writes about and through insight in their characters. This places Fielding's history more on the side of "natural history" than of that of chronicles of past events.

In some eighteenth-century writers the irony with which they exposed the hero's false claims ended up undermining the novel's own internal credibility. In two experimental stories of the time the authors deconstruct the authority of the narrator, the critical voice that gave the ironical novel a semblance of truth. The author thereby abandons the role of moral critic to question the validity of the novel itself. In Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1760), the constant digressions of this "autobiography" that ends at the narrator's conception destroy whatever coherent meaning was still holding the novel together. The paradox that accounts for the enduring charm of this "autobiography" lies in the role of a self that is always intruding yet nowhere to be found. In a more

In the visual arts the concern with veracity led mostly to formalist conclusions. The question of whether art, to be truthful, should represent objects as they are or as they ideally ought to be was almost always answered in favor of the ideal. The Greek and Roman statues discovered in the excavations of Pompei (1748) and Herculaneum (1738), as well as Johann Joachim Winckelmann's interpretations of Greek sculpture and architecture spread the notion that ancient art favored idealized models of reality. Especially French classicism imitated the simple lines, perfect proportions, and harmonious compositions of the Greeks. But somehow its cold, well-drawn forms remained far removed from the ancient models that inspired them. Even Jacques-Louis David, who in his paintings applied the classicist principles with more genius than others, always appears disengaged from his heroic subjects. Classicist art, despite its formal perfection, appears to have replaced concrete flesh and blood by universal rules of reason. Winckelmann himself had explicitly warned against this way of interpreting and imitating the ancient models. Classical motifs had, of course, been common since the Renaissance. But before the eighteenth century their influence had been restricted to the presence of ancient columns or temples in painting. The two great painters of the French seventeenth century, Nicholas Poussin (1594–1656) and Claude Lorrain (1600–1682), had also found inspiration in ancient landscapes and classical myths. But their bucolic Arcadias with Roman ruins had never degenerated into the formalist "truthfulness" characteristic of the later classicist style.

Even some contemporaries of the classicists felt the artificiality of the rationalist canon and pursued a different kind of artistic veracity. Jean-Baptiste Chardin (1699–1779), the loving observer of ordinary objects and domestic intimacy, succeeds in directly conveying the touch of velvet, the shine of polished brass, the smell of freshly baked bread instead of concerning himself with geometrical compositions or ancient heroes. Antoine Watteau's (1684–1721) canvases evoke the secret hidden at the heart of what we thought we knew. The enigmatic beauty of his *Embarkment for Cythara*—a classical theme treated in a nonclassical way—approaches the viewer from a timeless dreamland. It answers none of our questions. Why are the pilgrims, frozen in the imperturbable peace of an immobile *fête galante,* on their way to Aphrodite's sacred island? He sublimates everything into aesthetic mystery. His Pierrots stare at us from a distant world, very alive yet unresponsive to our scrutiny.

Neither does the term "classicist" apply to Giambattista Tiepolo's exuberant apotheoses. His radiating hues and rapturous motions defy the subdued colors and static harmonies of the neoclassicists. The four panels of the encounter of Rinaldo, the hero of Tasso's *Gerusalemme liberata,* with the enchantress Armida, in their striking contrasts of bright and pale tints, assume

the viewer into an unearthly sphere closer to the Baroque sources that inspired it than to classicist patterns. In England Gainsborough's and Reynolds's idealized portraits do indeed display a pure though by no means static classicism. But next to them we find Hogarth's satirical scenes and the many landscapes inspired by Poussin, Claude, and the dramatic Salvator Rosa, far removed from French classicism.

The art of the eighteenth century continued to maintain strong ties with the Baroque. Not only is the Baroque not forgotten — indeed, it culminates in the architecture and sculpture of southeastern Europe, and, even after having lost its spiritual content, the Rococo style preserved much of its form. Yet the history of art never parallels that of philosophy. What Arnold Hauser asserted in general about periodization in art holds particularly true for the eighteenth century: "One ought, really, never to speak of a uniform 'style of the time' dominating a whole period, since there are at any given moment as many different styles as there are artistically productive social groups."[10] Indeed, the term "classic" itself soon lost much of its reference to ancient art and literature. It began to be predicated of any work of art that by its power and formal perfection set a model for later generations.[11]

The distinction between art and ideas finds a strong confirmation in the difference between theories about art and what poets and artists were actually doing. For d'Alembert, a typical representative of Enlightenment rationalism, art hardly differs from science, and even less from craft. In his "Preliminary Discourse" to the *Encyclopédie,* he divided the "sciences" according to the faculties most active in them: memory, reason, imagination. Imagination included mechanical as well as fine arts. Both are practical ways of knowing, but they rest on a system of "positive and invariable rules" as much as theoretical sciences do. The sole merit of these rationalist speculations was that they restored the element of truth in art. Seventeenth-century critics had fundamentally distrusted the imagination, and Samuel Johnson still described it as "a licentious and vagrant faculty, unsusceptible of limitations, and impatient of restraint."[12] D'Alembert's attribution, then, of some mode of truth to art was not insignificant. Yet obviously art is not "science": the aesthetic symbolization entirely differs from the scientific one.[13] Indeed, if art is primarily imitation, as d'Alembert still continued to hold, then its truth must consist exclusively in a correspondence between an idea and a thing, and that may reasonably evoke some comparison with science, as it did in Plato. But at no time did its aesthetic quality primarily reside in the correctness of the representation. Rather does the artist aim at transforming an ordinary reality into a symbol that discloses a previously unknown aspect of reality.

Rationalist critics recognized only two forms of truth: *correspondence*

between idea and reality, and *coherence* among the parts and the whole. They never mention the most essential quality of aesthetic truth, namely, the *disclosure* of a new aspect of reality. This began to change with the writings of Anthony Ashley Cooper, earl of Shaftesbury, one of the most original and influential writers of the early eighteenth century. His ideas, elegantly expressed in allusive rather than assertive phrases, paved the road toward a new aesthetic theory. He had been inspired by Platonism, but also by Leibniz's idea of moral harmony and by his former tutor John Locke's empiricism. The latter's influence accounts for the subjective perspective he imposed upon a basically Platonic theory of beauty. The harmonious proportions of nature become truly beautiful only when viewed as symbolic of the mind's own inner harmony. "Nothing affects the heart like that which is purely from itself, and of its own nature; such as the beauty of sentiments, the grace of actions, the turn of characters and the proportion and features of the human mind."[14] Only a subjective "sense of beauty," analogous to the bodily senses, enables us to perceive the proportion between physical and mental harmony. How powerful a role this subjective element played in his aesthetics appears in the following passage, in which he describes the male perception of female beauty: "We should find perhaps that what we most admired, even in the turn of outward features, was only a mysterious expression, and a kind of shadow of something inward in the temper; and that when we were struck with a majestic air, a sprightly look, an Amazon bold grace, or a contrary soft and gentle one, 'twas chiefly the *fancy* of these characters or qualities which wrought on us: our imagination being busied in forming beauteous shapes and images of this rational kind, which entertained the mind and held it in admiration."[15]

Applying this subjective factor to artistic creation, Shaftesbury warns the artist against copying nature. "A painter, if he has any genius, understands the truth and unity of design; and knows he is even then unnatural when he follows Nature too closely and strictly copies life."[16] The work of art originates in an inner vision of harmony between mind and nature. The artist becomes "a second Maker, a just Prometheus under Jove."[17] Only in the mind does nature attain aesthetic truth. "All beauty is truth," Shaftesbury writes. Not the truth of faithful description, which is the lower kind based on observation of a given form, but the unique truth attained by the mind's power to create forms of spiritual harmony. "The beautifying, not the beautified, is the really beautiful."[18] "The beautiful, the fair, the comely, were never in the matter, but in the art and design; never in the body itself but in the form or forming power."[19] The ability to create beauty requires the existence of moral harmony in the artist's mind. To be a great poet one must first be a good man. Lack of moral sensitivity weakens the sense of beauty: aesthetic perception

is directly conditioned by moral harmony. Shaftesbury united ethics to aesthetics. "Arts and virtues are 'mutually friends'—and thus the science of virtuous and that of virtue itself become, in a manner, one and the same."[20] Harmony and proportion, the foundations of art, form also the ground of morals. Moral refinement, no less than aesthetic taste, requires education.

Shaftesbury's ideas, however influential, did not survive in their original form. His followers transformed his spiritual empiricism into a sensational one. For Shaftesbury, the subjective experience merely *discloses* the spiritual form in which beauty resides. For Francis Hutcheson, who claims to apply Shaftesbury's principles, beauty consists primarily in a subjective experience.[21] He does distinguish the ideas from the experience of pleasure they cause: "the ideas of beauty and harmony, like other sensible ideas, are *necessarily* pleasant to us" (I, 3). But in his empiricist epistemology, ideas themselves have a subjective origin: they are reflections of sensations. He admits that the perception of beauty reveals qualities inherent in the thing perceived rather than mere sensations of the perceiving mind (I, 16). But the question remains whether it is the perception that causes objects to be beautiful or the qualities of the perceived object. Hutcheson compares the inner sense of beauty to the senses of hearing and seeing, "because of its affinity to the other senses" (I, 13). He never intended to identify beauty with pleasure. Indeed, he emphasizes the objective qualities of the form required for inducing aesthetic pleasure, such as uniformity in variety, proportionality, pictorial harmony. Yet those qualities merely "occasion" aesthetic pleasure. The theory of beauty is thereby bound to become subjective. Hume, drawing the conclusion from these principles, collapsed the idea of beauty with the pleasure it causes. "Pleasure and pain . . . are not only necessary attendants of beauty and deformity, but constitute their very essence."[22]

Still, Hutcheson was a perceptive observer who followed his observations wherever they might lead. Thus he radically reinterpreted the mimetic theory of art. Art ought to imitate nature, but unless the mind idealizes nature, the artist will not be able to answer Plato's critical question: Why should the artist attempt to copy poorly what nature has done well? In Hutcheson's view, the artist ought to imitate a natural model in such a way that it becomes a symbol of a spiritual ideal. As Shaftesbury had suggested, in the aesthetic intuition the mind becomes aware of the affinity between its own inner life and the outer world. There exists a concordance between the mind's disposition and "natural, inanimate objects." "Thus a tempest at sea is often an emblem of wrath; a plant or tree drooping under the rain of a person in sorrow—in short, everything in nature, by our strange inclination to resemblance, shall be brought to represent other things, even the most remote, especially the passions and

circumstances of human nature in which we are more nearly concerned" (IV, 4). Despite his associationist terminology—"inclination to resemblance"—Hutcheson is already preparing the turn from imitation to expression. For him, the model the artist imitates needs not be beautiful. The deformities of an aging face or the monotony of a barren landscape become "beautiful" once the artist or the viewer shows their congruence with a mental state and thereby evokes the harmony that unites the order of nature with that of the mind. Indeed, that inner harmony becomes more apparent when the model is *not* physically perfect because the feeling of tension awakens the mind to the deeper harmony between inner and outer reality. Too facile a concordance fails to alert the mind to its own part in the aesthetic creation.

The Extension of the Aesthetic Field: From Imitation to Expression

DIDEROT

The conflicts among different views concerning the relation between beauty and truth made the eighteenth-century discussion of "aesthetics" very lively. Most instructive in this regard are the constant changes in Diderot's intellectual development. As a young man he published an essay on art that later appeared in the first volume of the *Encyclopédie*. In it his position hardly differs from d'Alembert's. "If the object leads to action, we give the name of 'art' to the compendium of rules governing its use and to their technical order. If the object is merely contemplated under different aspects, the compendium and technical order of the observations concerning their object are called science."[23] The description exposes the utilitarian outlook of the *Encyclopédie* team. But by the second volume of the *Encyclopédie,* in an article later published separately as *Traité du beau,* Diderot had abandoned this conglomeration of arts with crafts. He understood that the prospect of uniting all the mind's activities within a single comprehensive system (the original purpose of the *Encyclopédie*) had become impossible. Instead he now attempted to integrate Augustine's objective definition of beauty with Hutcheson's subjective one. He concluded that the subjective "sense of beauty" failed to account for the qualities inherent in the beautiful object and that beauty was based on the objective qualities of order, proportion, and relation in the object. "I term 'beautiful,' independently of my existence everything that *contains the power* of awakening the notion of relation in my mind; and I term 'beautiful' in direct relation to myself everything that does awaken that notion."[24] Diderot thus appears to leave the subjective element of pleasure out of the description.

Poetry alone overcomes this discursive quality by symbolizing the mind's impressions in the order of the words. It *represents* things as soon as it says them, and it *presents* them as symbolic expressions of the mind. This emblematic character of poetic language appears not only in the order of the words but also in their sounds and in the rhythm of their conjunction. A poem is "a fabric of hieroglyphs," "a forest of symbols" (*Lettre sur les sourds muets,* in *Oeuvres,* IV, 34).

Connected with this thesis on linguistic symbolization Diderot advances another, even more fundamental one, on the analogy and irreducibility of all modes of aesthetic expression. Visual images may be aesthetically as expressive as poetry, yet, contrary to the title of Batteux's treatise, they cannot be reduced to "a single principle." Each mode of expression is different. No mode of aesthetic symbolization can be directly transposed into another. Virgil's graphic description of Neptune who, disturbed by the sudden storm at the beginning of the *Aeneid* (I, 124–27), raises his head above the waters would merely look ludicrous in a painting. Diderot's thesis anticipates Lessing's concerning the irreducible contrast between Virgil's poetic description of Laocoön and the Belvedere's Hellenistic sculpture, which we shall discuss later. Diderot's argument has not been lost on contemporary psychologists who came to oppose the method of teaching the deaf-mute a surrogate form of speech (such as lip-reading) rather than educating them in the different, more appropriate visual sign language.

Despite these irreducible differences, a definite analogy unites the various modes of aesthetic expression. The analogy consists not in a similarity of the aesthetic objects but in a comparable pattern of symbolization. Diderot supports his view of functional analogy by referring to the newly invented light-organ that projects beams of color corresponding to musical tones. A deaf-mute, he claims, could come to understand indirectly what speech is like by observing the organist's finger movements as they become instantly translated into light. Indeed, a person of normal hearing has occasion to observe a similar analogy among different forms of expression. When walking through an art gallery, Diderot writes, he feels like a deaf-mute: the paintings speak a silent language; one that essentially differs from spoken language in that each canvas displays the whole scene at once rather than unfolding it in temporal succession, as language does.[28]

For all his objections to the imitation theory, Diderot continued to maintain that in some way art imitates nature. Through a detailed study of actual paintings in France, Holland, and Germany, as well as through his reading of Christian Ludwig von Hagedorn's *Betrachtungen über die Malerei,* Diderot gradually acquired a new respect for realistic representation. Where nature

serves a symbolic function, its excesses and deformities may as much stand model to the artist, as harmony and balance. The first sentence of the *Essais sur la peinture* (1766), in which he synthesized this fresh experience, sounds like a manifesto: "La nature ne fait rien d'incorrect. Toute forme, belle et laide, a sa cause." Diderot commends Chardin's everyday realism as an *imitation très fidèle de la nature,* "the very substance of the objects, the air and the light you take at the point of your brush and apply to the canvas" (*Salons* [1763], in *Oeuvres,* IV, 265). In the *Essais* he applies the same rule to the portrait: to qualify as a work of art a portrait must present more than a flattering resemblance. It must dare to reveal what age or smallpox has done to a face. It must reflect individuality rather than a universal type or a moral virtue. Artistic conventions hold no authority against nature's primeval power (*Essais,* in *Oeuvres,* IV, 467–69). Passions and feelings, wild nature and monsters, deserve to be represented as well as rational harmony, among things. "The arts of imitation need something savage, crude, striking, and enormous" (*Essais,* in *Oeuvres,* IV, 498).

We are a long way from *la belle nature!* But have we returned to the literalist theory of imitation? I think not, because what the artist imitates is not in the first place the object as simply perceived but as perceived through an emotional prism. The symbolic function of the model is "purely ideal and not borrowed from any particular image of nature" (*Salons* [1767], in *Oeuvres,* IV, 524). Art that focuses entirely on rendering an accurate perception of nature leaves out most of nature's spiritual meaning. Instead, the artist ought to represent nature as reflected in *les grands enthousiasmes de la vie*. Diderot developed this insight in a series of critical reviews, written for Grimm's *Correspondance littéraire* on the yearly art exhibitions at the Louvre and later published as *Salons* (*Oeuvres,* IV, 193–1005). His theory of expression called for a more radical transformation of the aesthetic object than the one art critics of his time called *la belle nature*. He refers to La Tour's portraits that seem "made of flesh and blood," not in the first place because they resemble the facial features of their models, but because they capture their spiritual identity. He "idealizes" nature by internalizing natural forms. Nature remains the only model available to the artist but he must present it as reflected in ideas, feelings, and memories. Nature as imitated by the artist always symbolizes an inner state of mind. Diderot accepted the empiricist principle that all knowledge is derived from sense impressions, but for him, the imagination transforms those impressions into symbols of inner life. This internalization of the impressions justifies Arthur Wilson's paradoxical interpretation of Diderot's aesthetics: "When Diderot used the word 'imitation' as he did frequently in all his aesthetic writings, it was in the sense more readily conveyed to twentieth

century students by the word 'expression.' The scrupulous imitation of nature that he called for is accomplished by expressing her."[29] The ideal model is not derived from nature: it resides in the artist's soul. Herbert Dieckmann, another perceptive interpreter of Diderot, arrived at a similar conclusion: "To the question of imitation he substitutes that of expression or, more correctly, of the relation between 'thought' or the artist's internal state and his expression in the work."[30]

Still, Diderot's position is not free of ambiguity. Yes, he constantly reminds his readers that copying nature has no aesthetic merit. Yes, the inspiration for painting or sculpturing a particular scene or a particular face must entirely come from within and thus be expressive of an inner state. Yet his sensationalist theory of knowledge often stands in the way of his theory of expression. The rules of painting described in the *Essais sur la peinture* all insist on a realistic rendition of things as they appear. Feelings may be conveyed only through the choice of the physical subject—not by a transformation of the forms of appearance. Diderot even objects to disharmonious expressions of passion. Regardless of the subject, the artist must observe the traditional conventions of harmony. Obviously the French critic's attempt to avoid subjectivism as well as naturalism did not always succeed.

The narrowness of his aesthetic ideal also imposes strict moral norms upon artistic expression. The author of the lascivious *Family Jewels* as well as of a number of risqué stories turns surprisingly moralistic in his art criticism. Throughout the *Essais sur la peinture* he insists that the moral quality of a work of art forms an essential part of its aesthetic merit. "To render virtue lovable, vice odious, and to expose the ridiculous—that is the project of each honest man who picks up the pen, the brush, or the chisel" (*Essais,* in *Oeuvres,* IV, 501). Linking the beautiful to the good and the true, he adds to the ancient definition of beauty as *splendor veritatis,* the splendor of goodness. "The true, the good, and the beautiful stay close to each other. If we add to one of the two former qualities a rare, brilliant condition, the true will be beautiful and the good will be beautiful" (*Essais,* in *Oeuvres,* IV, 513). Diderot despises Boucher for being "licentious" and neglects Watteau for being frivolous while he praises the often-sentimental Greuze for the moral nobility of his work (*Essais,* in *Oeuvres,* IV, 500). With Diderot, nothing is ever simple, however. His moral high-mindedness was balanced by a sensuous temperament as well as by an ingrained skepticism concerning all values, including the ones he so zealously defended. His own descriptions of Boucher's canvases are more erotic than the works themselves!

His art criticism reveals as much, if not more, about his own feelings, moral principles, and prejudices as about the paintings he discusses. Madame

Necker, charmed by his subjective approach, praised Diderot's art reviews because she "liked painting only in poetry." Others, like Barbey d'Aurevilly, could hardly contain their irritation about the critic's continuous intrusions. "In his novels as in his other works, he never forgets himself, himself and his sermonizing. . . . The painter breaks through the painting to stick his head out of a hole in the canvas to make sure that everyone sees him well and always understands him well."[31] The charge is all too true, yet vanity may not have been the sole reason for Diderot's pertinacious presence. He felt so driven by the importance of his literary mission that, indeed, he rarely dropped the preaching tone. Art, for him, formed part of a comprehensive project to improve the condition of the human race.

LESSING

It is hard to find two men who occupied more similar positions in the aesthetic life of the eighteenth century than Lessing and Diderot. As art critics and playwrights, both strongly influenced the ideas of their time. Both expressed themselves in an easy, conversational style. Lessing admired Diderot's dramas and aesthetic theories and Diderot admired Lessing's. Yet each one succeeded in preserving his own literary identity. Diderot was light-hearted, sensitive, and folksy with a touch of vulgarity; Lessing more focused, serious-minded, capable of irony and sarcasm, but hardly ever indulging in levity. The expressive theory intimated in Diderot's *Letter on the Deaf-Mute* Lessing elaborated into a full-fledged philosophy.

His views on aesthetics are spread out over his Hamburg theater reviews (*Hamburgische Dramaturgie*) and a long essay in which he compares poetry with the plastic arts (*Laocoön*). I shall discuss Lessing's dramatic work in an appendix to chapter 5. His essay *Laocoön* (1766) introduces a category that brought the centuries-old debate about the comparative merit of poetry and of the visual arts to a close.[32] Beauty, Lessing concludes, is the defining characteristic of the visual arts, expressiveness that of poetry. Lessing illustrates the distinction by comparing a passage from a literary work with a recently discovered Hellenistic sculpture that represented the same subject. Virgil's *Aeneid* (II, 199–224) describes how the Trojan priest Laocoön, together with his two sons, is killed by two gigantic serpents Minerva has summoned from the sea. Johann Winckelmann had previously compared the two works of art (*Thoughts on the Imitation of Greek Works of Painting and Sculpture,* 1755). In his view, the statue bears the composed artistic expression of the classical period, whereas Virgil's poem displays the uninhibited emotion characteristic of the later, Roman age. Lessing accepted Winckelmann's surprising interpretation of the sculpture as "composed" and of the poem as "emotional," but

he rejected Winckelmann's explanation of the difference. In his judgment, the emotional treatment of Virgil's poem has nothing to do with its presumed later age, but with the specific nature of literature. Even Greek poetry of the classical age had been capable of violent expression, as Sophocles' *Philoctetes* shows. But, he argued, neither Greek nor Roman taste tolerated emotional distortion in statuary.

The comparison between the two artistic genres presented a unique occasion for testing Horace's oft-quoted and mostly misinterpreted *ut pictura poesis* (a poem must be like a picture). Lessing conjectured that Virgil's poem had preceded the statue in time and hence ought not be read as a description of an existing work of art.[33] On a more substantial level, he argued that, since poetry develops in time while pictorial art remains fixed in space, the passing emotional images of poetry have a slighter impact than a picture frozen in immobility. In a statue emotional tension lastingly distorts the subject's features and thus conflicts with the aesthetic harmony required in a work of art. Traditionally beauty has been considered the dominant category of visual art. But if beauty were the principal quality of poetry (as the later interpretation of *ut pictura poesis* suggested), then none but the pictorial passages of a poem would possess aesthetic merit, while physically or morally disturbing scenes and portraits would detract from its aesthetic value. Homer's description of the ugly Thersites (*Iliad,* II) as well as Shakespeare's portrait of Richard III proves that the opposite occurs. Restricting the aesthetic to the beautiful submits poetry to an inappropriate norm.

Lessing obviously overstates his thesis: a poem must also be beautiful, and visual art may be strongly expressive, as the Laocoön statue, contrary to Winckelmann's and Lessing's assessment of it, shows. In fact, Lessing himself refers to contemporary theorists who argued that even in the plastic arts expressiveness had become the primary law. "Truth and expression (they claim) are art's first law and as nature herself is ever ready to sacrifice beauty for the sake of higher aims, so must the artist subordinate it to his general purpose and pursue it no further than truth and expression permit" (chap. III, p. 19). Lessing suspended judgment on this opinion until, after having completed the twenty-fifth chapter of his book, he read Winckelmann's *History of Ancient Art* (1768). It fully persuaded him that the visual arts also might be expressive. By that time he already had reached the conclusion that poetry, besides being expressive, can and must also be beautiful, though its means for being so differed from those of the visual arts. Poetry moves in time and is able to describe things in motion; visual arts are static. With this distinction Lessing exposed a more subtle difference than the one between beauty and expressiveness. The purely spatial nature of painting and sculpture reveals all features at

Although in the earlier discourses artistic genius had included formal harmony in color and composition as well as moral grandeur, in the later ones it tends to move beyond harmony. (I write, "tends to" because nothing is ever definitive for this versatile critic!) "Genius is supposed to be a power of producing excellencies, which are out of the rules of art; a power which no precepts can teach, and which no industry can acquire" (VI, 74). "Genius," then, refers to the capacity to achieve a qualitative leap in aesthetic excellence that cannot be justified by established rules or conventional ideals. It still follows rules, both formal and moral, but they are rules of its own making (V, 76). As such it surpasses both conventional moral ideals and classicist harmony. But it reconciles them on a higher level. In this new conception of genius the expressive concept of art definitively breaks through. The aesthetic weight shifts altogether from the imitation of external nature to "the nature and internal fabric and organization of the human mind and imagination" (VII, 99). Nature remains the fountain of all forms, but she reveals her inner secret only to the mind and hand of the artistic genius. "Thus the highest beauty of form must be taken from nature; but it is an art of long deduction and great experience, to know how to find it" (VI, 80). Copying nature's appearances is no art, but merely "a scanty entertainment for the imagination" (VII, 102).

With his reinterpretation of the concept of taste Reynolds completes his move toward an expressive theory of aesthetics. Taste, according to him, consists not in sensitiveness to the formal qualities of a work of art (harmony, composition, etc.), but in some of that ability to partake of nature's creativity, which characterizes the artist of genius. "Genius and taste, in their common acceptation, appear to be very nearly related; the difference lies only in this, that genius has super-added to it a habit of power of execution; or we may say, that taste, when this power is added changes its name, and is called genius" (VII, 96). Still Reynolds never became an unbridled romantic. Even artistic genius must obey certain established rules, without which nothing would be left but "caprice and casualty" (VII, 99). But these rules differ from the guidelines of academic training. Unfortunately Sir Joshua remains exceedingly vague in defining them. The principles of orderly composition, harmony of light and shade, and a happy blending of colors are too general to function in this capacity.

Reynolds's theory suffers from a discrepancy between the sensationalist theory of knowledge, to which he persistently turns for philosophical support, and a concept of aesthetic truth that in fact has its base in the creative imagination. Thus, after having asserted that the criterion of beauty resides not in the external form of things but in the mind and the imagination, he immediately hastens back to Lockean orthodoxy in denying the imagination any creative

power. "The imagination is incapable of producing any thing originally of itself, and can only vary and combine those ideas with which it is furnished by means of the senses" (VII, 107). Inconsistencies of this nature show the eclectic as well as the transitional character of Reynolds's work. Over the years he borrowed from various aesthetic theories, without fully embracing any single one. In the earlier discourses he increasingly stressed the subjective and "moral" factor. Not until he expressed his unambiguous preference of Michelangelo in the final discourse did he definitively embrace the principles of a new era in aesthetics. With Kant the expressive theory of art at last received its theoretical justification.

On the Way to a Symbolic Theory of Art

THE CONCEPT OF TASTE AND THE BIRTH OF AESTHETICS: FROM SHAFTESBURY TO BAUMGARTEN

The term "taste" current in the vocabulary of eighteenth-century aesthetics varied in meaning from one author to another. For Boileau and Fontenelle, it had consisted in a capacity of judging art in accordance with right reason, that is, with objective principles of harmony, verisimilitude, and insight. A famous article ("Goût") in the *Encyclopédie,* begun by Montesquieu and completed by Voltaire with an appendix by d'Alembert, wavers between an objective, rational, and a mildly subjective interpretation. Voltaire argued that taste requires more than an acquaintance with the principles of harmony: "One must feel beauty and be moved by it." But aesthetic sensitivity needs to be educated. A genuine judgment of taste must be able to claim the consensus of all educated persons. Voltaire still assumed that the foundation of beauty lies in the things themselves.

For Montesquieu, however, taste had consisted in the pleasure one takes in an object without regard to its use. "When we find pleasure in something that is useful for us, we say that it is *good;* when we find pleasure in seeing it, without discerning for the moment any utility in it, we call it *beautiful.*"[36] Not a word about the objective qualities of the beautiful here! "Perfection in the art consists in presenting objects to us in such a way that they cause us as much pleasure as possible" ("Goût," p. 343). Montesquieu admits that the work of art must meet certain objective conditions, but he explains them as derived from primary sense impressions. Thus the pleasure we find in symmetry would derive from the fact that symmetry is "useful to the soul and able to further its functions" ("Goût," p. 349). This concept of taste, based mostly on beauty's objective effects, opened up a space for perceptions, feelings, and emotions—those

subjective elements that Boileau's theory of *le vrai seul* had not been able to accommodate. But how could aesthetic pleasure preserve that universality which art critics claimed for taste? In an appendix to the *Encyclopédie* article, d'Alembert tried to resolve that problem, arguing that the "true philosopher" knows how to distinguish the universal element in taste from the conventional one and thus to determine which pleasures are genuine and which are "illusory pleasures" ("Goût," p. 366). The term "illusory" reveals the bad conscience of the rationalist who, afraid of the anarchy of pleasure, withdraws by objective qualification much of what he had granted to subjective feeling.

In Britain the concept of taste had similarly wavered between an objective and a subjective meaning. Shaftesbury, who with Addison made the word fashionable, used it in defense of objective norms that he felt were threatened by the subjective relativism of Locke's epistemology. Far from being at the mercy of arbitrary feelings, taste for him consisted in the awareness of the objective harmony that unites the physical cosmos with human feelings and emotions.[37] Shaftesbury vaguely intuited what was to become the fundamental principle of Kant's theory of the beautiful, namely, that the aesthetic experience originates in the primary awareness of harmony between the faculties of the mind and the represented object. For the British critic also, the disinterested attitude necessary for aesthetic taste demands a detachment that does not come naturally but must be learned. In addition, taste requires a sense of moral grandeur and even a feeling of tension between the self and its surroundings. Only the awareness of an unresolved contrast induces the mind to search for that deeper harmony which causes the properly aesthetic pleasure. The contemplation of uncultivated nature may arouse or heighten that tension. "Even the rude rocks, the mossy caverns, the irregular unwrought grottos and broken falls of waters, with all the horrid graces of the wilderness itself, as representing Nature more, will be the more engaging, and appear with a magnificence beyond the formal mockery of princely gardens."[38]

With Hume the pendulum swung in the opposite direction and the notion of taste became wholly subjective. According to his early *Treatise on Human Nature* (1738), the aesthetic experience depends on "such an order and construction of parts, as either by the primary constitution of our nature, by custom, or by caprice, is fitted to give a pleasure and satisfaction to the soul."[39] In a later essay, "Of the Standard of Taste" (1757), he moderates that subjectivism somewhat by referring to the "general rules of beauty." But the rules themselves are drawn from "the observation of what pleases or displeases."[40] To speak of "real" beauty is as fruitless as "to pretend to ascertain the real sweet or real bitter." Nonetheless, Hume considers the judgment of taste universal. But he ascribes this quality to the similarity of the subjective processes

of thinking and feeling, which vary little from one person to another. Hence the paradox that, though judgments of taste are in principle universal, only few people are endowed with enough aesthetic sensitivity properly to evaluate a work of art.

Neither French nor British critics had succeeded in satisfactorily incorporating their analyses of the aesthetic experience within a general theory of knowledge. To do so was Kant's project in *The Critique of Judgment*. He thereby relied heavily on the work of Alexander Baumgarten, the philosopher who had first used the term "aesthetics" for referring to the science of the beautiful. In his *Aesthetica* (1750), the rationalist Baumgarten intended to complete Wolff's theory of knowledge that had included little about sense perception and imagination, though both play an essential part in the epistemic process. Together they constitute what Baumgarten calls the "aesthetic" knowledge, the *perfectio cognitionis sensitivae*.[41] This knowledge lacks the objective quality of conceptual cognition, but in the intuition of harmony it grasps the unity in the multiplicity of phenomena that, according to Wolff, was a distinctive quality of truth. In contrast to reason, however, the aesthetic intuition never moves beyond perceiving the harmony between the universal and the particular. It experiences this harmony but is incapable of rationally justifying it. The aesthetic judgment, then, can claim no objectivity. Still the fact that most educated people agree on the principles of art indicates that the aesthetic experience occurs in accordance with certain rational norms.

On its own level art aims at attaining what constitutes the objective of reason, namely, subsuming diversity under unity, particularity under universality. Though not rational in itself, the aesthetic judgment is nonetheless analogous to the rational one (§ 42). Baumgarten grounds the analogy between logical truth and aesthetic perception on the rationalist assumption that the actual world as perceived by senses and imagination must in all respects correspond to the laws of the mind. Aesthetic perception, in an obscure yet intuitive awareness of the logical harmony of the world, presents what *ought to be* (in the rational order of things). Baumgarten's *Aesthetica* overcomes narrow rationalism and inconsistent subjectivism by granting aesthetics an indispensable place in the realm of truth. In his earlier *Reflections on Poetry* (1735), where the term "aesthetica" first appears, he had argued that a good poem must be like the world: the whole ought to be harmonious and the parts well ordered. Yet the poem need not refer to the real world: it constitutes a virtual world of its own, independent of any external reality.

The problems inherent in such a comparison appeared soon enough. Despite his sympathy for Baumgarten's aesthetic conception, Kant noted that a work of art can never be entirely "pure" or self-sufficient. Aesthetic forms

always refer to a world beyond the work of art. This is particularly the case with poetry. Words continue to bear the mark of their original destination: to articulate our life world. A poem's meaning, then, moves inevitably beyond the virtual aesthetic reality that it construes. Still Baumgarten's aestheticism proved to possess a durable staying power. Even in the early part of the twentieth century some art critics still restricted a poem's significance to a self-contained meaning. In isolating the poem from the "real" world the German philosopher did away with the imitation theory, which, despite many modifications and reinterpretations, had remained dominant among critics. But he did so at the expense of art's ontological significance.[42]

THE KANTIAN REVOLUTION: INTUITION AND GENIUS

For Kant, as for Baumgarten, the judgment of taste belonged in the realm of truth. Art and beauty present *ideas* that, because of their rich emotional content, cannot be conceptualized. At the beginning of his "Analytic of the Beautiful," the first part of the *Critique of Judgment*,[43] Kant explains how the aesthetic judgment differs from the objective, cognitive one "In order to discern whether or not something is beautiful we do not relate the representation through reason to the object for knowledge. Rather, we relate it through the imagination (perhaps in conjunction with reason) to the subject and its feeling of pleasure or displeasure" (*KUK*, § 1; *AB*, pp. 3–4). In objective knowledge the imagination serves a purely instrumental function: it unifies the multiple data that enter consciousness through the senses into a single representation. In the process of thinking the mind is hardly aware of this operation. But if the mind, instead of moving directly to full objectification, lingers at this intermediate stage of the imagination a different, nonconceptual representation emerges. This intermediate level, according to Kant, is the birthplace of aesthetics. The representations constituted at this level hold the middle between objective concepts and sense perceptions, but they also cause a pleasurable feeling of harmony between the mind and its representations. With respect to them the mind has not yet achieved that intellectual distance essential to objective cognition. They remain, so to speak, inherent in the mind itself, in such a way that the mind can freely play with this product of its creative imagination without being tied by the fixed rules of objective reality.

Kant insists that the concomitant feeling of pleasure does not constitute the essence of the aesthetic experience. It merely follows the judgment of taste. Analogous to the cognitive judgment and in contrast to feelings of pleasure, the aesthetic judgment is universally valid, even though it lacks the irrefutability of logical propositions or scientific conclusions. "There can be no objective rule of taste which determines by concepts whether an object is beauti-

innate mental disposition (*ingenium*) through which nature gives the rule to art" (*KUK*, § 46; Bernard, p. 150). Yet Kant adds a surprising specification: works of genius become models, "not to be copied but to be imitated" (*KUK*, § 47; Bernard, p. 152). Genius, then, though itself above the rules, sets up rules for others to follow. This paradoxical conclusion (Does genius not exclude imitation?) makes sense only if we remember that for Kant, even the artist of genius must be directed by taste, even though he may take some liberties with established rules. "Taste, like judgment in general, is the discipline (or training) of genius. It severely clips its wings, and makes it cultured and polished. But, at the same time, it gives guidance, as to where and how far it may extend itself if it is to remain purposive" (*KUK*, § 50; Bernard, p. 163). Kant's notion of genius creates the conditions for genuine aesthetic truth. The great artist raises art beyond subjective experience to where it becomes symbolic of great ideas. Kant here approaches a fully symbolic theory of art.[50] But in the end he fails to overcome the subjective interpretation of aesthetics. When he describes genius as "the innate mental disposition through which *nature* gives rule to art," one may wonder whether "nature" means more than the fundamental structure of the mind itself.

THE SUBLIME AND THE BEAUTIFUL

The three most common categories of eighteenth-century aesthetics—taste, genius, and the sublime—complement one another. A particularly close relation links genius to the sublime. In the sublimity of nature and morality, genius finds its inspiration. Many critics of the Enlightenment therefore regarded sublimity in a work of art the mark of genius. The term "sublime" entered aesthetic theory through the Latin translation of a Greek treatise on "high style" in rhetoric. Its third-century anonymous author (Longinus [?]) located the sources of the sublime style in the soul's "invincible love for all that is great and more divine than ourselves," which induces it to cross "the boundaries of the surrounding world."[51] Rediscovered in the sixteenth century, the tract was translated into Latin in 1572 and became popular through Boileau's French translation (1674). In the notes he added, Boileau extended the category of the sublime beyond rhetoric and applied it to consciousness itself. Great *thinking* was more sublime than great *style*. Moreover, the French critic traced the origin of both meanings to an objective quality in nature itself: the sublimity of nature evokes great thoughts, strong emotions, and noble expressions.

In England the idea first received a more specifically aesthetic content. According to Samuel E. Monk's classic treatise on the subject, "the sublime tended to become the all-inclusive category for those objects and these emotions which

the strict neo-classic doctrine could not admit as beautiful, but which Englishmen were traditionally and constitutionally [!] ready to accept as of aesthetic value."[52] For Shaftesbury, as for Addison and Burke, the consciousness of the sublime stems from the tension between the soul and the surrounding nature. Thus, wild and savage nature arouses the soul to strong emotions and magnanimous feelings. Joseph Addison argues (in twelve issues of *The Spectator*) that the sight of vast expanses in nature makes the mind aware of its own boundlessness. "A spacious horizon is an image of liberty, where the eye has room to range abroad, to expatiate at large in the immensity of its views."[53] Yet it was the young Edmund Burke in his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1756) (begun and virtually completed when he was still an undergraduate at Trinity College) who defined the sublime's distinct character by separating it from the beautiful. A representation that causes emotions of terror or of grandeur has little in common with the beautiful, though it still falls within the aesthetic range.

Remembering Lessing's discussion of the expressive character of literature (in *Laocoön*), one would expect the sublime to be primarily a poetic category. Poetry alone was fit to express strong emotions. Yet by the end of the eighteenth century many felt that the grandeur and terror of nature could be more forcefully presented in painting than in words. No poetic description would equal a pictorial representation of the awe-inspiring power of nature. But to achieve the full emotional effect of this power, painters ought not to be satisfied with a faithful representation of scenery; they had to intensify certain aspects and exclude others until their picture of nature reflected the soul's inner landscape. Salvator Rosa was considered a master of this pictorial expressionism. British painters, influenced by him, amplified the power of nature by the "architectural sublime" of solitary buildings, Gothic cathedrals, and, above all, ruins of abbeys and castles. A landscape could hardly be sublime without some reference to history: a dilapidated remnant of the past, an allusion to an ancient battle or hero. In the end, it was not nature itself, but nature as related to the soul that interested them. Such romantic canvases as Joseph Turner's *Hannibal Crossing the Alps* and John Martin's *Deluge* triptych show dwarflike humans struggling with the titanic powers of nature. The pursuit of the sublime formed a natural transition between the art of the Enlightenment and that of Romanticism.[54] The morally sublime came to consist in actions undertaken with strong passion and carried through with extraordinary courage, even if they conflicted with accepted moral norms. Great crimes may require as much moral energy as deeds of heroic virtue.[55]

Here also Kant provided the definitive expression. In his early *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1763),[56] Kant had followed Burke

in attributing the distinction between the beautiful and the sublime to different mental states. But while Burke links the sublime primarily to emotions of terror, Kant associates it mostly with moral feelings. For him, courage, honesty, universal affection, and, in general, "true virtue," more than ragged mountain peaks, raging storms, and visions of Milton's infernal kingdom, evoke sublime feelings. In Kant's moral writings, the *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785) and the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), he attributes the sublime to the moral will. It consists primarily in an attitude rather than a feeling, though the moral attitude itself produces sublime feelings.[57] In the lengthy and profound "Analytic of the Sublime" that appears in the later *Critique of Judgment* (1790), Kant also refers to nature as sublime but always in connection with the person's unique dignity, which surpasses the majesty of nature. There also he compares the beautiful with the sublime, as Addison and Burke had done. But he traces the difference to his own distinction between understanding and reason. The beautiful symbolizes an indefinite *concept* of the understanding; the sublime an indefinite *idea* of reason. The former does so by means of finite forms; the latter through the absence of form.

In beauty, imagination and intellect attain a state of balance. In the sublime, the imagination strains this balance to a point where it threatens to disrupt the aesthetic harmony altogether. This tension between idea and representation produces the experience of the sublime. While the imagination enjoys free play in the experience of the beautiful, in that of the sublime the idea does "violence to the imagination" through a vision that both attracts and repels (*KUK*, § 23; Bernard, pp. 82–84). No image, no aspect of nature is sublime in itself: it only becomes so when the mind recognizes the disproportion between idea and representation. In various ways artists and poets evoke this excess of mind over nature, of idea over image. They may do so by giving their subject proportions that exceed the capacity of the imagination and thereby suggest the *idea* of the infinite (ibid., § 25–26), or by painting or describing scenes of overwhelming power (threatening rocks, volcanoes, waterfalls) that oppress the imagination yet make the mind aware of its superiority over nature (*KUK*, § 28; Bernard, pp. 99–101). Or they may depict desolate spaces that awaken the soul to its own boundlessness. All such images drive the mind into itself. For Kant, the sublime remains essentially a subjective experience.[58]

The experience of the sublime conveys an awareness of the "unconditional" that lies at the root of the moral act. "In fact, a feeling of the sublime in nature cannot well be thought without combining therewith a mental disposition which is akin to the moral" (*KUK*, § 29; Bernard, p. 109). Still, the feeling of the sublime intrinsically differs from the moral consciousness, which requires