

The Anti-Enlightenment Tradition

ZEEV STERNHELL

*The Anti-Enlightenment
Tradition*

Translated by David Maisel

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For Ziva

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Preface

A book like this requires one to deal within a single conceptual framework with a great variety of problems that at first sight seem to be unrelated. Such an enterprise, which is never easy, is particularly difficult in this case, for the opposition to the Enlightenment constitutes a complex and multifaceted phenomenon with superimposed strata, and its ramifications are many and often unexpected. This opposition eventually nurtured an anti-Enlightenment culture, in the absence of which it would be hard to conceive of the twentieth-century catastrophe.

The structure of this book is analytical. It is not arranged according to authors and when they wrote, although chronology is in general respected, which allows one to bring out the dynamic of the evolution of ideas. Every reading is quite naturally an interpretation. I have tried to follow the advice of Hippolyte Taine with regard to Thomas Carlyle: the historian must brush aside all the parasitical vegetation that accumulates in the course of research, and take hold of the “useful, solid wood.”

Work on the book went on for a number of years and took place in various countries. It could consequently happen that I read a particular work in two or three different editions, and sometimes even in different languages. I have done my best to unify the references, but that has not always been possible. In any case, I have always given exact references when a work is mentioned for

the first time, and I have repeated the whole title when the same work first appears in another chapter. As a result, this book does not contain a bibliography: as all the sources are provided in the notes, I did not see the point in giving them again in alphabetical order at the end of the book. It should also be pointed out that the book is not a simple translation from the original French edition but a new revised and expanded edition. New material has been added, which means that there are changes in the text and in the notes. The new French paperback edition to be published by Gallimard approximates this English-language edition.

During the years I worked on this book, I accumulated many debts. First among them is my debt to my wife, Ziva. The idea for the book is hers, and without her it would never have come into existence. Not only was the time and energy she devoted to me given at the expense of her own work, but her research and her insights on modern architecture and its cultural context, and on the close connections that develop between different kinds of intellectual activity, contributed a great deal to my own thinking.

In her rereading of the French manuscript, which included linguistic corrections, Françoise Laurent invested not only her intelligence, her critical sense, and her capacity to grasp the interrelationship of ideas but also forty years of friendship, from the distant days in the Latin Quarter in the 1960s when she helped edit my doctoral thesis, which became my first book, and made it readable.

This book is my fourth to benefit from David Maisel's intelligent and faithful translation, and I wish to thank him heartily.

My thanks are also due to the various institutions that have facilitated my work and provided stimulating and enriching environments. My home institution, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, in particular the Department of Political Science, furnished me with a first-class intellectual climate, resources, and some financial assistance. The Israel Science Foundation gave the crucial financial support that allowed the project to be started.

I had the privilege to begin work on the book at the Netherlands Institute for Advanced Study at Wassenaar, and then continued it at the Centre d'Histoire de Sciences Po in Paris and the Remarque Institute of New York University, where it was more or less finished. I would like to express my gratitude to Professor Henk Wesseling of the University of Leyden, rector of NIAS at the time of my stay in Wassenaar, and his staff, to Professor Jean-François Siri-nelli, director of the Centre d'Histoire de Sciences Po, and Pascal Cauchy, its secretary general, and to Professor Tony Judt, director of the Remarque Institute, and Jair Kessler, its assistant director.

My final thanks go to my New York literary agent Georges Borchardt, to the two anonymous readers for Yale University Press, and to my capable and enthusiastic editors at Yale, John Kulka, now at Harvard University Press, and his successors Keith Condon and William Frucht. Otto Bohlmann has been a sensitive and deeply learned copyeditor, and Ann-Marie Imbornoni a kind and efficient production editor.

Introduction

While the eighteenth century is commonly perceived as the quintessential age of rationalist modernity, it was also the cradle of a second and strikingly different modernity. In fact, at the very moment when rationalist thought seemed to have reached its peak, a comprehensive revolt against the Enlightenment's fundamental views erupted in European intellectual life. This revolt, which lasted for roughly two centuries, was directed above all against the French, or more precisely the Franco-Kantian, Enlightenment but also took aim at the British Enlightenment from John Locke to David Hume. From the second half of the eighteenth century to the age of the cold war, the confrontation between the two traditions formed one of the most prominent and enduring features of our world.

The origins of rationalist modernity lie in the intellectual ferment of early modern Europe, in the scientific revolution and the Glorious Revolution, in Thomas Hobbes, and in the Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns. By the mid-eighteenth century, this vein of thought seemed to have attained a position of virtually unmatched importance and was deemed the harbinger of a new era. It was very soon apparent, however, that the cultural victory of rationalism was eliciting a violent response and that a different political culture was emerging. In 1725 Giambattista Vico produced the first version of his *Scienza nuova* (New Science), which from our perspective was the first link in the chain of

antirationalism and anti-intellectualism, of the cult of the particular and the rejection of the universal. He was the first to voice a rejection of the principles of natural law. Yet his relative anonymity outside Italy meant that his significance at the time was limited, and it was not until his “discovery” by Jules Michelet that he began to play a substantial role in shaping the Anti-Enlightenment culture of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Hence, in terms of a direct and immediate influence, the founders of Anti-Enlightenment thought were Johann Gottfried Herder and Edmund Burke.

After the fifth century B.C.E. in Athens, the age of Enlightenment was the second great period of political thought. That is when modern ideas on history, politics, and culture came into being. The Enlightenment was first of all a political movement: “I saw that everything essentially depended on politics,” said Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “and however one looked at it, no people would ever be anything except what the nature of its government made it. And thus this great question of what the best possible government would be came down to this: What would be the nature of the government that would form the most virtuous, enlightened, wise people — the best people in the noblest sense of the word?” In the eighteenth century, political power had become the basis of all power, and Rousseau understood his time well when he thought that political liberty was the basis of all other liberties. That was why he was so influential. Hume, the political philosopher of the British Enlightenment, put it this way: “As no party, in the present age, can well support itself, without a philosophical or speculative system of principles, annexed to its political or practical one; we accordingly find, that each of the factions, into which this nation is divided, has reared up a fabric of the former kind, in order to protect and cover that scheme of actions, which it pursues.”¹

Apart from Rousseau, Locke, Hume, and Immanuel Kant, there were few philosophers in the strict, technical sense of the word among the thinkers of the Enlightenment. On the other hand, there were very many great minds willing to oppose evil relentlessly and to make every effort to promote their ideas. It was the time of the universal intellectual embodied by Voltaire, whom Friedrich Nietzsche saw as an exemplary free spirit.² All the *philosophes*, in the sense that this term acquired in the eighteenth century, considered politics to be the only means by which life could be changed. Never before had the world of the future been discussed with such intensity: politics had become everyone’s business.

It was the time of the *Encyclopédie*. This much-disparaged *Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* is full of weaknesses, like many other collective works, especially when they aim at the dissemination of knowledge, but its first edition in seventeen volumes was an unprecedented exploit in the history of learning. Denis Diderot and Jean d’Alembert placed man at

the center of the universe, and the individual asserted his right to happiness through material progress. Man was being liberated through reason. But at the same time, the people of the eighteenth century restored the passions to their proper place: "Whatever moralists may say," said Rousseau, "human understanding owes much to the passions, which, as commonly agreed, also owe it a great deal. It is through their activity that reason is developed: we only seek to know because we wish to enjoy, and one cannot conceive that someone with neither desires nor fears would take the trouble to reason."³ The Enlightenment was never the age of intellectual aridity and downgrading of the senses it is still constantly depicted as being by its enemies.

The term *Gegen-Aufklärung* was probably invented by Nietzsche, and was in common usage in Germany at the turn of the twentieth century.⁴ It was no accident that Nietzsche invented this term in order to define the thought of Arthur Schopenhauer and Richard Wagner, for its creation reflected not only his understanding of the intellectual trends of his time but also the fact that it was in the "Nietzsche years" that the Anti-Enlightenment gained momentum and became a veritable intellectual torrent. It was at that time that the antirationalist and antiuniversalist revolution of the end of the eighteenth century came down into the street, adapted to the needs of a society that within a few decades had changed as never before. In English, the term "Counter-Enlightenment" had existed for at least some fifteen years before it was used by Isaiah Berlin, who believed he might have invented it. It was employed by William Barrett, an American professor of philosophy well known in his time, editor of *The Partisan Review*. Barrett was one of the first American academics to introduce existentialism to his countrymen. It is not surprising that it was precisely in a book on existentialism that this Nietzschean concept appeared. It was, however, undoubtedly due to Berlin's innate talent for the popularization of formulas that the term "Counter-Enlightenment" became accepted in the English-speaking world. If this term never existed in French, it was perhaps partly because *Gegen-Aufklärung* was flatly translated in that language as "the reaction to the philosophy of the Enlightenment." The translators into French were not aware that Nietzsche had just invented an analytical concept of the greatest importance. On the other hand, the term "anti-philosophe" appeared at more or less the time that the *encylopédistes* adopted the name "philosophes."⁵ So even if in France they did not speak of an "anti" or "counter" Enlightenment, the idea, from the eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, did exist there as elsewhere. As one approached the twentieth century, the intellectual framework of the war against the Franco-Kantian Enlightenment gradually became a no less dominant ideology of the contemporary world than Marxism.

Like the Enlightenment, the Anti-Enlightenment was also a political move-

ment, and its attack began before the French Revolution and had no connection with it. In the last quarter of that great century, an inversion of values took place that had deep and lasting implications whose full significance would only be perceived a century later. Burke and Johann Gottfried Herder, and before them Vico, had launched a campaign against the French Enlightenment, rationalism, René Descartes, and Rousseau long before the storming of the Bastille. There was a half-century between Vico's *New Science* in its final version of 1744 and the fall of the Old Regime; Burke made his first criticisms forty years before the Declaration of the Rights of Man, and Herder, who, despite his opposition to the French Enlightenment, enthusiastically welcomed the fall of the authoritarian monarchy in France, demonstrated his hostility to the principles represented by the philosophes from 1769 onward.

There were many and sometimes contradictory currents in the Enlightenment, as in the movement that opposed it. It could hardly have been otherwise.⁶ If richness, pluralism, diversity, and internal contradictions were essential characteristics of the Enlightenment, the same can be said of the Anti-Enlightenment. To disregard this diversity would be a grave error. The Enlightenment was not a consistent theoretical structure but rather an intellectual tradition with immediate and practical objectives. Yet, despite the many differences between Voltaire on the one hand and Rousseau on the other, Rousseau on the one hand and Jean-Antoine-Nicolas de Caritat de Condorcet on the other, Charles-Louis de Secondat de Montesquieu on the one hand and Diderot and the encyclopédistes on the other, the thinkers of the French Enlightenment and their principal ally, Kant, had certain principles in common that constituted the very heart of the eighteenth-century intellectual revolution. Without any fear of distorting the complex realities of the period from the beginning of the eighteenth century to our own day, one can say that there is a logic and a coherence in both intellectual traditions.

Coherence, however, does not imply one-dimensionality or petrification of thought. A virtually ideal example of this is Rousseau. His celebrated conflict with Voltaire and his stormy relationships with the other philosophes were among the great episodes of the eighteenth century. The philosophes, for whom Rousseau had become a "monster" because, as Mark Hulliung showed in a remarkable work, he gave a second life to Pascal, even more dangerous than the first, could not do otherwise than reject him. In his own eyes, however, Rousseau never ceased to be a child of the Enlightenment, and he never strayed far from the Enlightenment. Sometimes more radical, at other times more conservative, than the philosophes, he remained staunchly loyal to the ideals of freedom, individual autonomy, and toleration that typified the "century of philosophy."⁷ It was in this way that, despite all the poisoned barbs

exchanged in the Parisian *salons*, Rousseau saw himself, and this was also the view of the ensuing centuries. For all of them, Rousseau and Voltaire, without distinction, were for better or for worse the most formidable figures of the Enlightenment, harbingers of the modern era. If Rousseau was one of the most complex and ambiguous figures in the history of Western political thought, that was nothing new. He was hardly more so than Plato, Karl Marx, or Nietzsche. “The political sermonizer, the village orator, the pamphleteer, the journeyman theorist are, as it were, pressed into the service of social history. It is not so with great men. They are their own history,” writes Judith Shklar in *Men and Citizens*, one of the more important works ever on Rousseau. And in another work: “Other philosophers write about those less fortunate than themselves in measured sentences, and they often do persuade us of their case. But they do not shake us, as Rousseau does, with his epic prose. He alone is the Homer of the losers.” The essential point was precisely that, in his vision of man and society, Rousseau was a foundation stone of the Enlightenment. The philosopher of liberty, a thinker with vast horizons and many interests, a true intellectual phenomenon, fascinated by antiquity, the heir of Plato and Aristotle, he at the same time, as Nietzsche so rightly saw, announced the coming of modernity. Why, in the case of this “primitivist,” as Voltaire called him, who offered both pessimistic and optimistic versions of the myth of origins, was the *Discourse on the Sciences and Arts* (First Discourse) already in the time of Herder and Burke eclipsed by the *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* (Second Discourse)? It was because, as Jean Starobinski said, the antithesis of nature and culture can be resolved in a progressive movement. This was the philosophy that Kant found in Rousseau and made his own. Rousseau also aimed at restoring the sovereignty of the immediate: that is, the reign of values unaffected by the passage of time. In the final analysis, that is what counts, and that is why Rousseau, the greatest of all the critics of inequality, the disparager of the idea of “original sin,” which means a negation of the autonomy of the individual, has always provoked such hatred among all the enemies of the Enlightenment.⁸

It was precisely against this new vision of history, man, and society, against the new theories of knowledge, against the famous Kantian *sapere aude*, against the vision of the Enlightenment as a movement of emancipation of reason, of resistance to all forms of unjustified domination and against ideological dogmatism that all the variants of the Anti-Enlightenment revolted. Its thinkers campaigned for two centuries against certain fundamental principles that at the end of the seventeenth century had made possible the founding of the freedoms of the Englishmen, and, in the following century, the great declarations of rights and the French and American revolutions. That is why the

interpretation of the events in England at the end of the seventeenth century was an inescapable point of departure for some of the first critics of the Enlightenment. If the critique of the foundations of political rationalism and hence liberalism was to be convincing, it was absolutely necessary that the year 1689 should mark not the beginning of a new era but simply a restoration of ancient English freedoms. For Hume, this theory associated with Burke and his school was sheer fantasy: the freedoms of the English were a novelty resulting from the revolution and were not the resurrection of some supposed ancient constitution based on documents like the Magna Carta. Most of Hume's historical work was based on this idea: the venerated ancient charters were really only catalogues of privileges that power-hungry nobles had succeeded in forcing out of despotically inclined kings. According to him, the British system was based neither on a supposed ancient constitution nor on an original contract of government but on a political compromise and a mutual dependence of Crown and Parliament, and thus on a delicate balance.⁹

But it was the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen that was the special object of aversion of Burke and his school. In 1789, Locke and Hume could be disregarded as political thinkers, the Glorious Revolution could be interpreted in various ways, especially on the Continent, and America was still too far from the centers of power and culture to play a pioneering role in the development of civilization. Moreover, the critics of the Enlightenment did all they could to promote the idea that the revolt of the British colonies in America was in no way a rebellion against the old order and still less a mutiny of sovereign reason against history. The more intelligent among them, like the man of letters Friedrich von Gentz, Burke's translator into German and interpreter, and later counselor to Metternich, thought that the Declaration of Independence was the ideological cover the colonists needed in order to give their secession the appearance of a noble act. They did not in fact have any intention of opposing the rights of man to the specific rights of a historical community. At the beginning of the year 1800, Gentz published a long article in which he sought to dissociate the revolt of the thirteen American colonies, a simple secessionist movement with clear, moderate, and limited objectives, from the French Revolution, a violent and truly monstrous event.¹⁰ The appeal to the pernicious "natural and inalienable rights" was according to him an error of judgment on the part of the Americans. This essay was immediately translated into English by John Quincy Adams, future president of the United States and at that time minister plenipotentiary in Berlin. Long forgotten, this text was republished in 1955 by Russell Kirk, the founder of the contemporary cult of Burke, and at the time of the cold war became one of the foundations of the ideological campaign against the Enlightenment.

From Adams to Kirk in the 1950s and Gertrude Himmelfarb in our own time, including Carl Becker in the 1930s, one sees the same phenomenon among the American critics of the Enlightenment, which is to minimize as far as possible or even completely ignore the decisive influence of the philosophy of natural rights on the formation of society, the state, and the nation in America.¹¹ How, indeed, could it be otherwise? If the French Revolution was a revolt against God and the natural order of things and a harbinger of the Soviet Revolution, and if on the other hand America was the last bastion of liberty, there was a pressing need to forget the ideological significance of the founding of the United States and make it merely an accident that a more skillful government than that of George III would no doubt have been able to prevent. Whether at the end of the eighteenth century or in the midst of the cold war, in the conservative view of things the American War of Independence could not have a significance comparable to that of the French Revolution. The distinction between a good “revolution” and a “utopian” and consequently bad revolution was taken up again after the fall of communism and is today one of the ideological constituents of neoconservatism both in the United States and in Europe.

If, however, it had not been followed by the French Revolution, the attainment of independence by the North American British colonies would have had only a limited effect. It was the French Revolution, in putting an end to the Old Regime in the most populous and powerful of European countries, that gave a political existence to the intellectual heritage of the Enlightenment. It was the events in Paris from May to October 1789, followed by the fall of the monarchy and the European War, that gave the passage to modernity the stamp of a revolution from the depths of the eighteenth century. Hegel dates the beginning of the modern age from the break that the Enlightenment and the French Revolution signified at the turn of the nineteenth century: with this “glorious sunrise” we come “to the last stage in History, our world, our own time.”¹²

The Enlightenment wished to liberate the individual from the constraints of history, from the yoke of traditional unproven beliefs. This was the motivation of Locke’s *Second Treatise of Government*, Kant’s *Reply to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?* and Rousseau’s *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*: three extraordinary pamphlets that proclaimed the liberation of man. It was against the liberation of the individual by reason that the Anti-Enlightenment, including its liberal branch, launched its attack, and its campaign was infinitely more sophisticated and subtle than that of the classical, undisguisedly authoritarian enemies of the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century. In making its objective the destruction of the atomistic view of society, this attack announced the birth of communitarianism. Contrary to the belief prevalent in certain American

communitarian circles today, the rectification of liberalism by communitarianism resulted throughout the twentieth century in a lessening of liberalism, or, at least, of liberalism as understood by Benjamin Constant, Alexis de Tocqueville, and John Stuart Mill.

If the French Enlightenment, or rather the Franco-Kantian Enlightenment, and the English and Scottish Enlightenments produced the great intellectual revolution of rationalist modernity, the intellectual, cultural, and political movement associated with the revolt against the Enlightenment constituted not a counterrevolution but a different revolution. It was not a countermodernity but a different modernity that came into being and that revolted against rationalism, the autonomy of the individual, and all that unites people: their condition as rational beings with natural rights. That second modernity was based on all that differentiates and divides people — history, culture, language — a political culture that denied reason either the capacity or the right to mold people's lives, saw religion as an essential foundation of society, and did not hesitate to call on the state to regulate social relationships or to intervene in the economy. According to its theorists, the splintering, fragmentation, and atomization of human existence arising from the destruction of the medieval world was the cause of the modern decadence. They deplored the disappearance of the spiritual harmony that was the very fabric of medieval life, and that was destroyed by the Renaissance according to some and by the Reformation according to others. They regretted the passing of the time in which the individual, guided by religion to his last breath, a laborer or artisan living solely for his trade, hedged in by society at every moment, was merely a cog in an infinitely complex machine of whose destiny he was ignorant. Bending over the soil and asking no questions, he fulfilled his function in the march of civilization. On the day when, from being simply a part in a sophisticated mechanism, man became an individual, the modern sickness was born. From Burke to Friedrich Meinecke, the aim remained the restoration of the lost unity. Thus, the outlook of the individual was confined within the straitjacket of the community to which he belonged. The idea of the primacy of tradition, custom, and membership of a cultural, historical, and linguistic community was first put forward by Vico. Man, said Vico in criticism of the theoreticians of natural rights — Hobbes, Locke, Hugo Grotius, and Samuel Pufendorf — did not create society all of a piece; he is what society made him, his values are social values and are therefore relative. The relativity of values is a fundamental aspect of the critique of the Enlightenment, and the damage it has caused is tremendous. It was this other modernity that brought about the twentieth-century European catastrophe.

The contentious coexistence of these two modernities is one of the great

invariables of the two centuries between our world and that of the end of the eighteenth century. This is a point that generally escapes the attention of historians and critics of culture: if the enlightened modernity was that of liberalism which led to democracy, the other modernity, coming down into the street at the turn of the twentieth century from the cultural heights inhabited by Ernest Renan and Hippolyte Taine, took the form of an intellectual and political movement that was revolutionary, nationalistic, communitarian, and a sworn enemy of universal values. Having violently rejected the idea of the autonomy of the individual dating from the second half of the eighteenth century, if not from Hobbes and Locke, a hundred years later antirationalist modernity became a political force of extraordinary disruptive power. With the technological revolution, rapid modernization, and the democratization of political life in Western Europe, a new social reality came into being. As a result, this new mass society produced the new manifestation that already in the 1970s I called the “revolutionary right.”¹³ Whether it is a matter of “reactionary modernism” or the “conservative revolution,” one is always confronted with the same phenomenon: the content and function of this other modernity remained the same. Its pet aversions, as in the time of Herder and Burke, remain Kant, Rousseau, Voltaire, and the philosophes.

One must also draw attention to another point of very great importance: one of the principal driving forces of this campaign that continued long after the Second World War up to the present day was an attack on the Enlightenment in the name of a certain liberalism, of a pluralism of values that easily ends in relativism. A liberalism opposed to the Enlightenment could still make sense and play an important role until the second half of the nineteenth century, but when a new society emerged as a result of the rapid industrialization of the European continent and the rise of nationalism among the masses, Anti-Enlightenment liberalism, often deceptively attractive because its dangerousness was not always obvious, threatened the very possibility of the survival of democracy. One of the main lines of argument of this book is that the rejection of the Enlightenment since the end of the eighteenth century has not only been a negation of the principles on which the democracies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were founded, but, inasmuch as the individual’s capacity to be the master of the world in which he lives has been a fundamental element of liberalism and, later, of liberal democracy, this revolt undermines the very foundations of liberalism itself.

Here it should be pointed out that pluralism need not necessarily be identified with relativism. But pluralism can lead to relativism when it denies the existence of absolute values or when, claiming the equality of all values, it asserts the impossibility of a choice between values. It is significant that it is in

the ideological context of the cold war and the confrontation with communism that we see a strong revival of the critique of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution deriving from Burke and Taine, and a resurgence of the old Anti-Enlightenment themes developed and matured throughout the nineteenth century. A corollary of antirationalism is relativism: there is thus a nationalist relativism, a fascist relativism, and a liberal relativism. The latter is exemplified by Isaiah Berlin, who in the second half of the twentieth century continued the line of thought initiated by Herder, of which the work of Meinecke in the period between the two world wars was a characteristic expression. Leo Strauss was not mistaken concerning the great dangers inherent in Berlin's relativism, and in 1961 he made a harsh critique of *Two Concepts of Liberty*.¹⁴ Moreover, Berlin adopted Meinecke's position of separating politics from culture without asking himself whether it is not precisely the cultural infrastructure that plays a decisive role in politics, or rather whether the very idea of such a separation is not an illusion.

Historiographical cognition, says Hans Blumenberg, is ill disposed toward the notion of absolute beginnings (how could it be otherwise?), and the founder figures have succumbed to the erosion inflicted on them by historiographical diligence.¹⁵ And yet, if one absolutely has to give a precise date to the beginning of the campaign against the Enlightenment that had the consequences it did in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it would undoubtedly be the summer of 1774, when the young Herder wrote *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit* (Another Philosophy of History for the Formation of Mankind) as a defense against the influence of the French Enlightenment in Germany, and in so doing traced the broad outlines of a different modernity. That is certainly what the young Lutheran pastor at his post at Bückeberg in Westphalia intended when he launched the first comprehensive attack against all that mattered in Enlightenment thought: first of all against Descartes, who with his rationalism had emancipated the mathematical sciences and physics from theology, and then against Montesquieu, the writer in relation to whom anyone who wrote on the humanities at that time had to define himself, against Rousseau and Voltaire, and also, and no less strongly, against Hume, William Robertson, Adam Ferguson, Jean-Rodolphe Iselin, Nicolas Antoine Boulanger, and d'Alembert—to name only the authors directly quoted or referred to indirectly or alluded to in this extraordinary pamphlet.

It was Voltaire, who had just invented the concept of the “philosophy of history”—that is, thinking in a philosophical way about history—who was his first immediate target. But, at the same time, surprisingly in view of some of the objectives Herder had set himself, Montesquieu was criticized no less

harshly. Through the French writers and, together with them, practically all the great historians and thinkers of the British Enlightenment, it was the whole of rationalist modernity that was aimed at. Some ten years after the Bückeburg pamphlet, the polemic with Kant began, which symbolically confirmed the great division between the two types of modernity: the one that stood for universal values, the greatness and autonomy of the individual, master of his fate, the one that conceived of society and the state as instruments in the hands of the individual who had set out in conquest of liberty and happiness, and the communitarian, historicist, nationalist modernity, a modernity in which the individual is determined by his ethnic origins, history, language, and culture.

At the end of the decade, whose intellectual life was marked by the confrontation between master and pupil, the Königsberg philosopher and the Lutheran pastor, now settled in Weimar, the Old Regime collapsed in France, and the split between the two branches of modernity became a historical reality. When the thought of the Franco-Kantian and British Enlightenments was translated into concrete terms by the French Declaration of the Rights of Man after it had been formulated in less dramatic circumstances but no less clearly and precisely in the British colonies in America, Burke put out his *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. This great pamphlet was preceded by *Vindication of Natural Society* in 1756 and *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* in 1757.

From the start of his political and intellectual activity, Burke defined the Enlightenment as the guiding spirit of a movement of intellectual conspiracy whose aim was the destruction of Christian civilization and the political order it had created. According to him, the essence of the Enlightenment was to accept the verdict of reason as the sole criterion of legitimacy for any human institution. Neither history, nor tradition, nor custom, nor experience could ever fill the role of reason. Burke added that a society's capacity to assure its members a decent life would not be an acceptable criterion for the men of the Enlightenment or constitute the legitimacy of a society of this kind. They are not content with a decent life: they demand happiness, or, in other words, utopia. Like Herder at the same time and independently of him, Burke denied reason the right to question the existing order. The rights of man, and the idea that society is the product of the individual's will and exists solely in order to assure his well-being, are a dangerous delusion, a veritable revolt against Christian civilization. The existing order has been consecrated by experience, by collective wisdom, and has a *raison d'être* that may not be obvious to each individual at all times but is the product of the divine will present in history. That is why atheism is another way of destroying civilization, and that is why force has to be used to assure the survival of what exists. The defense of

privileges is thus the defense of civilization itself. A society only exists through its veneration for history and its respect for the established church and the elites. Replacing the elites with other people, overturning a system consecrated by experience and a centuries-old tradition, and destroying the power of the church may be compared to the conquest of a civilized country by barbarians. In other words, all is legitimate, all is permissible, all means are justified to crush the revolution in France. The whole might of the British state should be mobilized to stop this revolt against all that is and must forever be sacred.

A true pioneer of ideological warfare, Burke invented the concept of “containment,” if not the word itself, which became famous at the time of the cold war. The policy of containment that was used with regard to the Soviet bloc, Burke tried in America. Containing the pretensions of the colonists who were breaking away from the mother country, translating their natural rights into limited political terms, and thus continuing the English revolution of 1689, was a primary concern with him, as he hoped by this means to confine the danger to a distant land and prevent it from spreading to Europe. When this same revolution of the Enlightenment took place in France, however, a policy of containment was no longer appropriate. When it was at the very gates of England, at the heart of Western civilization, one could only respond with all-out war.

Thus, it appears that this great British parliamentarian was the founder not of a liberal conservatism in the Tory tradition or of the Continental variety but rather of the school of thought known today as neoconservatism. Authentic liberal conservatives like Tocqueville in France and Lord Acton in England, or, closer to our time, Leo Strauss, Michael Oakeshott, and Raymond Aron, feared the corrupting effect of power. They were the heirs of Montesquieu and Locke, and if they drew their inspiration chiefly from *The Spirit of Laws*, they owed many of their views to the *Second Treatise of Civil Government*. Their great objective was to protect liberty through a division of power and by developing the capacity of the individual to stand up to the authorities. Against this, the representatives of neoconservatism are fascinated by the power of the state. Unlike the classical liberals, they aim not at limiting its intervention in the economy or in society but, on the contrary, at molding society and government in their image.

The figure of Burke has never ceased to fascinate, right up to our own day. New editions of his works, like those of Herder, have succeeded one another at an impressive rate, as have the works devoted to them, for both were great “moderns,” and their ideas continue to play a part in the thinking on the problems of our time. As with all great modern thinkers, one finds in their writings many contradictions, which are, however, resolved as soon as one asks the question, What is it that is specific to their thought?

Burke was not a reactionary any more than he was, as is often claimed, a liberal conservative. He was not a bigot, and he made a celebrated defense of the rights of Americans, Hindus, and Catholics. He was clearly opposed to royal authoritarianism. Some writers go very far in their admiration for a liberal Burke. In a recent work, *Liberalism and Empire*, which is a critique of British liberalism, John Stuart Mill emerges as the villain and Burke as the near-hero. Some neoconservatives see him as their prophet, while a Marxist scholar thinks, on the contrary, that “by his insistence on the importance of circumstances Burke ruled himself out of court for the late twentieth century,” which was not the case with another writer, who discerned in Burke an echo of Martin Heidegger and of Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer and their *Dialectic of the Enlightenment*.¹⁶

Burke defended himself against the accusation that he rejected any reforms, but in fact he did not consider a single change demanded by his Whig friends worthy of interest. If the liberal tradition from Locke and Montesquieu down to Tocqueville and John Stuart Mill is any criterion, it is difficult to see in what respect Burke could claim to belong to that spiritual family. Tocqueville, for his part, believed that Burke had no understanding either of the eighteenth century or of the French Revolution. Opposing despotic royal rule in defense of the exorbitant privileges of a tiny minority that governs through corruption is not enough to make someone a liberal. It was no accident that Burke never, at any time, proposed either to the Americans or to the French, engaged in the process of the refounding of society and the state, that they should adopt the principles of government put forward by Locke and Montesquieu. He could say that Montesquieu’s book was a work of “genius” without ever making it a model for political action in his time. How could it be otherwise, if the refounding of society was itself a sin that bore in itself the seeds of its own destruction? The defense of the Americans was in fact nothing other than a defense of the British Empire, and that is why neither Locke nor Montesquieu could be cited in support of the action. With regard to the French of May 1789, not only did Burke not suggest to them any reform in the spirit of Locke and Montesquieu, he advised them to go back to the ancient “constitution” of the realm, to the time when, a century and a half earlier, the States General had convened for the last time. His defense of minorities was noble but highly selective. He took an interest in the Catholics, who could become a cause of instability, and in Ireland, with which he had a special relationship,¹⁷ but not in the blacks or the Jews. In his time, 40 percent of the inhabitants of Virginia were slaves, but as he did not regard liberty as an “abstract” principle — that is to say, a universal one — blacks did not count in his praise of the love of liberty of the Southerners. Moreover, liberty, to his mind, was not a natural right but was linked to property, which had the immediate effect of excluding all those

who were without it, not only in the colonies but in England itself. His defense of the Hindus was undoubtedly that of a whole civilization, a whole world, against the abuses of a brutal and corrupt colonial administration, and it is worthy of admiration, but this campaign was based on history and not on individual rights. Defending the Hindus meant accepting them as they were and not taking into account the countless bad practices of Hindu society. Was this a form of multiculturalism? Was this a way of defending one's neighbor? Or was it a way of saying that all values are of equal merit, all values are "historical" and therefore relative? But, if this was the case, why would the principles of 1789 signify the decadence of Christian civilization, and why would revolutionary France be the object of a new crusade?

Burke and Herder, who in the meantime had written a great deal, and in the years 1784–1791 had produced his *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte des Menschheit* (Ideas for a Philosophy of the History of Mankind), developed in contexts that were utterly different. Neither their intellectual equipment nor their immediate aims were the same, but in their principles they embodied the inversion of values that was gaining ground progressively in the eighteenth century. Vico, who died in 1744, was still virtually unknown when Burke and Herder launched their campaign. They represented the two facets of the first major attack on the autonomy of the individual. They differed totally in their view of the French Revolution—we shall later see in which way—but the reasons for their revolt against the idea of a civilization that was rationalist, individualist, and based on universal values were very similar if not identical. Each in his way—one a philosopher and cultural critic, a theoretician without any contact with the world of politics, and the other a political thinker but also a politician who knew every trick of the trade—laid the groundwork, not of a reaction against modernity, but rather of a different modernity.

It would be difficult to exaggerate the historical importance, both in their own time and in the long term, of Burke and Herder. Indeed, these two representatives of the first revolt against the body of ideology produced by the French and English eighteenth centuries, overshadowed by the great philosophical work of Kant, fixed the conceptual framework of the critique of the Enlightenment for nearly two hundred years. Right to its very end, the nineteenth century continued to develop the principles inherited from Herder and Burke, adding elements of its own, notably elements of a cultural determinism that found its way into intellectual life, into historical and literary discourse, long before social Darwinism and Gobinism became accepted. If this process developed with such facility, it was precisely because cultural determinism, which in fact was very close to ethnic and racial determinism, was already at the end of the eighteenth century an integral part of the revolt against the Enlightenment.

The first generation of the Anti-Enlightenment saw the old world collapse in 1789. Thomas Carlyle, Taine, and Renan represented the second wave of the deconstruction of the thought of the Enlightenment, the one that arose as a result of the democratization of political life, first in England at the beginning of the 1830s and then in France after 1848 and 1870. Where they were concerned, the second British Bill of Rights of 1867, the Paris Commune, and the founding of the Third Republic announced the coming of Caliban. In this context, there began to be a reflection on the failure of Western civilization and its medieval heritage: an organic, communitarian civilization steeped in the fear of God subjected to democratic decadence and the grip of "materialism." The broad lines assumed by the critique of rationalist modernity at that time were to be fixed for a century and a half. Carlyle and Taine wrote the history of this long decline. Together with Renan, they analyzed the trouble and prescribed a cure: uprooting the idea of the all-powerfulness of the individual, reconstituting organic communities and ending the farce of universal suffrage and equality. Their works constitute so many reflections on the decadence of France, and the spirit of their productions somewhat recalls that of the *Journal Meiner Reise im Jahr 1769* (Journal of My Travels in the Year 1769) which Herder brought back from Paris and which was not a diary but his first major political essay. France was always seen as the embodiment of a rationalist culture derived from the Enlightenment, corroded by democratic tendencies and the heritage of Rousseau. These reflections were made precisely at a time when Europe was at the height of its power. France was about to acquire the second-largest colonial empire in the world, and there would be a degree of equality in that country that existed nowhere else and never before. Did not Herder and Burke also dwell on the decadence of France precisely at the moment when it was about to give the world an extraordinary lesson in vitality? It would seem that for the enemies of the Enlightenment decadence is inevitable in a world that adopts rationalism, universalism, and the idea of the primacy of the individual as principles of conduct.

If, however, the nineteenth century in its mature development still retained a certain duality, the same cannot be said of its final two decades. In a new social and political context in which rapid industrialization was changing the face of the Continent, the rejection of the Enlightenment exploded with an unprecedented intensity. It was not the Great War that, as is often claimed, marked the beginning of the twentieth century. The twentieth century was born when, in a world that was changing at a pace unthinkable only thirty years earlier, new ways of life, techniques, and technologies appeared all at once, and economic development, the democratization of political life, and compulsory education became living realities, whereas they were only dreams for the previous generation. And this new century had undoubtedly emerged when rejection of the

Enlightenment became a mass phenomenon, when democracy, political liberty, and universal suffrage — all recently acquired — appeared to an important part of the urban masses to be a danger to the nation and to civilization.

It was in this new context of the turn of the twentieth century that the third wave arose, which would break upon Europe in the period between the two world wars. Antirationalism, relativism, and nationalism, those three immutable pillars of the war against the Enlightenment and the principles of the French Revolution, always had the same function: that of sustaining the campaign against humanism, the much-derided universal values, and, finally, democracy. It was in this great ideological laboratory of the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth that the European catastrophe was prepared. The meditations on decadence, the expressions of horror for mass culture, and at the same time the cult of the popular soul reiterated often word for word the great themes of the writings of Herder and Burke, Carlyle and Taine, as well as those of Renan. In Charles Maurras we find not only Joseph de Maistre but also the essential principles underlying the thought of Burke. In reading Oswald Spengler we hear a dramatized echo of Herder's thinking, which does not, however, mean that the whole of Spengler is already to be found in Herder. But, equally, it is unconvincing to claim, as is often done, that Spengler's work not only had no connection with Herder's but was intended as an attack upon it. Benedetto Croce, whose intensive criticism of the philosophy of the Enlightenment, of the theory of natural rights, humanism, and democracy ("nothingness"), preceded the fall of liberalism in Italy by twenty years, links up with the historicism of Friedrich Meinecke.¹⁸

The concept of the preeminence of history and culture, of the link with one's native soil, which with Herder took on a sense of almost physical attachment, gave rise to the affiliation of the *Kulturvolk* with the *Kulturstaat*. It was Herder's cultural nationalism that laid the foundations of political nationalism, and it was the first link in a chain that extended as far as Meinecke. Meinecke's understanding of Herder before the Second World War, very close to that of Hans-Georg Gadamer during the Second World War, demonstrates this clearly. The disconnection that is usually made between the two nationalisms is highly artificial. Herder reproached the Prussia of Frederick the Great not for its authoritarianism but for the fact that it was not a national state. It was not, as has been frequently said, a defense against the French cultural preponderance that produced Herder's nationalism, it was his nationalism and his antirationalism that were at the root of his hatred of France and everything French. In the same vein, four years before his trip to Paris, in 1765, Peter the Great, because he was "a true patriot," was for Herder "the name and marvel of our century."¹⁹ The very common mistake, rich in implications, of dissociating both Johann

Gottlieb Fichte and the whole of the German nineteenth century from Herder always persists, and has become a kind of accepted idea. The mistake is constantly to dwell on the process that Georg Iggers has described as “the transformation of German historical thought from the cosmopolitan culture-oriented nationalism of Herder in the late eighteenth century to the nationalistic and power-oriented assumption of much of German historiography in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.” For Iggers, as for practically everyone, this school of thought “was a child of the German national revival and the Wars of Liberation.” Iggers undoubtedly had a perfect understanding of the relativism and antirationalism that underlay Herder’s thought; he knew that the idea that the nation is the source of all truth means that there are no objective criteria of truth. He knew that if reason cannot comprehend life and history can only be understood through empathy, the borderline between truth and error, good and evil, becomes very difficult to define. But, if this is the case, why is it so difficult to acknowledge the fact that the Wars of Liberation began with Herder’s revolt against the French Enlightenment and not with Fichte? The Napoleonic Wars provided the conditions that enabled the Herderian ideology to become a political force, but they did not create historicism. Even Meinecke, who after 1945 did all he could to separate German culture from the disastrous German twentieth century, was aware at the beginning of the century already of the connection between Herder on the one hand and Fichte and the reformers of the period of the Napoleonic conquests on the other.²⁰

Seventy years ago already, Max Rouché, the writer of a monumental work on Herder, slightly dated but of an erudition unequaled to this day, put forward the idea that Herder seems to have been both a *Stürmer* and an *Aufklärer*. Against this, Wolfgang Pross, one of the most recent and best specialists in Herder, tipped the scales in favor of the Aufklärer and once again took up the idea of a liberal Herder whose nationalism was eclipsed if not suppressed by the German nineteenth century, a Herder who adopted Spinoza’s, Ferguson’s, and Rousseau’s conception of the function of the state, and who believed, like them, that the purpose of the state is to maintain the liberty of its citizens. This is a great overstatement: Herder was no Rousseau, no Ferguson, and no Spinoza, and there is nothing in his political writings that could bring him close to them, but in this way attention was once again drawn to Herder’s humanist aspect. “Did not Herder, when he arose to create a new epoch, proclaim both humanity and nationality?” asked Meinecke in the same vein at the end of the Second World War.²¹

The writer of *Another Philosophy of History* was of course also that of *Briefe zur Beförderung der Humanität* (Letters Toward the Advancement of Humanity) twenty years later. But these texts of the final decade of the eigh-

teenth century, in which Herder condemned the warlike patriotism of the ancients as well as that of his own time and called for a brotherly coexistence of nations, can change neither the significance nor the historical importance of his long campaign against the political principles of the Enlightenment. The term “humanity” does not even appear in his writings at the time he wrote his major political works. This term had a universalistic connotation which at that period was very displeasing to him, and it was too closely associated with Voltaire. When Voltaire said that “toleration is the attribute of Humanity” and that “anyone who persecutes a man, his brother, because he is not of his opinion, is a monster,” Herder replied by ridiculing this kind of morality. Voltaire, in his opinion, was guilty of having “spread the light, the so-called philosophy of humanity, tolerance, ease in thinking for oneself, the gleam of virtue in a hundred charming guises, little human inclinations diluted and sweetened.” What followed was even worse: “What wretched recklessness, weakness, uncertainty and chill! What shallowness, lack of design, distrust of virtue, of happiness and merit! . . . Our gentle, pleasant and necessary bonds have been dissolved with a shameless hand, yet those who do not reside at the Château de Ferney have been given nothing at all in their stead. . . . Into whose hands will he deliver us with all the philosophy and the pretty dalliance of a way of thinking without morals and solid human feeling?”²² It was in *Another Philosophy* that Herder expressed his whole self. This work, which followed the *Journal*, was intended as a direct answer to the *Dictionnaire Philosophique*, which was printed clandestinely in 1764, and whose republication in 1769, regarded as definitive, took place precisely when Herder began his career and went to Paris.

Herder’s pluralism may at first sight appear to be a call for multiculturalism, or, as Charles Taylor would have it, “the modern ideal of authenticity.” Herder, he said, was the one who put forward the idea that each of us has an original way of being human. If people are not true to themselves, they miss the point of their life, or, in other words, they miss what being human is for them. This is how the principle of originality is introduced: each of our voices has something unique to say. Herder applied his conception of originality not only to the individual person but to the *Volk* as well: “Just like individuals, a Volk should be true to itself, that is, its own culture.” Taylor knows that we have here “the seminal idea of modern nationalism, in both benign and malignant forms.”²³ The bottom line, however, is that in Taylor’s view the idea of cultural difference, or cultural pluralism — which amounts to the same thing — is the basis of our modernity. Thus, communitarianism claims specifically to be the heir to Herderianism, which is made out to be the perfect liberalism. This form of liberalism, as opposed to humanism, is based on the cult of difference. These views,

expressed in the early 1990s, clearly owe a great deal, to say the least, to Claude Lévi-Strauss with regard to their general context, and to Isaiah Berlin with regard to their immediate context.²⁴ Later we shall see Kant's severe criticisms of Herder, which are even more relevant today than they were at the end of the eighteenth century.

In fact, translated into political terms, the defense of authenticity — Taylor, like others, gives as an example Herder's famous condemnation of the mania of imitating the French that prevailed at the court of Frederick the Great — can equally well lead, as indeed happened, to a desire for withdrawal and isolation. One can see Herder as the philosopher of openness, the man who proclaimed the equality of all cultures and all periods, if one overlooks the fact that as soon as he applies these great principles to different periods of history, to different cultures and different peoples, a hierarchy is set up, and openness gives way to isolation and a hierarchy of values and cultures. The superiority of the Germans, from the Germanic tribes of the great invasions to the Germans summoned to a cultural revolt against the France of Voltaire and Rousseau, is rarely questioned. The principle to which Herder was true throughout his life, the supreme value of historical specificity, did not prevent him from producing a scale of values in which the Middle Ages were rated higher than the modern world and Germany higher than France. He often seemed to have two different approaches: one of equality and openness when it was a matter of the remote past and distant countries, and another when it concerned his own time, France, and the French and British Enlightenments as a whole. That is why the transition from Herder to Fichte took place easily and in a completely natural way.

The question I ask in this book is, therefore, to what, in the final analysis, did Herder contribute: to the unity of the human race or to its fragmentation? To openness or to the idea of cultural self-sufficiency, to the particularism and specificity expressed in the cult of national geniuses and characteristics that ends by promoting perpetual conflict, or to the cosmopolitan ideal of *Humanität*? For what resulted from the long struggle waged by Herder against his three great historical enemies — the heritage of the Roman Empire with its leveling, standardizing legislation, destructive of local particularities, the wholly Mediterranean Renaissance that threatened the spirit of the peoples of the North, and the French influence, with its universal, Latin, and anti-Germanic values — was a relativity of all values rather than a spirit of tolerance among an infinite number of peoples and cultures, all of whom were said to be of equal value.

The year 1936 would seem to be a somewhat unfortunate time to wage war against the French Enlightenment and defend the "special path" of Germany, to exalt the spontaneous and irrational aspects of life and deplore the inability

of Western rationalism to comprehend them. But this was precisely the moment when Meinecke gave his definition of historicism, which he associated first of all with Herder: "The essence of historicism is the substitution of the process of *individualizing* observation for a *generalizing* view of forces of human history." As in the case of all broad concepts, there were various types of historicism, which were either of a national kind or differed in degree.²⁵ All these varieties of historicism, however, had a common basis. Over and above the positive value given to history viewed as human progress in its immanent reality, there was a basic hostility to the idea of a natural law, to intellectualism, and to rationalism. The result was that historicism demolished the concept of a common human nature, of a universal reason that gives rise to a universal natural law, regarding this way of thinking as empty, abstract, and, above all, hypocritical. From Herder to Leopold von Ranke and Meinecke, historicism, in Meinecke's own words, was thus a revolt against the idea that man "had remained basically the same." Historicism therefore denied "the concept of natural law, handed down from antiquity, which confirmed this belief in the stability of human nature and above all of human reason." It opposed "the theory of natural law that held that reason . . . always spoke with the same voice and uttered the same timeless and absolutely valid truths, which were in harmony with those prevailing in the universe as a whole." Meinecke was convinced that German historicism was "the highest stage thus far reached in the understanding of human affairs."²⁶

Meinecke took up the idea of historicism from Ernst Troeltsch, who in his *German Spirit and Western Europe*, published in 1925, defined the Western spirit as a belief in a natural law, in the unity of the human race, and in universal values. Against this, the German spirit was defined as a pluralistic conception of history, as a flowering of national individualities without any common criterion.²⁷ The two historians spoke of the difference between Germany and the West, but in fact it was the gulf between the modernity of the Enlightenment and that of the Anti-Enlightenment that was in question, and Germany had no monopoly on this attack on the rationalism and universalism of the Enlightenment. From Vico, the first great enemy of rationalism, natural law, and a world from which Providence was absent, to Croce and Georges Sorel, his two great admirers at the turn of the twentieth century, and from Herder to Meinecke, Maurice Barrès, and Spengler in the same period, the veneration of the particular and the rejection of the universal was the common denominator of all the Anti-Enlightenment thinkers, regardless of their time and milieu.

It is very interesting to set this view, characteristic of the image which German high culture had of itself at that period, and which it identified with the

Anti-Enlightenment, against that of Nietzsche. Precisely because it is difficult not to see Nietzsche as an Anti-Enlightenment figure, his harsh verdict on the German attack on the Enlightenment from its beginnings is particularly striking. In *Daybreak*, Nietzsche passed an extraordinary judgment on the whole German nineteenth century, and it is no accident that this text appeared at the time when Nietzsche was freeing himself from Wagner's influence. All the forcefulness of Nietzsche was needed to express, at the end of the nineteenth century, the significance of the Anti-Enlightenment tradition for the modern world in a few succinct lines.²⁸

It was Herder who gave Europe a view of history as consisting of cultures that, even when not cut off from each other, regarded foreign contributions as threatening their authenticity. Moreover, as we have seen from Herder's opinion of France, these cultures could easily become antagonistic, and this was precisely the opposite of the view of culture held by Voltaire, Montesquieu, and Rousseau. According to Herder, each civilization has its own unique values. Each civilization reaches a climax and then goes into an irreversible decline. Through his cult of historical and cultural individualities, Herder founded historicism and initiated the relativity of truths and values. Historicism was truly the beginning of the fragmentation of the human race, of the destruction of the idea of all humanity marching at the same pace toward the fullness of days. Herder, however, was a Christian, as Vico was before him. Providence, which presided over history, led mankind toward the practice of virtue. God carries out his plan for the education of the human race, but if each nation proceeds directly from God, the rationalist idea of continual progress necessarily disappears. From Herder to Meinecke, historicism continued on its way, but the Herderian dualism rooted in Herder's Christian faith, which Meinecke did not fail to mention and of which he still had a few traces, progressively died out. With Spengler, whatever had remained of it in the nineteenth century disappeared completely.

Historicism, or the idea of the irreducible individuality of cultures and peoples, was a concept indicating the difference between rationalist modernity and its antithesis. It was more than a kind of neutral observation bereft of any value judgment, which would simply have meant that there were many cultures and an infinite variety of customs, laws, and forms of behavior in the world. The direct consequence of this concept was a more or less radical general relativism. It was far more radical in Spengler than in Herder, but the principle was the same. Spengler's relativism was integral in the sense that Maurras understood his nationalism to be. Herder's version was still hesitant, although already well argued, and his relativism was the first link in a chain that ended in the dislocation of the European world. Herder attacked the

French ideas, and Nietzsche, despite his anti-Herderian opposition to nationalism, attacked the English ones, which at the turn of the twentieth century amounted to the same thing. In the same way as a century earlier, it was always a matter of rationalism, the idea of progress, the rights of man, and equality.

The attraction of the historicist attack on the French Enlightenment for the generation of the cold war became apparent in the 1950s. It was at that time that the totalitarian school came into being. One of the chief representatives of this school was Isaiah Berlin. Fascinated by Vico, Herder, Sorel, and Machiavelli and a violent detractor of Rousseau, Voltaire, and Helvétius, he was closer to Burke than to Tocqueville or to John Stuart Mill. With the appearance of Berlin, this school gained a new life and an extra dimension. In the mid-twentieth century, reflections on the Enlightenment and modernity were dominated by an awareness of two revolutions, the French Revolution and the Soviet Revolution, that, from the perspective of the 1950s, seemed to be inter-related. In 1972, Berlin wrote a eulogistic preface to the English translation of Meinecke's *Die Entstehung des Historismus*, which had appeared in 1936, and equally flattering essays on Herder and Vico. These essays had a very great success precisely because, in taking up the lines of thought of Burke and Taine opposed to the eighteenth century, Berlin appealed to the sensibility of the intelligentsia of the period, for whom the totalitarian school provided an attractive and simple explanation for the difficulties of the cold war. Berlin applied to the conditions of a world overshadowed by the Bolshevik threat, easily conceived as a modern version of the much-reviled Jacobinism, the criteria and principles common to three generations of rejectionists of rationalist modernity and of an optimistic view of the progress of mankind.

A highly charismatic figure, from the end of the 1950s Isaiah Berlin enjoyed an unrivaled position in the English-speaking world. All those who knew him agree that he was a man out of the ordinary. A refugee in England in adolescence, he remained true to his Jewish origins and showed an unfailing lifelong devotion to the cause of Jewish nationalism. Immensely cultured, he very quickly rose to the top of academic life. From the beginning of the 1960s he was the British intellectual best known to the educated public, to which his lectures and writings were addressed. Knighted by the queen in 1957, president and founder of Wolfson College, Oxford, president of the British Academy in the 1970s, he played a preeminent role in the intellectual life of his adoptive country and in the English-speaking world as a whole. While the thinkers that mattered in Oxford were foundering in analytical philosophy, Berlin was able to salvage the history of ideas and preserve its status as a separate discipline. In certain American intellectual circles, Berlin, who died in 1997, is today the object of a veritable cult, to the point of being almost unassailable.

His opposition to the Enlightenment from the point of view of a defender of liberty is extremely symptomatic and gives cause for reflection, if only because of the fact that Berlin took up the main gist of the arguments put forward by Meinecke forty years earlier. For Berlin — an excellent example of the “soft” Anti-Enlightenment — as for Meinecke, there seemed to be no relationship of cause and effect between the war against rationalism, universalism, and natural rights and the war against democracy and its fall in the twentieth century. In the last years of his life, in one of the many interviews he gave at that time, he said a few things in praise of the Enlightenment, but his work as a whole manifests a total rejection of its positions and principles.²⁹ It sometimes seems that Berlin was not really aware of the significance of his thought or of the significance of the line of thought initiated by Herder. Hypnotized by the cold war, he launched his attack on Rousseau and then on the idea of “positive” liberty, and in the name of pluralism wrote a fulsome panegyric to “negative” liberty. In a series of essays, particularly those published in *Against the Current* and *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, he performed an immense service to all the enemies of rationalism and universalism in our time. Before certain postmodernists and in a strikingly political context, Berlin, despite the fact that his thought is not all of a piece and contains many ambiguities, provides the proof that one can undermine the foundations of the Enlightenment from a liberal — albeit relativistic — perspective. In the introduction to *Against the Current* that Roger Hausheer wrote for him, this was perfectly clear: Berlin considered the principles of the French Enlightenment to be fundamentally opposed to those of a good society. Moreover, his interpretation of the Enlightenment repeats the principal clichés handed down from one generation to the next from Herder and Burke onward. These clichés have made a strong reappearance in our time with neoconservatism.

Very often the full influence of the thinkers wholly or partly of this school of thought was only manifest a number of years after the publication of their major works. Each of the thinkers of this category, however, enjoyed considerable immediate success. From Burke to Meinecke, and including Taine, Renan, Carlyle, Maurras, Barrès, Croce, and Spengler, each of the writers we are dealing with here was a successful author, if not the head of a school. At the same time, they all considered themselves combatants in a war of civilizations. From Herder and Burke, who campaigned against the rationalist civilization of the Franco-Kantian Enlightenment, to Isaiah Berlin, enlisted in the ideological struggle against Marxism and communism, whose moral and intellectual roots he saw in Rousseau, Voltaire, and the eighteenth century, they were all warriors in a great crusade. They all considered themselves, as Berlin expressed it, swimmers “against the current.”

The current referred to here was that of the Franco-Kantian Enlightenment, of democracy and of the sovereignty of the people in the true meaning of the expression, the meaning ascribed to it by Rousseau, Jeremy Bentham, Mill, and Tocqueville: a system in which liberty would be compatible with equality, in which equality would be compatible with the autonomy and sovereignty of the individual, and in which liberty would mean not only nonintervention in each person's individual sphere but also the individual's inalienable right to be master of his destiny. An urge for nonconformity and a sense of taking part in a war for the preservation of an entire civilization was common to all these men. Herder and Burke confronted the philosophical deluge of the Enlightenment: the first taking on rationalism and deism, and the second, the liberal tradition going back to Locke. Carlyle rebelled against the England of the two Bills of Rights that set the country on the path to democracy; Renan and Taine sought to save their country, together with the whole of Western civilization, from the triumph of democracy in the France of the Third Republic. At the beginning of the twentieth century Croce continued their way of thinking and applauded the rise of fascism, gravedigger of the despised eighteenth century, just as Spengler contributed to the fall of the Weimar regime. Maurras saw the defeat of France in 1940 as the long-awaited opportunity to bury the French Enlightenment, the principles of the French Revolution, and the Third Republic. In the face of a Europe dominated by a left-wing and often communistic intelligentsia, Berlin, following in the footsteps of Meinecke, once more took up the case against the rationalist Enlightenment. For all these thinkers, rationalism was the source of the evil: it led to "materialism," to utopias, to the supremely pernicious idea that man is able to change things. It killed instinct and vital forces; it destroyed the almost carnal connection between the members of an ethnic community and made one live in an unreal world. It was no accident if, as a result of seeing themselves as the defenders of a minority point of view, all these nonconformists ended up creating a new kind of conformism and promoting many concepts that very soon became commonplaces.

An important element in the Anti-Enlightenment tradition up to the second half of the twentieth century was its conception of the role of the state. With the exception of Isaiah Berlin, who belongs to the period extending from the 1950s onward, none of the thinkers examined here feared the power of the state when it restricted the growth of democracy and was used on behalf of nation, elites, and inequality. They were not, as Carlyle was the first to demonstrate, fanatical believers in *laissez-aller* or staunch defenders of the liberty of every individual versus the state, and the liberal Croce did not hesitate to give his support to Mussolini during the crucial phase of his seizure of power. The idea of a minimalist state existing "on a low burner" is alien to them. A strong

government as such did not frighten them, and most of them considered war the expression of a community's vitality. They were all fascinated by the victories of the armies of the French Revolution, by the Napoleonic dictatorship, by the German Wars of Liberation of 1813, by the Prussian victory over France in 1870, by the crushing of the Paris Commune, by the stifling of democracy during the First World War. They all promoted some form of nationalism.

These people did not believe that blocking and neutralizing the revolutionary potential in society meant abandoning the new social classes created by industrialization to the free play of economic forces, which inevitably gives rise to poverty and hence to revolts and revolutions. Only Herder, coming from the Eastern part of Europe and living in a milieu that would only really begin to be touched by industrialization half a century after his death, was relatively unconscious of the rise of the new classes. Against this, Burke's peevishness can largely be explained by the growth of the new urban centers that aroused his fierce opposition to any reform of the electoral system, for any change could have had the effect of undermining the power of the aristocracy linked to the great merchant bourgeoisie. Burke owed his election in Bristol to his reputation as a parliamentarian favorable to a compromise with the American colonists, for the prosperity of the port of Bristol was greatly dependent on American trade. All his successors, grappling with the harsh realities of the following two centuries, were perfectly conscious of the role a state could play in intervening in the economy in order to curb and canalize democracy.

As one advanced into the nineteenth century, the role assigned by these thinkers to the state was to control democratic tendencies, viewed as a threat to the natural order of things or purely and simply as demagogic illusions. The inevitable process of democratization, the progressive access of the male population to universal suffrage, did not reconcile the liberals opposed to the Enlightenment to the principles of democracy, but it caused them to accept the disagreeable and, as they saw it, dangerous realities of political democratic rule. Some resisted democracy until they died, and the front was then shifted to the defense of social and cultural inequality. The social and cultural elites had to be defended on a different terrain, and high culture had to be protected from the danger represented by universal primary education. Limiting the effects of democracy and bringing it under control within the framework of universal suffrage remained a fundamental objective of the "blocked" liberalism. At first, it was a matter of the right to vote: in the critical years 1830 to 1870, Carlyle, Renan, and Taine did all they could to prevent universal male suffrage from becoming established in France and England. Together with the fear of the spread of "positive liberty," in the definitive sense this term has gained through the writings of Isaiah Berlin in the late 1950s (that is, the

freedom of the individual to take advantage of majority rule in order to shape the economy and society), there was a fear of a constant lowering of the level of culture. The fear of a constant erosion of high culture and the loss of the place it merits in social life remained as integral to the outlook of Carlyle, Taine, Sorel, and Renan as to that of Croce, Maurras, Spengler, and Meinecke.

That is why reflections on decadence had such an important place in their thought. It is also the reason why, in Europe until the mid-twentieth century and in the United States until the present day, religion as a factor promoting the health of society — a religion often, though not always, without faith and without a metaphysics — also played a crucial role in their thinking. None of these thinkers had any moral respect for bourgeois society, but they saw private property as a sacrosanct pillar of the established order. It was maintained that the existing social order, though it may not be perfect, made it possible to live a decent or, in other words, civilized life. The permanence of Western civilization — the great Christian civilization — could only be ensured if its reality was not touched in its essence. However, the scornors of the Enlightenment, it cannot be said too often, were not turned toward the past. Their nostalgia was not for the recent past but for a highly selective historical landscape and generally, at least until the beginning of the twentieth century, for the organic culture of the chivalric Christian Middle Ages. Historians of ideas and cultural critics who considered themselves philosophers as well, they also saw the nation as the supreme framework of social organization. The kind of solidarity provided by the nation seemed to them greater than that provided by any other form of social cohesion. It is no accident that Burke can be regarded as one of the originators of nationalism. His claim to this title is less obvious than Herder's but is nevertheless quite real.

A book necessarily entails choices. The choice of writers examined in this book is governed not only by their direct and immediate influence on the intellectual life of their time, and the representative, typical quality of their work, but also by their influence on posterity and their long-term contribution to the Anti-Enlightenment tradition. That is why their presence has been felt to this day and discussion of their work continues unabated. A work devoted to political ideas is a study of the influence of those ideas on events and behaviors both at the time and over an extensive period. It is an analysis not of pure concepts but of their concrete political application, their acceptance, and their diffusion. That is the reason why, for example, the philosophical and political works of Louis de Bonald, one of the first great critics of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, far superior to the writings of de Maistre, are not discussed in this book, which in any case has more than five hundred pages.

Bonald was much less known than de Maistre, the inspirer of Maurras and his movement, whose influence at the turn of the twentieth century was decisive not only in France but more or less everywhere in Europe and in Latin America, far beyond the circles of the traditional right. Even in London at that period, vorticism circles, very avant-garde, with Thomas Ernest Hulme and Wyndham Lewis, were steeped in Maurrasism.

The same applies to Burke. If the sole criterion is the intrinsic value of a work, that of August Wilhelm Rehberg ought to be placed far above his. The critique of the French Revolution by this senior official of the state of Hanover has greater depth than Burke's, and its philosophical aspect is very often superior. But as a pamphlet, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* has a force that is lacking in Rehberg's work, which contributed to the fact that, from its appearance in 1793 in a Germany already conquered by Burke, few people took the trouble to read his *Untersuchen über die französische Revolution* (Inquiries into the French Revolution). Fichte did so, and even engaged in an important debate with Rehberg. Kant also read him and even answered him, which he did not do to Burke when the German translation of the *Reflections* by Gentz was published three years before Rehberg's work. On the other hand, Rehberg has never been translated into English, the French translation of the first volume of his work only appeared in 1998, and his *Sämtliche Schriften* (Complete Works) are hard to find. Rehberg's obscurity in relation to Burke is undoubtedly an injustice, but it is precisely the continuous fame of Burke, whom Rehberg did not fail to quote, up to the present, that has contributed to the neglect of all the other writings of the period based on the same principles of seeking to destroy the foundations of the French Enlightenment.³⁰

The case of Ernst Brandes, another official of the Chancellery of Hanover, was similar. His *Politische Betrachtungen über die französische Revolution* (Political Meditations on the French Revolution), published in 1790, at the same time as Burke's *Reflections*, does not exist in English, and its translation into French, made in 1791, has been forgotten. Another example was Jacques Mallet du Pan's *Considérations sur la nature de la Révolution de France* (Considerations on the Nature of the French Revolution), published in London in 1793 and translated into English a year later. Each of these works explained in a very similar manner why rationalism in politics and the revolution it produced were a mortal danger for civilization. These examples can be multiplied at will.³¹

It should also be pointed out that this book focuses on precisely those figures that are ambiguous, that are not all of a piece and elude any easy classification. "Philosophers of history" and "committed spectators," they are not one-dimensional and for that very reason are particularly interesting and

significant.³² Some of their works have a certain duality, the result of contradictions due to the fact that people evolve and are influenced by events. Sometimes they revise their positions a few years or a few decades after taking them up. There is a loose, complex network of connections between all these writers. They all agreed that the purpose of thought was action; they all took an interest in the world of their time, not only in order to understand it and to learn to live in it, but, as Marx said, in order to change it. For them, thought was closely related to action: they were all “committed” intellectuals in the true sense of the word. They would all have unhesitatingly subscribed to Renan’s confession after the French defeat by Prussia in 1870: “I wish above all to avoid the reproach of not having given the affairs of my time and of my country the attention that every citizen is obliged to give them. . . . Before declaring that a sage must devote himself entirely to pure thought, one has to be quite sure that one has exhausted every opportunity to make the voice of reason heard.”³³ Apart from Herder, who lived in a milieu where public affairs were the privilege of a small circle of dignitaries surrounding the monarch, these writers were all fascinated by politics. Among all of them, present-day affairs were grafted onto historical reflection, and all of them came to politics via history. All the writers we are dealing with were simultaneously actors and observers. None of them left a systematic political essay, but they all produced works of political thought and intellectual controversy, written for immediate ends. Some of them, like Herder, Burke, Carlyle, and Renan, produced hastily written pamphlets that became classics of political thought.

However, because the concrete questions these writers considered were of general interest, their responses immediately took on a universal significance. They were not only political philosophers and critics of culture — “philosophers of history,” as they often called themselves — historians of ideas, art, religion, and literature, but also well-known, talented publicists, engaged in the public life of their respective countries. When they were not active politicians throughout their whole lives like Burke, one of the first great intellectuals to make a profession of politics, they took part in political life from time to time. Thus, Barrès was deputy for Paris, Croce was a deputy, a senator, and a minister; Renan was twice, in 1863 and 1871, an unsuccessful candidate in legislative elections. They all thought of the present when they wrote about the past, and were interested in the past because they were looking for answers there to the burning issues of their time. This reproach, if it is one, Edward Gibbon had already made to Voltaire.

The most common reproach that the Anti-Enlightenment thinkers continually made to the people of the Enlightenment was that of having never left their study or the realm of abstractions, and, as a result, being ignorant of the

realities of the world as it was. It was Burke, one of the best parliamentary orators of his age, who originated this idea, but in fact it was only a myth. Far from losing themselves in purely theoretical problems, the great thinkers of the Enlightenment were primarily concerned with the concrete social and political questions of their time. Many of them held important public positions, like Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot, Montesquieu, and the farmer-general Claude Adrien Helvétius, or worked for ministers and their staffs, like Voltaire and Gabriel Bonnot de Mably or like Hume, principal private secretary of the ambassador of Great Britain in Paris and for six months chargé d'affaires. Moreover, as Daniel Roche has demonstrated, the provincial academies, those sanctums of enlightened thought and leading institutions in the fight against the Old Regime, served their towns, their provinces, and the state.³⁴ It is an interesting fact that the charge of a lack of realism and utopianism that the adversaries of the Enlightenment have for two centuries leveled against the men of the French Enlightenment was not generally made against the eighteenth-century Germans. And yet, if there was a class of intellectuals cut off from political life, it was undoubtedly the Germans. But as the great majority of these writers and thinkers since Fichte (in his nationalistic phase) and Hegel came to the rescue of the existing order, it was assumed that they were practical folk, conscious of the difficulties of politics and government.

The internal cohesion of Anti-Enlightenment thought was also due to the fact that all the writers after Burke and Herder read each other very attentively. For the historian of ideas who studies them today, their work is raw material, but at the same time each of them was an interpreter of his predecessors' thought. That all these writers from Burke and Herder to Berlin attacked a caricature of the Enlightenment rather than its reality is an interesting phenomenon in itself and is not without significance. We shall discuss this later on. Studies of influences, as we know, are the most complex kind of study that exists, but in this case things are relatively simple: Taine wrote at length on Burke and Carlyle, Meinecke wrote extensively on Burke and Herder, Renan considered Herder the greatest philosopher since Plato, Carlyle, fascinated by Germany, imported into England the thought of the *Sturm und Drang* movement to which the young Herder belonged. Croce, who often resembles an Italian Meinecke, read Vico with the same enthusiasm with which Meinecke studied Herder. In 1895, Sorel wrote a long study of Vico that preceded Croce's by fifteen years. The borrowings from Taine by the Italian founders of the social sciences, who also drew their inspiration from Croce and who were among the most implacable enemies of the Enlightenment and of democracy, are beyond counting. Berlin wrote with equal fascination about Vico and Herder, and, following Meinecke, he attacked the French Enlighten-

ment in much the same way as they did, and so added another link to the chain of Anti-Enlightenment political culture.

Thus, this book is devoted to an investigation of the common intellectual basis of the thinkers of the Anti-Enlightenment, and to its reconstruction over and above all contradictions. First of all, I think the relationship between ideas, politics, and culture is a direct relationship. Second, I do not intend in this book to describe a cultural, ideological, and political reality in all its details or to give an exact representation of the thought of each writer in all its complexity; I intend to show what is essential and typical in this reality.

If historians of ideas wish to produce something other than a simple narrative, whether chronological or arranged according to themes, if they want to understand matters touching civilization, they can hardly avoid following in the footsteps of Tocqueville and search for the *idée-mère* (leading idea). This principle, whose true progenitor was Montesquieu, was taken up again first of all by Taine, exactly in the terms stipulated by Tocqueville and then by Max Weber, who reformulated this idea as the ideal type. For Tocqueville and for Weber, as we know but as is always worth recalling, the ideal type was a “mental construct” (*Gedankenbild*), which “in its conceptual purity . . . cannot be found empirically anywhere in reality.” Weber, usually claimed by the sociologists, was, like Tocqueville before him, no less a historian of ideas. The same applies to the philosopher Ernst Cassirer. If his *Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, published in 1932, is still today the most important work on the subject, it is because this disciple of Kant was working in the tradition of Weber. From Tocqueville to Weber, and in some respect Aron, these great historians of ideas were able to find the essential point and reveal the broad outlines of a phenomenon, even if they did not grasp all the particulars, the precise components of a given political situation.³⁵ A historical concept, one must insist in order to avoid any misunderstanding concerning the discussion that follows throughout this book, does not reflect all the characteristics or the average characteristics of the different elements included in the concept. It is concerned with the typical, the essential.

Here I must insist on another important point. In demonstrating the existence of a common denominator in the different varieties of the Anti-Enlightenment, in insisting on the internal coherence of its elements, I am necessarily taking a stand in the contemporary debate on the history of ideas. For more than forty years I have considered the history of ideas to be an unrivaled instrument for studying the basis of the most widely accepted postulates.³⁶ In his introduction to the collection of essays by Isaiah Berlin, *Against the Current*, Roger Hausheer, writing on behalf of Berlin and in his name, expressed the feeling of a good many historians of ideas that their discipline often suffers

from an ambiguous situation in which it finds itself, and even from a certain lack of sympathy, the reasons for which are not always clear. Might not these reasons be connected with the fact that the history of ideas tends to ask disturbing and often painful questions, and in so doing undermines well-established beliefs and convictions? The history of ideas reveals the constructions, the classifications, the guiding concepts by means of which we order and interpret most of our experience, especially in the realms of morals, politics, and aesthetics.³⁷

Indeed, what other discipline can bring out so clearly the continuity of a tradition, the lineage of ideas, their path, often strange and adventurous but always fascinating? What other discipline is better able to grasp the derangement of the values of a civilization, the translation into politics of processes of change? It means considering the intimate connections between philosophical reflection, historical research, literary production, and politics. Here it must also be said that an underestimation of the power of ideas is not only an expedient error but also a very common one. Ideas spur people on to action, and even when they are only rationalizations of psychological or social pressures or economic processes, intellectual constructions rapidly acquire a power of their own and become autonomous political forces. It is difficult to grasp how the mere pressure of events could have produced those unprecedented phenomena: the French Revolution in the first place, and then the revolutions of the twentieth century.

In a series of lectures given at Harvard in the spring of 1933, Arthur O. Lovejoy, the founder of the history of ideas as an independent academic discipline, launched the concept of the “unit-idea”: the idea as an autonomous unit.³⁸ Like Becker, like Paul Hazard in 1935, like Max Rouché in 1940, like Lucien Lévy-Bruhl at the very beginning of the twentieth century, Lovejoy, no less than Cassirer and Meinecke, is regarded in this book as a primary rather than a secondary source. All these writers represented their time, and that is their true importance.

According to Lovejoy, a unit-idea could be isolated and its development traced in all areas of thought: history, philosophy, literature, politics, art, and religion. In other words, “the same idea often appears, sometimes considerably disguised, in the most diverse regions of the intellectual world.”³⁹ The evolution of an idea, its different facets, forms, and significances can be followed both in diverse disciplines and over very long periods of time, from the beginnings of thought in ancient Greece. In this way, Lovejoy gave a broad outline of his discipline: the historian of ideas can draw from more than one discipline, from more than one aspect of intellectual life, and, what is no less important, from various different periods. Lovejoy was convinced that the different “provinces of thought,” to use his expression, had far more in common than was generally

believed. This multidimensional view of the history of ideas was the most important and lasting contribution of Lovejoy and his disciples to historical reflection. Lovejoy also had the merit of raising with great stringency questions of continuity and influence through long periods of history. These questions are undoubtedly some of the most difficult and delicate. It should be understood, of course, that continuity does not imply determinism.

At the same time, Lovejoy's conception of the autonomy of concepts in relation to their cultural, linguistic, and political contexts, generally very favorably received when it appeared, was very soon subjected to criticism. Lovejoy himself opened the columns of his newly founded journal to a debate that was to last for more than half a century. The most important of these criticisms concerned the claim that an idea can be an autonomous element. These first criticisms were made in defense of the context, the spirit of a period, and finally, of the history of ideas as *Geistesgeschichte*. Geist has no mystical or mythological connotation here but is simply the sum of the characteristics and components of a period or movement which the historian perceives as a unity and the total significance of which is greater than that of its components. In the face of these objections, Lovejoy defended his method, which was simply to go through texts with a fine-tooth comb to see if the same component recurred in two or more different contexts.⁴⁰ Thus, the question of contextualism was posed as soon as the history of ideas became a full-fledged academic discipline.

At the same period, one found in the French historian of ideas Max Rouché the idea that a great work always has two meanings: the one the writer intended and the one bestowed on it by later generations. The question arises whether all interpretations are equally valid. If it is normal for different generations to look in a work for a significance that corresponds to their own preoccupations, where is the dividing line between a legitimate interpretation and a deliberate or involuntary distortion? And who has the capacity to decide? Can Herder be regarded, at one and the same time, as a great humanist and as the precursor of a biological nationalism? Is Nietzsche to an equal degree an ardent individualist, antinationalist, and philosemite and one of the founders of Nazism? Are there no criteria that, contrary to the belief of Jacques Derrida, enable us to understand the intentions of a writer over and above the contradictions with which every major work is fatally studded? Is it not obvious that texts cannot be read in any way other than in the light of the objectives that the writers set themselves? But is it not equally obvious that as soon as it goes out into the public sphere a work gains an existence and a meaning of its own and has an influence that was not always and was sometimes not at all intended by the author? When a work is seized upon and shamelessly pillaged, as was Nietzsche's by the Nazis, should one not nevertheless ask if it did not lay itself open to this treatment?

Did not Nietzsche's long campaign against humanism, equality, and democracy, despite his strong criticism not only of German nationalism but also of nineteenth-century German culture, help, by playing a leading role in the education of two generations of Germans, to open up a breach that permitted this — in itself unacceptable — usurpation? Why did a mishap of this kind not happen to the work of Tocqueville or of Mill?

These questions will recur more than once later on. Here I shall simply point out that the first of the difficulties posed by the Lovejoy method becomes less significant when the period under analysis possesses an undisputed unity. For the historian especially, more than the philosopher, tracing the development of a concept or an idea, whether it is the idea of progress or liberty or the concept of history, from ancient times to the present day, poses problems of an extreme complexity. If such an initiative can yield penetrating insights, it can also lead to conceptual perversions and tremendous errors. The same applies when one considers the social dimension of ideologies, their real influence on the course of events. A search, at a distance of centuries, for direct or hidden influences can be fruitful, as, for instance, in looking for Platonic motifs in Rousseau's thought, but a search of this kind can also seem a sterile exercise. However, just as it is certain that Niccolò Machiavelli, who is generally given the title of the founder of political science, could not reflect on politics in the same way as we do, it is also clear that he, like Aristotle, could make interesting observations on human nature, government, the art of leadership, and politics in general. Some of his observations could have been made today if, due to his work, they had not become platitudes. Machiavelli continued to be read and reread throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries precisely because historians, writers, politicians, and quite simply a large number of educated readers thought that the writer of *The Prince* and *The Discourses* had ideas that were useful for their time. All men, François-René de Chateaubriand remarked very opportunely at the time when the old world of prerevolutionary Europe was disappearing forever, are children of their age. Before him, Voltaire had also thought that "every man is formed by his age," and he added, "Very few raise themselves above the manners and morals of their time."⁴¹ It is precisely these exceptional individuals who are able to see beyond their own horizon and transcend their moment in history. The questions that preoccupied Dante or Saint Thomas Aquinas are no longer ours, but that does not mean that the medieval debate on the latent or open conflict between the two powers, the spiritual and the temporal, has no meaning for our time. The questions of principle raised by the opposition of church and state retain their significance, if only because these principles can be translated into terms that are significant for us. Pluralism is only the first of them.

Once again, however, this question is no longer valid when the field of research is restricted to a period that constitutes a real unity of historical time. This is certainly true of the period from the end of the seventeenth century to our own day. We should remind ourselves of this if only because one of the main lines of attack against the Enlightenment is the idea that the French Revolution was a religious explosion, prepared by illuminati and carried out by fanatics, believers no less convinced than the men of the Middle Ages, in search of eternal truths and an earthly paradise. The idea that the revolution was of a fundamentally religious nature was far from original. First expressed by de Maistre from the time of the French Revolution onward, taken up again by Tocqueville, developed under the cover of a positivist historical study by Taine, given acceptance in the United States in the 1930s by Carl Becker, this idea, twenty years later, was a favorite of the totalitarian school. When the cold war was at its height, the idea that the utopia of the Enlightenment gave birth to the Soviet Union and then Stalinism was very common. Adorno and Horkheimer, however, leaned rather in the direction of a connection between the Enlightenment and Nazism. This attack, as we know, still continues in our own time in various forms. According to Jacques Derrida, for instance, who used this argument against Edmund Husserl, there is only a single step from humanism of any kind to racism, colonialism, and Eurocentrism. All humanism, in fact, presupposes an attitude of exclusion.⁴² Is it necessary to say that this total condemnation of humanism falsifies both the spirit of the Franco-Kantian Enlightenment and that of the English and Scottish Enlightenments?

We should also look briefly at another aspect of the lively polemic concerning the nature, meaning, and methodology of the history of ideas in which different cliques and schools of thought have in the past quarter of a century opposed one another. I am referring to the approach that seems to me the least advantageous of all: the “hard” version of linguistic contextualism that rejects any analytical method except for the analysis of language and vocabulary. For this school of thought, only the text exists: that is, only the forms of the discourse are worthy of analysis. If, as some claim, we are incapable of understanding the intentions of an author because our historical situation makes it impossible for us to transcend our own historical horizon, if the meaning a historian ascribes to a text is not that intended by the author but is conditional on the sources, ideas, and values of which the historian is the bearer and trustee, and if, as Derrida believes, the author’s intention is in any case inaccessible to us because we can never know anything about the state of mind or mental disposition of another person, the history of ideas is faced with almost insurmountable obstacles.⁴³ What is at stake here is nothing less than our capacity to understand the significance of the texts on which we are working.

Fortunately, these texts are far from inaccessible. As Quentin Skinner rightly observed, "If we merely concentrate on the language of a given writer, we may run the risk of assimilating him to a completely alien intellectual tradition, and thus of misunderstanding the whole aim of his political works." The moderate contextualist school therefore accepts that one can consider a writer's intentions and thus the meaning of a text outside a purely linguistic context. However, after giving this sage advice, Skinner, undoubtedly the most important of the "soft" contextualists, also made an attempt at deconstructing the classical notion of the history of ideas. In a brilliant article that has had a profound influence since its publication in 1969, he tried to discredit an idea that has always justified the study of the history of political thought: the idea that the great writers of the past raised questions that also apply to us and sought solutions to problems that are still with us. In a text that has become a sort of postmodernist papal bull, Skinner argued that a writer, in all times and places, is concerned with a specific problem in a unique situation. He writes for one set of readers and not for another, and looks for solutions to concrete questions that are exclusively his own. Thus, each text, each statement of fact, each principle, each idea deals with a specific situation and a particular moment. It is thus futile and naïve to speak of eternal truths or perpetual problems: one cannot transcend one's time and place, there are no eternal questions just as there are no eternal concepts, only specific, sharply defined concepts that belong to specific and thus diverse societies. This is the only general truth that exists, with regard not only to the past but also to our own time.⁴⁴

If the postmodernists had simply wanted to say that each generation has to think for itself, has to seek its own solutions to its own problems and not hope to find concrete answers demanding immediate political action in Aristotle, Saint Augustine, or Machiavelli, they would only have stated the obvious. If they had simply wanted to show that the problems Plato was dealing with were those of Athenian democracy and not those of present-day American or French democracy, that would merely be a truism. But that is not what they are doing: their intention is more complex, for it really amounts to denying the existence of universal truths and values. Through contextualism, particularism, and linguistic relativism, in concentrating on what is specific and unique and denying the universal, one necessarily finds oneself on the side of anti-humanism and historical relativism.

One has only to look at the eighteenth century in order to realize the depth of the gulf, on both sides of the Atlantic, between rationalist modernity and its enemies. Beyond all that divided the founders of the United States from the men of the French Revolution, the heritage of Locke and the Glorious Revolution of 1689 from Rousseau and Voltaire, or James Madison and Alexander

Hamilton from Étienne Bonnot de Condillac, Condorcet, and Saint-Just, there were certain concepts and convictions that were common to both parties. They were all convinced that they were working in a specific context to change or create a given situation and at the same time enunciating principles of universal significance. They were working on behalf of their own time, they wanted to change a world that was theirs and only theirs, but at the same time they had an acute awareness that they were initiating actions that would affect posterity without any possibility of return.

Indeed, no other period could boast of having developed so keen an awareness of having cut itself off from the past as the time of the Enlightenment, that extraordinary beginning to the modern age. While the Middle Ages sought legitimacy by connecting itself to the systems of thought of the ancient world, enlightened modernity viewed itself as a historical rupture without precedent. The modern period deliberately and voluntarily presented itself as such, and distanced itself from the previous period by calling it the “Middle Ages” and placing it between itself and antiquity. The very expression “Aufklärung,” a truly revolutionary concept, signified this awareness of the rational nature of the new epoch: self-understanding is characteristic of the beginning of a new phase in history. The modern age did not begin before it declared itself to be such: as Hans Blumenberg said, the title was not the motive force of its existence, but it constantly had need of it in order to set itself up.⁴⁵ The people of the Enlightenment, more than any previous generation, had the feeling that a decisive rupture, something irreversible, had taken place.

The most cogent example of the dual nature of their work was the fate of the most important piece of political philosophy ever produced in the United States. *The Federalist*, as we know, was a simple collection of electoral pamphlets. Written between October 27, 1787, and August 16, 1788, during the campaign in New York State for the ratification of the U.S. Constitution promulgated in 1787, this series of eighty-five articles published in the New York City press had a clear and well-defined primary objective: to convince the population of this pivotal state that both liberty and property would be preserved and protected in a federal state with a strong central authority. In the second place, it sought to show that liberty did not depend on the size of a country but on good institutions, and in doing this, its writers invoked the authority of Montesquieu. Its third objective was to show that a democracy could exist that was not direct but representative. And finally, it argued that liberty required the limits to the rights of the majority to be clearly formulated.

At the same time, while waging an excellent electoral campaign, the three authors, writing under the pseudonym of Publius, were perfectly conscious of the universal value of their writings and actions. Hamilton, Madison, and

John Jay knew that the experiment to which they invited their fellow citizens had no precedent and was a revolution of universal significance. The Constitution dealt with the concrete problems that the Americans of the end of the eighteenth century had to confront, and it was voted in because it corresponded to their needs and hopes, but it formulated general principles that the founders thought to be just and good and consequently valid for all men in all times and places.⁴⁶ This opinion was never disproved in the course of the next two centuries. In our day, *The Federalist* has in the United States the status of one of the sacred texts of American history. It yields in authority only to the Constitution itself.

The campaign was at its height when, in March 1788, the first thirty-six articles were published as a volume. Two months later, on May 26, a second volume appeared, containing articles thirty-seven to sixty-five. A year later, at the beginning of May 1789, the States General were convened in Paris. While Madison, recognized today as the “father of the Constitution,” for eight years became the intellectual leader of Congress before becoming third president of the United States, while Hamilton became the great minister of finance that George Washington, elected on April 6, 1789, had been waiting for, and Jay assumed the presidency of the Supreme Court, the revolution began in France. In January 1789, the first federal elections were held in the thirteen former colonies; in France the letters patent were issued for the election of the States General, and Abbé Sieyès published *Qu’est-ce que le Tiers État?* (What Is the Third Estate?). Six months later, on June 7, the Third Estate assumed the title of National Assembly, and on June 27 the king himself decreed the fusion of the three orders. The Old Regime was no more. A few weeks later, the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen expressed in a few pronouncements the chief ideas of the French Enlightenment. An occasional text if there ever was one, this firebrand born of times of crisis and disturbances marked the date of birth of a new age. The principles of 1789 were to go round the world.

The Federalist is sufficient in itself to refute the point of view of a certain postmodernism concerning the history of ideas. It is true that this is an almost perfect example: men called at a critical juncture in the history of their community to provide solutions to concrete political problems in a country on the margins of civilization gave answers of universal value and produced a classic of political thought. The same can be said about Burke. It is likely that if the revolution was merely a reaction to a crisis of regime, a palliative to deal with bread riots or financial bankruptcy, an accident en route or the product of some machination, Burke would not have risen to the level of the Declaration of the Rights of Man, and his pamphlet, simply intended to fill a breach

through which he saw the flood pouring in, would not have become, for more than two centuries, the intellectual manifesto of revolutionary conservatism.

That is why, in addressing his fellow countrymen on the subject of the British constitution or the revolution of 1689, in reflecting on the usages and customs of his country, in defending British traditions, the Whig parliamentarian in his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* outlined certain principles that were as abstract and universal as those of the abhorred French revolutionaries. In defending history, prejudice, and religion against reason, and the community against the individual, in attacking the principles of contractualism and all that Europe had gained from the school of natural rights, Burke in turn evoked a response. *Rights of Man*, that other superb pamphlet, which we owe to Thomas Paine, also became immensely popular. "The great American," as he was sometimes called in England, who, like that other radical Jeremy Bentham and like Friedrich Schiller, became a French citizen by a decree of the National Assembly, and who was elected deputy for the Pas-de-Calais, had already in 1786, two years before *The Federalist*, published *Common Sense*, a work that made him famous. Thus, the authors of *The Federalist*, Burke, and Paine between 1788 and 1791 produced three hastily written pamphlets dealing with the burning issues of the hour, but nevertheless involving fundamental principles of political and social life.

Nearly a century earlier, when writing the *Second Treatise*, Locke also had an immediate objective: one that was very understandable to his contemporaries, as it is to us. He wanted to provide an ideological cover for the change of regime that had just taken place in England. After five years of exile in Holland, he returned with William of Orange and sought to justify the revolution of 1689. Here again was an occasional piece that soon entered into the political debate, in which it featured both before and after the two revolutions at the end of the eighteenth century. For Rousseau, he was "the wise Locke," while for de Maistre, on the other hand, hatred of Locke was the beginning of wisdom. The American Declarations of Rights were Locke's thought put into practice. As for Burke, unable to attack the theoretician of the Glorious Revolution openly, and claiming the authority of that revolution which he interpreted in his own way, he did not mention him even once in his *Reflections*. For Burke, Locke simply did not exist, any more than the founders of the United States existed. It was the simplest if not the most serious-minded way to avoid confronting the theory of the rights of man, of which the founder of conservatism had a holy horror. Thus, Burke was not, as is often thought, a link in the chain of the great tradition of British liberalism. On the contrary, Burke founded a new political tradition: that of "blocked" liberalism, a liberalism incomplete or defective from its inception. In our time, this type of liberalism takes the form of the various kinds of neoconservatism.

When Fichte delivered his *Reden an die deutsche Nation* (Addresses to the German Nation) in 1807–1808 in Berlin under the Napoleonic occupation, his sole intention was to issue a call to arms, but in so doing he adapted Herder's teachings to the new conditions created by the conquest of Germany by the French and became one of the great prophets of nationalism. When the power relationships were reversed in 1870, after the Franco-Prussian War, Renan wrote his *Réforme intellectuelle et morale de la France* (Intellectual and Moral Reform of France), a pamphlet violently attacking the French Enlightenment. In this pamphlet, Renan, like Taine in *Les Origines de la France contemporaine* (The Origins of Contemporary France), saw the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, Rousseau and democracy as responsible for French decadence. Similar arguments were to be used after the collapse of France in 1940, and the *Réforme* was read in the first months of the Vichy regime as if it had just been hot off the press.

All these writers wrote with the immediate application of their ideas in mind, but at the same time posed fundamental questions about human nature and the role of man in society. They gave an idea of what they thought a “good” society should be. They all tried to transcend the immediate context in which they lived and felt that they were stating “eternal principles” and essential truths. They refused to remain enslaved to paradigms: the fact that some contemporary writers treat these terms with sarcasm does not alter the reality at all. All the thinkers of the Anti-Enlightenment reflected on the rise and fall of civilizations and did not hesitate to position themselves within a perspective of twenty-five centuries when they engaged in a dialogue with Plato.

It was in connection with this reflection on the fate of civilizations that the idea was advanced at the beginning of the twentieth century that the Enlightenment was not exclusively an affair of the eighteenth century but was really a form of civilization that, from the Athens of Pericles to the China of Confucius to Modern Europe appeared in times of decadence when myths vanished and were replaced by the rule of reason. Enlightenment thought is thus present at all times and in all places, and for its enemies, it constitutes a permanent threat to culture.

The Clash of Traditions

In order to embrace in all its fullness and complexity the significance of the campaign against the English and French Enlightenments for the world of our time, one has to begin by going back to the late seventeenth century. The triumph of the moderns in the famous Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns, which began in 1687, just when England was preparing the Glorious Revolution, was the first success of the Enlightenment. The second victory of the new values was the establishment of the new English regime.

Both intellectually and politically, the whole significance of the Glorious Revolution was expressed in Locke's *Two Treatises*. At a time when England was changing its regime rapidly and without resistance or bloodshed, France, at the end of the reign of Louis XIV, was only able to embark on a long and difficult intellectual battle. This tremendous difference between the situation in the two countries left a lasting imprint on the French Enlightenment, and from the end of the eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth century people spoke of a conflict of civilizations. In the political and social context that existed in France throughout the eighteenth century, the awareness of the injustices and malpractices of the situation at the time, the struggle against authoritarianism, the struggle for liberty and for the right of people to free themselves from the shackles of the past, took the form of a violent cultural and ideological campaign.

The rejection of what existed gave rise to an unprecedented upsurge of historical thinking: never had the world of the future been debated so intensively. People thought about the past but did not bow down to its authority, or to that of the present; and if they did not bow down to the present, it was because they were convinced they had the right and the capacity to mold the future. "We are now got at the origin of Man, and at the origin of his rights. As to the manner in which the world has been governed from that day to this, it is no farther any concern of ours than to make a proper use of the errors or the improvements which the history of it presents," wrote Thomas Paine in his famous refutation of Burke's *Reflections*. "Those who lived an hundred or a thousand years ago, were the moderns, as we are now. They had *their* ancients, and those ancients had others, and we shall also be ancients in our turn. . . . The fact is, that portions of antiquity, by proving everything, establish nothing. It is authority against authority all the way, till we come to the divine origin of the rights of man at the creation."¹

Contrary to an idea promoted by the first enemies of the Enlightenment, which the nineteenth century did not fail to adopt, the age of Voltaire, Gibbon, and Hume was the real beginning of modern historiography. Historiography only became possible with the beginnings of criticism, and criticism is only possible when one affirms one's autonomy. Historiography only becomes a form of intellectual activity when one ceases to look for the divine will in history and entrusts oneself to the power of reasoning in order to understand the past and prepare for the future.

Criticism of the existing political order, but also criticism of morals, religion, law, and history, from the point of view of reason is the distinctive feature of the Enlightenment. Kant knew this, and Cassirer and Husserl made a point of praising reason at a critical juncture in the history of their age. A comprehensive critique of what exists marks the entrance to rationalist modernity. It was in the last years of the seventeenth century that modernity began to appear as a radical break with the past (antiquity), and above all with its accepted models. With the Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns, there was an extraordinary, almost unprecedented break that sanctioned the rebellion, innovation, and criticism associated with the idea of modernity. The controversy that arose at the turn of the eighteenth century was the last in a long series of reflections on the *antiqui* and the *moderni* whose beginnings went back to Cassiodorus, historian of Theodore the Great, after the fall of the Western Roman Empire. From the twelfth century to the eighteenth, the debate on modernity never stopped. This was because the idea of modernity, as Jürgen Habermas has shown, reappears each time people in Europe are conscious of beginning a new period: "The modern world is distinguished from

the old by the fact that it opens itself to the future, the epochal new beginning is rendered constant with each moment that gives birth to the new." The school of Chartres, with Bernard of Chartres and John of Salisbury, put forward the idea that the ancients were "giants" and the modern "dwarfs" stood on their shoulders, but, thanks to their position, the modern "dwarfs" saw farther than the ancients. In the sixteenth century, there were two clearly opposing sides to the debate: with Rabelais, Giordano Bruno, Jean Bodin, and Francis Bacon at the beginning of the following century, the moderns were no longer afraid to assert their superiority.²

On the other side was the camp of the ancients. In a fine chapter in his *Essays*, rightly called "Of Custom and Not Easily Changing an Accepted Law," Montaigne, after giving the great names of antiquity from Socrates and Plato to Octavian and Cato, declared, "I have a great aversion to novelty, whatever its appearance, and in this I am right, for I have seen the harmful results it can have. . . . Even the best pretext for modernity is very dangerous: *adeo nihil motum ex antiquo probabile est*."³

In the mid-seventeenth century, Blaise Pascal adopted a compromise position in what seems to have been a last attempt to save whatever could be saved of the authority of the ancients. This difficult balance became hard to maintain, however, as an increasing number of Europeans came to the conclusion that the masterworks of Pierre Corneille, Jean Racine, and Molière, Nicolas Poussin, Charles Le Brun, and Claude Perrault were something quite different from an imitation of the great writers of ancient times. In many ways, the age of Louis XIV was not inferior to the age of Augustus. On January 27, 1687, at the Académie française, Charles Perrault recited a famous poem on the age of Louis the Great, which he compared advantageously to antiquity. The celebrated Quarrel raged on until it ended, a quarter of a century later, with Fénélon's *Lettre à l'Académie*. In 1715, on the eve of his death, Fénélon put an end to what he called "the dispute" and even "the civil war of the Académie": "I do not exalt the Ancients as models without imperfection: I do not wish to take from anyone the hope of overcoming them. I hope, on the contrary, to see the Moderns victorious through the study of the very Ancients they will have overcome." Indeed, in its underlying implications, the "Letter to the Academy" has a far more modern and progressive character than the counterrevolutionary pamphlets of the end of the century. Far from blindly worshipping the genius of antiquity, Fénélon did not hesitate to praise his contemporaries fulsomely: "One must admit that there are few excellent writers among the Ancients, while among the Moderns there are some, whose works are precious." Not only does the archbishop of Cambrai not fail to point out the weaknesses and faults of the ancients, particularly in philosophy, he notes the cultural and

historical difficulties the modern reader has in studying the work of the ancients. He thus asserts not only the right to innovate but also a continuous forward movement, based on the progress of the human spirit and the independence of each generation. Moreover, Fénelon has a very rationalist and modern sense of the superiority of his age, “which has only just emerged from barbarism.” A few pages earlier, he said that the Franks of Clovis’s time were “a fierce band of wanderers, and if one can perceive a ray of politeness coming to birth in Charlemagne’s empire . . . the immediate fall of his house plunged Europe once again into a terrible barbarism. Saint Louis was a prodigy of reason and virtue in an age of iron. We have only just emerged from this long night.”⁴

That was how Enlightened modernity gained respectability and the idea of linear progress came to be accepted. The present was conceived as infinitely superior to the immediate past and did not have any complexes concerning the greatness of antiquity. Already the superiority of the present began to be clearly asserted. The cult of the Middle Ages that appeared at the beginning of the eighteenth century with Vico and at the end of the century with Herder, and was much developed by the early Romantics, was in no way a type of return to faith or the rediscovery of a brilliant lost civilization, but solely a revolt against the Enlightenment. The fact that this veneration of a vanished world began with Vico and Herder is not surprising. In some ways, the Augustinian Fénelon, author of the famous *Démonstration de l’existence de Dieu* (Demonstration of the Existence of God), writing at the turn of the eighteenth century, was closer to the great “pagans” of the French Enlightenment than to their enemies, Vico, Johann Georg Hamann, Herder, Burke, and de Maistre, pillars of the faith and the established church.

The *Letter* also has another interesting aspect. Its author hoped that the Académie “would get us a treatise on history.” Fénelon considered history a key discipline, an incomparable tool “that uncovers origins, and explains how peoples passed from one form of government to another.” But in order to write history, he said, one needed good historians. A good historian would devote himself particularly to “depicting the main characters and discovering the causes of events.” He would show objectivity, a critical sense, curiosity, would not be blinded by patriotism, would present the facts without taking sides, and would not be swayed by the prevailing opinion (“he would follow his tastes without taking account of those of the public”).⁵

A good historian would not be guilty of anachronism and would not be guided by the discovery of innumerable “small facts”: one should leave “this superstitious exactitude to compilers.” He would not be “a dry, sad writer of chronicles,” who could only produce “a history chopped up in small pieces, so to speak, without any living thread of narrative.” Against this, a historian

worthy of the name would reconstruct “the exact form of government and the details of the manners and customs of the nation whose history he is writing, in each period.” This is where one must show exactitude: in depicting periods, systems of government, ways of thinking, and social structures, for — this is certainly what Fénélon meant, and it was a lesson that was learned by Voltaire — “each nation has very different customs from those of the neighboring peoples. Each people often changes its own customs.” Here is also the origin of the famous discoveries usually ascribed to Herder. Fénélon considered a good historian to be like a good painter: “The principal perfection of a history lies in its order and arrangement. In order to achieve this exemplary order, the historian must embrace and possess the whole of his history. He must see it in its entirety, as though at a single glance. He must be able to look at it from every angle until he finds his true viewpoint. He must demonstrate its unity, and draw from a single source, so to speak, the principal events that depend on it.” A demanding reader, Fénélon ended with a concise but concentrated critique of the great historians of antiquity: Herodotus, Xenophon, Polybius, Thucydides, Sallust, Tacitus, all of whom, he said, had their faults, often major faults.⁶ It only remained for the reader to draw his own conclusions: the world moves ahead, and the future belongs to the moderns.

The scientific and intellectual revolution that took place in the seventeenth century, which ensured the victory of the moderns and whose last stage happened in these years of “crisis of the European consciousness,” to use Paul Hazard’s felicitous expression,⁷ gave birth to an unusual intuition in the history of our civilization: the idea and already the conviction that people have the right to build a world different from the one they have inherited. In this way, history lost its function of guardianship. If, as Fénélon thought, the world had only just emerged from barbarism, it could not possibly seek its norms of conduct in the long night from which it had just emerged. As a result, an extraordinary reservoir of intellectual and then political energy was released. Each generation now felt itself free to engage not only in the discovery of the physical universe but also in that of history, of anthropology, of new political and social structures. The individual felt himself to be master of his existence, equal to the most powerful, capable of forging for himself a world that his ancestors could not even dream of. He began by drawing up accounts and speculating on the reasons for the misfortunes that overtook him. This was the famous question that bursts forth at the beginning of the first chapter of the *Social Contract*, the hundred pages of the *Second Discourse* where Rousseau considered the origins of civil society, and in so doing produced an extraordinary essay of philosophical anthropology without God. Rousseau, the thinker most hated by the enemies of the Enlightenment, created a history of the

origins of humanity that destroyed the religious conception of life. He was the one who eradicated revelation from the life of men, and in the very beginnings of capitalism raised the flag of revolt against social injustices. According to him, the origin of evil was to be found not in human nature but in social structures, and property was the source of the evils in eighteenth-century bourgeois society, where there was no liberty, and inequality prevailed. Contrary to a commonly accepted idea, Rousseau was not a pessimist: if he cannot be counted among the theoreticians of progress, he nevertheless regarded man as master of his destiny. For the people of the Enlightenment, evil resided not in man but in social conditions, ignorance, superstition, and poverty.

Alain Renaud has brilliantly demonstrated that Rousseau was the first person to have expressed the idea that human liberty reveals itself through man's capacity to free himself from nature, and hence through an absence of definition or essence. One may recall the Sartrean metaphor of the paper cutter as it appears in one of the most famous texts in twentieth-century thought: *Existentialism Is a Humanism*. In this celebrated lecture, given in 1946, Sartre described the main difference between a human condition and a thing-like condition. He reproached theology and traditional philosophy as having conceived of man as being created on the model of a manufactured object, and of God, correspondingly, as being a kind of skilled craftsman. In this conception of the world, there is no room for human liberty, as man is a prisoner of his nature, of a certain finality or model, which he can no more escape than a paper cutter can. An authentic humanism, on the other hand, is characterized by the idea that "there is at least one being in whom existence precedes essence, a being that exists before it can be defined, and that that being is man." Without Sartre being in any way aware of it, said Renaud, putting his finger in this way on a fundamental but little-known and ill-understood aspect of eighteenth-century thought, this phenomenological or existentialist conception of humanism, far from breaking away from the philosophy of the Enlightenment, was entirely in keeping with Kant's and Fichte's ideas on the humanity of man as historicity. These ideas were largely derived from Rousseau.⁸

It was in fact Rousseau, who in his *Second Discourse* was the first to express this idea, which, as Renaud demonstrated, Kant took up, in his *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose*: "Every animal has ideas, since he has senses," said Rousseau. "He even combines his ideas up to a certain point, and man only differs from the beast in having it to a greater degree. . . . It is therefore not so much understanding that gives man his specific distinction among the animals as the fact that he is a free agent. . . . It is in the consciousness of this freedom that the spirituality of his soul is revealed." Rousseau showed that it is precisely because of this capacity not to be a prisoner of natural

determinations that man confronts problems of individual history and collective history through education and through politics. Such an anti-naturalistic reelaboration of the nature of man, such a revised conception of man could not be conceived without profound repercussions in the political order. Rousseau, and then Kant, showed in this way that man can be perfected and that this perfectibility is a continual negation of nature, and thus a construction of self by self and hence historicity. This historicity is an ever-renewed tearing away from natural determinations. The importance of what Rousseau outlined cannot be overestimated. Rousseau had just found the first radical answer to racism: "man in his wild state," even when beginning his evolution "through purely animal functions" and reminiscent of animality through his lack of historicity, was in no way an animal. He was guided by faculties common to all men at all times and places. Although these faculties were as yet undeveloped, they carried the potential of an infinite freedom whose implementation was conceived as a tearing away from nature. In Rousseau, all humanity was one and the same humanity.⁹

This humanism was the reason for the hatred directed toward Kant (in this respect a disciple of Rousseau), and toward Rousseau himself, for two centuries. Moreover, one should add here that Rousseau rejected in advance the idea that a human nature present in all men could lead to a tyranny of the universal. The reproach made to the modern universalist philosophy that it failed to denounce slavery tends to forget not only Rousseau but also Montesquieu and Voltaire, the encyclopédistes and the men of the British Enlightenment. But it is above all the French Revolution that is overlooked. Slavery was in fact abolished by the French Revolution. The slaves, like the Jews, were liberated, and for the first time in history, all men living within the frontiers of a single country, France, were subject to the same laws and became free citizens with equal rights. For Kant, as for Rousseau before him, all men whoever they were belonged to that world of humanity that was history conceived as perfectibility.

Before Kant and before Rousseau, Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle provided another example of the magnificent self-confidence of modern man. Fontenelle is one of the pet aversions of all the enemies of the Enlightenment who, like Georges Sorel at the beginning of the twentieth century, see him as the very symbol of evil. Men, he claimed, were the same in all times and places: "Why would brains in those days have been better?" Is it not obvious that "nature has a certain dough in its hands which is always the same, and which it turns again and again in a thousand ways"? "The ages do not create any natural differences between men. . . . We are thus all perfectly equal, Ancients and Moderns, Greeks, Latins and French." The ancients preceded the moderns in

time, which creates the illusion that they invented everything, but the moderns, in their place, would have arrived at exactly the same results. In reality, the moderns reached heights never attained by the ancients. The ancients did not only have qualities. Far from it: full of faults and weaknesses, they “exhausted most of the wrong ideas it is possible to have; they necessarily had to pay error and ignorance the tribute they paid.” What the ancients lacked most of all, according to Fontenelle, was scientific method, or what he called exactitude and rigor: “Often weak commonplaces, inept comparisons, feeble witticisms, vague and confused speeches, pass with them for proofs.” The past centuries did not have a Descartes: thanks to this leap forward, in all areas of knowledge there is “a precision and an exactitude which, until the present, were hardly possible.” That is why, “being thus enlightened by the views of the Ancients and even by their faults, it is not surprising that we surpass them.” The generations succeed each other, and the most recent ones will always be superior to their predecessors: “It is obvious that none of this has an end, and the last Physicists and Mathematicians will naturally be the most skillful.” There is infinite progress in knowledge: one is always modern in relation to someone: “There was a time when the Latins were modern, and then they complained of people’s obstinate loyalty to the Greeks.” “One must be able to accept that Demosthenes and Cicero can be compared to someone with a French name.” Responding in advance to Burke and Herder, Fontenelle also called upon his contemporaries to rid themselves of the tendency that people have “to abandon reason for prejudices.” Although one must recognize that “the reading of the Ancients has dissipated the ignorance and barbarity of former ages,” and that it is to the revival of the Greeks and the Romans that the world owes its emergence from “the barbarous ages that followed that of Augustus,” this does not mean that one should submit unconditionally to the wisdom of the ancients.¹⁰

Here, as in a sort of microcosm, one can see the whole difference between the spirit of the Enlightenment and that of its enemies. Not only are the Middle Ages idealized by Herder and the Romantics presented here as a period of barbarism, but Fontenelle compares the evolution of humanity to that of an individual, with the sole difference—but an all-important difference in relation to Vico, Herder, Sorel, or Spengler—that progress is infinite. A man has his childhood, he has his age of maturity, “but I have to admit that *this* man will never have an old age . . . that is to say that men will never degenerate, and the sound views entertained by all the good minds that will come in succession will always be added on to one another.”¹¹

The victory of the Enlightenment in the eighteenth century was no longer in doubt. It was made possible on the one hand by the authority wielded by

Locke and the success of Christian Wolfe's universal rationalism, and on the other hand by the failure of Vico's *New Science*. "You who live, and above all, you who begin to live in the eighteenth century, congratulate yourselves!": François-Jean de Chastellux marshaled all the apologetic arguments of the moderns in order to paint an apocalyptic picture of the brutality and barbarity of the manners and morals of antiquity, reaching the conclusion that "these monuments of cruelty sufficiently prove the superiority of our modern philosophy to one that could accept such abominations." One finds the same pictures of barbarity in Constantin — François Volney, who, in addition, laughs at the superstitious religious practices of the Greeks and idyllic accounts of the freedom and equality they enjoyed, when Sparta and Rome were brutal oligarchies that held in subjection whole populations of serfs and of plebeians who were as miserable as their slaves. Chateaubriand likewise knew that the ancient republics could not have suspected the existence of "liberty, daughter of the Enlightenment."¹²

While having a keen sense of the specificity of their age and demonstrating the modern self-awareness, the thinkers of the Enlightenment, like their successors in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, did not see their age as "ultimate and unique." Their period was undoubtedly a great one, but the movement forward never stopped. They often depicted the history of Europe as a vast process of preparation for modern times: they could discern the beginnings of democracy in the pre-Socratics. There was no "end of history," however: no period, no people could claim to have reached the optimum. There was no finishing line. Against this, Burke considered his world perfection: generally speaking, eighteenth-century England was the maximum possible. He conceived of the end of history two centuries before one of his neoconservative disciples, Francis Fukuyama.¹³ The concept of the end of history, which at the beginning of the last decade of the twentieth century fired the imagination of American neoconservative circles, undoubtedly belongs to this school of thought.

Contrary to a commonly accepted idea, the universal critique that Paul Hazard rightly saw as the heart of the Enlightenment had no intention of changing man, only society. Criticism was conceived as a means of improving the human condition, an instrument of progress and happiness. Happiness became a right, and this concept replaced the notion of duty. It was the aim of all intelligent beings, the center toward which all their actions converged. This was the end of the craving for the absolute.¹⁴ Philosophy was to be guided by practicality: it was no longer to be anything other than the search for happiness. The good of the individual became the final objective of every political and social action: this was the great contribution of the school of natural law.

The thought of Locke, its most famous theoretician, dominated the eighteenth century even after the appearance of Rousseau. From the time of Hobbes, in the mid-seventeenth century, whose line of thought was continued by Locke, the sovereignty of reason asserted itself progressively, reaching its definitive expression a hundred years later. Even if one agrees about its limitations, even if it was incapable of knowing substance and essence, there is no doubt about its role: that of uncovering and analyzing facts, laying bare the elements of reality, comparing them, finding the connections between them, and formulating laws as a result. Its method was thus experimental. Reason was given the task of revealing the truth and condemning error. It was universal, identical for all men. Not only science and the arts depended on it, the future of the human race did as well.

But, "What does 'enlighten' mean?" asked the people of the eighteenth century via Moses Mendelssohn.¹⁵ Kant, in a famous text published in 1784, one of the finest produced by the thinkers of his time, gave in a few pages to which one never tires of returning an answer that remains the definition of the Enlightenment that is truest to the spirit of the philosophes: "*Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity*. Immaturity is the inability to use one's understanding without the guidance of another. . . . The motto of the Enlightenment is therefore '*Sapere aude!*' Have the courage to use your own understanding."¹⁶

Kant's call for the emancipation of the human being from the shackles of history and religion is a corollary of his vision of the Enlightenment as a dynamic process, a continual progress toward an ever more advanced self-emancipation. This optimistic view of history was based on the idea of the primacy of the rights of man: under Rousseau's influence, Kant began to consider liberty the first principle of morality, and the theory of the social contract now seemed to him the only political philosophy compatible with this conception of morality. Kant acknowledged his debt to Rousseau: "It was Rousseau who opened my eyes. . . . I am learning to honor men, and I should consider myself much more useless than most workers if I did not believe that the study of this subject can give to all others the following value: a demonstration of the rights of humanity." He saw the author of the *Social Contract* as the Newton of ethics: "Rousseau was the very first to discover, beneath the diversity of the conventional forms of humanity, the nature of man in the depths in which it lay concealed."¹⁷

In Kant's opinion, the men of his time were not yet masters of their fate; they were not yet liberated from prejudices and superstitions. But if the age was not yet enlightened, it was already the age of reason and criticism. It was this rational criticism of certitudes and traditional values that produced the theory

of natural rights, the principle of the primacy of the individual with regard to society, and the idea that the well-being and the happiness of the individual must always be the aim of any political action. It was the rational criticism of the existing order that enabled society to be conceived as a collection of individuals, and the state as a tool in the individual's hands. It was thus criticism that gave birth to our hedonistic and utilitarian vision of society and the state: throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the reaction against the Enlightenment described this conception of the primacy of the individual over the collectivity as "materialism." Very soon, "materialism" — that is, liberalism, democracy, socialism — became the code word par excellence for evil.

The liberation of the individual, in the sense that Kant gave this process, found its concretization in the first years of the French Revolution. Kant remained true to the revolution despite the trauma of 1793, and he continued to believe that reason not only allows us but obliges us to change society in accordance with the principles of justice. In 1797 he still expressed the conviction that man could improve himself.¹⁸ Kant, as we know, did not recognize the right of the individual to resist political power, and in this respect he was more retrograde than not only Locke but also Hobbes. If Hobbes did not grant the individual the right to rebel, he at least allowed one to glimpse the possibility that if the authorities place the life of the individual in danger, they lose their *raison d'être* and finally disintegrate, which is another way of slightly opening a door to revolt. Kant on this point rejected the assumptions of the school of natural rights. The right to rebel was for him a contradiction in terms. Moreover, he denied the individual the right to question whether the origin of the existing political system was legitimate or not. Nietzsche severely reproached Kant for this conformism, which he saw as typical of intellectuals, without mentioning that this applied chiefly to German intellectuals: "Even Kant was respectful and obsequious, as we scholars tend to be, and displayed no greatness in his treatment of the state."¹⁹ That was one charge, at least, that could not be leveled against the French philosophes.

What, then, according to Kant, did the reflective citizen have left? Only one weapon, but a decisive one: criticism. It was his only means, but sure and effective: spreading the Enlightenment, continuing the *Aufklärung*. It was in the freedom of reflection given to nonviolent citizens that Kant saw the greatness of his period. The day had come when man could leave "that immaturity for which he was himself responsible." No violent revolution could bring about a real reform of ways of thinking; it would be bound to end in despotism and repression. Only *Aufklärung* could prevent old prejudices from being replaced by others that were just as bad. If one is to have progress of the only kind that is truly of value for the morality of the world and for politics that can

claim to be a politics of mankind, “all that is needed is *freedom*. And the freedom in question is the most innocuous form of all—freedom to make *public use* of one’s reason in all matters.” Éric Weil said that *public use* and *in all matters* are the key terms here. Nothing can escape criticism: neither religion, nor the principles of legislation, nor the church, nor the state; and this criticism is made in public.²⁰

The Enlightenment was a process of slow transition from a state of dependency to one of liberty. In this, as Habermas points out, it was an “unfinished project.”²¹ That is how *we* see it, but not how it was seen by the men of the eighteenth century: Voltaire was convinced that victory was very close, and that it was a natural result of the intellectual revolution he had witnessed. Neither the age, nor people’s views, nor manners and morals were the same as they had been: “Almost all Europe has changed its character in the last fifty or so years,” he wrote in 1763, and there was no reason to think that this forward movement would stop.²² Kant, a witness of the French Revolution, was enthusiastic about the events in Paris. *The Contest of Faculties*, the last of his writings to be published in his lifetime, in 1798, expressed the optimism of a generation that saw liberty victorious in America, the Old Regime overthrown, the Declaration of the Rights of Man proclaimed in Paris, and liberal tendencies appear in Prussia itself. “The Revolution which we have seen taking place in our own times in a nation of gifted people [spirited people] may succeed or it may fail. It may be so filled with misery and atrocities that no right-thinking man would ever decide to make the same experiment again at such price. . . . But I maintain that this revolution has aroused in the hearts and desires of all spectators who are not themselves caught up in it a *sympathy* which borders almost on enthusiasm. . . . It cannot therefore have been caused by anything other than a moral disposition within the human race.” Kant goes on: the peoples of the world are moving toward “a constitution which would be incapable of bellicosity, i.e. a republican one. The actual *form* of the desired state might be republican, or alternatively, it might only be republican in its *mode of government*, in that the state would be administered by a single ruler (the monarch) acting by analogy with the laws which a people would give itself in conformity with universal principles of right.” That, he said, is why “I now maintain that I can predict from the aspects and signs of our times that the human race will achieve this end, and that it will henceforth progressively improve without any more total reversals.” The French Revolution was thus a phenomenon that “*can never be forgotten* since it has revealed in human nature an aptitude and power for improvement of a kind which no politician could have thought up by examining the course of events in the past. Only nature and freedom, combined within mankind in accordance with principles

of right have enabled us to forecast it.” While animals submit passively to the laws of nature, in man nature and liberty are united. According to nature, people would be tempted to behave “like docile sheep, well fed,” but “a being endowed with freedom aware of the advantage he possesses over non-rational animals, can and must therefore follow the *formal* principle of his will and demand for the people to which he belongs nothing short of a government in which the people are co-legislators.” The French Revolution bore witness to the forward movement of mankind: not that this progress is automatic, observed Theodore Ruysen, but mankind is henceforth in a state of alert: it is conscious of its power. Thus, the lesson to be drawn from the philosophy of history is not a promise but a call, an echo of the categorical imperative: it calls on rational beings to assume responsibility for their destiny.²³

The Contest of Faculties was the final manifestation of the call issued by Kant in his *What Is Enlightenment?* In 1790, Kant wrote: “The first aphorism [‘think for yourself’] concerns a reason that is never *passive*. The tendency to passivity and consequently to the estrangement of reason is called *prejudice*. The greatest [prejudice] of all is to consider nature not subject to the rules that understanding gives it as a foundation on account of its own essential law, and that is *superstition*. The liberation from superstition is called *Enlightenment*.” Françoise Proust said that free thought, liberated thought, is autonomous thought, thought that is only authorized by the jurisdiction of one’s own understanding. It dictates its own laws and regards only the natural and moral laws one’s reason gives it as legitimate. That was the meaning the word “law” gained in the eighteenth century. Law is opposed to what is arbitrary, as it is universal, and it enables the problem posed by Rousseau to be solved. The problem was that of finding a form of relationship in which one would be free at the same time as being subject to it. The desired relationship is that which one has with the law to which one is freely subject, as it is the law of one’s own reason.²⁴ This defense of the principles of the Enlightenment was a magnificent response to Herder and Burke, and even, despite the fact that Kant had never heard of him, to Vico.

One restoration and two revolutions later, another enlightened liberal, Tocqueville, summed up the meaning of the idea of liberty for the men of the Enlightenment. It was poles apart from the one in which Burke believed: “According to the modern, the democratic, and if I may say so, correct conception of liberty, each man, being presumed to have received from nature the enlightenment necessary to conduct himself, has from birth an equal and inviolable right to live independently of others in all that concerns him alone, and to forge his own destiny as he wishes.” In this way, Tocqueville brought together the two aspects of the idea of liberty that Burke wanted to ignore, that

Benjamin Constant, following Kant, had already expounded, and that Isaiah Berlin was to separate a hundred years later. In this, he reveals himself an authentic liberal, a liberal of the Enlightenment, and in so doing provides the proof that there is no liberalism other than that which is based on the principles of the Enlightenment. A few lines later, Tocqueville described the conceptual framework of liberal nationalism: "The idea that each individual, and by extension each people, has the right to decide on its own actions. This idea, as yet obscure, inadequately defined and ill-formulated, is gradually finding its way to everyone."²⁵ Tocqueville's idea of the nation is light-years away from Burke's. For Tocqueville, it was in the eighteenth century that the transition took place that permitted the emergence of modern liberty, individual liberty, and collective liberty.

Unlike Burke, for whom the French Revolution represented a revolt against Christian civilization, Tocqueville was perfectly aware of the realities of the eighteenth century. Looking, sixty years later, at the recommendations of the three orders on the eve of the summoning of the States General — those of the nobility and the clergy as well as those of the Third Estate — he discovered "with a sort of terror that what was being proposed was the simultaneous and systematic abolition of all the laws and practices then existing in the country." It was thus not the Parisian "literary cabal" that was responsible for the events of 1789. Tocqueville did not see the revolution as the product of a huge conspiracy against the chivalrous tradition of Christian civilization, as Burke did; he saw it as the product of the realities of the Old Regime. He gave his reply in two chapters of *L'Ancien Régime et la Révolution*. Chapter 12 of the book was called "Why, Despite the Progress of Civilization, the Condition of the French Peasants Was Sometimes Worse in the Eighteenth Century Than It Had Been in the Thirteenth." Tocqueville was often closer to Rousseau than to Burke, at least where it concerned the peasantry in the Old Regime and not the rebellious workers of June 1848. He understood the passage in Rousseau in which the writer learned from a peasant from whom he asked for a meal about the condition of the peasants. This experience, said Rousseau, was "the seed of the inextinguishable hatred that arose in my heart since that time for the vexations borne by these unfortunate people, and for their oppressors."²⁶ That was something that Burke and later Taine, blinded by their hatred of the French Enlightenment and the revolution, did not even try to understand.

In the following chapter, the first chapter of book 2, Tocqueville discussed "the way in which, toward the middle of the eighteenth century, the men of letters became the chief political figures of the country, and the effects of this." On the one hand, their very condition "prepared them to relish general and abstract theories concerning government and to have blind confidence in

them,” and at the same time Tocqueville showed that if the French intellectuals of the eighteenth century did not participate in public life as they did in England, they were not estranged from politics. “They were constantly concerned with matters of government; this was, in fact, their actual occupation.” These were fundamental questions that were their center of interest: “One heard them every day expounding their views on the origin of societies and their original forms, on the basic rights of citizens and those of the authorities, on natural and artificial relationships between men, on the wrongness or legitimacy of customs and on the underlying principles of laws. Thus, each day probing the essential constitution of their time, they carefully examined its structure and criticized its general plan.” Here one came to the main point: “It was no accident if the philosophes of the eighteenth century generally conceived ideas that were so opposite to those that still served as the basis of the society of their time. These ideas were naturally suggested to them by the spectacle of the very society they beheld. The sight of so many unfair or absurd privileges . . . simultaneously aroused in each of them the idea of a natural equality of conditions. Seeing so many distorted and bizarre institutions, relics of other periods . . . they readily developed a distaste for old things and traditions.” It was that society, the only one that was really a “blocked” society, a society without a future, that caused the French men of letters “to be naturally drawn to wish to rebuild the society of their time according to a completely new plan which each of them drew up in the light of his reason alone.”²⁷

“When one disregards the details in order to find the idées mères,” said Tocqueville, this was “the political philosophy of the eighteenth century”: the writers of that time, whatever the differences between them, “all believed that simple, elementary rules based on reason and natural law should be substituted for the complex traditional customs that governed the society of their time.” Very often, Tocqueville himself resembles a man of the eighteenth century in that one sees that he was deeply attached to experimental rationalism. In his final work, he devoted several extraordinary pages to praising the men of 1789: “It was ’89, a time of inexperience, no doubt, but one of generosity, enthusiasm, virility and greatness, a time of immortal renown, which men will look back to with admiration and respect when those who saw it and we ourselves will long have disappeared.” And Tocqueville continued, giving us a declaration of more than rhetorical significance: “The French were sufficiently proud of their cause and of themselves to believe that they could be equal in liberty. In the midst of democratic institutions they therefore everywhere set up free institutions.” Here, Tocqueville, who is hardly mentioned by Berlin, was in fact replying in advance to *Two Concepts of Liberty*: negative liberty is

defending the individual against external interference, while positive liberty is creating one's own world within equality. Tocqueville wished to emphasize this point, and he continued, "Not only did they totally pulverise the antiquated legislation that divided men into castes, into corporations, into classes, and made their rights even more unequal than their conditions of life, but with one blow destroyed the other laws, more recent products of the royal authority, that had deprived the nation of the free enjoyment of itself."²⁸

This society, which Tocqueville thought did not deserve to survive, was precisely Burke's ideal: in his view, the society of his time should not have been preserved simply because it existed, but because it was the best society possible. That was the whole difference between a liberal conservative and the father of neoconservatism. It was no accident that Tocqueville's praise of 1789 occurred on the page following some harsh criticism of Burke. Tocqueville saw Burke as merely a writer of "eloquent pamphlets" who did not realize "the state in which this monarchy whose passing he regretted had left the country." Elsewhere, Tocqueville reproached Burke for not having understood the true nature of the French Revolution, which came to sweep away the ancient institutions common to the whole of Europe, or what Burke called "the ancient common law of Europe." Here it would seem that Tocqueville was wrong: Burke understood the nature of the revolution very well, and that was the cause of his anger. But it is interesting to see how little attention Tocqueville paid to Burke. To judge from the list of passages copied out or summarized in view of a sequel to *L'Ancien Régime*, Tocqueville had read practically the whole of Burke, and called him a "powerful mind," but he thought him blinded by "his hatred . . . of innovators." He said he was admirable when he spoke of details, but his horizon was extremely limited: "The general character, the universality, the final significance of the revolution which had begun escape him completely. He is as though buried in the old world and in the English stratum of that world, and does not understand the universal new phenomenon that had arisen."²⁹

Tocqueville was much closer to the men of the eighteenth century than to the blocked cold-war liberalism of Isaiah Berlin or the neoconservative liberalism of our time, both in his belief in the existence of "fixed laws that it is perhaps not impossible to discover" and in his view that the French Revolution was a necessity. He thought the revolution "emerged independently from what had preceded [it]" and it "accomplished all at once . . . what would have been accomplished gradually" in any case. If it had not happened in the same way or if it had not happened at all, "the old social edifice would nevertheless have fallen everywhere sooner or later." Tocqueville expressed the greatness of the revolution on the eve of his death, in his most mature work, and what is still more significant, this encomium followed his praise of the eighteenth

century: "It was in that century that people spoke for the first time about the general rights of humanity, of which each man can claim an equal enjoyment as a legitimate and inalienable heritage, and about the natural rights that belong to every citizen."³⁰

Alexis de Tocqueville was the most important French thinker after Rousseau, and the last great liberal. In the nineteenth century, only Benjamin Constant could be compared to him in France, and as for the rest of Europe, only Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill were on the same level. Constant and Tocqueville belonged to a political tradition that came to an end with the death of the author of *Democracy in America*. The two major French figures of the second half of the nineteenth century, Taine and Renan, already belonged to a different school. Tocqueville, and in many ways Constant, although he is more problematic, form part of the rationalistic and humanistic tradition of the French Enlightenment. Against this, Taine continued and developed the tradition of Burke, adapting it to the conditions of the second half of the nineteenth century.

Like Burke, Taine went back in time, and in a few succinct pages painted a fascinating picture of the "terrible clash" which the two political traditions, that of the Enlightenment and its antithesis, had been moving toward in the two centuries preceding the French Revolution. That was how the violent encounter occurred that Taine described as a clash of civilizations. Taine dwelt on this confrontation that shook the world of the late eighteenth century in a remarkable chapter devoted to his great predecessor, Burke. Indeed, of all the readers of the *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Taine was undoubtedly the one whose work was closest to the spirit of Burke. The Germans Gentz and Rehberg were the first to understand Burke immediately and to grasp the long-term significance of his campaign against the Enlightenment, rationalism, and democracy. But Taine's attraction to Burke was far more significant. A century after the revolution, when classic liberal thought had yielded its finest products, *Democracy in America* and *On Liberty* by John Stuart Mill, Taine linked up with the work of the Irish pamphleteer.

Taine's reading of Burke is fascinating, but does not provide any real surprises. He said that for him, "this political clairvoyance verges on genius." His whole interpretation of the history of England versus that of France was based on the vision made famous by Burke in his campaign against the French eighteenth century. Thus, Taine showed how the English arrived on "the threshold of the French Revolution conservative and Christian, contrary to the freethinking and revolutionary French." With regard to this confrontation between the England of the established order and revolutionary France, he agreed with his great mentor that "never was the contrast between the two

spirits and the two civilizations more visible, and it was once again Burke who, with the superiority of a thinker and the hostility of an Englishman, took it upon himself to reveal it to us." A few pages further on, Taine came back to this idea: the French Revolution was not "the clash of two governments but of two civilizations and two doctrines. Two enormous machines, thrust forward with all their weight and at full speed, met face to face, not by chance but as a fatality. An entire age of literature and philosophy had provided the fuel that carried them and determined the course they were to take." Thus, one had "one crusade against another," and England, "scared, was as fanatical as France was enthusiastic." Taine showed Pitt refusing in the House of Commons "to have dealings with a nation of atheists," and he gave as examples of the "furious execration, invective and destruction" prevalent at that time two major texts of Burke: his "Letter to a Noble Lord" and his two "Letters on a Regicide Peace."³¹

How did one arrive at this clash of civilizations? Taine's demonstration repeated Burke's arguments virtually in their totality. It was not only as one-dimensional as that of the deputy for Bristol had been but as naïve as one could imagine. Only, if Burke had an excuse, that of the requirements of propaganda, one might have expected more of Taine in the mid-nineteenth century. Beginning with the English constitution, he said that contrary to appearances, it was not a collection of privileges—that is, sanctioned injustices—but an assemblage of contracts—that is, recognized rights. Each person had his right, great or small, which he defended with all his might and of which he would not give up one iota. It is through this sentiment, said Taine, that political liberty is secured and maintained: "It was this sentiment which, having deposed Charles I and James II, was expressed as principles in the declaration of 1688, and was developed in demonstrations by Locke." That was how Taine interpreted Locke: the *Two Treatises of Civil Government* were a codification of the freedoms enjoyed by the English and not a theory of natural rights. They are free men, he said, who "after negotiating between themselves still remain free. Their society does not establish their rights, it guarantees them." However, these guaranteed rights are historical rights, not natural rights; the men who founded the society came not out of the state of nature but out of a historical situation that went back at least to the thirteenth century. The rights of the British subjects, both great and small, were not "based on a philosophy, but on an act and a deed: I mean the Magna Carta, the Petition of Rights, habeas corpus and the whole body of laws voted in Parliament." And then he added something he considered important, though it would have brought a smile to the lips of Constant or Tocqueville, or even Carlyle: these rights "may have been unequal, but they were so by mutual agreement."³²

Thus, the constitution was a contract, and the English were ready to defend the rights it endorsed, at all times and with all their might. These men engaged passionately in public affairs, for they were their affairs, whereas in France they were only the affairs of the king and Madame de Pompadour. Politics, like religion, overflowed with activity, journals and pamphlets abounded, and political life was of an extraordinary vehemence. "There is something of Milton and Shakespeare in the tragic pomp, the passionate solemnity" one finds in Pitt, Chatham, Fox, Sheridan, or Burke. Finally, things were sorted out: "A hundred and fifty years of moral reflections and political struggles gave the English an attachment to positive religion and the established constitution." Those same "hundred and fifty years of politeness and general ideas convinced the French to place their confidence in human goodness and pure reason."³³

There follow eight pages of a concentrated exposé of the contents of *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, studded with long and well-chosen quotations. The total lack of critical sense one finds here should not surprise us: not only does Taine the historian feel no need in his *History of the English Literature* to question the correctness of the partisan attack launched by Burke in the midst of a daily political struggle, he falls into line with the pamphlet without hesitation. There is a world of difference between Taine's attitude and Tocqueville's harsh criticism of Burke. In his later works Taine went even further and adopted for himself the least sound aspects of the Burkian polemics, whose violent crusading style he imitated. Thus, Burke's hatred for the revolutionaries, both in form and content, came to life again in the writings of Taine and so was directly transmitted to the generation of the turn of the twentieth century.

The ideal England described by Burke was for Taine the model of a perfect regime. Taine quoted at length Burke's strongest passages, those representing the very heart of his thought. Taine's relationship to Burke recalls Renan's relationship to Herder: the two great names of late nineteenth-century France could only find their source of inspiration in the two cultures that were able to resist the French Revolution. "We have not been drawn and trussed, in order that we may be filled, like stuffed birds in a museum, with chaff and rags and paltry blurred shreds of paper about the rights of man." According to Taine, this quotation from Burke explains why the Enlightenment did not have the same effect in France and in England, why the two peoples were in a totally different mental state at the end of the eighteenth century and had opposing views of the political and social ideal. Thus, Taine could read with envy on the same page of the *Reflections* the following statement by Burke: "We fear God, we look up with awe to kings; with affection to parliaments; with duty to magistrates; with reverence to priests; and with respect to nobility."³⁴

The same applies when he goes on to enumerate—speaking on behalf of Burke and identifying himself with his hero—all the elements that distinguish a communitarian and historicist culture from French individualism: “We repudiate that limited and vulgar reason which separates man from his attachments and sees in him only the present, which separates man from society and counts him only as one of a herd.” “We despise”—here we have a direct quotation from Burke—“‘the metaphysics of a schoolboy and the mathematics and arithmetic of an exciseman’ whereby you carve up the state and rights into square miles and numerical units.” Thus, the constitution is not a fictitious contract invented by Rousseau but a real contract where all parties sustain the others and feel themselves to be sustained by them; it is wealth accumulated and transmitted from one generation to another. There is no society without a faith, which is the origin of justice; atheism is not only against the sense of reason of the English but also against their instincts, and they are Protestants not out of indifference but out of zeal. The rejection of the rights of the majority and of the sovereignty of the people is absolute. Here Taine quoted another important text: “A true natural aristocracy is not a separate interest in the state, or separate from it. When great multitudes act together, under that discipline of nature, I recognize the people, but when you separate the common sort of men from their chieftains so as to form them into an adverse army, I no longer know that venerable object called the people in such a disbanded race of deserters and vagabonds.” Finally, there was the horror of equality or of “systematic leveling,” which, after disorganizing society, brings to power “litigious attorneys and usurers set in action by shameless women of the lowest condition, keepers of hotels, clerks, shop-boys, hairdressers, fiddlers and dancers on the stage.” According to Burke, whose views Taine unhesitatingly adopted as his own, the destructive effect of this leveling is irreversible, and “if monarchy should ever again obtain an entire ascendancy in France, it will probably be the most completely arbitrary power that has ever appeared on earth.”³⁵

With the exception of Herder, no critic of the Enlightenment before Burke had attacked the very foundations of Enlightenment thought with such virulence. Contrary to a common idea largely accepted today, the importance of Edmund Burke was not that he was a pillar of the English liberal tradition but that, together with Herder, he was one of the two great founders of a new political tradition, that of a different modernity based on the primacy of the community and the subordination of the individual to the collectivity.³⁶ Taken as a whole, the work of the Irish pamphleteer sought to bury the achievements of the school of natural rights and the social contract, of which Locke’s *Second Treatise* was the most accomplished English expression as well as being one of

the foundations of the Enlightenment. Burke's concept of the political ideal in fact rejected the conception of the autonomy of man, and liberty was reduced to inherited privileges consecrated by usage. Where he was concerned, the rights of man as conceived by Locke did not exist.³⁷ But the major contribution of Burke, and of Herder before him, was to show that the dividing line passed between the adherents of a rational explanation of cultural, social, and political phenomena and those who favored an antirationalist approach.

Burke, considered one of the most important political thinkers since the French Revolution, did not write a single work of political theory. At the same time, all his intellectual and political work was accomplished within a clear and well-defined conceptual framework from which he never deviated. From his *Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, his sole theoretical work, written at the very beginning of his career, in 1757, in order to disparage rationalism and the idea of natural rights (this had no sequel but thirty years later contributed to the thinking of the time of the French Revolution), Burke never ceased to fight for the same cause.³⁸ In his *Reflections*, all the important ideas in his writings and political speeches of the 1770s and 1780s were taken up again and brought together, and sometimes reformulated for the requirements of the most important political struggle of his life. It is its quality as a condensation of a mass of writings produced for an immediate political purpose in which all the themes of blocked liberalism, based on a total, comprehensive rejection of the Enlightenment, are expressed that has given this work its immediate and lasting success and its mixed legacy. Occasional works that proved to be essential to posterity were not unusual in this period that changed the face of the earth.

"The author of the *Reflections*," said Burke, "has heard a great deal concerning the modern lights; but he has not yet had the good fortune to see much of them."³⁹ On the other hand, he did see that "a silent revolution in the moral world preceded the political, and prepared it," and that "the literary cabal had some years ago formed something like a regular plan for the destruction of the Christian religion."⁴⁰ It is his total rejection of the French Revolution without the slightest hesitation that persistently struck the imagination both of his contemporaries and of the following generations up to our own day. The first to take up the torch, in the very year of the death of the Irish pamphleteer, was de Maistre. When one reads de Maistre after Burke, one wonders by what optical illusion one is perceived as a respectable liberal, while the other appears as an archreactionary to some and as the first fascist to Isaiah Berlin. True, one does not find in Burke the famous Maistrian aphorisms — "war is divine" — or the images of carnage that abound in the *Soirées de Saint-Petersbourg*, but in his eagerness to call for force to drown the new French regime in

blood, his antirevolutionary messianism, his horror of the “specious philosophy” which had infected society to the very top and which he saw as the first cause of the French Revolution, he was hardly less vehement than the diplomat from Savoy.⁴¹ But in Burke, the revolution was not the product of the divine will; it was produced by “bad men,” the intellectuals who were destroying religion, who were undermining the legitimacy of the social order by depicting it as fundamentally unjust; it was produced by the bankruptcy of a ruling class weakened by its prosperity as well as by a false philosophy, and by the rise of another class with sinister intentions. On the one hand, Burke produced an apology for the Old Regime which even critics of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution like Carlyle, Renan, and Taine did not concur with, but which one finds again in de Maistre, and to some degree in Maurras: he saw Europe in the years preceding the French Revolution as the finest age of humanity. He did not believe, like Tocqueville, that the condition of the French peasant in the eighteenth century was worse than it had been in the thirteenth century.⁴² And on the other hand, he understood the conflicting character of French society and like Carlyle was aware of the decadence of its privileged classes.

Burke, the first great critic of intellectualism, was also the pioneer of total war, the first to understand that the philosophy of the Enlightenment could only be contained if it was opposed by an equally powerful counterphilosophy supported by bayonets no less sharp than those of the Jacobins. He was the first to launch an ideological campaign that he hoped would result in an invasion of France and the total destruction of the hated regime. This so-called liberal did not shrink from any means to eradicate the evil. He was the first proponent of the cordon sanitaire, the inventor of the idea that the ideological plague needed to be contained before one set about reconquering the territory. To his very last day, he never ceased to advocate an all-out war against revolutionary France, the destruction of the regime, the conquest of the land, and the restoration of the former regime as a measure of defense against the deadly threat that hung over the whole European order. For him, the French, having rejected the established elites, royalty, the aristocracy, and the clergy, had ceased to be a body, a corporation, and consequently a nation, or to constitute a state. The French nation was in Coblenz; all you had in Paris was mob rule.

This celebrated parliamentarian was also the man who ushered in a long tradition of radical disparagement of the revolutionary elites which one finds more or less unchanged throughout the nineteenth century, in Taine and in the Maurras school, and which extends to the violent criticism of the French Revolution on the occasion of its bicentenary at the end of the twentieth century. This applied both to the great names of Enlightenment philosophy

and to the members of the National Assembly, the leaders of the revolution, and the people rebelling against the natural order of things, that being the royal authority, the social hierarchies, and the privileges of the church. Throughout the 1790s, Burke displayed profound contempt both for the people with its ingratitude toward a regime that had assured the wealth and well-being of the country, and for the revolutionary figures. The hatred Burke displays for the philosophers of the Enlightenment and especially Rousseau is surpassed only by his hatred for the people of Paris storming Versailles and for the National Assembly issuing the Declaration of the Rights of Man.

All things considered, Burke began a tradition that de Maistre and the revolutionary conservatives of the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth in France and Germany, Maurras and his disciple in England, T. E. Hulme—the theoretician of vorticism—Paul de Lagarde, Julius Langbehn, and Spengler, continued. Burke has more affinity with the American neoconservatives of our time than with the authentic British conservatives of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, such as Lord Acton and Michael Oakeshott. For if Burke became famous, it was due as much to his appeal to the depth and richness of the real, the measurable, and the concrete versus “abstractions,” “chimeras,” “clouds,” and “illusions” as to his call for an out-and-out war against the cultural and ideological enemy.

Not only does Burke require us to accept established facts—what we have in front of us comes from far away, and for that reason what exists is legitimate and its legitimacy must be preserved—we owe to him the idea that any change in the existing order necessarily takes on the form of a utopia and can only end in disaster. He can also be credited with inventing the idea that any action against an order consecrated by history is a mortal sin against civilization and that to question the world as it is constitutes a declaration of a cultural war on the Christian West. It is again to him that we owe the idea of harnessing the masses that Max Weber was to develop more than a century after the greatest enemy of democracy that Britain produced until Carlyle. At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, the principle of harnessing the masses in order to make them into a weapon of war against democracy took the form of the revolutionary right. The objective remained the same; only the means evolved.

Burke’s campaign against the Enlightenment took place in three stages. Contrary to the accepted view, his stand against the revolution in Paris could surprise only those who have misunderstood both the meaning of his early philosophical writings and the purpose of his political actions, including those relating to America. Burke launched his offensive against the spirit of the Enlightenment from the time of the appearance of Rousseau’s *Second Dis-*

course in 1755. However, it was in 1791 that his hatred of Rousseau expressed itself in all its virulence and also in all its platitudes. Rousseau for him was the personification of evil, of all that was base, despicable, and dangerous to Christian morality and politics. A corrupter of morality, Rousseau was also a destroyer of taste and aristocratic prejudices. He embodied the greatest of all sins: pride. Was it not he who saw human convention as the basis of authority and sovereignty? For Burke, Rousseau, more than Voltaire, was the spiritual mentor of the men who had taken over France, for "in him . . . vice . . . was by far the most conspicuous." Burke condemned Rousseau for producing a theory of social equality based on his conception of liberty, and reproached him for postulating abstract natural rights unconnected with Christianity. It was under his influence that a tremendous revolution began that changed manners and morals and politics and society. Under the impact of his thought, the spirit of chivalry and "aristocratic prejudices" disappeared. Finally, we have the following characteristic description whose absurdity probably did not fail to be noticed by contemporaries: "There is a great dispute" among the leaders of the National Assembly as to "which of them is the best resemblance of Rousseau. In truth, they all resemble him. His blood they transfuse into their minds and into their manners. Him they study; him they meditate; him they turn over in all the time they can spare from the laborious mischief of the day, or the debauches of the night."⁴³

These lines belong to the third stage of Burke's war against the French Enlightenment. The first stage was that of the thirty years before 1789, the second stage produced the *Reflections*, and the third came immediately after his pamphlet, with his call for a crusade against the France of the Declaration of the Rights of Man until the evil was rooted out. The first laws passed by the revolutionaries confirmed the personal convictions he had expressed ever since his first attacks on Rousseau. His initial reading of Locke had already convinced him of his main idea: the emancipated thinking of Locke's *Second Treatise*, the subversive ideas of Rousseau's *Second Discourse* threatened an entire civilization, the great Christian civilization. As he saw it, the French Revolution was not an unfortunate accident but the implementation of the ideas of the eighteenth century: it was the first total revolution in history. If Burke had not been morally and intellectually prepared long before, if his aversion for the French Enlightenment had not already reached its maturity, the explosion of the *Reflections* would not have taken place with such violence and such rapidity. Burke, whom Tom Paine regarded, all things considered, as "a metaphysical man,"⁴⁴ did not fear ideas as such: he feared the new ideas, the "enlightened" ideas which, in order to better disparage them, he called "abstractions." He feared the ideas that presented the image or the model of a

future different from the existing order. In order to oppose the theoretical foundations of the school of natural rights, he formulated the principles of historicism. The fall of the Old Regime in June, the night of the fourth of August, the Declaration of the Rights of Man, the days of the fifth and sixth of October, provided proof of the power of enlightened thought, and hence of the threat of death that now hung over Europe. It is absurd to claim that Burke went forth to battle in 1789 because he foresaw the Terror and the long European War. He launched his attack upon France because he felt that the transformation of the States General into the National Assembly, the abolition of the ancient privileges, and the forced march of the king and queen from Versailles to Paris represented the swan song of the order of chivalry and signified the end of the only social and political order worthy of a civilized society.

In the same vein, this clash of civilizations, "one of the greatest spectacles the human eye has ever beheld," was defined by de Maistre as an "out-and-out struggle between Christianity and philosophism." As we shall see later, however, where de Maistre was concerned, the only Christianity deserving of the name was the one that existed before the Reformation. Protestantism, the source of individualism, was the counterpart of Jacobinism and was responsible for the deepest fall of "human reason" in history.⁴⁵ The sixteenth century saw an initial revolt, that of the individual against collective discipline, but it was only in the eighteenth century that "impiety really became a power. . . . From the palace to the hut, it infiltrated everywhere, it infested everything." But it was the intellectuals, those "who are called philosophes," who waged a "fight to the finish" against Christianity. All the scholars, all the men of letters, all the artists in France "from the beginning of the century" hatched "a real conspiracy against public morals," and after they had succeeded in winning over the aristocracy and the women, they "caused incredible devastation in France." They made their own contribution to the corruption and general degradation that was prevalent in France on the eve of the Revolution.⁴⁶ Taine said the same; Maurras was to reiterate these ideas to the letter.

The identity of the chief culprits was hardly surprising: Montesquieu, who was to Lycurgus what Charles Batteux was to Homer or Racine; Locke, who did a great wrong when he took it into his head to give laws to the Americans; Rousseau, one of the greatest sophists of his age and perhaps the most mistaken man in the world; and finally, the archenemy Voltaire. In five or six pages of the first volume of *Soirées de Saint-Pétersbourg*, de Maistre vented his spleen on the "corrupt spirit" of Voltaire: "See this abject countenance that modesty will never color, these two dead craters that still seem to be boiling over with licentiousness and anger . . . this frightful *rixtus* [gaping mouth] . . .

and these lips compressed with cruel malice like a spring about to release blasphemy and sarcasm!" Worst of all, "his works are not dead. They are alive, they are killing us!"⁴⁷

According to de Maistre, the "revolutionary torrent," which had its source in "one of the greatest afflictions of the human race," namely the Reformation, possessed two essential characteristics. Although it successively took two different directions, it never changed in its general character, and this character was "satanic" and "distinguished it from all that has been seen and perhaps from all that will be seen." Like Burke, de Maistre saw the French Revolution as "a unique *event* in history," and it was characterized by being "radically *bad* . . . the greatest degree of corruption ever known, absolute impurity." De Maistre believed there was a logic behind great revolutions; they were produced by a necessity, they were never fortuitous or accidental. His observation that "the French Revolution led men more than they led it" applied to more or less all great revolutions, but "it was never more strikingly illustrated than at that period." As a result of this "force that carried all before it," "the rascals that seemed to lead the revolution were no more than instruments." The men who were brought to the forefront never intended to set up the revolutionary government or to inaugurate the Terror. The republic came into existence without their knowing what they were doing: they were led into it imperceptibly by circumstances. Thus, "the most frightful despotism recorded in history" made its appearance. Indeed, there was never "a baser and more absolute tyranny" than this "plebeian tyranny."⁴⁸ Renan and Taine were to express themselves in a similar way, and this idea served as the basis of the totalitarian school after the Second World War.

Taine was of the same school of thought. The spirit was the same, the style often similar. The third book of the first part of *Origins* dealt with the formation of the revolutionary spirit through a "combination" of "scientific knowledge" and the "classical spirit"; the fourth dealt with its propagation. The assault on the established order was a total one and once again assumed the dimensions of a war against the great chivalrous and Christian civilization. The French Revolution was the product of this intellectual campaign: reason set out to destroy tradition, and this "great expedition" took place in "two stages." The first was the one in which Voltaire led the "philosophical army" against "hereditary prejudice." Montesquieu joined this campaign, and the two of them, describing the great diversity of customs, religions and sects, regimes and social organizations in Europe and elsewhere, both in their own time and in antiquity, undermined the basis of the legitimacy of the existing order in France. Taine, we see, was no fanatic of cultural pluralism. He had a clearly established order of priorities. "From that moment, the spell was bro-

ken. The ancient institutions lost their divine prestige; they were now no more than the works of men, the products of their place and time, born of expediency and convention. Skepticism entered through every breach." Voltaire thought that half the customs and practices of an "organized nation" were abuses. Where Christianity was concerned, the skepticism immediately turned "into pure hostility, into a long drawn-out and bitter polemic." Finally, all that remained of it was deism.⁴⁹

The second "philosophical expedition" was made up of two armies. The first was that of the encyclopédistes, of Diderot and d'Alembert, and included Paul Henry Thiry d'Holbach, Helvétius, Condorcet, André Lalande, and Volney: all very different from one another, but united in their loathing of tradition and their common war cry of return to nature and the abolition of society. The second army was "the battalion of Rousseau and the socialists." Here Taine devoted several eloquent and often perspicacious pages, which seem to have come straight out of Carlyle, to the main enemy, and fixed for a century the pattern of criticism of this "strange, original and superior man, but one who, from childhood, bore within him a grain of madness. . . . A true poet and a sick poet, who instead of seeing things saw his dreams and lived a novel." He was "a man" who "summoned the generations with the trumpet of the Last Judgment." Taine believed that the view of humanity and the outside world held by Rousseau reflected his view of himself. As he ascribed his weaknesses and vices purely to circumstances, he thought the same applied to mankind. Nature is good; there are no faults in the human being, it is society that is responsible for all misfortunes. Taine multiplied quotations and famous references to the ills of society—"Nature made man happy and good; society depraves him and makes him miserable"—in order to show how a spiritualist doctrine was re-created around this central idea. Personal enjoyment is not sufficient for man; he also needs a clear conscience and the sentiments of the heart. None of his impulses and inclinations, whether those that are specific to him or those he has in common with the animals, are bad in themselves. The evil is in the way that men are governed. Remove these barriers, the products of tyranny and routine, and the sound and healthy character of nature will reassert itself, and man will once again be not only happy but also virtuous.⁵⁰

This principle, said Taine, was the starting point of the attack. A historian of ideas imbued with the teachings of Burke and Carlyle, Taine analyzed the rebellion that Rousseau began. His one-dimensional interpretation was not very original, but this is not the main thing. It is often the most banal interpretations that strike the imagination and become accepted ideas.

For Taine, Rousseau's attack was the most thoroughgoing of all, a comprehensive attack that went infinitely further than that of Montesquieu or

Voltaire, or even than that of Diderot or d'Holbach. It was an assertion of the right to immediate happiness, inseparable from the regained nobility of the human being, it was a total rejection of the existing state of things. In a few concentrated pages, Taine quoted the classic texts of the Rousseau of the *Second Discourse* and the *Social Contract* that made him the boast of the republican camp and an object of hatred for the adherents of the old order. These texts stated that political society was the origin of "the unjust contract . . . between the crafty rich and the swindled poor" that "in the name of legitimate ownership consecrated the usurpation of the soil." Today, said Rousseau, this contract is even more unjust, for "as a result . . . a handful of people are glutted with superfluities while a famished multitude lack the bare necessities." Taine went on to show how, according to Rousseau, this fundamental inequality, which constantly increased with the passage of time, became the basis of arbitrary rule until "the hereditary and perpetual subjection of the people seemed to be of divine right like the hereditary and perpetual despotism of the king." The illegitimacy of the existing order thus having been established, what remained was to assert that rights should exist only through consent and that finally it was enough for an adult person to use his power of reasoning for this so-called legitimate authority to be overthrown. Thus, the foundations of all institutions were undermined, and the prevailing philosophy denied any authority to custom, religion, or the state.⁵¹

Thus, in the name of the sovereignty of the people, Rousseau (in his *History of the French Revolution*, Carlyle spoke of "the Gospel according to Jean-Jacques") denied the government all power and all authority, made those elected by the people into mere representatives, and its magistrates into "forced laborers of the State, more ill-regarded than a valet or an unskilled worker." A government that attempted to fulfill its function would immediately be seen as a usurper against whom insurrection would be not only the most sacred of rights but also a duty. "The dogma of the sovereignty of the people, interpreted by the masses, was to produce a perfect anarchy until the time that, interpreted by the leaders, it would produce the perfect despotism."⁵² Here we touch the heart of a fundamental aspect of Taine's analysis that at the end of the nineteenth century was to play an essential role in the fight against the principle of the autonomy of the individual and the democracy that was derived from it. For it was Hippolyte Taine, for whom the French Revolution was the greatest cultural disaster of all time and whom Nietzsche saw as the greatest historian of the age, who was behind the historical thinking of the critics of the Enlightenment until the mid-twentieth century.

Taine, in a modern idiom, and with experience of the revolutions of 1848, the Second Republic, the defeat of 1870, and the Paris Commune behind him,

developed the promising idea that the theory of the sovereignty of the people has two aspects. On the one hand, it can lead to an extreme weakening of the executive — “a perpetual demolition of the government” — and on the other hand, it brings about “a boundless dictatorship of the State.”⁵³ This is the immediate source of the idea that the French Revolution is the origin of all twentieth-century dictatorships. For the historian Jacob Talmon, as for the philosopher Isaiah Berlin and for other scholars of the generation of the cold war, the person most responsible for the rise of “totalitarian democracy” is undoubtedly Rousseau.

Like Burke, Taine traced democratic despotism to the idea of a social contract, conceived as the original and only source of all rights. As soon as this contract between “perfectly equal and perfectly free beings, abstract beings, mathematical units as it were, all of the same value” was drawn up, “all other pacts” — that is to say, the existing situation, rigged up by all the critics of the Enlightenment from Burke onward as the “historic pact” — “were null and void.” Thus, the “new State” came into being, in which none of the former institutions, church, family, property, could claim any rights. This state was not a state on the American model, a sort of mutual insurance company. Taine had no sympathy for a state conceived as “a simple utilitarian machine,” an “American impertinence” as Renan called it, but nothing could be worse than the “democratic monastery that Rousseau built on the model of Sparta and Rome,” in which “the individual was nothing” and “the state was everything.” This “firstborn, only son and sole representative of reason” came into being the moment that “the *Social Contract* substituted the sovereignty of the people for the sovereignty of the king.”⁵⁴

Taine saw the alienation of the individual and his subjection to the monster known as popular sovereignty as the aim of all Rousseau’s work. He multiplied famous quotations in order to demonstrate the total submission of the individual necessitated by the founding of such a state. Before the social contract, man was an owner of possessions, but by means of the social contract he alienated himself and became obligated to the state. “In our lay monastery,” he said, “all that a monk possesses is a revocable gift of the monastery’s.” But this monastery is also a “seminary” where the training of the citizen is the principal concern of the state. Taine shows what Rousseau considered the ideal training of a citizen to be: the one envisaged by Plato in his *Republic*, the one envisaged by Lycurgus, and the one practiced in Sparta. Its objective would be to make each individual an integral part of a whole, existing only for and through the totality. Through their training and their way of life, the future citizens would be accustomed from earliest childhood to recognize the decisions of the assembled people as the only legitimate ones. In order to give a full picture of the

horrors in store, Taine turned to Étienne-Gabriel Morelly's *Code de la nature*, which complemented Rousseau's work. Morelly, whom Taine rightly considered a marginal figure but who was useful to him in this context, was one of the few people Talmon used to demonstrate his thesis in his *Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*. In this way one saw the outlines of the totalitarian state. The term itself would only appear half a century later, but the principles underlying this new phenomenon were clearly enunciated. The principal interest of the new state, said Taine, "would always be to create dispositions that would enable it to endure . . . to uproot in people's hearts the passions that oppose it and to implant in their hearts the passions that favor it . . . In a monastery, the novices have to be educated to be monks, or else, when they are grown up, the monastery will no longer exist."⁵⁵

Finally, and this, perhaps, is the main point, this secular monastery would have a religion, "a lay religion," in other words, a dominant ideology that would have sole legitimacy. This was the other great idea that the totalitarian school of the 1950s took from Taine's *Origins*. The special characteristic of the new state would be its hostility "to any associations other than itself. They are rivals, they disturb it; they capture the will and mislead the votes of its members." All opinions, all ideologies, all political and social organizations that do not directly serve the state serve to disrupt social unity and are therefore to be proscribed. That is how Taine interpreted the meaning of the general will. The texts he used to support this view were the famous passages in the *Social Contract* that were to be used by three generations of critics of the Enlightenment: "It is important that there should be no separate society in the state, and that no citizen should have any opinion other than that sanctioned by it."⁵⁶

Rousseau's critics, from the beginning to the 1950s, have laid emphasis on the first part of this statement. In its continuation, they have seen the reduction of the body of citizens to a human dustheap, defenseless against the state mechanism. Taken as a whole, this text seems to them to be laying the foundations of left-wing totalitarianism. Contrary to this, Kant understood the idea of the general will quite differently. He believed that Rousseau's intention was to make certain that each individual could participate in the formation of the general will and would only have to obey the laws in whose formulation he himself had participated. In other words, according to Kant, Rousseau was laying the foundations of democracy.

In his exposition, Taine now passed without any transition from Rousseau to Louis-Sébastien Mercier, the author of *L'an deux mille quatre cent quarante* (The Year Two Thousand Four Hundred and Forty), and a hundred other books. An "indefatigable scribbler" for some, he was the "Rousseau of the gutter" and a "caricature of Diderot" for others.⁵⁷ Taine thought that this

member of the National Convention not only complemented Rousseau but was the logical and virtually inevitable continuation of him. He summed up Mercier's thinking as follows: "There is a civil religion . . . whose articles must be determined by the sovereign, not precisely like religious doctrines but as feelings towards society without which it is impossible to be a good citizen or a loyal subject." The greatest of all the enemies of this "new legislator" would be Christianity, for "the Christian's homeland is not of this world."⁵⁸ In modern terms, this would mean that the new state would not tolerate the existence of any political party, church, or social or cultural organization that did not depend on it and was not in its service. Since Karl Popper wrote *The Open Society and Its Enemies* on the eve of the Second World War, a system of government of this type has usually been described as a totalitarian system. That is also how Hippolyte Taine saw it from the 1870s onward. No matter if his interpretation of Rousseau was partial, fragmentary, and selective: for Taine, Rousseau was the prototype of the philosophe who filled the France of the Old Regime with the revolutionary spirit, and the entire revolution was the product of the work of the philosophes. For Taine as for his successors at the time of the cold war, first of all Rousseau and then Morelly and Mercier established the intellectual structures of totalitarianism.

Taine's complaints against the spirit of the Enlightenment were essentially a repetition of the arguments used by Burke and Herder, and they nourished the thinking of the post-1945 generation. It is strange to see the eagerness with which Taine took up the position of the German writer in criticizing both the French language as it had developed in the seventeenth century and the classical spirit. Taine was concerned with defending a civilization, not his country. His condemnation of the *Grand Siècle* was absolute, as harsh as Herder's in his *Journal* or in *Another Philosophy of History*. He said that the language of the Académie française and of the salons was really an instrument of explanation, demonstration, and persuasion, an instrument that a century later developed into "a scientific method analogous to arithmetic or algebra." "In its concern for purity, in its disdain for literal terms and for lively turns of phrase . . . the classic style is incapable of fully depicting and recording the infinite and varied details of experience." It is unable to express passion, the living individual, the particular, the specific. It can only express a portion of reality, a minute portion, and with this style one cannot translate the Bible, or Dante, or Shakespeare: "Read Hamlet's monologue in Voltaire and see what is left of it!" The same applies to Homer and Fénelon and even to eighteenth-century novelists. Fielding, Defoe, and Richardson have words that are too strong, scenes that are too bold; they contain familiarities, forthright expressions that are offensive to the French. By its very nature, the classical style is always in danger of

seizing on *commonplaces* for materials,” with a result that “is usually small, worthless or dangerous.” For this reason, Taine, like Herder, regretted that French was the dominant language in Europe, for the domination of French, the language of quasi-mathematical method, meant the victory of “the favorite organ of reason, or rather of a certain reason, reasoning reason, that wants to think with the least possible preparation and the greatest possible convenience . . . that cannot or will not embrace the fullness and complexity of real things.”⁵⁹ Judging from Taine’s writings, no less than from Herder’s, one might think that the French of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was a dead language and the people of the Enlightenment were pedantic robots, without soul or vitality.

Criticism of the French language, classicism, and reason were the three prongs of Taine’s attack on the culture of the Enlightenment. Moreover, the classical age “had no sense of history” and presumed that “man was everywhere the same,” so that when the revolution came, the French had no “idea of the human creature as he really is . . . He was always represented as a mere cipher . . .,” a “dispenser of phrases” made into a “dispenser of votes.” Finally, there were “never any facts, only abstractions.” Thus, the myth came about that Enlightenment thought disdained history, tradition, and heredity in favor of reason, which was incapable of understanding the true individual but whose authority increased with the discoveries of science. According to Taine, only Germany, the land of the Herderian Anti-Enlightenment, had a historical sense. This myth facilitated the task of depicting the man of the Enlightenment in all his platitudes, in all his banality, in all his aridity. In his case, “the form is finer than the substance is rich,” no poetry can come into being, lyrical poetry cannot ripen, nor can epic poetry. Taine cited the testimony of Voltaire, who admitted that “of all polite nations, ours is the least poetic.”⁶⁰ One never “hears the involuntary cry of a live sensation,” and in the theater, from Corneille and Racine to Marivaux and Beaumarchais, one sees only people of society. Classical art is incapable of seizing the particularity of a living personality; it creates not real individuals but general types; it is hardly concerned with specific circumstances, the time and place of one person rather than another. Thus, an “abstract world” is created, or it is “man in himself” that is depicted in “the pomp and elegance” of the verses of Corneille and Racine. Even in Molière “individuality is suppressed, the face at times becomes a theatrical mask.” And Taine concludes: “There is thus an original weakness in the classical spirit.” Kept in its proper proportions, it produced its purest masterpieces, but worsening over time, in the eighteenth century it was incapable of representing “living reality, real individuals as they exist in nature and in history.”⁶¹ In this abstract and artificial world, there were neither individ-

uals—complex organisms of superimposed characteristics and intermixed and intermingled particularities, real individuals in all the complexity of their circumstances—nor time and space, nature or history.

The eighteenth century rejected hereditary prejudice, abolished the past, abandoned religion for reason, and ignoring experience, continually fell back on general and abstract principles. But “man only imagines anything through his experience,” and “reasoning reason” could not conceive that truth can only “be expressed in legend.” As a result, “not seeing people, they failed to recognize institutions,” and “not understanding the past, they failed to understand the present.” Thus, the Old Regime ran to its perdition: twenty million people whose mental state was hardly more advanced than in medieval times could only live in the social edifice that was that of the Middle Ages, but one that was fitted out: a cleaned-up building in which, after windows were inserted and fences were constructed, “the foundations, fabric and general distribution” were preserved. But this the eighteenth century was not capable of doing. Only Montesquieu, “the most balanced of all the spirits of the age,” understood this, but isolated and lacking influence, he walked as though on “burning coals.” Classic reason, for its part, no longer saw “the ancient, living roots of ancient institutions”; it regarded “hereditary prejudice as pure prejudice; tradition no longer had any claims.” Armed in this way, reason took the “administration of souls” from tradition and assured “the reign of truth.” All barriers were overturned, and modern man was born, actuated by two sentiments, one democratic and the other philosophical, rising “from the depths of his poverty and ignorance . . . and removing the weight of established society and accepted dogmas.”⁶²

According to Taine, the new philosophical spirit, the skepticism that had taken the place of deism, first of all reached the aristocracy: “The salons opened up to political philosophy and then to the *Social Contract*, the *Encyclopédie* and the preachings of Rousseau, Mably, Holbach, Raynal and Diderot. In 1759 d’Agenson, very excited, already thought the final moment was near.” Taine quoted him: “A philosophical wind of free and anti-monarchical government is blowing this way. . . . Perhaps the *Revolution* would meet with less opposition than we think; it would take place *with applause*.” In a footnote, Taine added, “The night of the fourth of August 1789 seems to be predicted here.” Next, the Third Estate was won over: “The dogmas of liberty and equality infiltrated and penetrated the whole literate class. . . . It was the spirit of Rousseau, the ‘republican spirit.’ It won over the entire middle class: artists, employees, priests, doctors, attorneys, lawyers, scholars, journalists.” That is how the Jacobin victory finally came about. Thanks to the cheap and abundant revolutionary literature, “the eighteenth-century philosophy came downstairs and

spread.” If on the first floor, in beautiful gilded apartments, these “ideas” were only “drawing-room sallies,” elsewhere in the house the lit flames found “piles of wood accumulated over a long period,” and in the cellars “a powder magazine was fully prepared.”⁶³

Taine’s accusations were repeated by Renan; they were identical to those of Carlyle and were hardly different from those of Herder and Burke a century earlier or of the neoconservatives a century later. The same arguments were put forward with the same earnestness, for the problematics did not really change. The eighteenth century, said Renan, consumed by “the strange fire that was within it,”⁶⁴ the sickness, depravity, and decadence it emanated, imposed a “yoke of narrow-spiritedness”; it had “a very limited range of ideas.” Thus, the Enlightenment was the cause of the “great moral weakening” in all areas that had taken place in France for a century. The word “poison” used a great deal by Carlyle recurs in Renan in reference to the Enlightenment: “The poison, though taken in small doses, has its effect.”⁶⁵ The artificial and ahistorical revolutionary legislation, leveling down and destructive of faith, was the concrete result of this process, but the ravages of materialism were felt in all areas of intellectual and political life. France had rotted away with mediocrity and egalitarian abstractions. Moreover — and here one seems to be overhearing Herder word for word — on the one hand “that century had no understanding of the nature of spontaneous activity,” and on the other, it was a time that “only had a good understanding of itself, and judged all others by itself.”⁶⁶

Things came to a head with the French Revolution, which according to Renan very soon became “a low terrorist democracy that turned into a military despotism and a means of enslavement for all peoples.” As with Taine, one arrived at a view of the Revolution that was especially popular in writings on the historical origins of the troubles of the contemporary world in the period of the cold war. “Terrorist democracy” and “totalitarian democracy” are one and the same thing. In the same way, Renan showed how “the failed experiment of the Revolution cured us of the cult of reason.”⁶⁷ This way of thinking reappeared in his 1890 preface to *L’Avenir de la science* in which he rejected the spirit of the original edition of the work.⁶⁸

For this reason, here we must make a short diversion. On the one hand, the young Renan viewed the French Revolution very differently from the Renan of 1890. But on the other hand, he already saw that the problematics of his time went back to the preceding century. Like Carlyle, he too was fascinated by “the tremendous phenomenon represented by the whole of the eighteenth century,” that “century that changed our world” and remained “our eternal model” inasmuch as it inspired “intense convictions without turning into a

sect or religion, and while remaining purely science and philosophy.” The eighteenth century, he said, “had neither Racine nor Bossuet, and yet it was far superior to the seventeenth. Its literature was its science, its criticism; it was the preface to the *Encyclopédie*, it was the luminous essays of Voltaire.” For it was in the eighteenth century that humanity, “after having walked for long ages in the night of infancy, without any self-awareness . . . took possession of itself.” Thus, “the French Revolution was humanity’s first attempt to grasp its own reins and guide itself,” and “the true history of France began in 89; all that preceded it was a slow preparation for 89 and is only of interest for that reason.” In 1849, at the start of his career, when politics did not yet have the importance for him that it was to have twenty years later, he could have a truly Kantian way of speaking: “The French Revolution . . . was the moment corresponding to the one in which a child, led until that time by spontaneous instincts, caprice and the will of others, comes forward as a free person, moral and responsible for his acts.” Man’s reaching maturity was the doing of the revolution. Renan looked at the eighteenth century with the eyes of a young scientist, fascinated by the principle that “the world must be governed by reason,” by “that incomparable audacity, that marvelous, bold attempt to reform the world in accordance with reason.” In note 7 corresponding to this passage, at the end of the work, Renan wrote: “The Declaration of Rights in the constitution of ’91 was particularly characteristic. This was the whole eighteenth century: control of nature and what is established, analysis, a thirst for clarity and manifest reason.” In another note on the same page, Renan expressed himself in a way that would be difficult to imagine in 1870: “The year 1789 will be a holy year in the history of mankind.” The Renan of 1849 had no doubt about it: “For my part, I imagine that in five hundred years, the history of France will begin with the *Jeu de Paume*.” A few pages before, there was a passage very characteristic of the view of the revolution of the generation born after the fall of Napoleon: “We have not seen great things, so we take everything back to the Revolution. That is our horizon, the hill of our infancy, the end of our world.” Renan claimed that the French Revolution was a phenomenon unparalleled since the Great Invasions, and the like of which would probably not be seen for centuries. It was “the most marvelous of epics in action,” but “that horizon was a mountain” and could not serve as a criterion for the future.⁶⁹

Renan went still further. He thought that the renewal that the intellectual achievement of the eighteenth century made necessary could not have taken place peacefully. To think that the sudden destruction of the established order could have been avoided is an illusion: one would never have dared to abolish privileges, the religious orders, a mass of other abuses: “Nothing is done in a state of calm: one only dares in a revolution.” In the march forward, violence is

inevitable: "There are men who are necessarily detested and cursed by their age. The future explains them and coldly states: such people were also needed." And finally, "Fact is the criterion of right. The French Revolution was not legitimate because it happened: it happened because it was legitimate."⁷⁰

The events of June 1848 and the coup d'état of 1851 caused Renan to see things in a different perspective. Well before the War of 1870, he came to see the time of the Enlightenment as the origin of the sickness that was eroding France. Even in the text of 1849, however, the praises heaped on the eighteenth century and the French Revolution should not mislead us, for all the reserves and criticisms that would increase with the passage of time were already clearly stated there. In the same breath and on the same page in which he lavishes the praises, Renan elegantly lists his condemnations. The greatest revolution, said Renan, was the first one "made by philosophers." Condorcet, Mirabeau, Robespierre provide the first example of theoreticians seeking to "govern humanity in a reasonable and scientific way." All the members of the elected assemblies were, "almost without exception, disciples of Voltaire and Rousseau." The results were not long in coming: "A chariot driven by such hands" inevitably "fell into an abyss and crashed." The way societies develop is in fact infinitely complex, and institutions that at first sight seem absurd are not really as ridiculous as they appear: "Prejudices have their reasons that one does not see." The rejection of prejudices in their totality had an analytical clarity that the eighteenth century liked, but these abuses were an integral part of the "old edifice of humanity": the criticism of the first reformers was "on several points acrimonious, obtuse toward spontaneity, overproud of the facile discoveries of reflective reason."⁷¹

After 1870 the tone became harsher and the French Revolution is described in *La Réforme* as a phenomenon contrary to nature and contrary to history that could only give rise to decadence, mediocrity, and where France was concerned, a weakening and the loss of its place in the world. It was twice defeated by "the Prussian aristocracy": once in the period 1792 to 1815 and the second time in the period from 1848 to 1870.⁷² This interpretation is characteristic of the view of the nineteenth century held by the critics of the French Enlightenment. The war that raged in the quarter-century between Valmy and Waterloo was seen by Renan and Taine as a war between two cultures, two conceptions of man and society, two philosophies of history. The Restoration and the July monarchy were an interval in which France, again acquiring a royal house, seemed to pull itself together. The February and June revolutions, the Second Republic, and its heir the Second Empire provided the proof that the sickness had affected the entire organism, and the process of decomposition begun in 1789 would continue.

Carlyle also belonged to the school of thought that reflected on the bank-

ruptcy of the chivalrous, Christian Western civilization — an organic, communitarian civilization. It was a way of thinking that was to determine the nature of the critique of Enlightened modernity for one and a half centuries. For Carlyle, the old society drew its strength from Christianity. It was full of vigor and vitality, a heroic society. But it was also a collectivity that was superior to the modern world in an area where it is generally not given any kind of pre-eminence: the church and its monasteries gave noble and pious souls a full opportunity for social advancement.⁷³ The world of the Middle Ages had been disintegrating for three or four centuries before finally giving way in the years preceding the French Revolution. The social dissolution and desegregation that marked the eighteenth century and the revolution was only the last stage in the decomposition of a great civilization and a reaction against this decomposition. In Carlyle's view, the French Revolution was not, as Burke thought, a sudden cataclysm that overtook a flourishing world and the product of a great conspiracy, but the culmination of the decomposition of an organic civilization that had succumbed to the onslaught of individualism. De Maistre saw things in the same way. The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the Reformation had contributed to this process: in reality, one has to go back to Luther to find the starting point of the collapse caused by the degeneration of the church. The decay of "the thing which still called itself the Christian Church" brought it about that "the inward being wrong, all outward went ever more and more wrong." Thus, faith became atrophied and doubt and incredulity found its way into everything. When finally "the builder cast away his plummet" and disregarded the laws of gravitation, all that remained of the walls that had collapsed was chaos, and one arrived at the French Enlightenment and the revolution. The world of the "withered, unbelieving, secondhand Eighteenth Century" became one of "artificial pasteboard figures and productions."⁷⁴

"It was a strange age, that of Louis XV; in several points, a novel one in the history of mankind. In regard to its luxury and depravity, to the high culture of all merely practical and material faculties, and the entire torpor of all the purely contemplative and spiritual, this era considerably resembles that of the Roman Emperors." And further on, one finds: it was "an age without nobleness, without high virtues or high manifestations of talent; an age of shallow clearness, of polish, self-conceit and all forms of *Persiflage*." But what was still more serious was that "this era, called of philosophy, was in itself but a poor era," "amongst the most barren of recorded ages. Indeed, the whole trade of our Philosophes was directly the opposite of invention; it was not that they stood there; but to criticise, to quarrel with, to rend in pieces, what had been already produced." In short, they practiced a "mean trade."⁷⁵ For Carlyle, "meanness" was undoubtedly the word that expressed most exactly his deep

contempt for the age of Louis XV, the definition of a world by which he embraced both the Old Regime and the Enlightenment. In this, while also speaking of an “enlightened, sceptical” age, he differed from Burke and was much closer to the men of the turn of the twentieth century.⁷⁶ One can say in fact that Carlyle was a bridge between the aristocratic and the plebeian rejection of the Enlightenment.

In its degradation and perversion, in its selfishness and its materialism, in its utilitarianism, in its charlatans who had taken the place of heroes, in its skepticism that was “not intellectual Doubt alone, but moral Doubt,” the eighteenth century, according to Carlyle, resembled the end of the Roman Empire.⁷⁷ The Muslims would have had no trouble in calling this period, like their own ages in which the knowledge of God was absent, the “period of Ignorance.” Skepticism, he said, is a “chronic atrophy and disease of the whole soul,” it is “the black malady and life-foe, against which all teaching and discoursing since man’s life began has directed itself.” In those days, the long decline necessarily ended in a “*caput-mortuum* . . . the body-politic, long since deprived of its vital circulating fluids, had now become a putrid carcase, and fell in pieces to be the prey of ravenous wolves.”⁷⁸ In this faithless age “in which Wonder, Greatness, Godhood could not now dwell,” “already we discern . . . all the elements of the French Revolution.”⁷⁹

The principal figure in “the most parched season of Man’s History, in the most parched spot of Europe” was Voltaire, who “seemed the Wisest, Best,” a man who “could drag Mankind at his chariot wheels.” In Carlyle’s opinion, Voltaire, despite the veneration in which he was held by the whole of France “from the Queen Antoinette to the custom-agent at the Porte St. Denis,” could not be considered either a philosopher or a hero. He represented the mediocrity of his period: “There is not, that we know of, one great thought in all his six-and-thirty quartos.” He was guilty of superficiality, levity, egoism, ambition, and craving for power. He was preeminently a man of the world, a Parisian to his fingertips, polite, attractive, cultivated, cold, ironic, with a prosaic view of things.⁸⁰ He was not without qualities, however: he was sometimes capable of perceiving goodness, beauty, and truth, he defended Calas, he “maintained a certain indestructible humanity of nature, a soul never deaf to the cry of wretchedness”: “All this is well . . . but is still far from constituting a ‘great character.’” This was also Diderot’s essential weakness: like Voltaire who lacked character, he was not courageous, and “with all his high gifts, had a rather female character . . . with little of manful steadfastness, considerateness, invincibility”: his Parisian milieu made his life easy and flattered him, and he recoiled “in horror from an earnest Jean-Jacques who . . . imagined . . . that truth was there as a thing to be told, as a thing to be acted.”⁸¹ Even Taine

considered this verdict unfair, puerile, and coarse where Voltaire was concerned; it was virtually slander. Carlyle as a historian was guilty of a real sin: he had judged him from the exterior. Taine did not say this explicitly, but that is what his criticism implied.

If Carlyle was of one opinion with regard to Voltaire, this is not exactly true in the case of Rousseau. Like Nietzsche's, Carlyle's view of Rousseau was one of great ambiguity, full of contradictions. On the one hand, he saw Rousseau as a spiritual giant endowed with "a spark of real heavenly fire," and as one of his gallery of heroes from which Voltaire and Diderot were excluded: he "did . . . touch upon Reality, struggle towards Reality; was doing the function of a prophet to his time." But at the same time, he was not entirely a hero-man of letters, as he lacked "depth or width," was selfish and "a very vain man, hungry for the praises of men." With his "morbid, excitable, spasmodic" character, he was not "a strong man." And yet "he could not be hindered from setting the world on fire. The French Revolution found its Evangelist in Rousseau": "What could the world, the governors of the world do with such a man? Difficult to say what the governors of the world could do with him! What he could do with them is unhappily clear enough — guillotine a great many of them."⁸²

Voltaire and Rousseau, Voltaire no less than Rousseau, were also Herder's great enemies. With *Another Philosophy of History* (1774), another modernity was born and the Christian, antirationalist, and antiuniversalist reaction to the Enlightenment asserted itself for the second time (the first time was with Vico, who was then unknown). The tone was a little different in *Ideas for a Philosophy of the History of Mankind* written between 1784 and 1791, but the argument was essentially the same. The idea that humanity is directed not by itself but by Providence, that the divine must be embodied in matter in order to rule it and to reveal itself in it at the same time as being concealed in it, was an inheritance from Luther, and it is from this that Herder, like Luther, derived the concept of the primacy of history.⁸³ In the pamphlet of 1774, biblical reminiscences and allusions and direct quotations from the Bible abound, the general tone is sermonlike, the style is often apocalyptic, and the apostrophe "My brethren" recurs many times throughout the text. Speaking of the fall of Rome, Herder at the beginning of the second part of the pamphlet of 1774 indulged in the following flight of oratory: "Peoples and continents lived under the tree, and now, when the voice of the holy watcher called 'Hew it down!' — how great was the void!"⁸⁴ "But, brethren," he exclaimed in the midst of a passage extolling the glory of the Creator who, he said, was "the first and only actor," the only one "to enter every moral or immoral effect of an action . . . , let us under no circumstances abandon the poles around which everything revolves: truth, the recognition of goodwill, the happiness of man-

kind!” For “in the utmost elevation of the sea in which we are now floating through treacherous and foggy light that may be more dangerous than pitch darkness” — the allusion to the Enlightenment is all the more obvious in that this passage comes immediately after a violent attack on Voltaire and his age — “let us be diligent in our search for the stars, those reference points for all direction, security, and tranquility.”⁸⁵ Max Rouché was not wrong in saying that *Another Philosophy of History* may be regarded as the Apocalypse according to Herder, with the author playing the role of the Angel of the Lord who, with a holy enthusiasm often replaced by a holy anger, reveals the mystery of history to humanity. The historian, according to Herder, as according to Hamann, is a divine seer, a prophet of the past, and he based himself in this on Lutheran and evangelical ideas.⁸⁶

The view of history as the product of a divine plan of which humanity is at once the object and the unconscious instrument, the Lutheran character of *Another Philosophy of History*, are also interesting in that they created a new scale of values. Herder rebelled against the so-called Eurocentrism, the pride and sense of superiority of the eighteenth century; he reproached the historiography of his time for being an apologist for his age, and he observed that to that end it was “mocking and debasing the customs of all peoples and ages.” That was the “philosophy of the century,” that “dull, short-sighted, all-despising, exclusively self-satisfied philosophy, which accomplishes nothing”! The Orientals, Greeks, and Romans did not have this contempt for the Other. Against this, eighteenth-century Europe boasted of its virtues and its superiority in all areas: “We are the doctors, the redeemers, the enlighteners, the new creators — the times of mad fever have passed!” Was there really “more virtue” in Europe “than ever before in the world? Why? Because there is more enlightenment — but I believe that for that very reason, there must rather be less.” After all this, he came to the conclusion, stated at the very beginning of the book, that far from being able to claim any superiority, the eighteenth century was on the contrary an “age of decay.”⁸⁷ From now on Herder was going to work for a rehabilitation of the Middle Ages and of the historical periods and cultures whose value was disputed by the anti-Christian Enlightenment.

In the campaign against the school of natural rights, rationalism, and the autonomy of the individual, against the first beginnings of liberalism in the sense understood by Locke, and after him by Bentham and Tocqueville, Herder played as important a role as Burke and often an even more important one. The convergence of the two writers, who do not seem to have known one another, derives from the logic of their presuppositions on the limits of reason. Burke’s critique of the Enlightenment was based on the same postulate as Herder’s: the inability of human reason to grasp the meaning of history and determine its

evolution by organizing politics, society, and the state in such a way as to serve the individual. Like Herder, Burke defended prejudices, like him he considered the guidance of history by Providence the sole source of legitimacy, like him he saw prejudice as the pillar of any human order worthy of the name. Like Herder, he defended the existing religion and social order, but unlike him he also defended the established political order. Herder's social conformity was due to the fact that the existing order was what remained of medieval Europe. For Burke, the British regime, the historical freedoms of the British were the ideal. For Herder, on the other hand, Prussian authoritarianism with its deistic and cosmopolitan inclinations, its philosophe-king receiving Voltaire, could not be a model of perfection.

Both of them represented the two aspects of the second modernity. Burke waged his campaign on behalf of entrenched privileges and the political "establishment," and Herder threw himself into the fray from a nonconformist starting point, but both set about defending a Christian communitarian civilization on the path to extinction. The final objective was the same: Burke thought that in assuring the permanence of the existing social and political order he was saving civilization; and Herder thought that in setting up a barrier against individualism, in putting forward a coherent plan for a communitarian order that could replace an enlightened bourgeois society that was deistic when it was not actually atheist, he too was saving civilization. His critique of the Enlightenment was a barrier against the encroaching forces of destruction, as religion had been replaced by deism, which he saw as a by-product of mechanistic philosophy and an ally of enlightened and antinational rule. In that world going to its ruin, all vital forces were sapped by rationalism, the search for happiness had replaced the idea of service, and the idea of progress had undermined faith as well as the cardinal virtues of obedience, self-denial, and respect for authority and the family.

Herder and Burke both knew that modern thought was born at the moment when man took the place of God. In the nature of things, Herder could not like Descartes, Hobbes, or Locke, and he fought against Rousseau and Kant. No one did more than him to oppose the influence of Kant in Germany, to discredit universal values. Herder the philosopher of history and Burke the politician and political thinker represented the two complementary aspects of the campaign against reason in the name of "life," the attack upon the universal in the name of the particular and the specific. Both of them launched an appeal to all the forces able to overthrow these two pillars of the Enlightenment. Both of them led the struggle against the socially leveling capacity of the Enlightenment, or, in other words, against equality. Herder accused the Enlightenment of harboring despotic and imperialistic tendencies. According to him, France

in Europe and Europe in the world at large exported their cultures as a means of domination of other peoples and other cultures. Both of them reproached their age for its materialism and its “mechanistic” values, or, in other words, its rationalistic individualism. Materialism and mechanism were the two key concepts that in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were used to explain all the misfortunes of the period.

Burke and Herder had a significant point of divergence, however: their views of the French Revolution differed profoundly. Burke defended prejudice as a product of history: created by it, prejudice alone can guide us in the present in molding the future. The more ancient it was, the deeper its roots, the more trustworthy was the prejudice. Thus, prejudice was the symbol of continuity, it ensured the permanence of traditions and was the guarantee of the future. For Herder, the continuity of institutions had no value as a criterion, but cultural continuity, linguistic continuity, the continuity of manners and morals, and the preservation of the social order had an absolute value. Burke had advantages that Herder lacked: a regime that liberal Europe envied. Prejudice in Herder was undoubtedly an expression of the variety and individuality of national traditions rather than a defense of the existing political order. But essentially, prejudice had the same purpose in both writers: to assert the superiority of history to reason, of the national collectivity to the individual, of the national culture to foreign cultures, of hereditary privileges to the rights of man, and of particular values to universal values.

For the believer that Herder was, the archenemy was Voltaire, the living incarnation of the critical spirit, of rationalism, of atheism, the man “who writes on behalf of virtue, though more wickedly than Machiavelli”: in the eighteenth century, a person who wrote like Machiavelli would have been stoned, but Voltaire was not stoned! Voltaire was the typical representative of the philosophical spirit, of Enlightened modernity and its consequence, French decadence. The senility of the philosophical eighteenth century was expressed in the French culture of his time, the symbol of an entire world in decay, a world where they “reasoned,” where they published dictionaries and encyclopedias, the world with an “abstracted spirit. Philosophy out of two thoughts, the most mechanical thing in the world.” These expressions recur several times, especially when he tries to show that “a large part of this so-called modern education must itself be mechanics,” that the “modern spirit,” rationalism, and French culture are identical, when he sets out to prove “what a noble mechanical thing modern humor is.” “Is there a narrower frame of thought, of the manner of living, of genius and taste,—than among that people through which in a hundred guises has been spread most brilliantly throughout the world? What spectacle is more of a marionette of pleasing

regularity; what manner of life more aping of carefree, mechanical pleasantry, amusement and affected speech.”⁸⁸ In his *Journal* Herder described the French temperament as “only false pretence and weakness.”⁸⁹ Because they are “apes of humanity” and “for all of Europe” and only apes, the French can be aped in turn by the rest of Europe. All their philosophy is only a mimicry of the sentiments of humanity, genius, virtue: the civilization they created is an “easier mechanics,” a machine that finally produced a free thought that was “dear, feeble, irritating, useless.”⁹⁰

It was clearly no accident that Herder was so acrimonious toward France. France represented the rationalist, cosmopolitan, antinationalist type of civilization that had to be discredited. Gadamer was right when he showed how crucial for Herder was the unfavorable image of France he had gained from his reading. He took it with him when he went to Nantes, he took it back with him when he left, and this image remained integral to all his work.⁹¹ Criticism of France was a criticism not only of French literature or philosophy but of a whole culture, a culture that was fundamentally bad because it was based on rationalism. One can only imagine what the *Journal* would have been if Herder had visited France as Tocqueville was to visit America.

In *Another Philosophy* Herder was content merely to summarize the violent accusations against France he had made in his *Journal*. In this text, written at one go, the young Herder stated his conviction of the irremediable decadence of France, comparable to the decline of Italy, Greece, Egypt, and Asia. It has to be said: it is seldom that one reads such nonsense from the pen of a thinker of this stature who enjoys the reputation of Herder. The young preacher, who had come from Riga by sea, not only did not know France and indulged unrestrainedly in absurd generalizations, what he did know of its literature, its philosophy, and its history, he thoroughly disliked. The whole of Herder is in the pages of the *Journal*, and he never changed. That is the important point if one wants to understand his thought. “The monks of Lebanon, the pilgrims of Mecca, the Greek popes were real vermin, the product of the decomposition of a noble steed. The Italian academics of Cortona were relics of their fathers, and in order to spread their fame, they wrote long books, memoirs, quartos, and folios. In France, they will soon reach that point. When Voltaire and Montesquieu are dead, they will prolong the spirit of Voltaire, Bossuet, Montesquieu, Racine, etc., until there is nothing left.” He said that the moment when the French had “nothing left” would come sooner than one thought, and the famous *Dictionnaire raisonné* provided the proof that when one has nothing more to say, when “original works come to an end,” one produces encyclopedias. “For me, it is the first sign of their decline.” Where the intellectual life of France was concerned, his judgment was final: “The time of its literature has passed, the age of Louis XIV has gone. . . . They are living among ruins.”⁹²

Nor was this all. What, in fact, was this glorious past in reality? "What was really original about the age of Louis XIV? The question is complex." The answer, however, was not. In thirty or so pages, Herder expressed his animosity toward an entire civilization whose immense failing, in the final analysis, was its rationalism. The gist of the matter was that French culture lacked originality. Its leading lights owed much to Spain and Italy: "Corneille's *Cid* is Spanish; his heroes are even more Spanish," and, what for a *Stürmer* was extremely serious, "his language in his first plays is more Spanish still." Mazarin, the patron of the arts, was Italian, taste in art was Italian, and it was the Italians who invented the most outstanding arts. Thus, Italian influence is decisive in Molière, Fénelon's famous *Télémaque* is a "half-Italian poem." When the Italian and Spanish influence died out, only "monotonous gallantries" remained, emotions disappeared, "cold reason" took over and chilled "fantasy and passion." Moreover, "the Frenchman has no idea of what is real in metaphysics," in Rousseau everything is paradox, in Fontenelle everything is swamped in dialogue, and in Voltaire, history, which is merely a pretext for his wit and mockery, is distorted. This is what Voltaire himself writes about Corneille: "One could think one is reading the master of ceremonies, not the king of theatre"! Even Montesquieu is not exempt from the charge of indulging in spurious effects: "One sees the trouble he goes to in order to be abstract and profound," in order to give the impression of "giving one a great deal to think about and of seeming to have thought even more"; and he does all this by "embellishing minor cases and minor judicial actions under a scaffolding of vast perspectives, continuations of the same subject, remarks, preparations, etc."⁹³ That is what his classification of systems of government really amounts to.

Herder also attacked the French literary theory of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which was unsympathetic to the dramatic innovations of Shakespeare, whom he associated with the German spirit and whom he saw as the true representative of modern drama in preference to the French tragedians of the classical period.⁹⁴ In his desire to discredit the age of Louis XIV, Herder forgot his famous principle of pluralism and the equal value of all periods. Where France was concerned, the principle that each people contains its grain of genius within itself was soon forgotten, and the Herderian criticisms, as harsh as they were unfair and ridiculous, rained down upon the Grand Siècle.

Both the spirit and the language are at fault. The French, he said, cultivated fine phraseology: Herder put "the Crébillons . . . Fontenelles . . . Bossuets and Fléchiers" all in the same basket: it is difficult to imagine a greater expression of contempt for French culture. If Fontenelle had devoted the same care to the content of his works as he gave to turns of phrase, "What a great man he would be!" So this is the problem, which has two aspects. On the one hand, the

French are not philosophical; their philosophy is acquired and “thus is only roughly precise and thus it is wrongly applied, and so there is no philosophy!” And on the other hand, the French language does not allow things to be stated exactly: “The philosophy of the French language therefore precludes a philosophy of thought.” Montesquieu lacks precision because of his language; Helvétius and Rousseau, “each in his way, confirm what I am saying even more.”⁹⁵

Not only is the French model a bad one, every imitation is in itself destructive of the national genius. The problem of imitation became a question of patriotism, and in Germany the struggle was waged not against the ancients but against the French. As a good *Stürmer*, the Lutheran preacher fostered the ideal of originality, not individual originality but collective, national originality. The term *Originalgenie* appears at the bottom of page 454 of his *Journal*: great poets, according to his theory of popular expression, great men, according to his philosophy of history, are the interpreters of the entire people. During his travels in France, he consigned his thoughts to notes attached to his journal: “No human being, no country, no people, no national history, no State is the same as another, and consequently the true, the beautiful and the good are not the same either. If one does not search for this, if one blindly takes another nation as a model, everything is extinguished.” In accordance with the same way of thinking, Herder denied the possibility of the French spirit or language, French literature or art ever being renewed.⁹⁶ The Herderian relativity of values was undoubtedly accompanied by a sympathy for the unique spirit of each people, but if he believed in eternal values in religion, he denied these values in other spheres. His approach to religion was dominated by the Christian faith in the education of humanity by God, but other spheres of intellectual and cultural activity, and first of all literature, were under the sway of German nationalism, the ideal of autarchy and pluralism, or, that is to say, antiuniversalism, whose necessary concomitant was relativism. This is what Isaiah Berlin, the accomplished Herderian of the second half of the twentieth century, failed to realize, for he refused to recognize the existence of this duality in Herder. When, with Herder’s heirs, the faith had gone and religion was only a social force, the relativity of values persisted.

In this way, there began with Herder the long series of reflections on decadence and the death of civilizations that culminated in the twentieth century with *The Decline of the West*. The ideal of spiritual autarchy and general relativity represented here makes Herder, back in the eighteenth century, a precursor of Spengler. As Herder saw it, each climax preceded a decadence, and this decadence was irremediable. The *Journal* pronounced the sinking of the West to be inevitable: “Europe’s refined political sense will not prevent its decline.” This decline would take place, even if the process was a long one, as it

was during the period that preceded the fall of Rome. The fire smoldered for a long time: "In our period, it will smolder even longer, but it will burst forth all the more suddenly. All this in the nature of things must inevitably happen. The substance that strengthens us and makes our gristle into bones ends by transforming into bones the gristle that ought always to remain gristle, and the refinement that makes the common people civilized will end by making it old, weak and useless. Who can go against the nature of things?"⁹⁷ Herder took up this idea again in *Another Philosophy of History*, where he systematically elaborated his reflections on the exhaustion of European civilization, by which he generally meant the spread of classicism and French civilization. The decline of old peoples is compensated for by the rise of young ones: "The Ukraine will become a new Greece . . . out of a mass of small uncultivated peoples, as the Greeks once were, a civilized nation will emerge, its frontiers extending to the Black Sea, and from there throughout the world. Hungary and part of Poland and Russia will take part in this new civilization. From the northwest, this spirit will spread out over sleeping Europe and subdue it intellectually."⁹⁸

In reading Herder, however, one is very soon aware that it would be very naïve and a gross error to accept the idea of the equality of all peoples or the future rise of Ukraine and Hungary at face value. Not only were France and the eighteenth century a decadent civilization and period, not only were the Middle Ages the youth of a new civilization, in relation to the Germans the Slavs were also an inferior species: "Despite their exploits here and there, they were never an enterprising people of warriors and adventurers like the Germans." On the contrary, they took over everywhere from the Germans, occupied lands abandoned by others. Good workers, agriculturalists, and shepherds, they were "servile and submissive," preferring to buy peace rather than to fight, with the result that they were finally exterminated or enslaved. Is it then surprising that after centuries of enslavement, the Slavs' "softness of character" "degenerated into the cunning, cruel laziness of valets"? But "the wheel of time that changes everything keeps turning," and "you too, peoples that have fallen so low . . . delivered from your chains of slavery . . . will have your beautiful lands . . . in which you will be able to celebrate your ancient festivals of work and peaceful trade."⁹⁹

It is hard to see these texts as an application of the principle of the equality of all peoples. The moral inferiority of the Slavs is obvious, but what is still more interesting is that their unhappy history has given them a "nature." Herder does not speak of races or species: nations are historical phenomena, but he sees them as living persons, organisms, each of which has a character of its own, unique of its kind, whose disappearance Herder fears in the modern cultural standardization. This character is the product not of a unique biolog-

ical constitution but of a unique historical constitution. History creates a “constitution” in the true meaning of the word. At the provisional point of arrival represented by the time when Herder wrote, this immutable character, this unique, original spirit had assumed the concrete forms of determinism. Moreover, in the little work of 1774 there was already a hierarchy of values that makes it impossible to state that all peoples were chosen peoples. Only certain peoples were. In any case, the idea of election itself is a highly selective one. Thus, if one looks not at general declarations of principle but at Herder’s actual historical analyses, one sees that the idea that was tentatively put forward in *Another Philosophy of History* that each people in turn is the chosen people at a certain moment of history no longer exists in *Ideas*. Contrary to what is generally thought, Herder’s Weimar period — the later part of his life — was not always or necessarily a period of movement toward Aufklärung in relation to the period of Sturm und Drang.

If for the Slavs Herder expressed a mixture of pity and scorn, in the case of non-European peoples that at some point settled in Europe the hierarchy and scale of values were even more in evidence. The Turks did enormous harm to the most beautiful countries of Europe, turning them into deserts, “making the formerly most skillful of the Greek peoples into disloyal slaves, dissolute barbarians. How many works of art were destroyed by these ignoramuses! How many things they caused to disappear which can never be remade! Their empire is a great prison for the Europeans that live in it. . . . What are these strangers doing, who still after thousands of years claim to be Asiatic barbarians? What are they doing in Europe?”¹⁰⁰

The same question can be asked about the Jews. In the chapter on the Jews in the third part of *Ideas*, one learns that in ancient times they were an intelligent people, hardworking, and also not lacking in military courage. It was not a people gifted for the arts, nor really for the sciences, and in spite of its geographical situation, it lacked the adventurous spirit of maritime peoples. But what ruined the Jews was “a trait in their national character that Moses already forcefully opposed,” and that was the lack of a political sense. “In short, it was a people that met its downfall in the course of its education, because it never achieved a mature political culture on its own soil, nor has it attained since that time a real feeling for honor and liberty.” The conclusion he came to characterized the image of the Jew for a century and a half, for it maintained that his faults were not acquired or the product of history but were integral to his makeup and national character and were apparent from the beginning of his existence: “The people of God, which received its country from Heaven itself, has for millennia and almost from the time of its appearance been a parasitic plant [*parasitische Pflanze*] on the trunks of other

nations, a family of crafty middlemen throughout almost the whole earth that despite all oppression nowhere aspires to an honorable condition and a home of its own, nowhere aspires to a homeland.”¹⁰¹

This unflattering portrait was accompanied by reflections on the Jewish influence in the world. Jewish universalism was a great source of weakness: “The laws of Moses absolutely had to be applied in all places, even among peoples with a quite different political organization. That is why no Christian nation has built its legislation and its State structure entirely on its own foundations.” Herder went on to describe the pernicious influence on Christendom of “the intolerance of the Jewish religious spirit,” which “was thought to be . . . a model for the Christians as well.” One of the harmful effects of the Old Testament was “the contradictory idea of making Christianity, a spontaneous and simply moral religion, into a State religion of the Jewish kind.” Finally, scattered to the four corners of the earth, the special feature of the Jews is that “no people on earth has kept itself as recognizable and as robust as this one in all climates,” taking over “internal trade and especially finance.” Thus, “the relatively backward nations of Europe became the voluntary slaves of their usury.”¹⁰²

Herder continued his exposition in the last part of *Ideas*: “We consider them a parasitic plant that has attached itself to nearly all European nations and to a greater or lesser degree absorbs their sap.” He did not go so far as to think “they brought leprosy to our continent.” That “is unlikely, but a worse leprosy is that, throughout all the barbarous centuries, as money changers, middlemen and agents of the Empire, they became vile instruments of usury, and for personal gain thereby strengthened the proud and barbarous ignorance of Europe in matters of commerce. They were often treated with cruelty, and what they had gained through avarice and deception or through work, intelligence and order was high-handedly taken from them, but being accustomed to such treatment and expecting it, they merely cheated and extorted all the more.” However, Herder admitted that the Jews were indispensable in Europe and still were in his time, and “it could not be denied” that “in the obscure ages” they played a major role in the propagation of science, medicine, and Arab philosophy. It was also due to them that “Hebrew literature” survived. The day would come, he said, when in Europe they would no longer ask who was Jewish or Christian, “for the Jew would also live according to the European laws and would contribute to the good of the State. Only a barbarous organization prevented this or rendered his capacities harmful.”¹⁰³ But in the meantime Christianity had to be deJudaized.

Here a question arises. How could the Europeanization — that is, the change of identity — advocated for the Jews as the only way for them to live a decent

life be compatible with the principle of the equal value of all cultures? The answer to this question is that one should not be deceived by appearances, for Herder's work is not an innocent intellectual exercise. He undoubtedly made a sincere effort to penetrate the works of foreign peoples. A German from East Prussia, unlike the majority of his fellow countrymen he liked Russia and the Ukraine. At the same time, he entered into the spirit of Hebrew poetry as no one had done before him, and enthused over the war poetry of the Scandinavian and Norman pirates and the love poetry of the Finns and Lapps, and published the legends of the peoples of the Southern Sea. But his capacity to view other cultures in an unprejudiced manner and without mental reservations failed when it came to France, and generally, when it came to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Herder never read Corneille or Racine in the spirit in which he read Shakespeare. He never saw the Jews of his time with the sympathy he devoted to the far-off tribes of Israel and their poetry. With him, pluralism only applied to peoples distant in time and space.

It is interesting to see Lucien Lévi-Bruhl's interpretation of Herder in 1887, in the light of the two classics that had just appeared: the beginning of Bernhard Ludwig Suphan's edition of Herder's *Werke* and Rudolf Haym's biography.¹⁰⁴ The French philosopher, writing at the time when the French nationalism expressed a few years later in the cult of "la Terre et les Morts" ("the Land and the Dead"), very close to the German nationalism of his time, was beginning to become a political force, regarded Herder, as Rouché did half a century later, as a German man of letters whose attack on the French Enlightenment was a way of condemning imitation in literature: "When will the German public stop being the three-headed monster of the Apocalypse, at once Greek, French and English? When will we gain the place our people deserves? We have only to burrow in the German soil and the national poetry will spring forth."¹⁰⁵ According to the British historian Alexander Gillies, one of the first biographers of Herder in the English-speaking world, Herder's aim throughout his work was to make the Germans become conscious of themselves and their power: "Germany owes him a greater debt than anyone from Luther to Hitler," he wrote in 1945.¹⁰⁶ Careful readers of Herder cannot fail to notice that Johann Wilhelm Ludwig Gleim's *Preussische Kriegslieder von einem Grenadier* (War Songs of a Prussian Grenadier) of the time of the Seven Years' War enchanted the Protestant pastor who did not think highly of Corneille and Racine. Gleim celebrated the victories of Frederick II, and Herder could not have been under any illusions: it was very mediocre poetry, but it was national. His indulgence took the form of enthusiasm, and he honestly admitted his bias in favor of a German writer who was not imitative.

Drawing unexpected conclusions from the Rousseauist idea of the return to

nature, Herder went further than this. He maintained that if nature is the source of all goodness and truth, and if each people, like each individual, has its own special character, every spontaneous expression of its genius must be good, and all that does not proceed from the depths of the nation is necessarily mediocre and does not really count. It will disappear with the world that brought it into being. Lévy-Bruhl said that Herder could have summarized his thinking as follows: "German literature will be national or it will not exist."¹⁰⁷ Herder undoubtedly applied his principle of historical pluralism in favor of Germany and its culture, and this ideal of cultural autarchy, supported by his philosophy of history as a whole, inevitably had immediate political implications. The idea that Herder's work is apolitical and that a cultural nationalism does not immediately result in a political nationalism is the invention of certain modern critics, and it does not hold true. It occurred neither to the generation of the Napoleonic Wars nor to the one that at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth saw a radical nationalism emerging all over Europe.

Here we reach a turning point. When Herder considered the factors that had hindered the free development of the German genius in the past, he pointed to the disastrous effects of the Renaissance in Germany: "From that time, we have received everything from the Latin peoples and they took from us everything we had."¹⁰⁸ According to him, Germany lost in the exchange. It would have done better to follow the path indicated by its own genius. In that way, it would have escaped foreign influences, especially the French influence that estranged it from itself for a century. In other words, what Herder deplored was the Western influence: the Italian Renaissance, the French and British Enlightenments. Going farther back, he disliked ancient Rome, and Rome was Roman law, the concept of the citizen — a political and judicial, not a cultural, concept. Herder much preferred the Greek polis, a closed national society with its local gods, its unique local customs. He detested the multinational empire, which he saw as a force of standardization. Seen simply as a citizen, man lost his specific character. For the same reason, Herder hated the Franco-Kantian Enlightenment and the British Enlightenment, whose fundamental concepts were political and judicial, and which he wished to replace by ethnic and cultural concepts. To the concrete idea of the citizen he opposed the spirit and character of the nation. Contrary to the claim still made by their critics, it was the people of the Enlightenment that had concrete ideas and dealt with concrete questions, and it was their enemies that juggled with abstractions. To define nations by their "character" or "spirit" as Herder did in *Another Philosophy* was to use concepts far less concrete and precise than the political definition of a nation provided by the *Encyclopédie*. But in Herder there is a real

inversion of values: culture is the reality, while politics represent artifice. Membership of a body of citizens is artificial, the body of citizens itself is artificial, while the nation's existence is comparable to a plant's. The nation henceforth possesses a quasi-biological existence.

The two concepts of the world that we have here could hardly coexist. The philosophes — those who wished to be true to the idea of continuous progress and those who, like Voltaire, did not accept it — extolled the modern era because they perceived in their civilization a continual attempt to liberate it from its Christian, Germanic, and feudal character. That is what progress was: "It is easy to judge from the picture we have drawn of Europe from the time of Charlemagne to our own days," said Voltaire on the last page but one of his *Essay on the Manners*, "that that part of the world is incomparably more populated, more civilized, more rich, more enlightened than it was then, and it is even superior to the Roman Empire, if you except Italy."¹⁰⁹ Most of the thinkers of the Enlightenment saw the Middle Ages as a past they hoped had gone forever. That is why they saw the Renaissance, that grandiose evocation of classical and pagan antiquity, as the beginning of modernity. Herder, on the contrary, wanted to revive a Germanic and Christian civilization (sometimes more Germanic than Christian), one that was organic and national.

Here we should add an important point. The ideal of a culture protected by virtually unpassable barriers, which Herder put forward at the beginning of the 1770s, was influenced by the infatuation of the French with foreign countries, particularly England. Herder, who came to the defense of Germany against France, detested the cosmopolitanism of the French. The philosophes were undoubtedly no less patriotic and conscious of the greatness of their country than Herder was, and had no need of lessons in patriotism from anyone. Yet Montesquieu and Voltaire stayed for long periods in England, that land of liberty they always admired. Voltaire learned English, and if his pronunciation left much to be desired, he could nevertheless write it after a fashion. Montesquieu, after traveling through the whole of Europe from Hungary to the Netherlands, spent two years across the Channel. Rousseau stayed with Hume. Herder, for his part, was no admirer of British liberty, the British parliamentary system, or British freedom of the press. He did not have the same sense of tolerance as the French, he did not wage any heroic campaigns for justice like those of Voltaire, and as for the struggle against slavery, the celebrated chapter 5 of the fifteenth book of *The Spirit of Laws* was the true eighteenth-century antislavery manifesto. Voltaire held the Europeans to be the real culprits in the slave trade, and in Rousseau there are some eloquent and unambiguous pages in condemnation of slavery: "Thus, from whatever point of view, slavery has no right to exist, not only because it is illegitimate

but because it is absurd and meaningless. The words *slave* and *right* are contradictory; they are mutually exclusive.”¹¹⁰

Herder, however, thought that “close to the monkey” nature had “placed the negro.” “We should pity the Black,” he wrote in the sixth book of *Ideas*, which passed a contemptuous judgment on black and East Asian people, even worse in the case of blacks than in that of East Asians. “Nature,” he said, “by virtue of the very principle of its art of creating forms, had to endow these peoples, whom it was obliged to deprive of more noble gifts, with a greater measure of sexual enjoyment, and this could not fail to show itself physiologically. . . . We should therefore pity the Black, since because of the complexion required by his climate, no nobler gift could be bestowed on him, but we should not despise him; and we should honor the Mother who, even when she deprives, is able to compensate. . . . What use to him would be the tormenting idea of superior joys for which he is not made?” Nature “ought not to have created Africa, or, at any rate, if anyone was to live there, it had to be the negroes.” The Chinese and Japanese were also far from arousing his admiration: Herder dwelt on the various physical deformities of these peoples of Mongol origin. The Hindus, for their part, were no more than “contented sheep” of a proverbial passivity: a statement which, coming from this admirer of warlike Germanic tribes, was not exactly a compliment. One can find nothing in these pages that could give one a favorable opinion of their civilization.¹¹¹ We see that Herderian Christianity went together with a great deal of scorn for the “colored” races.

On the other hand, one finds nothing in Herder equivalent to chapter 13 of the twenty-fifth book of *The Spirit of Laws*, the “Very Humble Remonstrance to the Inquisitors of Spain and Portugal”—one of the finest declarations of tolerance ever made. The chapter ends with the following passage: “We must warn you about one thing, and that is, that if in the future somebody dares to say that in the time in which we are living the peoples of Europe were civilized, you will be mentioned in order to prove that they were barbarous, and the idea that they will have of you will be such that it will besmirch your age and bring hatred on all your contemporaries.”¹¹²

Herder’s fight against the philosophes was a fight against rationalism, against a non-Christian philosophy of history, against the propagation of a civilization based on the autonomy of the individual and the rights of man. The Herderian belief in a providential plan, even when supported by Leibnizian principles of continuity and finality, could not fail to conflict with the struggle against Christianity waged by the most enlightened thinkers in France and Britain. This struggle was a comprehensive struggle whose elements could not be separated. The campaign against Christianity was at the same time a

campaign against abuses and prejudices in the name of the rights and autonomy of the individual, first asserted in the seventeenth century by Hobbes and then by Locke and by innumerable pamphlets at the time of the Glorious Revolution. The liberation of man could only be a total liberation, and it was precisely against this that Herder asserted the rights of the cultural and national community. It was then that he launched the idea of the nation as a living organism and of the individual as an integral part of a whole.

The Foundations of a Different Modernity

Reflection on the Enlightenment has always at the same time been reflection on the contemporary world. Vico, Herder, and Burke, of course, lived in the eighteenth century, but where their successors are concerned, the age of Enlightenment and the French Revolution fixed the pattern of the political and cultural life of the two following centuries. That “unique century,” as Michelet called it, was also unique, though for diametrically opposite reasons, for the successors of its first major enemies. Indeed, no less and perhaps even more than in the nineteenth century, a reading of the first great critics of the Enlightenment in the twentieth century is most relevant in our own time, with regard both to the scope of that criticism and to the issues raised in that age.

Vico preceded Herder, but his influence was not felt until the nineteenth century, and even then it was not really comparable to that of the German pastor. Immediately famous, and having, like Voltaire, a feeling for the effective use of the pamphlet, Herder had a hold on European thought whose importance for the modern world can scarcely be exaggerated. In contrast to this, Vico stated in his *Autobiography* — where he spoke in the third person, probably in order to distinguish himself from Descartes, who used “I” — that “he lived in his native city not only as a stranger but quite unknown.”¹ It was only at the turn of the nineteenth century that the writer of the *New Science* became to be known as the greatest Italian philosopher. Outside the peninsula,

one had to wait for Michelet for his presence to be felt. After the “Michelet years,” Vico’s thought reappeared above all as an influence on the work of writers of great consequence at the turn of the twentieth century: Croce and Georges Sorel, and in the second half of the century, Isaiah Berlin. Like his predecessors, Berlin blames the Enlightenment, as Mark Lilla has put it, for the political disasters of our time, and it is to Vico that he turns for building his case against the Enlightenment.²

In our time, among critics of culture as among postmodernists of all stripes and all academic disciplines, the long neglect of Vico has given way to a blind admiration. Lilla’s subtle and erudite work constitutes one of the most important exceptions. Lilla too has insisted on Vico’s importance for the culture of our time, but he has managed to avoid most of the excesses. Indeed, as Alain Pons acutely observed, Vico who was nothing has become everything: he has been given the role of universal precursor, the man who said everything before the others. Thus, one has a Vico who was pre-Romantic, Hegelian, Marxist, existentialist, structuralist before his time.³ Today we also have a postmodernist Vico. Whatever the case, the myth grew up of Vico as a solitary, marginal giant of genius, the man who all alone invented the humanities and the social sciences, and especially history and the philosophy of history, anthropology, and linguistics. It is true that Vico did all he could to persuade his readers, and no doubt posterity, to see him in this way. In what he was trying to do, he said, he had to “reckon as if there were no books in the world.”⁴

Indeed, everyone finds what he or she is looking for in Vico, for his manner lends itself to it, but he is not the only person of this kind. The same applies to Herder, Hegel, Marx, or Nietzsche. Like Herder, Vico had the pretension of embracing everything in his work. He claimed to have a universal knowledge, which at the beginning of the eighteenth century, when the modern world was being created, was not unusual, and as everything is to be found in him in an embryonic state, any idea, because it was not yet mature and had not yet been put to the test, can be ascribed to him: everything is open to interpretations. On the one hand, the interpretations vary in accordance with the period and fashion as well as the discipline proper to the reader, and on the other hand Vico, like Herder, was a many-sided writer. Moreover, at a time when the great leap forward of the Enlightenment was just beginning, Vico, who seemed to want to take part in it, claiming to be inspired by the example of Francis Bacon, really took up a position against the intellectual revolution of his age. As Vico will often be referred to in this book, it is necessary to examine the essential features of this first attack on the Enlightenment. It is obviously inappropriate, within the context of the present book, to attempt a comprehensive analysis of the thought of the writer of *On the Ancient Wisdom of*

the Italians, the work with which Vico began his criticism of Descartes, but we should examine the principles that were to inspire the Anti-Enlightenment campaigns of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Here we should look for a moment at the pages that in 1946 Hazard devoted to Vico, as they represent a very common approach to the subject. If Europe, he said, had listened to Vico, “that hero of thought and original genius,” it would have learned that reason was not our most important faculty, but rather imagination was, and it would have known that reason did nothing but desiccate the soul. Would not the Europeans have yearned for their lost paradises? They would also have learned that the explanation for things lay embedded in the depths of time. Thus, “all their ideas, their whole conception of the world, would have been overturned.” Would not our intellectual destiny, asked this great expert on the eighteenth century, have been different? That destiny would certainly have been very different; the only question is whether it would have been better or worse. If the men of the eighteenth century had submitted to the verdict of history, if, like Vico, they had not been affected by the ideas of Locke, that “modern novelty . . . newly arrived from London”⁵ which for Paul Hazard seems to have been a disaster, how many more years would have had to pass before the American Declaration of Independence and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man were promulgated? And what was this ideal of the past? What lost paradises were there for all the Europeans who were neither nobles nor rich bourgeois, nor bishops, nor famous intellectuals? Would their lives have been better if their daily reality had not been subjected to a criticism that declared it unworthy? If, without waiting for the twentieth century, reason had been relegated to second place from the eighteenth century onward, if that “modern novelty,” the *Second Treatise*, together with the *Letter Concerning Toleration*, had not crossed the Channel, would the ideas of liberty, justice, and tolerance have taken shape? Without Locke, would our world have been less brutal, less violent, less sectarian?

The central epistemological theme of *The Ancient Wisdom*, known as the theory of the *verum-factum*, is the identity of the true with what has been created, that is to say, with whatever owes its very existence to the fact of having been created. Men understand only what they have created, and as society was created by men, this creation needs science and can be the object of a science. In other words, since creation is an activity, it requires a creator. It is in this work that Vico’s opposition to Descartes is developed: if we can only prove or know what we have created ourselves, we can only prove the existence of God if we have created him ourselves. For that reason, “anyone who attempts to prove the existence of God a priori must be condemned for impious curiosity.”⁶ For the same reason, metaphysics cannot be proved a priori:

criticism of Descartes develops into a rejection of the aridity of Cartesianism, unable to appreciate the value of the social sciences and to contribute to their development. In his *Autobiography*, Vico severely reproaches the French philosopher, whose physics was at that time “at the height of its renown among the established men of letters”: “In respect of the unity of its parts,” he said, the philosophy of Descartes was “not at all a consistent system,” nor did his metaphysics “yield any moral philosophy suited to the Christian religion. Nor does a distinctively Cartesian logic emerge from his metaphysics.”⁷

For Descartes, said Vico, truth has no history; history therefore cannot teach anything, and neither the philosopher nor the scholar should waste his time on it, even if it is the history of his own mind. Accordingly, Vico took the course opposite from that of the Cartesian method: he wrote his autobiography as a historian, and he declared in a highly characteristic passage: “We shall not here feign what René Descartes craftily feigned as to the method of his studies simply in order to exalt his own philosophy and mathematics and degrade all the other studies included in divine and human erudition. Rather, with the candour proper to a historian, we shall relate plainly and step by step the entire series of Vico’s studies, in order that the proper and natural causes of his development as a man of letters may be known.” Contrary to the method he believed had been followed by Descartes, Vico sought to expose the true history of his intellectual adventure. In his “autobiography” — or, if one prefers, his personal hagiography — he spoke of his spiritual masters, Plato, Tacitus, Francis Bacon, Grotius, “the four writers whom he admired above all others and desired to turn to the use of the Catholic religion.” Two giants of antiquity contributed to his development, each in his fashion: Tacitus contemplated “man as he is, Plato, as he ought to be.”⁸

Vico undoubtedly always remained faithful to the idea that mathematics — he was speaking of geometry — remained the most trustworthy area of human knowledge. But at the same time, there was a change in his thinking, which found expression in his major work: the divergences in our knowledge of human affairs and thus of society became a question of principle and not of degree, and the history of men and the societies in which they live became the most certain knowledge that one can have. This is what Vico wrote right at the end of his book, where he returned to this fundamental idea he had expressed earlier: “It is true that men themselves made this world of nations (and we took this as the first incontestable principle of our Science, since we despaired of finding it from the philosophers and philologists).”⁹

Here we have the great discovery ascribed to Vico: the progress of human affairs is conditioned not by chance or by arbitrary choices but by their historical and social context. It follows that a science of these affairs, these affairs

that are ours — that is to say, a social science — is possible. But what in the final analysis governs the life of men in the family or in the framework of the state is Providence, and it is Providence that permits them to leave a Hobbesian state of nature and to transcend their instincts and their beastlike behavior devoted entirely to a search for their individual good, and to make intelligent choices allowing them to live “in human society.” It was probably in reading Grotius that Vico saw that philosophy and philology (a term that he understood as also meaning history), the first relating to the universal and the eternal and the second to the particular and the contingent, could be combined to create a social science. But it was reading Grotius’s adversaries, especially Pufendorf on the state of nature and the concept of a natural law, that caused Vico to reject the classical doctrine of a law that was universal and accessible to human reason. Through studying the theories of natural law, Vico came to reject the theories of origins and of the nature of societies based on the idea of a natural law.¹⁰ The same was true where Hobbes was concerned: Vico accepted the author of *Leviathan* with regard to the state of nature and the origins of mankind, but he rejected the conception of society that followed from it: namely, that society was the result of a contract, and that consequently its origins must necessarily be rationalistic, individualistic, and voluntaristic.

Another essential idea that Vico drew from his reading of his predecessors, especially the philologist Jean Le Clerc (Vico wrote his name Leclerc), whom he greatly appreciated and who seems to have been one of the few scholars of the period to take his work into consideration, was the importance of myth. Vico came to the conclusion that the theoreticians of natural law were unable to explain the mythical nature of human thought in its beginnings. It was this idea that was to play a crucial role in the antirationalism of Sorel, who in the final years of the nineteenth century devoted a long study to the Neapolitan philosopher.¹¹

Vico’s “new science” was thus the science of things created by man. His ambition was to produce “the universal history of all times.” Here again, we cannot enter into the question of the dual nature of man: man after the Fall who, according to the Christian doctrine, is in a state of sin, and man who constructs the realities that are proper to him. But (and this a fundamental point in understanding Vico’s attack on the Enlightenment), human activity is the product not of individuals but of social agents. It is not autonomous but is guided by Providence in a way that is not always clear. The objectives that the individual seeks to attain necessarily relate to his role in society. He can never, even when pursuing individual ends, escape the network of relationships he is involved in as a social being. The individual is thus placed from his first breath in the straitjacket of his social and cultural context. It follows that the individ-

ual's actions will have consequences that he neither desires nor foresees, and these consequences will in turn cause a further social evolution.¹² The parallels with Hegel, which are obvious, should not be taken too far: in Vico, there is no dialectical process, for in him progress is followed by periods of decline. The problem of decadence is stated clearly here, and it was used to assail the various theories of progress throughout the nineteenth century. Here one can also recognize the great Herderian themes. The campaign against the Enlightenment had its own logic, and Herder could develop his thinking without any knowledge of Vico: Montesquieu and Voltaire were quite enough.

Vico's theory of history is one of the most interesting aspects of his work. Once again, we shall have to explain it in an abridged form, referring the reader to Mark Lilla's work for a thorough analysis. Vico sought "to unite in one principle all knowledge human and divine" and to elaborate "an ideal eternal history to be traversed by the universal history of all times, carrying out on it, by certain eternal properties of civil affairs, the development, acme and decay of all nations."¹³ In order to do this, Vico considered the origins of the species and of their first social institutions. But, whereas Hobbes and Locke — with whom Vico was familiar, and whom he mentioned in his autobiography — saw the emergence of societies as a decision-making process of essentially rational beings forced by the conditions of the state of nature to seek refuge in society and the state, Vico from the beginning parted company with the founders of liberalism. He rejected their rationalist view of man, the sort of two-handed machine created by Hobbes, and he opposed their individualistic, atomistic, voluntaristic, or utilitarian view of society. From Hobbes, Vico at most took only the concept of the state of nature: the idea that the origin of society lay with the absolute autonomy of the individual, forming his world without the intervention of Providence, was deeply repugnant to him. This applied to Locke and his godless world as well as to Hobbes.

That is why Vico went back to Plato. In order to find the principles he was looking for, he began with "the fables of the poets" and then, like Plato, quickly launched into linguistics. However, as he revealed in his autobiography, it was in pondering the works of Bacon and Grotius that he found the way to his own discoveries. Bacon had not succeeded in "compassing the universe of cities and the course of all times, or the extent of nations." That is what Vico took it upon himself to do, basing himself on Grotius, who had embraced "in a system of universal law the whole of philosophy and philology." On this basis, Vico looked for "the principles of universal history hitherto lacking." He "discovered new historical principles of philosophy, and first of all a metaphysics of the human race. That is to say, a natural theology of all nations by which each people naturally created by itself its own gods through a natural

instinct that man has for divinity.” This idea was to be one of the foundations of the Anti-Enlightenment culture, the particular overtaking the universal. Assuredly, neither Vico’s ardent Catholicism and Italian patriotism nor Herder’s Lutheranism and German patriotism yet permitted a total rejection of Christian universalism, but the principle had been stated and would be exploited from the turn of the nineteenth century onward.¹⁴

Vico believed his discoveries were in two spheres: “ideas and languages” that constituted a “philosophy” and a “philology of the human race.” He showed that poetry and song resulted from “the same natural necessity in all the first nations.” In his *New Science* Vico spoke of this discovery which cost him a good twenty years of work, in a context in which Hobbes, Grotius, and Pufendorf were mentioned. Elsewhere he was more explicit and said he had resolved the question left unresolved by Grotius: man is a social being by nature and not artificially through convention.¹⁵

This was how Vico launched his attack on the Enlightenment, which he took a stage further when he opposed imagination to reason and insisted on the importance of customs. Reason, he thought, utilized abstract concepts, while imagination used concrete images. In Vico, imagination, where both history and ontology are concerned, precedes reason.¹⁶ A jurist whose great ambition was to attain the chair of jurisprudence at the University of Naples, Vico expressed his antirationalism by attacking the rationalism of the theoreticians of natural law, led by Grotius. Grotius was considered by the writers of the Enlightenment to be the founder of a modern moral science: he taught the possibility of reaching universal norms of morality. It was precisely because Vico saw him as one of the four great men to whom he owed his development that he attacked him. Grotius and all the other theoreticians of that school, including Hobbes and Locke, the founders of liberalism, thought that law was based on a timeless concept of justice accessible to all rational men. Vico thought it was a gross error to believe that the norms accepted at such-and-such a moment of history were accessible to man in the earliest stages of mankind. It was not reason but customs that prevailed — “the natural law of the *gentes* was instituted by custom” — and customs were the result of imitation, which was one of the first capacities of primitive man. Which also brings us to the conclusion that “the world in its infancy was composed of poetic nations, for poetry is nothing but imitation.”¹⁷ This is how Vico indicated a nonrational origin of civilizations and explained the abandonment of the state of nature and the foundation of civil society.

In a striking page of his autobiography, Vico divides history into three periods: the age of the gods, the age of heroes, and the age of men, which have three corresponding languages. The divine language, which is speechless, is

expressed in hieroglyphics, the heroic language is symbolic and is expressed in metaphors, and the third is the demotic language, which employs expressions agreed upon for the uses of everyday life. To these two triads, he adds others: three types of human nature, of customs, and, as a consequence of these customs, three kinds of “natural law of the peoples” and hence three kinds of state.¹⁸ All forms of existence, all norms of natural law are a product of time and conditions. These norms, evolving over time, will obviously be modified, and here we have the first foundations of historicism. The question of the hand of Providence in history is also posed here. Vico, in effect, superimposes “an ideal eternal history” based on the idea of Providence by which, as he shows throughout his work, “the natural law of the peoples . . . and . . . the particular histories of the nations” were ordained, “each with its rise, development, acme, decline and fall.” If the historical process as Vico conceives it is a linkage of cause and effect, does one arrive at a form of determinism? The writer is clearly advancing a theory that implies the existence of laws of historical development. At the same time, he himself claims that man is free to make choices. Is there any place for free will in his system? “Human choice,” says Vico, “by its nature most uncertain, is made and determined by the common sense of men with respect to human needs or utilities, which are the two sources of the natural law of the *gentes*.”¹⁹ Is it a matter of universal norms coexisting with historical particularism?

Some of Vico’s readers claim that he practiced a consistent determinism, others say the opposite. Others again do not regard determinism and free will as incompatible. History as a whole — that is to say, the process of the development of institutional systems — can be determined, but within these systems men are free. The general constraining influence of social institutions is a reality which shows that the development of these institutions is the product of a causality, but at the heart of this process all is not determined to the same degree.²⁰

The central place of religion in Vico’s system cannot be doubted, and it was religion that protected him against the form of relativism that Herder and Justus Möser were to develop thirty or forty years after his death. The importance of religion in the rejection of the Enlightenment is only one element in the common denominator between Vico and Herder. A world without God was one that was inconceivable: the decline and fall of societies was the result of a weakening of religious faith. All nations, whether savage or civilized, in all periods, had three human practices in common: religion, marriage, and burial. He rejected the evidence of travelers who, returning from Brazil, East Africa, the Antilles, and other countries of the New World, claimed that some peoples lived without any knowledge of the divinity. Nothing, he believed, could be more untrue, and he thought that Pierre Bayle made a great mistake when,

perhaps on the basis of this type of falsehood, he stated that “peoples live in justice without the light of God.” Like Hobbes, Bayle went much further than Polybius, who had already made the false claim “that if there were philosophers in the world . . . there would be no need in the world of religions.” This was the reason that Vico took it upon himself to provide a “science” that, “in one of its principal aspects,” “must be a rational civil theology of divine Providence, which seems hitherto to have been lacking.”²¹

The struggle against the concept of a natural law, against the idea of an individual taken out of the state of nature by his power of reason alone, against the notion that civil society was the result of a decision of free and equal individuals to endow themselves with social and political structures from the family to the state simply in order to improve their condition; this, together with the view that the individual is caught from the time of his birth in a network of social relationships which he has not created and which vary from one period to another, from one place to another, produced this other modernity based not on what unites men but on what divides them. Vico’s individual formed by his social and historical context was the opposite of the Cartesian ego. Vico makes many allusions to the analogy that exists between the life of the human being from childhood to old age and that of the national community from its origins to its final decrepitude. In his work, the organic conception of society is already clearly apparent. Thus began the second modernity, whose full impact would only be felt at the end of the eighteenth century and in the course of the nineteenth.

After Vico, who was unknown in his time, Herder, from the time of his appearance, served as a pivot around which criticism of the Enlightenment and hence reflections on the contemporary world were organized. He is still today considered the most eminent representative, if not the inventor, of the new historical consciousness that emerged in the second half of the eighteenth century. Nothing is more untrue when one places Herder opposite Voltaire and Montesquieu, but nothing is more correct when one sees him as the first representative of the line of thought that in the nineteenth century laid stress on history, culture, ethics, the senses, the instincts, and the imagination: that is to say, on the things that distinguish and divide men rather than the things that unite them: that is, their common reason, universal values, and their material interests. In Herder and among the Herderians, not only in Germany but also in France and Italy, there emerged cultural nationalism and its product, political nationalism, which, as one advanced into the twentieth century, became more and more radical and more and more violent. Cultural nationalism very soon gave birth to the idea of the national state and its counterpart, the supremacy of the state and the idea that democracy is the enemy of the people.

Even Cassirer, also a victim of the German cult of Herder, had a curious

tendency to see his work as if it had emerged *ex nihilo* or fallen from heaven. He felt that Herder's view of history, of unequaled purity and perfection, gave rise to a new conception of history in that it was not content merely to search for the outline of history: it wanted to perceive each form separately. History, according to Herder, did not know anything that was not truly unique, with the result that no abstract generalization had any force, and no one concept, no universal norm could do justice to its richness. Every human situation had its particular value, each phase of history had its own laws and its immanent necessity. The first duty of the historian was thus not to submit his object to a uniform measure fixed once and for all but to adapt his measure to the individuality of the object.²²

Herder himself was aware of the great fragility of his reasoning, and he expected to "be misunderstood."²³ In other words, he knew that his argument, owing to its inconsistency, was very much open to criticism. On the one hand he recognized "the weakness of general characterizations," which he made a great deal, and on the other hand he wished to be the painter of the special picture of each situation, people, and period he encountered. He knew, for instance, that what he called "the Gothic spirit and Nordic chivalry in the broadest sense" could not cover "the various periods of the spirit of the Middle Ages." Elsewhere he asked a question and immediately gave the answer: "Were all Egyptians, Greeks, Romans — are all rats and mice — the same? No! But they are still rats and mice!" But if one loses oneself in an infinitude of particular characteristics, where does one get to? "When you keep your face close to the picture, fumbling with this splinter or groping at that speck of color, you will never see the entire image — you will see anything but an image!" He elaborates what could easily be taken as a criticism of his own method: "And when your head is full of a group with whom you have become infatuated, would your sight be able to grasp the whole of such alternating ages, to impose order on them, to pursue them gently? To isolate only the main causes underlying each scene?" The conclusion is automatic: nobody can do it, and "history flickers and flares before your eyes." Here we see Herder wishing to find a path between historicity — that is to say, historical relativity — and normativeness, the historian's search for the truth.²⁴

In reality, Herder's originality lay not in his supposed discovery of the specific and the individual but in the meaning he gave to the reinvention of history in the eighteenth century, which makes him the intellectual father of nationalism. That was his major contribution. For the German philosopher took the historical corpus he found in his predecessors and turned it against them by creating an alternative that was antirationalist, Christian, antiuniversalist, anticosmopolitan, particularistic, and by that very fact, nationalistic. He

brought together a multitude of ideas that before him had been stated in isolation, which is something that is quite common and is not necessarily a proof of genius. The idea of the education of the human race by Providence came from Jacques Bénigne Bossuet; the idea of national climates and geniuses came from Montesquieu, who also contributed, through his disciple Paul-Henri Mallet, who in 1755 wrote an *Histoire de Dannemarc*, to launching the idea of the superiority of the Nordics. Mallet, a native of Geneva, was interested in the culture of the northern peoples and in the origins of King Odin, whom Herder spoke of later. The idea of a cultural history instead of a dynastic history came from Voltaire, and relativistic criticism came from Charles de Saint-Évremond and Jean-Baptiste Dubos. One should add that that the idea of the superiority of popular poetry can be found in Diderot, and that of a critique of enlightened Europe can be found in Rousseau.²⁵

But Herder opposed the French writers with a synthesis of irrationalism and biblical narrative, of Christianity and antiuniversalism, and that was where his originality and power lay. He drew from their work conclusions they never thought of, precisely because they were rationalists. For Herder, it was not the equal necessity of all periods of history and all cultures that constituted the unity of the historical process, but the hand of Providence. The view of history as a drama set up by God was the means used by Herder to indicate the total dependence of the individual: dependence with regard to transcendency as with regard to the historical, national, and cultural community. "The God I am looking for in history must be the same as the one that is in nature, for man is only a small part of the whole, and his history, like the history of the worm, is intimately connected with the tissue he inhabits. . . . Everything that happens on earth necessarily happens when it does according to rules which are perfect in themselves." This view of the relationship between the individual and the collectivity is extremely modern, inasmuch as it anticipates the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The insignificance of the individual — "Man — never other than a tool!"²⁶ — was the flag raised by Herder against the Enlightenment; de Maistre followed immediately, and Carlyle took up this theme throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. In the second half of that century, Renan and Taine continued this line of thought until, at the turn of the twentieth century, the insignificance of the individual was translated into terms free of any Christian connotation, becoming the cornerstone of the struggle against liberalism and democracy. This comprehensive view of human affairs persisted all the way to Croce, Maurras, Spengler, and Meinecke.

Here Friedrich Meinecke requires our special attention. The main theme of *Die Entstehung des Historismus* is described by Carl Hinrichs in his introduction as the conflict between a new, concrete, individual way of thinking and

the former approach, which was abstract and absolute, for Meinecke saw the revolutionary character of historism as residing in the fact that it presented an antithesis to the Enlightenment. According to him, the Enlightenment judged history according to a criterion based on a reason that was held to be eternally valid and was divested of any religious or metaphysical element. The Enlightenment, said the German historian, was the product of the intellectual movements of the seventeenth century, via Cartesianism and the excessive importance given to natural law, via the extinction of religious fanaticism and the rise of the natural sciences. But at the same time, the seventeenth century also developed a strong and sober feeling for realities: thus, literature and *raison d'état* confronted natural law. Between natural law and the new practical sense there was no possibility of a fusion. The movement of the Enlightenment was to a large degree a movement of protest against the politics of *raison d'état*, the politics of naked force. Politics were so discredited during that period that Montesquieu himself considered them the contrary of honesty, justice, and morality.²⁷

Thus, historism also represented a rehabilitation of politics, but the return to favor of politics did not come alone: this rehabilitation of force, this beginning of a cult of the state had a counterpart: the campaign against reason in the name of political realism. Meinecke spoke of the “contrast between the thinking of the rationalistic Natural Law and the [new] empirical realism,” and went on to make a comprehensive attack on rationalism and the universalism of the French Enlightenment. Following Troeltsch, Meinecke attempted to show that within the doctrine of natural law there was already among the Stoics a certain disharmony between the idea of an absolute natural law derived from reason, itself of divine origin, and a relative natural law that, without in principle denying the existence of absolute norms, looked closely at the particularities of social life and the imperfections of human nature. In the French Enlightenment and especially in Voltaire as its most eminent representative, it was the absolute that triumphed. In other words, reason triumphed with the French Enlightenment. However, said Meinecke, the empirical reason and relativism originating with Machiavelli were also making headway.²⁸

As the specific character of German culture and its main contribution to Western culture was to be found in this rejection of the French Enlightenment, because it was in the rejection of the French Enlightenment that Meinecke saw the great difference between the political and intellectual evolution of France and Germany since the French Revolution, his work traced a continuous line of progress from the infancy of historism in Europe up to the German apotheosis. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe was regarded as a hero, but in the final analysis it was Möser and above all Herder who dominated the foreground.

Herder was truly the central, the tutelary figure. Meinecke had read Cassirer's *Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, which had appeared in 1932, four years before his own work, and as might be expected from this admirer of Bismarckian politics, he had not been convinced by the work of the most celebrated Kantian of his time. On the one hand, he acted as if *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* was not even worthy of attention, but on the other hand his own book was really a German national response to Cassirer, the Jewish rationalist, who was soon to go into exile.

Historism thus did more than develop an innocent sense of the value and legitimacy of variety and multiplicity. It not only defended the idea that the human spirit knows no other reality than history, because it made it—the famous idea we owe to Vico—but also put forward a number of principles whose influence on our age has been crucial and generally disastrous. For the violence of the reaction, its scale and depth were commensurate with the greatness of the enterprise: the man of the Enlightenment wanted to re-create the myth of Prometheus. His immediate enemies replied with an appeal to Providence, destiny, the deep sources of the collective unconscious.

Undoubtedly, it was in Germany that historism achieved a position of unparalleled dominance, it was there that it attained its full development, and it was from there that it spread throughout the nineteenth century. But if from Möser to Meinecke, and including Ranke, historism was the central current of German thought, if it was the German ideology par excellence, it was not limited to Germany. It was a pan-European phenomenon whose influence was enormous in the two centuries between ourselves and the French Revolution. In France, the historicist tradition emerged in the public sphere for the first time at the turn of the twentieth century. It was then that Barrès produced most of his work and gave a general outline of the historicist position. Better and more clearly than anyone else in his generation, he fixed the conceptual framework of the confrontations that tore France apart in the last years of the nineteenth century between Boulangism and the end of the Dreyfus Affair, reaching their conclusion with the Vichy National Revolution.

The main object of Meinecke's condemnation was the concept of natural law. According to him, it was natural law that prevented a deeper investigation of the human soul through its intellectualism and its rationalism. He claimed that it was only by shaking off the ascendancy of natural law that it became possible to recognize the principle of individuality, a principle that the Earl of Shaftesbury was the first to recognize. Meinecke placed this English writer among the pioneers. Chronologically, Voltaire was next in line: he was the greatest historian of the Enlightenment because he was the most innovative. He represented an age that looked at the past with an unprecedented self-

confidence. In Meinecke's opinion, the historiographical achievements of Robertson, Hume, and Gibbon were perhaps superior to his, but Voltaire was the greatest among them because he was the first to have the idea of a universal history and invented the idea of a "philosophy of history." He had an unrivaled crusading, propagandist spirit, he was able to free himself from the conventions and commonplaces of his time, and he had the capacity—here Meinecke quoted Goethe—to achieve a bird's-eye view of the world. Meinecke paid homage to Voltaire's genius, to his respect for the diversity of customs and beliefs, to his comprehension of the idea of the spirit of different periods and peoples: unlike Condorcet and Turgot, he did not believe in infinite progress. But at the same time, Meinecke was highly critical of his weaknesses: the irrational depths of the human soul were unknown to him, his image of perfection remained mechanical—that is to say, rationalistic—and the values of the Enlightenment seemed to him unsurpassable. According to Meinecke, Voltaire, a complex figure, was constantly torn in his interpretation of historical phenomena between a mechanistic point of view and a moral one (this opposition made by Meinecke is revealing), but despite these weaknesses he had a first intuition of the great leap forward of relativism.²⁹

By relativism, Meinecke meant an awareness of the individuality of historical phenomena and respect for their specific nature. Clearly, enlightened relativism had its limits; it could only operate mechanically, from cause to effect, from the exterior and not from the interior. An authentic relativism would be in contradiction to the guiding principles of natural law, according to which there are eternal and unvarying norms of life. But owing to the very fact that the Enlightenment had embarked on a quest on the scale of the universe, the stimulus given to the desire to seize humanity in all its aspects and all its manifestations finally led to a relativistic view of the world. In this way, the historical curiosity of the Enlightenment prepared the way for a deeper historical relativism.

Now, the following observation of Voltaire should be brought to the attention of all those who even today see Herder as the inventor of the historical world. "My aim is always to observe the spirit of the time. That is what causes the great events in the world," he wrote in his *Essay on the Manners*, and he returned to this theme in *The Age of Louis XIV* with this profession of faith at the beginning of that remarkable work: "It is not only the life of Louis XIV that we wish to write: we envisage a far greater goal. We wish to depict for posterity not the actions of a single man, but men's spirit in the most enlightened age that ever existed."³⁰ While staking his claim to be the true pioneer of the world of history, Voltaire showed what the beginning of modernity was: in the time of Louis XIV the "new" had undisputedly emerged triumphant, and a threshold

was irreversibly crossed. That did not mean that history followed an uninterrupted upward curve: "There will never again be a time when a duc de La Rochefoucauld, the author of the *Maximes*, after having a conversation with Pascal or Arnaud, would go to the theater to see a play by Corneille." This age, said Voltaire, which was only comparable to the age of Leo X, Augustus, and Alexander, was inevitably followed by a period of decline: "Genius only lasts for an age [century], after which it necessarily degenerates." Voltaire was not the fanatical devotee either of the simplistic idea of continuous and uninterrupted progress or of the domination of France that he has been made out to be since Herder. From these pages, one can readily conclude that even the supremacy of the language of Molière and Racine is not guaranteed forever. French became the language of Europe because everything lent itself to this, from the great writers of the age of Louis XIV to the Calvinist pastors who found refuge abroad and historians like Bayle and Saint-Évremond, read throughout Europe.³¹ For Voltaire, language did not have any special genius, as was claimed by Germans like Herder and Fichte: it was an exceptional conjunction of circumstances that made French the language of cultured Europe. What emerges is that the essential point for Voltaire was that in the seventeenth century an incomparable leap forward was accomplished.

Voltaire not only invented the idea of the philosophy of history, he not only created the sphere of cultural history within the framework of the history of civilization: in his historical writing, he pursued his work of demystification. He thought that all traditions spoiled what they transmitted. He applied the Cartesian principles to the search for historical truth. Although there are undoubtedly many weaknesses in his documentation, Voltaire accomplished a remarkable feat of research: he studied written documents, whether the memoirs of high officials or the manuscripts of contemporaries; he already made use of oral evidence and questioned witnesses. He did not hesitate to smash to smithereens, going through written sources and testimonies with a fine-tooth comb, myths like the crossing of the Rhine by the army of Louis XIV, celebrated in verse by Nicolas Boileau. Like the Parisian public, Boileau thought that the army crossed the river swimming, despite artillery fire directed from an impregnable fortress, an exploit that Bossuet described as "the wonder of the century." Voltaire dismissed the wonder: the celebrated fortress was only a hut of customs officials, the enemy only two weak infantry regiments and a few hundred cavalry.³² That was enough to make him odious to Herder and Burke. His war on Christianity, his criticism of tradition, and his rationalism were enough to raise against him, each for a different reason, Taine and Renan, Barrès and Maurras, Croce, Spengler, and finally Berlin.

Meinecke paid homage both to the quality of the work and to the French

Grand Siècle, but he felt that Voltaire's mistakes were commensurate with his stature. He demonstrated all the faults of the Enlightenment. The criteria by which he judged the past, the way he turned to the cultures of Asia in order to attack Christianity, the dark picture he painted of the Middle Ages, followed by the light of the Renaissance and again the night of the wars of religion, were criteria of reason. That was the core of the trouble, for in Meinecke's view, a gulf lay between the vast empire of the irrational and the petty realm of reason, a gulf opened up by the mechanistic psychology of the Enlightenment. It was precisely because of his mechanistic and egoistic reasoning that Voltaire could not understand "the specific existence of all the objective creations of the human mind and spirit," and the first of these creations was the state. Meinecke recognized that Voltaire wanted a strong and independent state, and especially one that was free from all religious influence, but only as an instrument of civilization, or, as he said, to use the language of the Enlightenment, an instrument for the "happiness" of the peoples. Voltaire put forward the principle that the state existed for the good of the individual, and in this he expressed the aspirations of the individualistic and liberal bourgeoisie; he spoke in utilitarian terms. Meinecke considered this principle a reflection of individual and class egoism.³³

That, said Meinecke, was why, in spite of the fact that Voltaire knew that "force . . . did everything in this world," his moralizing approach, which was that of the Enlightenment as a whole, prevented him from understanding the full depth of the idea of the state and the nature of political power. He recognized *raison d'état*, but he did not realize the dependence of all cultural life on the state or the state's absolute individuality. He held that monarchs were interchangeable, providing they lived in periods in which reason was developed to more or less the same degree. Once again Meinecke put his finger on what he considered the salient point: Voltaire's inability to grasp the immensity of individuality. Moreover, the concept of human solidarity seemed to Meinecke merely an aspect of the proud self-satisfaction of the Enlightenment, and what was worse, this solidarity transcended all national and religious boundaries. For the historicist school, this was a major sin. In the final analysis, his approach seemed unable to transcend the limits decreed by natural law. The philosophers of the Enlightenment were too fond of the idea of happiness, they were too full of morality to understand the true nature of power. We thus come to the main conclusion. Despite Voltaire's influence on Herder, it was with the *Journal* that the dawn of historicism arose and the Enlightenment was clearly thrust into the background and seen as a negative phenomenon.³⁴

After Voltaire, Meinecke dealt with Montesquieu, a figure he found more

difficult to assess. Montesquieu was free from the aspect of natural law that this admirer of Bismarck particularly despised: the idea that the origin and legitimacy of the state was to be found in a social contract.³⁵ At the same time, he was never able to free himself from the fundamental contradiction that is obvious from the very first lines of *The Spirit of Laws*: on the one hand, he said that laws are “necessary relationships deriving from the nature of things,” and on the other hand, he immediately asserted that “those who have said that *blind fate has produced all the consequences we see in the world* have said something totally absurd.”³⁶ The conclusion Meinecke drew from this was that the rationalist in him, who believed in an eternal principle of reason, prevented him from drawing the proper deterministic conclusions from his own premises. This made him confuse the laws of reason—one could say, the norms of reason—with the laws of mathematics or causal relationships. Today, said Meinecke, we think that concepts of true and false, of good and bad—that is to say, moral norms—are the result of a development from a lower to a higher stage of human life, and as such will continue to change in the future. Montesquieu, however, thought that these norms were eternally valid like the laws of mathematics. But, together with this, Montesquieu was also conscious of a certain impotence of reason in the face of the irrational forces working in history. Once again Meinecke praised Montesquieu’s achievement, and he did not forget Saint-Évremond, from whom Montesquieu learned a great deal, or Bossuet, but he pointed once more to the weakness of his work: Montesquieu’s pragmatism remained captive to a conceptual framework that was both mechanistic and utilitarian.³⁷

Here Meinecke returned to the problem of relativism, that essential component of historicism. But, here again, rationalism proved an insurmountable obstacle for Montesquieu: the jurist, the political thinker was able to consider the particular characteristics of periods and nations, but the rationalist was drawn to gross simplifications. The mechanistic causality of Cartesianism was an obstacle that prevented him from grasping the individual forms and structures of history. But despite the fact that, like Voltaire, he promoted the idea of progress, he did not embrace the perversion that progress became in the later Enlightenment. Finally, while Voltaire taught that the struggle between the rational and the irrational was a constant factor in history, Montesquieu was interested in the way reason could come to terms with the irrational. Whereas Montesquieu thought that “making a general custom out of all particular customs would be a rash thing to do,”³⁸ Voltaire believed it was ridiculous for each place to have its own laws. Indeed, in the long chapter 82 of *An Essay on the Manners* devoted to the arts and sciences in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, he made the fragmentation of France responsible for its misfor-

tunes: "How could an unhappy country . . . without written laws and governed by a thousand different laws, a land of which half was named after the language of *Oui* or of *Oil* and the other half after the language of *Oc*, be other than barbaric?"³⁹ From Herder to Meinecke and Berlin, the chief critics of the Enlightenment would promote this cult of the particular and admire this pluralism, despite the fact that in France it was Jacobin legislation and later republican legislation that was the source of progress and prosperity. Moreover, what would have happened in the United States if there had been no Civil War or if in the 1960s the federal government had not imposed civil rights and racial equality on the old slave states?

After Montesquieu, Meinecke considered the philosophy of history in the second half of the eighteenth century, from Turgot to Condorcet. This generation was still interested not in the individual but in the typical and the universally valid. Condorcet tried to show that human reason was infallible to the degree that a natural law like the law of gravitation was infallible. At the same time, there were nevertheless signs of a positive evolution: Georges-Louis Leclerc de Buffon inspired Goethe's and Herder's evolutionism, Diderot took the passions into consideration, Rousseau did an invaluable service to the cause of the rights of the individual, and the cultural criticism of the two *Discourses* did a great deal to shake the self-satisfaction of the Enlightenment and deepen the level of reflection. Rousseau was a pioneer, but all these thinkers were still victims of the same error: faith in reason. They all believed that reason can lead to universally valid truths. There were also other positive developments: A. Y. Goguet (1716–1758) wrote a cultural history of mankind from earliest times to ancient Greece; Boulanger was an inspiration for Herder. Even in the strictly classical period of Louis XIV there was renewed interest in the spirit of chivalry and the Middle Ages. Meinecke mentioned Jean-Baptiste de La Curne de Sainte-Palaye (1697–1781), the collector of the songs of the troubadours, and gave special attention to Mallet. Mallet, he claimed, displayed a true historical talent, but he was essentially a man of the Enlightenment, true to the concept of natural law and the idea of the universal identity of human nature. Mallet, said Meinecke, was a pioneer in an art that was to reach its perfection with the great Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt. It is only, he said, by combining political and military history with the history of manners, morals, and opinions that one can achieve "*a really useful and complete historical corpus*."⁴⁰ This work was not much noticed in France, but in England and Germany it led to a great infatuation with the Nordics.

According to Meinecke, there was major progress in England too. After Shaftesbury, there were Hume and Gibbon. Gibbon would have been capable of recognizing spiritual forces as forces that were also individual ones if his

“reason” had not still been bound by the principles of natural law. He was incapable of making the breakthrough to an experience that would have embraced the entire psyche: his intellectualism allowed him only to recognize the irrational forces of the soul. Hume was obligated to the thought of Montesquieu and Voltaire, and his *History of England* could have passed for an imitation of *The Age of Louis XIV*, but he was a deeper and more forceful thinker than Voltaire; his pragmatism represented a great leap forward, but he was still a victim of the limitations of natural law. He was unable to penetrate psychological depths, even though he knew there was a sphere of mystery and the word “chance” meant there were phenomena whose cause was unknown. But reason in Hume had not yet lost its fixed, permanent, and timeless quality, and he still made mistakes typical of the Enlightenment: hasty generalizations and a tendency to see relationships of cause and effect everywhere. The lessons to be learned from history were not yet individual, only typical and general.⁴¹

Gibbon, according to the German historian, was also a victim of the incoherence prevailing in Enlightenment thought. Absolute criteria were always in evidence. It was only with the rise of historicism, with its particularism — Meinecke spoke of “individualism” — that it was possible to grasp the whole tragedy of the ancient world. The same could be said of Robertson: he was a great historian, but he too was limited by his view that human nature was always the same, which necessarily resulted in a similarity of stages of cultural development.⁴²

Adam Ferguson went further: he demonstrated the power of instinct in social life. According to him, the origin of social institutions was very ancient; they were the result of spontaneous impulse and not of considered human activity. He recalled Oliver Cromwell’s saying that man never rises so high as when he does not know where he is going. This was a great saying, commented Meinecke. Thus, Ferguson too rejected the idea that the state was produced by a contract. Institutions are the product of the genius of an entire people: Vico had already said this, but he was a lone voice. Ferguson introduced the idea that man is a poet by nature; he showed that nothing can be added to the natural beauty of the poetry of primitive peoples. But his most important contribution was his conviction that men’s spiritual attitude was the decisive factor in the life and death of peoples and states; it was this force that Machiavelli called *virtù* and Ranke later described as the moral energy of a people. Peoples and states flourish when they have a deep sense of political community. Meinecke admired Ferguson’s capacity to understand that a political philosophy whose sole objective was to ensure public order and preserve the security and property of individuals without taking the character of the citizens into account would render them incapable of living as a community.

Men occupied solely in assuring their own welfare lose the virile spirit necessary to give societies their force. With him, war, reviled by the Enlightenment, had a positive and creative character. It was the sign of the beginning of a new age in history, one that gave proper importance to the state and the forces that sustain it. Meinecke thought that Ferguson made possible an understanding of the role of the individual in history.⁴³

However — it is hardly surprising to read this in Meinecke — it was only in Burke that there was a leap forward with the assertion of the national character of the state. Burke's youthful work on the origin of our ideas of the beautiful and the sublime drew the attention of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing and Herder and had an important place in the history of aesthetic ideas. Burke was also the first to apply these particularistic principles — the search for the specific in each work and in each period — to the state, a factor relatively neglected by the other British pre-Romantics like Richard Hurd and Ferguson. Meinecke noted that in his other youthful work, *Abridgement of English History*, also written in the 1750s, never finished, and published only in 1812 — an essay that did not go beyond the year 1216 — Burke revealed his fundamental disposition. There was nothing here resembling the condemnation of the Middle Ages so typical of the Enlightenment. Moreover, in seeing in the destiny of nations the hand of Providence he showed a religious attitude. But what was most important was the deep sentiment he had for the past: he saw in it the roots of our institutions as they exist in the present. In this way, he corrected the two great errors current in his time: before him, nobody saw that English law had remained the same from time immemorial and that it had remained essentially free from all foreign influence.⁴⁴

Meinecke thought that in opposing these errors Burke could have had the support of Hume, but Hume was not yet weaned from the norms of natural law. As a rationalist, he could not deny the principle of equality. Hume undoubtedly gives us a foretaste of Burke, but no more than that. Burke could have adopted Hume's formula in his *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* that if there are truths harmful to the state, it is better to relegate them to permanent silence and replace them with beneficial falsehoods, just as he could only have approved of Hume's recommendation in his *Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth* that tradition should be respected. Yet, despite the fact that his work was a kind of stepping-stone for Burke, and although his empiricism could in theory be very radical, it was still utilitarianism of the old kind. This utilitarianism viewed men in a superficial manner and treated their enthusiasms and passions in a mechanical way: "Hence his mechanical formula for the balance between authority and liberty."⁴⁵ So, Meinecke saw the attempt to find a compromise between the requirements of authority and the desire for

liberty — that classic problem of liberalism — as a “mechanical formula”: that is, the vestige of a past that was swept away by Burke.

Later, in 1791, when preparing his assault on the rights of man, Burke, in *Thoughts on French Affairs*, reproached Hume for his position on universal rights. But this rejection of universal principles was already to be found in Burke's *Vindication of Natural Society* written in 1756, that satire on Henry St. John Bolingbroke's enlightened philosophy which hoped to uproot religion by means of pure reason. Meinecke came back to the idea he had already expressed that Rousseau's criticism of civilization could also have been a harsh blow against the Enlightenment, were it not that he was himself a rationalist and used the arsenal of rationalism. In fact, said Meinecke, Rousseau attacked the enemy's positions from the outside, but Burke penetrated to the heart of the fortress of the Enlightenment and succeeded in disarming the enemy. This enemy, which had to be destroyed in order that one could reach a deeper level of understanding of human life and history, was the spirit of natural law.⁴⁶

Indeed, going from Hume to Burke was for Meinecke like first seeing a landscape in the cold, bare light of dawn and then in the first rays of sunlight of a warm day. According to him, Burke's thought was a definite advance in that this writer did not see the state in a general, abstract manner like the thinkers of the school of natural law, nor from an empirical, mechanical, and utilitarian point of view like Hume. Thus a gigantic step forward was accomplished, for Burke conceived of the state not only as a useful institution but also as an extraordinary work of nature, as a tree that, having developed for centuries, had thus acquired its titles of nobility; as a product of the divine will rather than an outcome of the caprices of human reason. The state has an aesthetic and ethical aspect; it has a moral value and an inherent beauty, and men's inner life can thus derive great benefit from it. Burke took a stand against the French ideas, against the danger contained in these ideas that were already finding their way toward England, and against the most arrogant expression of the spirit of natural law, the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen of 1789. Meinecke said that Burke was able to present himself as the most authoritative representative of his nation. Meinecke understood that Burke was also defending class interests, but these interests represented the historical rights of the nobility and the church capped by the monarchy. The hatred with which he attacked the French Revolution was commensurate with his adoration of the threatened treasures. The aristocratic state, the state “of the saints and knights,” which he idealized in his defense of it, refusing to see its weaknesses, was both a religious and a chivalrous conception.⁴⁷

Meinecke suggested that if one were to identify a single concept underlying all Burke's ideas on the values of human life, politics, and history, one could say

that it was “world piety”: Burke had a religious respect for the world as it was, with all its imperfections. He saw the world as possessing a cosmic harmony and had faith in its significance. Man was born here on earth and had duties toward his fellows. Burke spoke of “that mutual dependence which Providence has ordained that all men should have on one other” (*Thoughts on French Affairs*) and everywhere asserted the primacy of history over reason. It should be noted, said Meinecke, that in Burke one finds a combination of immanence and transcendence, a sense of divine forces operative in the world and of indissoluble links between this world and the one beyond. It can be seen in the context in which he speaks of the contract in *Reflections*: it is that of an indissoluble contract binding together the visible and invisible worlds, an eternal community uniting the higher and lower species. It is not Locke’s contract, which is always subject to modification. This concept of an eternal contract is fundamental to Burke, and this is what creates the idea of prescription.⁴⁸

According to Meinecke, Burke’s theory was a revitalized traditionalism, but not yet historicism. Meinecke reserved this term — according to him, the apex of human understanding — for the German genius: first of all, Herder, and next, Möser and Goethe. But although it did not reach the level of historicism, Burke’s thinking was the apex of traditionalist thought. He saw that the subtleties of reason might not be sufficient to recognize the wisdom hidden in the depths of sentiment. Moreover, he clearly saw that a living community was not only political but also cultural, and he had a strong feeling for the unity of past and present. That was the reason for his famous description of society in *Reflections* as an indestructible association that no generation or part of the people has the right to interfere with. However, Meinecke thought there was a contradiction in Burke’s thinking. Burke advised the French to imitate the British constitution, but was not a constitution the product of the specific and particular circumstances of each culture?

In reality, contrary to Meinecke’s opinion, there was no contradiction in Burke, for two reasons. The first was that Burke did not ask the French to adopt the British constitution, he asked them to go back to the beginning of the seventeenth century, the time of the last summoning of the States General in 1614, and accept that the same rules applied in 1789. He was convinced that France had a constitution of its own and that it simply had to be revived. The second reason was that, contrary to a widely accepted view, Burke did not deny the existence of universal principles: respect for tradition and the primacy of history were also universal principles. What he did was to deny the validity of certain principles and to introduce others, no less abstract and no less universal. Prescription was such a principle, as was prejudice.

In this period when the political culture of the Anti-Enlightenment was in the making, the Enlightenment, according to Meinecke, impelled by a logical

necessity, advanced inexorably in France toward its greatest and most fatal victory. He recognized that Burke, being the victim of a naïve form of historicism, was incapable of understanding the forces at work in the dramatic events in France. This is where the most ardently disputed territory lay, where there was a society in intellectual ferment cut off from political power, where the drama of history could only have been expressed in the most vivid manner. But these same principles of an unalterable law of nature became a universal instrument of war and froze history and historical thought, reducing them to a fixed and static condition. The progress made in France in the direction of historicism was undoubtedly real, but, according to Meinecke, the French spirit was incapable of rising sufficiently high: it was up to the German spirit to give a thrust and a clear direction to this process of liberation from universal norms and the sovereignty of reason.⁴⁹

Thus, after a long period of incubation and groping, the climax was reached with the German genius of Herder. Meinecke considered his *Journal*, which appeared in the year Voltaire's *Essay* was published in its definitive form, the manifesto of a new age. Meinecke saw in Herder's thoughts expressed in these pages brought back from France a collection of revolutionary ideas that were later to explode in the Sturm und Drang movement. These ideas were destined to act as a ferment of all spiritual and intellectual life, and of poetry, art, and philosophy first of all, and to do nothing less than totally transform the whole of historical thought. Even if there remained in Herder traces of Voltaire's ideas, "the Enlightenment," cried the German historian, "receded into the background, and the day of historicism dawned."⁵⁰

According to Meinecke, Herder's specific contribution to historical thought was that he developed a number of closely interconnected ideas: the idea of the absolute originality of all historical creations and their continual recurrence in the process of human development, the idea of the organic development of cultures and nations, the idea of decadence connected with the criticism that began with Rousseau and continued with Hamann, and the rebellion of the irrational forces, the forces of the blood against "the cold rationality of the Enlightenment and the mechanistic tendencies of civilization." Another line of thought was that there was never an age without God. Herder thus came to oppose the most recent doctrine of the Enlightenment, of which Voltaire was the champion. This doctrine represented history as a continual confrontation between reason and the forces opposed to it, and judged it in relation to the "perfection" attained by the eighteenth century. Similarly, Herder could not do otherwise than oppose the optimistic view of a continual progress of the human race. All these doctrines were rooted in the old conception of natural law, of a human nature that had always been the same.⁵¹

A consequence of Herder's view, according to Meinecke, was that good

appeared to be a necessary condition of evil, and evil a necessary condition of good. The clear-sighted Machiavelli had seen that in every institution, as necessary and useful as it may have been in the past, there lurks a hidden evil. Vico showed that men's limited passions and emotions were used by God to create a higher level of culture. Then one had the Hegelian idea of the "cunning of reason." In Herder's opinion, God, as man's educator, could sometimes lead man to his objectives by devious paths.⁵²

In the course of his ceaseless struggle against the rationalism of the eighteenth century, or, as Meinecke put it, against its arrogant belief in reason, against the admiration for the Renaissance of which the rationalists were guilty, seeing it as the summit of human culture, Herder created the concept of "destiny." As he approached his own time, Herder's tone became humbler: "In our place, we are both the purpose and the tool of fate." Reason, thought Herder, can lead to skepticism; when one looks into men's hearts, one realizes there is no progress and the world does not improve. There is in Herder both a pull toward decadence and a Christian call for action in this world. However, the formula "I myself am nothing, but the whole is everything," or the comparison of man to an ant, do not, according to Meinecke, demonstrate a dependence of the individual on the collectivity different from that he has on God.⁵³

That is why, despite the tremendous efforts of the most convinced Herderian of the second half of the twentieth century, Herder's name is still associated with the rise of nationalism. Isaiah Berlin used every possible means to reduce Herder's major contribution to the upsurge of political nationalism and the national state to the minimum and make it only a cultural phenomenon, but he only convinced those who were already convinced. Meinecke, for his part, did not have any such complex: he showed that cultural nationalism was simply the first stage of an ascension climaxing in the national state. Thus, the German historian focused on Herder's contribution to our understanding of the spirit of a nation. The most striking example is his approach to a particular period — the Middle Ages. Herder began by not liking the Gothic style, but, like Hurd in England, said Meinecke, he discovered in it the splendor of the human spirit where Voltaire and Hume saw only darkness. But Herder, as represented by Meinecke and Berlin, did not fall into an idealization of the past: he saw the relative value of each period. Here the concept of "happiness" intervenes. This idea, which represents the realization of men's desires and aspirations, cannot be viewed in universal terms.⁵⁴

This clearly poses the problem of historical and moral relativism. Meinecke, like Berlin after him, tried to convince his readers that Herder was not a relativist. Both of them claimed that the proper antidote to relativism was to be

found in Herder's Christian philosophy of history. Meinecke added a further argument; he tried to convince one that the Herderian "radical relativism," the equal value of all peoples and all races, is close to the French Revolution's idea of equality. The German historian forgot that, for the French Revolution, it was a matter of equality between free individuals, rational beings, possessing natural — that is to say, universal — rights and organized in political communities, not in ethnic groups. Here Meinecke fell back on the argument that Herder spoke of nations and not of races.⁵⁵ But where exactly is the dividing line between cultural determinism and racial determinism? Did not the twentieth century provide the proof that racial determinism can only develop on the basis of cultural determinism?

Finally, Meinecke showed a Herder whose religious fervor had cooled considerably in Weimar in comparison to what it had been in Bückeberg, and he spoke of a secularization of his thought. Christianity had lost ground with the author of *Ideas*, the religious fervor, which in any case was not a guarantee of universalism, had grown tepid, but his nationalism remained the same, which meant that its relative importance was all the greater. It is true that there are currents and countercurrents in *Ideas*, and there is undoubtedly a Herderian duality, but it is no less true that if there was a falling off of Christianity, nationalism remained a constant. One should not forget, in this context, his liking for a tribal way of life and oriental despotism in his work of 1774, which does not show a very liberal conception of society and the state. Meinecke admitted this, but he insisted that if Herder was one of the pioneers of the idea of the national state, that state was of an entirely peaceful character. Herder, he claimed, loathed states founded on conquest, for conquest destroyed the cultures of subjugated peoples. He also did not have a very clear idea of the nature of war, which he saw as the product of "pressures" and "constraints." One wonders, said Meinecke, whether there was ever a time where the human race was not subjected to pressures of some kind, and that meant that war was natural. Moreover, a young nation fighting for its freedom certainly had the right to resort to a policy of force.⁵⁶

This brings us to the question of Herder's heritage, a question that was implicitly contained in the lecture on Herder given in May 1941 at the German Institute in Paris by another great German intellectual, Hans-Georg Gadamer. The institute, directed by Karl Epting, the specialist in Nazi cultural propaganda in France, was devoted to bringing a knowledge of Germany to Frenchmen open to understanding and collaboration. But Gadamer's ambition went further: he not only wished to show the greatness of German civilization but its intrinsic superiority to French culture. Before the public that frequented this center of Nazi propaganda, Gadamer, then a professor at the University of

Leipzig, like Meinecke chose to celebrate Herder, the thinker “who invented the world of history,” who in his *Journal*, a work of genius, had the idea of a universal history of civilization.⁵⁷ He showed that the victory of Germany was the victory of German values. Herder had contributed to it in a time of political weakness, while Gadamer, a worthy successor with the advantage of finding himself in the situation of a victor, continued his work with all the more enthusiasm as he regarded Herder as an iconic figure, a real pioneer, one of the first to feel the great difference between the French culture of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the “German genius.”

This text was reprinted on the initiative of the author in 1967 in order to make it clear that this study had lost none of its validity. It is by no means a coincidence that Gadamer followed in Meinecke’s footsteps, and that both of them, like Heidegger, applauded the military victories of the new regime.

In his *Seduction of Unreason* Richard Wolin has shown the great ambiguities of the German inner immigration. In Paris under occupation, as Berlin had been in Napoleon’s day, it was the works of the young Stürmer that attracted attention, and it is natural that Gadamer placed the emphasis on the *Journal* and on *Another Philosophy*. He was not incorrect in thinking that it was his conception of history that made Herder oppose German culture to French culture and put his finger on the fatal tension between them. Gadamer, like Meinecke, was not a Nazi sympathizer, but he could not help asking the French public assembled under the swastika the only question that mattered at that time: What was the true historical significance of the German victory?

This lecture, despite, or rather because of, the exceptional circumstances in which it was delivered, is as important for an understanding of Gadamer and the German intellectuals of his time as it is for an understanding of Herder’s influence. Gadamer had totally assimilated Herder’s critique of the French Enlightenment, rationalism, and the rights of man and made it his own. Following Herder, Gadamer, like Meinecke a few years earlier, reflected on all that differentiated French and German culture, all that made Germany unique and consequently superior. Gadamer was not the only person at that period to vaunt those whom history had seemed to prove right. Bertrand de Jouvenel, a well-known liberal in the postwar period but a fascist intellectual of the 1930s, in 1941 produced a book, *Après la défaite*, immediately translated into German as *Nach der Niederlage*, with the same intention. An enormous literature on the defeat came into existence.⁵⁸ Ernst Jünger, honored with a new Iron Cross won during the French campaign of 1940, paraded around the Parisian salons: received by artists and writers, he was the very symbol of the victory of one system of values over another. Renan had already said it in 1870; in 1940,

with the whole contingent of fierce critics of the Enlightenment taking part in the Vichy National Revolution, one was back at the point where one had been just after the first great German victory over France in 1870: for all of them, force was the criterion of moral and intellectual superiority.

Gadamer viewed Herder as the originator of the general critique of the Enlightenment. This was the “passionate postulate” of that preacher. It was he who, going beyond Rousseau, made possible the “liberation from the cultural prejudices of the encyclopédist philosophes”; it was he who made it possible to bring to “nothing” the “naïve vanity with which the time of the Enlightenment viewed its civilization.” According to Gadamer, Herder transcended not only the philosophy of the Enlightenment but also its counterpart, Rousseauism, not only intellectualism and “the illusion of progress but also the revolt of sentiment.” Thus, the revolt against the Enlightenment led to the discovery of the sense of history. And now comes the main point: “Whoever says a sense of history says a sense of force.”⁵⁹

Pierre Pénisson, the author of an important work on Herder, complained of Gadamer’s analysis. Free of any trace of Aufklärung, Gadamer’s Herder vigorously asserted his rejection of reason, the Enlightenment, and the idea of progress.⁶⁰ Undoubtedly, to overlook Herder’s classical phase and the works of the Weimar period, which began in 1776 and in which a certain dogmatic humanism is in evidence, is as unjust as to forget the masterly work of his youth. But it was precisely in his *Ideas*, in the second half of the 1880s, that the Herderian view of history came to maturity, and there it corresponded to the idea that Gadamer gave of it. He did not falsify Herder’s thinking — far from it: “The whole history of mankind is entirely a natural history of forces [*Kräfte*], actions and human instincts in accordance with the place and time,” wrote Herder. “Destiny reveals its intentions by what happens and by the way in which it happens. Thus, someone observing history can see its intentions simply from what exists, from what reveals itself in all its fullness. Why did the enlightened Greeks exist? Because they did exist, and in the circumstances could not be anything else than enlightened Greeks.”⁶¹

Herder’s conception of history is clearly the key to his revolt against the Franco-Kantian Enlightenment. The pastor believed that a providential plan guided history. As he said in *Another Philosophy*, “Endless scenes of drama! God’s epic through the millennia, continents, and human races, a thousand-faced fable full of meaning!”⁶² For “if a simple house will reveal the ‘design of God’ in even the least of its components, how could it be otherwise with the history of its inhabitants?” A few pages later he continued, embellishing his text with verses from the Bible. “The book with seven seals given to the Lamb to be opened” (Revelation 5) and “the hour of his judgment is come” (Revela-

tion 14:7) appear in this text in which Herder teaches us that the work of the historian is nothing other than an attempt to decipher, transcribe, and make known the intentions of Providence. "The book of prehistory lies before you! Secured with seven seals, it is a wondrous book of prophecies. The end of days awaits you! Read!" he exclaims in a passage that one might think had come directly from a pastoral sermon.⁶³ This is a good illustration of the gulf that existed between his view of history and that of the "enlightened" philosophers. Even Kant, the closest among them to a certain pietism, was not in the habit of quoting verses from the New Testament.

Another Philosophy of History served exactly the purpose that Herder intended. Even if he did not invent history, the Protestant theologian created a new view of history which was no longer that of Bossuet but was much farther still from the one that French and British rationalists like Robertson and Ferguson had recently created. Herder had just put forward a way of seeing history as the product of a divine plan. He strongly objected to the negation of Providence expressed in the work of his predecessors and reduced the role of the human will to the minimum: "The course of Providence proceeds to its goal even over millions of corpses!"⁶⁴ he cried in *Another Philosophy*. Was Herder justifying the existence of evil in history? One can hardly doubt it. One finds in *Ideas*, where the polemic against Kant, even if it is less violent than that against Voltaire, nevertheless pursues with great fidelity the line of thought initiated ten years earlier, the following passage: "All the works of God have their *raison d'être* in themselves and a fine coherence between themselves. . . . Furnished with this clue, I go through the labyrinth of history and see everywhere a harmonious divine order, for whatever can happen does happen, and what can take place, does."⁶⁵ Between *Another Philosophy* and *Ideas* there are undoubtedly modifications, but the continuity is no less obvious.

That is why Gadamer was right to insist not only on the particular character of Herder's thought but also on its unity. He referred to the authority of Herder himself, who had indicated that his *Ideas* written in Weimar between 1784 and 1791 were a revision and a realization of the ideas and principles contained in *Another Philosophy* written at Bückeberg in 1774. To be sure, one can find in the *Ideas* a certain rapprochement with the Enlightenment, but it was in the form and the tone rather than in the content. Herder's antirationism, his appeal to faith, his intellectual reconciliation with Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi reveal the logic of his undertaking. Moreover, at a distance of a century and a half, these differences have lost much of their validity.⁶⁶ The work of the Weimar period does not have the same passionate character as the one produced at Bückeberg, but it is difficult to see it as an interiorization of the principles of the Enlightenment. In other words, it was undoubtedly

Herder who put his finger on the difference between rationalism and the *völkisch* vision of the nineteenth century, all the ramifications of which he could not foresee, but of which he was one of the first great progenitors, if not the very first. In 1941, Gadamer took his stand on principles enunciated from the last quarter of the eighteenth century onward.

For Herder France was identified with the Enlightenment. What the age of Enlightenment lacked was precisely what Herder considered to be France's greatest weakness: with the French, free thought took the place "of all that they perhaps needed most — Heart! Warmth! Blood! Humanity! Life!"⁶⁷ Here we have an idea that was to fascinate all Herder's admirers: this war cry recurred in Meinecke in order to demonstrate that Herder was right to reproach the Enlightenment for seeing the individual only as an isolated mechanism, Gadamer saw it in the same way, and it became, throughout the uninterrupted two-century-long campaign against the Enlightenment, a rallying point and a sort of proudly displayed flag.⁶⁸ This appeal to the forces of life, of the senses, of ethnic solidarity, of blood, was considered a magnificent declaration of revolt against the dryness of, or rather the stench of death emanating from, the French eighteenth century. Both Meinecke and Gadamer and Berlin after them refused to face the fact that this declaration was also that of that great revolt against rationalism that in the twentieth century assumed catastrophic proportions.

Gadamer also adopted as his own Herder's critique of faith in progress, his attack on the "delicate, weakened sensibility of the eighteenth century," on that "folly of his century," on that "fashion" of comparing peoples, civilizations, and periods and judging them according to the criteria of the present time. He revealed a violently antirationalistic Herder, quoted a classic text from *Another Philosophy*, and concluded, "The pith and kernel of the whole of history," which Herder had looked for, "was not to be found in his century's ideal of reason." What gives this historical problem its philosophical importance is that it is not a matter of straightforward human progress: all progress is seen as also being a loss. Moreover, in contrast to the eighteenth century proud of its struggle against prejudice and its victory over it, Herder, praised by Gadamer, considered prejudice a source of happiness for the peoples of the world.⁶⁹

Gadamer approved of Herder's limited historical horizon. One should not look in history either for a purpose or for the happiness of the individual: it is beyond human capacity to discover the divine plan. All that remains for man is faith in the certainty that the divine plan is progressing toward greatness. History thus has a harmonious character. Here too, the Leipzig professor's reading of Herder is correct. This philosophy of history expressed in *Another*

Philosophy recurs in *Ideas* and is essentially the same: “Universal history is not a fairy tale.” This is the answer to the great question, If history is a progression toward greatness, how do we interpret the experience of historical reality? “Clearly as *force* and as a combination of forces.” For — Gadamer drives the nail in further — “one can demonstrate that the concept of humanity in Herder is not the concept of an ideal but the concept of force. The place of Herder in the history of philosophy is determined by the fact that he applied to the world of history the idea of force, or rather of organic forces.” Finally, the historical reality is only “the manifestation of the play of certain forces.”⁷⁰

This, then, according to Gadamer, was the alternative Herder offered the philosophers of the Enlightenment who reflected on the progress of virtue and happiness. It is interesting, moreover, to see to what a degree Gadamer’s Herder was a de-Christianized Herder: the Protestant pastor’s confidence in history was not a faith in the accomplishment of a divine plan but a faith in the presence of God in history because of the demonstration of his wisdom to be seen in nature. That was the purpose of the philosophy of history: to oppose skepticism by directing attention to the analogy that exists between human history and nature. It was not the rationality to be found in history that was responsible for Herder’s belief in history; his philosophy of history tended rather to seek to overcome historical doubt by incorporating human history in the larger and more convincingly organized totality of the history of the planet.⁷¹

It is undeniable that the concept of force (*Kraft*) was fundamental to Herder’s philosophy of history. Hegel had already recognized the centrality of this idea in Herder’s writings, wrote Myriam Bienenstock, though not, like Gadamer, as something to Herder’s credit, but as a criticism. In his *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (1830), Hegel condemned Herder’s confusion in “conceiving God as force.”⁷² This Hegelian critique is of great importance for an understanding of Herder’s thought, for it was made a century before the preoccupations of the twentieth century were in evidence.

Here, Hegel returned to a criticism he had published in one of his first articles, “Faith and Knowledge,” written in the context of the celebrated “Panthéism Dispute” that took place in Germany after the appearance of Jacobi’s *Letters on the Teachings of Spinoza*. In this article, Hegel linked Herder with Jacobi. According to Hegel, Herder did not go so far as to replace rational thought with sentiment or the subjectivity of instinct, as Jacobi did, but he replaced it with the concept of “force” or “original force” (*Urkraft*), and to that degree his philosophical approach was slightly more objective than Jacobi’s. Herder refused, however, to define in rational terms the concept of “organic force” that he used in *Gott*, published in 1787 and republished in 1800 with corrections following his reconciliation with Jacobi: “It . . . is only

an *expression*, for we do not understand what force is.”⁷³ That is why Hegel fiercely attacked him: instead of clear and distinct philosophical ideas, Herder used “expressions” and “words” that cannot be explained or understood.

Before proceeding any further, I should point out that, as Bienenstock observed, the first edition of *Gott* was not different in everything, certainly not in essence, from the second edition, in which Herder was careful to eliminate anything that could hurt Jacobi. Already in the first edition, though he did not go so far as to oppose faith to knowledge, as Jacobi did, he was not so far from Jacobi in the fundamental question of how to understand their relationship.⁷⁴ This should cause us to reflect on the myth of an *Aufklärer* Herder of the Weimar period, writing *Ideas* in opposition to the work of 1774, which was only the expression of the rancor of an angry young man, while in his major work Herder had become a man of the Enlightenment. The first edition of *Gott* appeared at exactly the moment when Herder finished writing *Ideas*.

Hegel, observed Bienenstock, could not forgive Herder his adoption of Jacobi's position in the second edition of *Gott*, where he said that by *Kraft* he did not intend to “explain” anything. For Hegel, explanation and, over and above that, the imperative of knowledge were fundamental. There could be no question of renouncing knowledge for the principle of faith. For Hegel, to give up knowledge was to give up freedom and, together with freedom, all morality. In renouncing Spinoza's aim—that of liberating oneself through knowledge, through the recognition of necessity—in losing sight of the essence of Spinoza's system, Herder, said Hegel, surrendered abjectly on the main point, the fundamental objective. And it was precisely this fundamental objective—to show that freedom is acquired through the recognition of necessity—that explains the way in which Hegel's philosophy of history is different from Herder's.⁷⁵

Indeed, Hegel adopted from Herder concepts like “spirit” and the “spirit of a people,” but he gave them a completely different meaning. In reality, Hegelian rationalism could not accept a system of thought in which faith replaced reason. That is why Hegel praised Montesquieu and not Herder as the person who had “based his immortal work on an intuition of the individuality and character of peoples,”⁷⁶ and that was precisely why in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries Taine, Renan in his political writings, Barrès (via Michelet), and the German conservative revolutionaries, as well as nationalists in all parts of Europe and all the truly cultured critics of the Enlightenment, turned not to Montesquieu or to Hegel, but to Herder. Herder had also, from the beginning, seen the distance between himself and Montesquieu: his antirationism constituted an unbridgeable gulf. In the last years of the twentieth century, Isaiah Berlin's attitude to Montesquieu was also very critical.

The attack on Montesquieu is particularly interesting because, of all the writers of the Enlightenment, he was at once the one closest to Herder and the one most dangerous for his enterprise of deconstructing the French Enlightenment. Montesquieu, in fact, had created a philosophy of history that corresponded to Herder's intellectual preoccupations, but he remained rooted in the Enlightenment. For him, a law always presupposed a relationship, and this relationship was rational and logical; it was derived from a "primitive reason." Montesquieu saw man as the creator of his own destiny, a rational being guided by his own thought and his own will. He saw history as being made by beings endowed with reason, and as reflecting all the greatness and all the weaknesses of these "particular intelligent beings [who] are limited by their nature and consequently subject to error. On the other hand, it is their nature to act on their own." History is made up of a mass of phenomena that amount to a "reason," a "primitive reason, and laws are the relationships that exist between it and the different beings, and the relationships of these different beings among themselves." As someone who was still a thinker of the Enlightenment, Montesquieu saw in the fact that men act in accordance with their own will a reason to expect political and social history to take a new direction. Men have a knowledge of general principles and of the forces that move history; this gave him his conviction that they were capable of giving themselves a different future. He gave the final sanction to the divorce of divine law and natural law.⁷⁷

When Herder reproached Montesquieu for neglecting the necessity of adapting political solutions to the genius of a nation or a period, he knowingly misrepresented the nature of both *The Spirit of Laws* and of *Persian Letters*, in which the idea of the relativity of Western civilization was strongly affirmed from 1720 onward. In 1767, Ferguson's *Essay on the History of Civil Society* expressed several ideas that Isaiah Berlin, after many others, thought characteristic of Herder's original contribution. Ferguson put forward the idea of a specific form of happiness proper to each nation; he regarded each people as an individual entity, and the literature of each one as its own spontaneous creation whose origin cannot be sought in other countries. "Any singular practice of one country . . . is seldom transferred to another till the way be prepared by the introduction of similar circumstances." "If nations actually borrow from their neighbours, they probably borrow only what they are nearly in a condition to have invented themselves."⁷⁸ Like Herder, he regretted that we "are generally at a loss to conceive how mankind can subsist under customs and manners extremely different from our own," adding that "we are apt to exaggerate the misery of barbarous times."⁷⁹

It is precisely because he laid down the principles underlying social and

political structures while at the same time allowing for the specific conditions of different times and places, cultures, and physical and moral circumstances that Montesquieu was the true founder of political sociology and political science, as well as one of the great thinkers of liberalism. Herder misrepresented his thinking in order to attack him on the points where he could deliver the most forceful blows: Montesquieu's refusal to rise above reason, his refusal to see history as anything other than the domain of "general laws" and the product of the will of men rather than the hand of God.

In reality, just as he derived the true conceptual framework of his philosophy of history from Montesquieu, Herder owed to his main adversaries, Voltaire, Hume, and Robertson, another of the great ideas which still today are associated with his name: the idea that history is the history of a whole people, its culture, way of life, literature, songs, and legends. The writers he never stops attacking are precisely the ones who substituted cultural history, the history of the culture of the masses, for purely political, diplomatic, and military history. Substituting the whole history of a nation for dynastic history was an idea that Herder took from Voltaire's *Essay on the Manners*. In his *Journal* he summed up that lesson as follows: History is never "the history of sovereigns, dynasties and wars, but rather of the kingdom, the country, and everything that contributes to its happiness or its decline."⁸⁰

But what was the meaning of *esprit* as the term was used in the eighteenth century, and first of all by Voltaire and Montesquieu? Cassirer and Meinecke saw the role that this concept could play as an instrument of historical analysis. They pointed to the role of reflection on the spirit of an institution, a people, a period, in opening up a path to a new way of thinking about history. But there was the "enlightened" way of understanding spirit—the way of Montesquieu and Voltaire—and the Herderian way. In Montesquieu, the analysis of the spirit of laws was a reflection on the specific nature of peoples, their morals and manners, their ways of life, and their behavior on the basis of the different principles that govern their legal and political systems. In Voltaire, the "spirit of peoples and times" was much more than a mere tool of historical analysis: it was the fundamental element that presupposed the very idea of a philosophy of history.⁸¹ It was in this way, due to their conception of history as the history of the masses, that the rationalists were able to go beyond Bossuet and Vico. There was no need to disparage reason or to deny the autonomy of the individual in order to achieve this.

The same applies to the Herderian critique of French classicism, that supreme method of eliminating French influence, or that other idea associated with Herder, the sense of individuality. For these things, rationalism was no obstacle. One reads, for instance, in Montesquieu, "To transpose to past ages

all the ideas of the age in which one lives is the most fertile of sources of error.” Rousseau was no less explicit: “Do we not know that . . . consciousness is imperceptibly altered and modified in each age, in each people, in each individual as a result of instability and a variety of prejudices?”⁸²

Voltaire, Herder’s pet aversion, attacked by him all the more harshly because, together with Montesquieu, he was his initial source of inspiration, in *An Essay on the Manners* expressed himself with the same clarity: “The charge of atheism which we in the West level so freely at anyone who does not think like us, has been made against the Chinese. . . . We have slandered the Chinese solely because their metaphysics is not the same as ours. . . . This great misunderstanding about Chinese rituals has come about because we have judged their usages by ours, for we carry the prejudices of our contentious spirit to the end of the world. A genuflection, which for them is just a bow, has seemed to us an act of worship; we have taken a table for an altar. That is how we judge everything.” Voltaire, as we know, complained about Western ignorance. In speaking of Persia, he condemned “our ignorant audacity” and “our ignorant credulity,” which bring about our always imagining that “we have invented everything, that everything has come from the Jews or from us who have succeeded the Jews. We are duly corrected when we burrow a bit in Antiquity.” In one of his two chapters on India, Voltaire exclaimed, “It is time for us to give up the shameful habit of slandering all sects and insulting all nations!” Voltaire was pluralistic before Herder, and in a way that had an immediate liberal significance that Herderian pluralism could not have: “If there was only one religion in England, one could fear despotism; if there were two, they would cut each other’s throats; but there are thirty, and they live peacefully and happily together.”⁸³

In the same way, the Herderian idea that all perfection is essentially that of a particular country at a particular time can be found in Dubos, a writer who in the twentieth century attained the status of one of the initiators of modern thought. Dubos, whom Montesquieu, while criticizing him a great deal for his historical work *L’Établissement de la monarchie française dans les Gaules*, nevertheless described as a “celebrated author,” introduced the principle of nationalities into literature and, before Montesquieu, considered the influence of various climates. Voltaire admired Dubos’s work very much. Well known to Herder, Dubos exemplified a modernistic and relativistic literary criticism and, due to this, greatly subverted classicism and at the same time undermined the basis of religion. The abbé Dubos was the inventor of the famous concept “the milieu, the race, and the moment,” ascribed to Taine.⁸⁴ Here one finds the origin of the Herderian reaction to the thinkers of the Enlightenment: in attacking literary dogmatism, orthodoxy, and conformism, they cast doubt on the principles of faith.

Thus, the fundamental difference between Montesquieu, Voltaire, Dubos, and Herder was not that the German had a historical sense in which the French were lacking, but their diametrically opposite aims. While Voltaire and the other Enlightenment thinkers like Helvétius used their historical sense, or, if you will, their sense of historical relativity, to attack religion, Herder placed his sense of history at the service of Christianity and nationalism. Voltaire rehabilitated the Arabs and the Chinese to counter the Judeocentrism of the Christians; Herder rehabilitated the patriarchs on behalf of Christianity, the Middle Ages on behalf of the Christian German culture. Voltaire attacked Western pride as a consequence of Christianity, Herder did so because he saw this insolence as a product of the Enlightenment.

In the face of these maladies of the age that he fought in the philosophers, in the face of doubt and skepticism, Herder, like Burke, fell back on prejudice, and any prejudice, justified or not, was in his opinion preferable to the alternatives: doubt, reason, the autonomy of the individual. Tradition was the anchor that prevented one from going adrift. That is what Herder meant when, from the first two pages of the essay of 1774, he attacked “the philosopher’s spectacles” and his “a priori” narrative of the beginnings of human history, setting against them the description of the origins of the human race found in the Bible.⁸⁵ In his attack on the Enlightenment tradition begun in *Another Philosophy* and continued in books 8 and 10 of *Ideas*, in his condemnation, from 1774 onward, of any attempt at rational legislation, Herder initiated the line of thought pursued by Burke as well as Rehberg and Gentz in their criticism of the new French constitution. To Hobbes, to Locke, to Montesquieu, to Rousseau, and to all the varieties of the school of natural law whose common denominator was a voluntaristic view of the origins of society, Herder opposed the biblical narrative, or, in other words, a natural and not a rational origin of society.

If Herder’s work appears as the first comprehensive reaction to the Enlightenment, more powerful and more sophisticated than that of Burke, it is, among other things, because it was untainted by hatred of the French Revolution. At the same time, if the thinkers of the Enlightenment had few sharper critics, they never had a more gifted disciple than the pastor of Bückeburg. For Herder, while disparaging their works for their rationalism and their anti-Christian spirit, took from them most of his thought. He did not have some mysterious feeling for the particular and the specific, for the unique character of each human being; he did not discover the nation, as though through a sudden illumination; he did not discover the uniqueness of each event, and he was neither the first nor the only person to wish to do justice to oppressed or so-called primitive peoples. In *Another Philosophy*, Herder stated that “no two moments are ever the same,”⁸⁶ which, as we have seen, was not a discov-

ery at the end of the eighteenth century, though in the twentieth century it was to become yet another of his claims to fame. What matters, however, is that this idea was also to be found in the *Journal*. That means that the idea of a relativity of values was always present in Herder's thought and formed a fundamental part of his heritage: "No man, no country, no people, no national history, no State resembles the other, and consequently, the Truth, the Beauty and the Goodness within each one do not resemble the others either."⁸⁷

Herder's concepts are not political concepts, and precisely for that reason they are highly problematic. Apologists for Herder see in this, as in the case of Nietzsche, proof of his great naïveté, of his total innocence concerning anything to do with the political exploitation of his thought. But that precisely is the problem. The Herderian concepts were not legal and constitutional like those of Montesquieu, his preoccupations were not, like those of Locke and Rousseau, focused on the rights of the individual and the contractual character of society; he was uninterested in the nature, source, and legitimacy of power and sovereignty, in the good society and the place it gives to the individual, he did not consider the rights of man, precisely because the position he adopted was opposite to that of the philosophes. Herder was interested in "the people" as an organic body, in the nation, and in history, and it is exactly in this that his thought was revolutionary in relation to that of his time, it is exactly in this that it provided the conceptual framework for the war against the Enlightenment until the first half of the twentieth century. Herder's work had most of the characteristics of that innovation which formed the modern world.

Thus, the idea of force, the insignificance of the individual, the Christian faith, antirationalism, and the rejection of doubt, and the primacy of history and its integration into the larger framework of the history of the universe are the legacy that Herder left us. After Herder, following the confrontations of the end of the eighteenth century, questions concerning the philosophy of history, relativism, and decadence and the place of prejudice in the life of society were to dominate intellectual activity in the nineteenth century. The principles formed at the turn of the nineteenth century, adapted to the changes that had taken place in the meantime, nourished the ever more powerful current of the Anti-Enlightenment in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Thomas Carlyle was no doubt the most typical representative of a tendency that, while still remaining in the lofty sphere of high culture, was filled with a highly antidemocratic impetus, and announced from afar the explosion that took place at the turn of the twentieth century.

The central tenet of Carlyle's philosophy of history is the idea that society is subject to an eternal metamorphosis, and that it is exceptional men, heroes,

that bring about this transformation. Carlyle's heroes, it should be pointed out, are not vulgar dictators; far from it. They are men of genius with exemplary moral qualities. The heroes are not only statesmen, or soldiers that have become statesmen, but founders of religions, priests, and prophets, poets, men of letters, and philosophers. Unique in their qualities and their destiny, it is they who cause the human race to advance. Carlyle's hero was clearly not comparable, either in position or in function, with the "man of genius" whom John Stuart Mill also saw as the motive force of history, but the mystique of the outstanding figure was relatively common among the Anti-Enlightenment thinkers. The cult of the hero also reflected the elitism common to all varieties of this school.

If the body of society does and should change in the course of time, the question arises of how Carlyle conceived this transformation, of which the heroes are the agents and channels of transmission. Is this transfiguration necessary and normal, or can it lead to disaster? Is it an endless process? Are all periods of equal importance, which would imply a relativity of values? Is the evolutionary process one of progress? Can there be progress beyond Christianity? The author of *Heroes* showed how three great European civilizations succeeded one another: pagan antiquity, the Christian Middle Ages, and the modern era. "The greatest scene of modern European history," the "greatest moment in the modern history of men," the one that was the starting point of all subsequent evolution, was Luther's appearance at the Diet of Worms on April 17, 1521. On that day, one saw how "the poor miner Hans Luther's son," this one man come to defend "God's truth," was able to hold his own against "all the world's pomp and power." Carlyle declared that all that is great in modern Europe grew out of the seed contained in Luther's words on that day, out of his refusal to abjure them: Puritanism and the parliaments in England, the conquest of America, the "vast work" of "these two centuries," the French Revolution and Napoleon — the last of the great men — and, quite recently, Goethe and German literature, as well as Europe's civilizing influence throughout the world. One should see not only the place of the French Revolution in history but also the importance and nature of its origins: like Puritanism, the French Revolution would not have been possible without Luther's struggle for the truth, for freedom of conscience, in the face of falsehood, even if it led to "contentions and disunion."⁸⁸

It follows that since, according to Carlyle, the motive force of history is the appearance of the exceptional man, the messenger of Providence, progress cannot be stopped, and regression is impossible. Catholicism can never again be what it was before the irremediable corruption of the Papacy, any more than paganism can return, and the Middle Ages have also gone forever. But

what would happen to the nineteenth century? Society produces the great man who expresses not only the existential need for leadership but also the need for truth and faith. Society needs heroism: the hero is the supreme nonconformist, he is the man who “feels himself to be spiritually related to the Unseen World,” who has a divine relationship with the rest of humanity. “What else is alive but Protestantism?” he asks. If that is so, does it mean that the future depends on the appearance of a new Luther, Knox, or Cromwell? Would democracy kill the hero? Certainly not, since it produced Napoleon in “an age when God was no longer believed,” a great man who was not, like Cromwell, reared on verses from the Puritan Bible but on wretched skeptical encyclopedias: he is all the more to be admired.⁸⁹ Coming at the end of the unfortunate eighteenth century, the century of Voltaire, Napoleon, the last figure in *Heroes*, thus provides the proof that no decadence need be permanent or final. No one has the key to the future.

In the path he opened up, Carlyle was immediately followed by Taine, his most faithful and certainly most influential disciple. Carlyle left nobody indifferent, least of all a French historian of English literature like Taine. Where political ideas were concerned, Burke was Taine’s first true source of inspiration, but for Taine as a historian, Carlyle was an exemplar of historical method and the art of writing. Carlyle disconcerts, but at the same time he dazzles. At the end of his great chapter on Carlyle, Taine compared the English writer to Lord Macaulay, who had just died. He claimed that although he was exasperated “by this exaggerated and demonic style, this extraordinary and sick philosophy, this grotesque and prophetic treatment of history, this sinister and crazy politics,” he was convinced there was more genius in Carlyle than in Macaulay.⁹⁰

First of all, there was the fascination of this “extraordinary animal, the wreckage of a lost race; a sort of mastodon strayed into a world that is not made for him.” Everything was new: the ideas, the style, the tone. “He misconstrues everything; he does violence to everything — expressions and things.” The *History of the French Revolution* of this “puritan seer” is like a delirium. If the reader does not throw the book away in anger and exasperation, he has lost his judgment! There is only one step from the sublime to the ignoble, from the pathetic to the grotesque. His cynicism toward the modern world, his furious declamations are the dominant tone of this “strange spirit . . . [but one] who makes us reflect.” According to Taine, it is this frantic tension that constitutes his talent.⁹¹ Here, Taine put his finger on the secret of Carlyle’s influence at the end of the nineteenth century. Like nobody before him in the period after the French Revolution, he was able to make political cynicism a weapon against democracy.

His method would finally be the one adopted by Taine. The whole of Car-

lyle's philosophy of history, he said, was based on research, discovery, and the comprehension of facts. According to Taine, the great men exhibited by Carlyle — prophets, kings, writers, and poets — were only great for that reason. The great man discovers some unknown or unrecognized fact and proclaims it. People listen to him, they follow him, and "that's the whole story." Carlyle perceived this and believed in it with an unshakable and absolute faith. Intuition and conviction were the two salient features of his way of working, and the characteristics he also ascribed to great men. Taine added, "He was not wrong, for no principles are more effective. Wherever he went with this lamp, he shed an unanticipated light. He pierced mountains of paper erudition and penetrated men's hearts." In this way, Carlyle transcended official and political history: "He read characters, he understood the spirit of bygone ages," and, better than Macaulay, "he sensed the great revolutions of the soul."⁹²

But it was not only the visionary qualities that Taine admired in this writer, "strange and enormous in his fantasies and jokes." He was no less aware of his qualities as a researcher. The British historian rejected hearsay and legend: "He wished to derive a positive law from history," he brushed aside all the "parasitic vegetation" that accumulates during research and took only "the useful, solid wood." However, "the facts seized upon by this vehement imagination melted within it as though within a flame," and "ideas, transformed into hallucinations, lost their solidity." Finally, "a moving chaos of splendid visions, infinite perspectives, arose and boiled up in him." Carlyle spent his life, said Taine, in expressing veneration and fear, "and all his books were sermons."⁹³

This writer was "deeply Teutonic, closer to the primitive stock than any of his contemporaries"; he was almost German, "in the force of his imagination, in his perceptiveness as an antiquary, in his broad general perspectives." Unlike Macaulay, that methodical and cautious historian who proceeded on straight, regular paths, Carlyle belonged to the class of people whose spirit and temperament were those of poets, prophets, inventors, romantic ages, and Germanic races. Contrary to the kind of historian represented by Macaulay, whose whole talent, said Taine, when it went beyond mere analysis, was that of eloquently expounding arguments, Carlyle was an excellent example of the kind of people who throw themselves "with a sudden leap into the *idée mère* [leading idea]," always see the area they want to cover as a single whole, and think in "abrupt concentrations of violent ideas. They have a view of distant effects . . . and are discoverers or poets." Michelet, said Taine, is the best example of this sort of intelligence, and Carlyle was a British Michelet.⁹⁴ It has been pointed out that Taine did not bring up Montesquieu, Tocqueville (to whom we owe the concept of the *idée mère*), or Voltaire.

Taine wanted to be Michelet, Macaulay, and Carlyle rolled into one, but he owed a special debt to the latter. Carlyle always knew that genius is an intuition, an illumination. From Herder to Berlin, the thinkers of the Anti-Enlightenment all saw intuition rather than reason as the supreme instrument for the understanding of human affairs. Taine quoted a particularly characteristic passage from *Sartor Resartus* in which Carlyle sums up his method and at the same time provides the key to his historical work. That key was really also the one to Taine's work. The right method "is not in any case, that of common school Logic, where the truths all stand in a row, each holding by the skirts of the other; but at best that of practical Reasons proceeding by large Intuition over whole systematic groups and kingdoms; whereby, we might say, a noble complexity, almost like that of Nature, reigns in his Philosophy, or spiritual Picture of Nature." He undoubtedly knew that this visionary procedure was risky and that the strong assertions and the guesses were often lacking any proof. But when all is said, minds like Carlyle's were the most fertile. The classical historians, the "classifiers," did not invent, "they were too dry"; they lacked imagination, "the organ by which we perceive the divine." In other words, in order to understand phenomena or situations, one has to have an inner feeling for their directions and consequences. This way of proceeding Shakespeare had instinctively, and Goethe had it as a method. No other people are better able to refresh our ideas or free us from limitations and prejudices.⁹⁵

Taine claimed that it was Germany, from 1780 to 1830, that created all the ideas of his age, and it was from there that Carlyle took his great ideas. For half a century, perhaps for a century, our main business would be to rethink them. No intellectual movement more original, more universal, more fruitful, better able to transform everything and re-create everything, had appeared for three centuries. Taine thought that the development of the German philosophical genius at the end of the eighteenth century, which affected all disciplines, was comparable to the Renaissance and the classical age. "Like them, it was one of the moments in the history of the world," and like them, it affected all civilized countries and all the great works of contemporary thinkers. The original spirit that in Germany produced a philosophy, a literature, a science, an art, was distinguished by "the power of discovering general ideas." That, said Taine, was the special faculty of the Germans: it was the gift of understanding, which was that of finding total conceptions that bring together all the different aspects of a subject into a governing idea. Thus, beyond the divisions in a group, one sees the common link that binds it together, one reconciles oppositions, one restores apparent contrasts in a deep unity. This, Taine concluded, was the philosophical faculty par excellence. By this means, the Germans "perceived the spirit of ages, civilizations and races, and made history, which was only a world of facts, into a system of laws."⁹⁶

Carlyle's concept of civilization was also German: "Every civilization has its *idea*, that is to say, its principal trait, from which all the others derive, so that philosophy, religion, the arts, manners and morals, all forms of thought and action, can be deduced from some original and fundamental quality from which everything proceeds and which everything comes back to. Where Hegel would put an idea, Carlyle puts a heroic sentiment. It is more tangible and more moral."⁹⁷

All these ideas elaborated in Germany fifty years earlier, said Taine in an important text, come down to a single one, "*development* [*Entwicklung*], which is representing all parts of a group as interdependent and complementary, so that each one necessitates the others." This basic idea, "stripped of its accretions . . . merely asserts the mutual dependence of all elements in a series, and connects all of them with some abstract property situated within them. If one applies this to Nature, one comes to view the world as a scale of forms and as a series of states possessing in themselves the reason for their succession and their being, . . . comprising in their totality an invisible whole which, . . . sufficient to itself, in its harmony and magnificence resembles some almighty and immortal God." When one applies this idea to man, "one comes to consider sentiments and thoughts as natural and necessary products, bound together like the transformations of an animal or a plant, which leads one to conceive of religions, philosophies, literatures, all concepts and all human emotions as the necessary adjuncts of a spirit that carries them away when it leaves and brings them back if it returns, and which, if we can reproduce it, gives us in consequence the means to reproduce them at will." That is how Taine saw the two doctrines reflected in the writings of "the two foremost thinkers of the century, Hegel and Goethe."⁹⁸

Here we undoubtedly find the idea that Max Weber developed into the ideal type. Before him, Gaetano Mosca found in Taine the idea that history was the history not of class warfare but of the rise and fall of elites. Taine saw the abdication of these as one of the main reasons for the French Revolution; Mosca made it into a general law. Was not the search for general laws the great lesson of the German "philosophical spirit"? In this, in the passion for "total perspectives" that he had all his life, the historian and cultural critic Taine appears as one of the great unacknowledged founders of the social sciences. He was, however, also conscious of the limits of this phenomenon: continually resorting to hypotheses and abstractions leads one to invent arbitrary explanations or to lose oneself in vague explanations, two vices that corrupted German thought. Ephemeral systems, baseless theories abounded; the correction came from the French.

Indeed, "every nation has its original genius in which it molds the ideas it takes elsewhere." As a result, each person re-creates these ideas "in accordance with the

structure of his own center." If Taine adopted Herder's ideas, he was more generous and open than the Lutheran pastor, in that he saw the assimilation of foreign elements as a natural and positive process. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Spain revived Italian painting in a new spirit, the Puritans and Jansenists reinterpreted early Protestantism, and the French eighteenth century expanded the liberal British ideas on religion and politics. The same thing happened in the nineteenth century. The French were unable, like the Germans, to reach "lofty total conceptions all at once. They could only go step by step, starting with tangible ideas and ascending by slow degrees to abstract ideas." But the result was the same, if not better: the French not only understood Hegel and Goethe but corrected them. Thus, one saw Renan, that "superior spirit, the most delicate, the most elevated that has appeared in our days, . . . explaining, in a French manner," the German scientific production, "stored up beyond the Rhine for the past sixty years."⁹⁹ Thus, Taine tells us in passing that from the final years of the eighteenth century it was Germany that dominated the European cultural scene. Taine, no more than Renan, questioned the superiority of German scientific, historical, and philosophical culture.

In his reading of Carlyle, Taine was searching for himself. That is the reason why his attitude was at once critical and admiring. The thought of this modern Puritan "was not a metaphysics or any other abstract science, originating solely in the head, but a philosophy of life, originating also in the heart and speaking to the heart." Carlyle, said Taine, described the whole succession of emotions, doubts, despairs, inner struggles, exaltations, and lacerations through which the old Puritans arrived at faith: this path was also his. All visible things are symbols; in actual fact, what one sees does not exist. Matter only exists in a spiritual sense: language, poetry, the arts, the church, the state are no more than symbols. The universe itself is but one great symbol; man is merely a symbol of God. Science without reverence is sterile, perhaps even poisonous. The most learned man who cannot revere "is only a pair of spectacles without any eyes behind them." The universe, in the least of its provinces, said Carlyle, "is literally the starlit city of God. . . . Through every living soul shines the glory of the living God."¹⁰⁰

Taine saw this "vehement English poetry" as simply "an English *transcription* of German ideas." Carlyle, he thought, "understood religion in the German way — symbolically." His "Christianity is very free," "pantheistic," which "in good modern French," adds the author, "means mad or villainous." In fact, Carlyle considered Christianity a "myth." This was an important point, for he thought religion had a major social function. He regarded all religions as containing a form of the truth, they all in their way interpreted a sense of the divine; all of them were symbols. The only detestable form of religion was the

one that consisted of ceremonies learned by rote, a mechanical repetition of prayers. Whatever the creed, it was sentiment that gave it its validity, and that sentiment was the moral sentiment. All religions said the same, and what they said was: there is an infinite difference between a good man and a bad one. Christianity, for Carlyle, was only one of the forms of the universal religion: "He wished to reduce the human heart to the English sense of duty."¹⁰¹

Taine noted that in the literary sphere, in introducing Hegel and Goethe within the framework of Puritan sentiment, Carlyle renewed the art of criticism. He regarded the writer, the poet, the artist, as a hero: that is to say, as "an interpreter of the divine idea behind all appearances, a revealer of history," a representative of his century, his nation, his age. These "Germanic formulas," said Taine, "mean that the artist unravels and expresses better than anyone else the prominent and enduring features of the world around him, so that one can extract from his work a theory of man and nature, as well as a picture of his race and time." Moreover, Carlyle not only renewed the art of criticism but also invented "a new way of writing history." The crux of Carlyle's historical vision was his conception of the hero, who "contains and represents the civilization in which he is understood. He discovers, proclaims or practices an original concept, and his age follows him." Thus, knowledge of a heroic sentiment gives one knowledge of an entire age. In this, "Carlyle went outside biography. He regained the great perspectives of his masters. He felt, as they did, that a civilization, however dispersed in time and place, forms an indivisible whole. He assembled under the banner of heroism the scattered fragments that Hegel brought together with a law. He understood the distant, deep connections between things, those that link a great man to his time."¹⁰²

That is why, "since the heroic sentiment is the cause of everything else, that is what the historian must concentrate on. Since it is the source of civilization, the motive force of revolutions and the master and regenerator of human life, it is here that civilization, revolutions and human life must be observed."¹⁰³ In setting forth Carlyle's thinking in this way, Taine sketched the first outlines of his own method as a historian, a method that consisted of trying to re-create the soul of a period.

For what is a revolution if not "the birth of a great sentiment"? What does this sentiment consist of? What are its origins, its repercussions? One must ask oneself "how it transforms the imagination, the understanding, one's ordinary inclinations, what passions nourish it, what proportion of folly and reason it contains. . . . To explain a revolution is to embark on a psychological study. The analysis of critics and the intuition of artists are the only instruments that can do this." Only the great connoisseurs of the human soul, Shakespeare, Balzac, and Stendhal, are capable of it. Carlyle was one of these: his master-

piece was *Cromwell*. He wanted to make a soul — that of the greatest of Puritans, their hero — understood; his narrative is like an eyewitness account. His sincerity was as great as his sympathy, for the greatest historian of Puritanism was himself a Puritan. Taine a thousand times preferred Carlyle's *Cromwell*, made up of texts with commentary, to all the fine colorless narratives of Robertson and Hume. Carlyle, he said, displays a fact rather than gives an account of a fact; he allows one to touch the truth itself.¹⁰⁴

If in England Carlyle was the product of Sturm und Drang and its immediate progeny, Renan had this role in France. Like Carlyle, Renan, following Herder, launched an attack on the Enlightenment no less violent than that of the writer of *Another Philosophy*. For him as for Carlyle, Germany at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth was the country described by him in September 1870, in his first letter to Strauss, as the one to which I “owe . . . the thing I value most, my philosophy, I might almost say my religion. I was in the seminary of Saint-Sulpice in about 1843, when I began to know Germany through Goethe and Herder. It was as though I were entering a temple.”¹⁰⁵ It is possible that Renan, writing nearly thirty years later, slightly predated his expertise in German culture, but there can be no doubt that in 1845, when he noted down a few ideas on early poetry in his *Cahiers de jeunesse* (Youthful Notebooks), he added: “These ideas are wonderfully in agreement with those of Herder.” He regarded Herder, “one of the finest geniuses of modern times,” as the “king of thinkers,” whom he preferred to Kant, Hegel, and Fichte.¹⁰⁶ It was from the German philosophers that Renan received his taste for Protestantism. He would have liked to be a Christian of the same kind as they were, “but can I do that in Catholicism?” Elsewhere, he exclaimed: “Ah, if only I was born a Protestant in Germany! That's where I would have been at home; like Herder who was a bishop.”¹⁰⁷

Protestantism, for Renan, was not only a religion that guaranteed individual freedom but, together with philosophy, also a formidable weapon of war, and the true secret of German power: it was not the primary-school teacher who was victorious at Sadowa: it was Luther, it was Kant, it was Fichte, it was Hegel. A belief only has value when it is the consequence of reflection, and a religious act is only “meritorious when it is spontaneous.” Renan thought that “Protestantism is closest to this ideal.” Like Carlyle, that teutonized modern Puritan, like Herder and Burke, Renan believed that “man is most on the true path when he is most religious and most assured of an infinite destiny.”¹⁰⁸ This line of attack against the French Enlightenment was to be taken up again by Croce.

For Renan, as for Burke and Herder, and for Croce and Taine, “the highest degree of intellectual culture” was “to understand humanity.” The key to this understanding was history. Thus the whole of philosophy was placed in histor-

ical perspective. History was not just political history as usually understood but “the human spirit, its evolution, its various phases.” That is why one had to see it in a certain perspective: “One never lacks the philosophical spirit with impunity,” he said. However, despite his infatuation with German philosophy, with Kant and Hegel, despite his knowledge of Leibniz, Renan was not a philosopher in the traditional sense. He was not a metaphysician: he practiced what he called a *critical philosophy*. Like Carlyle, Taine, Croce, Meinecke, and Berlin, and in the tradition of his master Herder, this historian and critic of culture and society, in his important essay “Philosophie de l’histoire contemporaine” (Philosophy of Contemporary History), which somewhat recalls *Another Philosophy of History*, said that one must understand “those great movements of which the history of all periods is full, and which in the past seventy years have had a particular name and form: the name and form of revolutions.” In order to make himself quite clear, he explained: “Political history is not the history of parties, any more than the history of the human spirit is the history of literary cliques.” “The history of the human spirit is the greatest reality open to our investigation,” so that “all research to illuminate a corner of the past has a significance and a value.”¹⁰⁹

Thus, “each of our days is what it is through the way it understands history,” and “history is the true philosophy of the nineteenth century. Our century is not metaphysical. . . . Its great concern is history, and above all the history of the human spirit.” History involves choices, and it posits moral and intellectual identities: “One is a philosopher, one is a believer according to the way in which one views history. One believes in humanity or one does not believe according to the systemization one has made of its history.” In order to grasp what the human being is, one must have recourse to history. There is “a science of the human spirit which is not merely an analysis of the workings of the individual soul, but which is the very *history* of the human spirit. History is the necessary form of the science of all that is in the *process of becoming*.” Finally, we have a passage of great importance: “The science of man will not be seen in its true light until we are convinced that *consciousness develops*, and that, weak at first, vague and dispersed, in the individual as in humanity at large, through various phases it reaches its plenitude. One will then understand that the science of the individual soul is the history of the individual soul and that the science of the human spirit is the history of the human spirit.” Thus, “the great progress in modern thought has been to substitute the idea of *becoming* for the idea of *being*, the concept of the relative for the concept of the absolute, movement for immobility.”¹¹⁰

Renan knew that a historian necessarily expresses a philosophy of man and of life. This awareness was “the enormous historical development of the end of

the eighteenth century and of the nineteenth century”: the sense that “there is a life of humanity as there is the life of an individual. . . . Hegel’s claim to immortality is to have been the first to express with perfect clarity this vital force . . . that neither Vico nor Montesquieu had perceived, and that even Herder had only vaguely imagined. In this he is assured of the title of the definite founder of the philosophy of history.” History would never again be “a meaningless series of isolated facts” but would be “a spontaneous movement toward an ideal goal.” It would never again be a sequence of facts and causes as in Montesquieu, a movement without life and almost without reason as in Vico. “It would be the history of a being, developing through its inner force.”¹¹¹

In reality, Renan went back to Herder rather than to Hegel, and his vitalist and organic references represented an obvious Herderian heritage. “One is not aware that each nation, with its temples, its gods, its poetry, its heroic traditions, its fantastic beliefs, its laws and institutions, represents a unity, an approach to life, a shade within humanity, an aspect of the great soul.” The vision of history as the history of a being, the vision of each cultural community as a unique entity, is precisely what Renan took from Herder, and, before him, what Michelet took from Herder. That, according to Renan, was what was lacking in Montesquieu and Voltaire, and that was the reason he did not even mention them. The rationalism of the French Enlightenment did not allow them this view of the social body as a living organism. This was the contribution of Germany at the turn of the nineteenth century, and it was from this that Renan drew his conception of history as a psychology of mankind: “There is a *psychology of mankind* just as there is a psychology of the individual.” Thus, Renan placed himself directly within the Herderian tradition of classical German historicism: history, for him, had both a certain logic and an element of chance. Once again, Renan made a direct quotation from Herder: “The line of humanity, said Herder, is neither straight nor uniform. It wanders off in all directions and exhibits every kind of curve and every kind of angle.” It is “neither a rigid geometry nor a mere succession of accidental incidents. . . . The truth is that human affairs, though they often confound the conjectures of the wisest souls, nevertheless lend themselves to calculation. If one is able to distinguish the essential from the incidental, accomplished facts contain the general lines of the future.” Renan was particularly interested in the unconscious preparations for history, when human history had only just emerged from natural history. In his “Letter to Monsieur Marcellin Berthelot” of 1863, a classic Herderian text, he explained that history, for him, encompassed both man and the physical world. History as he conceived it was a comprehensive narrative, a history of the universe, and God was nothing other than the all-

embracing movement of the universe. "History in the ordinary sense, that is, the series of facts we know about the development of humanity, is only an imperceptible part of the true history, which is the picture of what we can know about the development of the universe."¹¹²

Following Herder, and not Hegel as has often been said, Renan considered the beginnings, the age of infancy and mythology. "The spontaneous man sees nature and history with the eyes of infancy. . . . A child creates in his turn all the myths that mankind has created. Any fable that strikes his imagination is accepted by him." Comparative philology and mythology "thus make us go back far beyond historical texts and almost to the origins of the human consciousness." Renan showed how "the primitive myths of the Indo-European race" still lived among the peasants of Swabia. He was amazed at the riches to be found "in the old popular or sacred songs." His imagination extended to China and Egypt, the Arabs and the Israelites, the Celts, the Germans and the Slavs, to anthropology, paleontology, and comparative zoology. On the one hand he had a conviction that there was "no caprice, no individual will in the tissue of facts in the universe" and on the other, an equally strong conviction "that the world has an aim and is engaged in a mysterious operation"; in other words, that history has a meaning.¹¹³

Like Herder, and like Vico, Renan saw the Middle Ages as the ideal period, which he constantly opposed to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: "The Middle Ages once again recalled Homeric times and the age of the infancy of mankind." Herder felt the same way. The nineteenth century, said Renan, discovered "the idea of the primitive phase of the human spirit," and dispensed with "the old Cartesian school" that "saw man in an abstract, general, uniform manner." For it was not in "cutting man into two parts, *body* and *soul*, without anything or any connection between the two," it was not "through the abstract world of pure reason that one gains sympathy for life. Our science of man is the study of all the products of his activity, and above all of his spontaneous activity." In a passage that seems to come straight from Herder, he continued: "I prefer to the fine Cartesian disquisitions the theory of primitive poetry and the national *epic* . . . as the study of comparative literature has laid it down."¹¹⁴

It is in reading Renan after Michelet that one becomes aware of the full extent of Herder's influence on the nineteenth century. It is Herder, the writer of the *Song of Songs* (1759), who is still considered the thinker who discovered the spontaneous expression of original humanity in poetry. This is so despite the fact that Herder had already read in chapter 32 of Voltaire's *Age of Louis XIV* that "it is the destiny of the human spirit in all nations: verses were everywhere the first children of genius and the first masters of eloquence."¹¹⁵

One finds the same idea in Vico, but it is to Herder that we owe its dissemination. Like Herder, Renan preferred mythologies, poems, and fables to history: “Fable is free, history is not.” Renan thought that although Firdawsi’s *Book of Kings* was a bad history of Persia, this fine poem represented the genius of Persia better than the most precise history, as it showed us its legends and its epic traditions, or in other words, its soul. The sacred books of India are worth more than history, as they give us “the spirit of the nation.”¹¹⁶

The Revolt against Reason and Natural Rights

At the turn of the nineteenth century, a broad consensus based on the critique of rationalism by Herder and Burke came into being and impregnated both German and French thought. The essence of this critique was that it contested the capacity of reason to grasp the specific character of a period, situation, or people. Herder made it at the beginning of his career when he scoffed at the “cold philosophy of the age,” incapable of understanding the greatness, the wisdom, the virtuousness of the human spirit in the time of the patriarchs, the cradle of humanity.¹ Herder’s campaign against the pretension of reason to understand history, to grasp the whole complexity of human thought, was, as we have seen, the underlying theme of *Another Philosophy of History*. The German pastor was in fact asking himself the question of whether a philosophy of history is possible. The spirit changes in the course of history in accordance with the specific nature of nations and periods, with the result that it cannot be reduced to a single intelligible principle. This is in contradiction to the very idea of a philosophy of history, which presupposes a unity of spirit, even if a hidden one, which links together the diversity of its modes of expression. Herder well understood the paradox of a philosophy of history that sought the principle of intelligibility in its very existence. The solution he offered was hardly surprising: Providence leads man, who is blind, toward the destiny of the human race. All the final pages of *Another Philosophy* are

devoted to this idea: "What am I supposed to say about the great book of God that extends over all the worlds and times, when I am barely a single letter in that book and when, looking around, I can scarcely see three more letters?"²

This explains why Hegel refused to take Herder as a model. Hegel also wished to give due consideration to originality, to the individual character of each period of history. Like Herder, he wanted to be true to the facts and to take history as it was, but he could not accept that "sympathy" or intuition could take the place of reason. For in calling for "facts" rather than "words," Herder — Hegel understood this no less than Kant — was not rebelling against the philosophy of the Enlightenment but against philosophy as such, against the very principle of rational thought. Hegel criticized Herder very severely because he did not believe it is possible to examine facts without resorting to classifications whose usage is justified by philosophical thought: "Reason should not sleep, and one should use the power of thought. The person who views the world rationally is viewed rationally by the world. There is a correlation."³

How could Hegel accept the question, What does the historian see when pressing his face to a picture? when its conclusion was that "every general concept is nothing but an abstraction"? Or the idea that "the Creator alone is the one who conceives the full unity of any one or of all nations, in all their great diversity, without thereby losing sight of their unity"? Herder's whole system, like that of Burke, was based on the impotence of reason, that same reason that Voltaire in his historical writings made the criterion of the progress of the human spirit. His discrediting of reason was absolute: in order to understand an age, a nation, a civilization, it was necessary, as we have seen, to feel sympathy for that nation, and sympathy was an appeal to intuition, to sentiment; it was the opposite of analysis and abstraction. The same applied to all spheres of intellectual activity: the intellect was replaced by emotions, the unconscious, sentiment, intuition, and finally faith. In the end, it was the heart that followed God, not reason. It was no longer possible to analyze the components of that organic whole that was the nation; one had to grasp the nation's soul. This, then, was the alternative that Herder proposed to Voltaire's method: "The whole nature of the soul which rules through everything, which models all other inclinations and forces of the soul in accordance with itself, and in addition colors even the most indifferent actions — in order to share in feeling this, do not answer on the basis of the word but go into the age, into the clime, the whole history, feel yourself into everything."⁴

Herder complained that "the latest fashion of the newest philosophers, particularly the French, is a tone of doubt! Doubt in a hundred shapes, all under the dazzling title 'From the History of the World.'" This was absolute evil, for "what one rescues of morality and philosophy from the shipwreck is

hardly worth the mention.” “Skepticism toward all virtue” was thus introduced into history, religion, and morality. Among the destroyers, Montaigne began the process, then one had Bayle, who extended his influence over his age, and then “Voltaire, Hume, even Diderot and his followers — it is the great century of doubt and wave-making.” Thus, in opposing instinct to intellect Herder took the part of spontaneous popular poetry against conscious art, vitality against refinement, history against rational doubt, and supported the national, ethnic, and quasi-biological state as understood in his time.⁵ Almost everywhere in his writings, the unconscious and the instinctive prevail over reflection, and a blind assertion of creativity prevails over the critical spirit.

It is thus self-evident that for Herder doubt, skepticism, philosophy, abstractions, and enlightened thought killed men’s vital forces. With Burke, he was one of the pioneers of the idea, vouchsafed a great future at the turn of the twentieth century, that the primitive and not the rational was the great human quality. The French of the Enlightenment showed all the symptoms of decline, and they transmitted that sickness to the whole of Europe. Thus, a situation arose in which “light” (that is, enlightenment) was “infinitely elevated and dispersed, while the inclination and drive to live” was “diminished incomparably.” One saw that the principles of universalism, liberty, and peace among peoples were elevated, and at the same time, or rather as a consequence of this, relations between the members of communities were “infinitely diminished” in all that was most fundamental to them: “the warm feeling of affection for one’s father, mother, brother, children and friends.” Moreover, “the desire to live, to act, to live a noble and charitable, joyful human life” was disappearing.⁶ Thus, reason, free thought, abstractions, and in short, the philosophy of the Enlightenment killed not only morality but also social life.

But what did Herder mean by “reason”? For this clergyman in the tradition of Saint Paul and the Reformation, there were two types of reason. One, besmirched by sin, that could not believe in God and another, enlightened by Grace, that did believe in him. While the thinkers of the Enlightenment based themselves on reason in attacking revelation, Herder saw reason as the proof and ground of revelation. Both in its origin and its function, it was related to God: it came from him and returned to him. Being essentially the knowledge of God through the study of the creation, Herder’s version of reason was not the critical spirit that judges things from a narrowly human point of view, but rather the sense that the presence of God is manifest throughout the universe. Like Hamann, Herder opposed the true meaning of history to the critical spirit: reason was subordinated to revelation, and the spirit of history, nourished by the faith that inspired the Bible, ultimately excluded the spirit of criticism. Reason could not criticize revelation; it was intelligent piety and

not skepticism, submission to the order of things and not rebellion, for the real, being divine, at least in nature, is rational. Liberty, for Herder, is gained through consciousness of the aim of the universe, through knowledge of the inner and outer worlds.⁷

Here we must consider the possibility of a connection between Herder and Gottfried Leibniz. One cannot really be surprised if Herder drew profitably from the work of the figure who is regarded as the father of German rationalism. He used Leibniz as he used Ferguson, Robertson, Montesquieu, and Voltaire. He had an extraordinary faculty of assimilation: he read everything, but he took from his reading only what suited his needs. His principal aim was to undermine the foundations of rationalism and individualism. Contrary to Alain Renaut's estimation, his work was not "the statement of a point of view between a transformed universalism and a certain awareness of cultural identities," which would be an application of Leibniz's thought, but was something else entirely.⁸ Philosophically speaking, the monadological model permits the independence of individual entities together with their communication within the harmony of the universe, but when applied to history, the Leibnizian model has totally different results. The independence of cultural, linguistic, ethnic, and religious communities is a daily reality, as is the animosity that sets these communities against each other. Coming from Riga, and knowing the harsh realities of Central and Eastern Europe, Herder was contemptuous of "commonplaces about improvement," rationalistic abstractions, and saw them as the product of a "paper [bookish] culture." Like all the nationalists who came after him, he was hungry for action: "Action! . . . Does not the girl's lover have a place better [better position] than the poet singing about her or the suitor courting her?"⁹ Herder, who dreamed of being a man of action, and in whom a philosopher of action was dormant, professed a desire for practical effectiveness and for action affecting the masses. He thought that humanity was merely a fantasy, whereas ethnic and religious, cultural and historical communities were reality.

For Leibniz, the idea of the monad allowed one to conceive of a totality closed in upon itself, unique, but a totality that may be viewed against a background of universality. Renaut was convinced that, seen in terms of those historical individualities that are nations, the Leibnizian conception of substance as monadic individuality seemed to Herder to allow the possibility of giving full rights to the idea of national originality without renouncing the cosmopolitan vision of intercultural communication. Conceived as a monad, each culture contains within itself its principles of development: the monadological model provides a conceptual foundation for a view of the national community based on the originality and independence of cultures. In order to

evaluate each culture, one should relate to its own principles of development without reference to ideals that do not belong to it, and similarly, one should regard influences that do not stimulate its internal dynamic but subject it to a foreign model as injurious. But at the same time, according to Renaut, the monadological model also contains the perspective of a communication between monads, and hence between peoples and cultures. Because Herder had learned from Leibniz that individuality had to be conceived in terms of monads, each culture may have seemed to him necessary to the coherence of the whole, and hence of humanity, and to the perfection of man, which shows itself progressively in history. Herder also learned from Leibniz the principle of continuity. This principle led to a conception of history as a continuous progression of nations and periods in the same civilization. In *Another Philosophy of History*, progress is often compared to the course of a river or the growth of a tree: images, said Renaut, that convey at one and the same time the idea of a divine plan of development, the equal necessity for all moments, and the perfect continuity that binds them together.¹⁰

Like Berlin's interpretation, Renaut's brilliant analysis is guilty of a generosity taken to an extreme. Its great weakness is that it does not take into account the partial manner in which the German pastor applies these principles not only to history but also to his own time. His affirmation of the individual and the specific is quite clear, but his universalist aspect is fragile, if not doubtful. The principle that each people and each period must be judged by its own criteria and not by those of another period is very selectively applied. Relations between entities are treated as a fact, but they are far from being egalitarian: there is in Herder a definite hierarchy of periods and civilizations. The special characteristic of Herderian thought is that in the midst of the Enlightenment, its humanism was not based on rationalism, equality between autonomous individuals, a conception of the nation in judicial and political terms as found in the *Encyclopédie*. For Herder it was more natural to base the relationships between people on historical, ethnic, and cultural differences than on an equality between groups conceived as collections of individuals.

An enemy of universal norms, Herder strongly disliked the importance that the philosophy of the Enlightenment gave to laws. For the thinkers of the eighteenth century, men created their own history, and good laws, good institutions created virtuous men as well as good citizens. Good laws also made free men: the opposition to absolutism was nurtured by the reflection on republican virtue to be found in *The Spirit of Laws*. While for Herder "a universal philosophy of mankind, a codification of reason and humanity" was useless, filled with generalities about the right and the good, for the thinkers of the Enlightenment the reform of morals began with the reform of laws.

Herder, for his part, scoffed at the increasingly common plans of reform, including those in the sphere of education. Here he made a characteristic remark. Instead of making plans, programs, and speculations, it would be far more useful, he said, to restore or re-create “good habits or even prejudices, techniques and forces.” Since every culture is the product of a specific milieu, a history, a language, it is in the spirit and the traditions of the nation that one must look for the specific norms of behavior corresponding to the genius of each people. The role of these local traditions in forming moral identity is all-important for Herder. He rails against a view of human affairs that is no more than “petty vanity,” in revolt against “the great, divine work of educating mankind — silent, powerful, hidden, eternal.”¹¹

Herder, who thought that men simply execute the divine plan, could not do otherwise than rebel against the idea that they make their own history. Burke similarly detested the idea that laws and customs that have grown up over the centuries could be a source of evil that reason must sweep away in order to assure men’s happiness, in order to endow them with good institutions and make them into virtuous people. Neither Herder nor Burke could give new legislation any moral importance, for such a move, proper to the Enlightenment, permitted the creation of a secular morality and implied the victory of rationalism and of universal norms: “For all times and peoples?” cried Herder. “How different [it is] to provide nourishment for the blood vessels and sinews of one’s people, so that its heart may be strengthened and its bones and marrow invigorated!”¹²

This, he said, was the great weakness of his “enlightened age”: “Reasoning that is spread too carelessly, too uselessly — might it not weaken the inclination, drives, and activity of life, and has it not in fact weakened them?” This fatal predominance of the intelligence produced an “exhaustion” of the spirit; it created “great, philosophically-governed herds” who “feel . . . like a machine.” That timid age was not even capable of the cataclysms of former times, the wars and robberies. It did not have the faults of former days, for it did not have the virtues. If the highwaymen had disappeared, it was not because the police and the law were more effective; it was not because morals were better or because people were happier. It was on the one hand because the robbers of the age of Enlightenment lacked sufficient courage and energy to practice their occupation, and on the other because they could, “by the customs of our age, . . . be robbing houses, chambers and beds so much more comfortably.” Herder declared that because the people of his age did not have the virtues of former times, “Greek freedom, Roman patriotism, Oriental piety, chivalric honor . . . or rather because we have none of these, we therefore, unfortunately, also cannot have any of their one-sided, wide-spread vices.”¹³

Herder regarded the qualities the eighteenth century was proud of as defects and symptoms of decadence: "We hasten our downfall with our deism, our philosophy of religion, our overrefined culture of reason." What "the philosophy of our age" has to offer is only "a few more luminous ideas," but — and here one can again hear the Lutheran pastor — "ideas yield nothing but ideas." The impotence of reason is thus asserted once more, and, together with it, the exhaustion of that rationalistic age and of the people who embodied it more than any other. Ten years later, he would say that "a lasting state" of prosperity for mankind "can only really be founded on reason and equity," but his rejection of the Franco-Anglo-Kantian Enlightenment was as strong as ever.¹⁴

Thus, Herder set against his age, where "alas, there is so much light!" the norms of behavior, virtues, and morals that would be the basis of the new civilization that all the enemies of the Enlightenment went in search of from the period before the French Revolution onward. The greatness of medieval civilization was due to the fact that it bound "everything together with inclinations and drives, not with sickly thoughts," and "how great [was] the power and effect" of those so-called barbaric centuries! Herder was undoubtedly aware of the misery caused by "the devastations, the vassals' wars and feuds, the armies of monks, the pilgrimages and crusades," but, all in all, when one balances up the qualities and faults of those "barbaric times" without which civilized Europe would be no more than "a wasteland," their qualities were far greater. His conclusion was hardly surprising: between the two types of civilization, his own and that of the Middle Ages, Herder did not hesitate for a moment: "Be this as it may: only give us something of your reverence and superstition, your darkness and ignorance, your muddled and crude customs, and take our light and lack of faith, our numbed coldness and refinement, our philosophical exhaustion and human misery!"¹⁵

It is his controversy with Kant, however, that best reveals to us the full depth of the chasm that lies between Herder's thought and the Franco-Kantian Enlightenment. From *Another Philosophy of History to Ideas for a Philosophy of History of Mankind*, Herder did not alter his position on the main point: "As happiness is an inner state, the criterion and definition of it lie not outside but inside each individual being."¹⁶ Kant replied that a human individual "does not yield in the enjoyment of this happiness to any of those who come after him; but as far as the value of their existence itself is concerned — i.e. the reason why they are there in the first place, as distinct from the conditions in which they exist — it is in this alone that a wise intention might be discernible within the whole." In other words, the value of individuals' states when they exist is one thing, the value of their existence itself is another. Thus, if the happy people of Tahiti had never come into contact with "more civilized

nations” but had remained immersed “in their peaceful indolence” for centuries more, would not the question arise, What good is the existence of this people? Would it not have been just as good “if this island had been occupied by happy sheep and cattle as by happy human beings who merely enjoy themselves?” And Kant concluded, challenging Herder, “and so the above principle is therefore not as evil as the author believes.”¹⁷ Indeed, this principle is not bad at all if one accepts the idea that it is culture that makes life worth living, and that it is in freeing itself from the grip of nature that humanity develops its intellectual potential to the full.

In insisting yet again on an idea he considered his own invention — in which, strangely enough, he is followed by most commentators of our own time — Herder was attacking the *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose*, a remarkable essay published by Kant in November 1784 in the *Berliner Monatschrift*, the journal to which in the following month he gave his famous manifesto *What Is Enlightenment?* In his *Universal History*, in which Rousseau’s influence is discernible in every page, he put forward some of the great ideas on the nature of society, liberty, and progress that shocked the Lutheran pastor so much. There can be no doubt that Herder’s reply in *Ideas* is a response to both essays at once. According to Kant (fifth proposition), “the greatest problem for the human species, the solution of which nature compels him to seek, is that of attaining a civil society, which can administer justice universally.” It was thus necessary, as Hobbes and Locke had already shown, to leave the state of nature, which is a state of violence. Thus, man, a being endowed with reason, had to create society with his own hands, or in other words to work “for a law-governed civil constitution among individual men, i.e. of planning a commonwealth.” Only in a society can one guarantee man “the development of all natural capacities. . . . This purpose can be fulfilled only in a society which has not only the greatest freedom, and therefore a continual antagonism among its members, but also the most precise specification and preservation of the limits of this freedom in order that it can co-exist with the freedom of others.”¹⁸

This, said Kant is the most difficult problem “*to be solved by the human race*. The difficulty is this: if he lives among others of his own species, man is *an animal who needs a master*. For he certainly abuses his freedom in relation to others of his own kind. And even although, as a rational creature, he desires a law to impose limits on the freedom of all, he is still misled by his self-seeking animal inclination into exempting himself from the law where he can. He thus requires a *master* to break his self-will and force him to obey a universally valid will under which everyone can be free.”¹⁹ In this way, Kant combined the explanation of the relinquishment of the state of nature given by Locke with

the idea of the general will derived from Rousseau. The constraint under which man is placed brings him to a state of peaceful coexistence that will finally make the master redundant. Man will be free, for he will govern himself according to the law of reason, and reason requires men to be free on the sole condition that each person's exercise of liberty is not incompatible with the exercise of this same liberty by any other person.

But here Kant took a further step, and he went much further than Locke or Rousseau. What use is it, he asked, to attempt to put an end to the state of nature among individuals, if this state persists among states? "However wild and fanciful this idea may appear," he said, and although it had been ridiculed when put forward by the abbé de Saint-Pierre and Rousseau, the reason for which he advocated a "Federation of Peoples" — a "Foedus Amphyctyonum" — was that it was "the inevitable outcome of the distress in which men involve one another." It was the state of war that Locke had already associated with the primitive condition of the state of nature that would "force the states to make exactly the same decision . . . as that which man was forced to make, . . . in his savage state — the decision to renounce his brutish freedom and seek calm and security within a law-governed constitution." That is how international law and a "Society of Nations" would come into being, and it is for the same reason that civil society came into being: the need to put an end to war. Human liberty therefore had to be subjected to a law common to all, which means that reasonable people would attempt to overcome the state of nature — that is, the state of war that exists between men, societies, and states — and organize peace on the basis of a universal law. That was the goal toward which mankind was advancing, goaded on by war, which forced it to exert itself to organize peace. The curve of progress, noted Ruysen, rose all the more surely toward that ideal because each fall was a valuable lesson and the starting point of a new advance.²⁰

This was a future or solution that was abhorrent to Herder. Kant thought that man was called to a destiny so lofty that no individual could realize it within the framework of his own existence: "Earlier generations seem to perform their laborious tasks only for the sake of the later ones, so as to prepare for them a further stage from which they can raise still higher the structure intended by nature."²¹ It follows that no individual and no generation is sufficient to itself; they are merely links in the chain of humanity's progress toward liberty and justice, toward new forms of political organization. Herder replied that "no individual has the right to believe that he exists for the sake of another individual, or for the sake of posterity."²² Another page of *Ideas* is even more to the point: "Every living being finds pleasure in living; he does not question or consider the question of the purpose for which he lives. His existence is his

purpose and his purpose is existence.” Herder continued his attack on Kant by invoking Providence and glancing with admiration at the non-European world, which was uncorrupted by rationalism: “This simple, deep, irreplaceable sense of existence is thus happiness, a little drop of the infinite ocean of he who is entirely happiness, who is in all and who rejoices and is felt in all. Hence the serenity and indestructible joy that many a European has admired in the faces and lives of foreign peoples, because with his restless agitation he did not find it in himself.” And a few lines later, he added: “What would be the meaning, for example, of the hypothesis that the faculties of man as we know him are destined for infinite growth,” or the idea that “all generations were really only created for the final one, which would be enthroned on the ruined scaffolding of the happiness of all the previous ones?”²³

Kant considered the first steps that distinguished man from an animal to have been a rebellion of reason and the will against the natural order. It can therefore be said that the first manifestation of liberty was a rupture of the perfect unity of man and nature. Kant felt that Rousseau was right to condemn the dreadful consequences of the contradiction between the state of civilization and the primitive simplicity of nature. But, according to Kant, the evil denounced by Rousseau made possible the benefits of culture. As soon as man became conscious of his liberty, his reason urged him relentlessly to develop his natural faculties, and required him to liberate himself gradually from the law of nature. A similar evolution, however, could not take place in the life of the individual. In the essay of 1784 that disgusted Herder, Kant made the following important observation: “*In man (as the only rational creature on earth), those natural capacities which are directed towards the use of his reason are such that they could be fully developed only in the species, but not in the individual.*” Thus, it is clear that the history of mankind is a continuous journey toward ever-higher spheres of political and intellectual life. The journey is long; the world is not yet enlightened, men have not yet left their state of minority, Aufklärung is an unfinished process. In *What Is Enlightenment?* Kant said so explicitly. He thus wrote an optimistic essay inasmuch as he opened up infinite horizons to humanity, but it was not a utopia. Nor was it an elaboration of the simple utopia that featured in *Perpetual Peace*, his famous essay of 1795, in which he demonstrated the correlation between internal law and politics and international law. He said, on the one hand, that “*the Civil Constitution of Every State shall be Republican*” and, on the other hand, that “*the Right of Nations shall be based on a Federation of Free States.*”²⁴

The polemic between Kant and Herder was of a fundamental nature. With the exception of Condorcet, Kant was the last surviving great figure of the Enlightenment, and his historical essays were a formidable defense of the

Enlightenment. The debate remained a German one, for Herder was not yet known in France. Voltaire was still alive when the pamphlet of 1774 appeared, but he had probably never heard of it. Besides, why would one of the greatest living Europeans have crossed swords with an unknown German pastor? As a refutation of *An Essay on the Manners*, the pamphlet of 1774 was pathetic. If he wanted to reply seriously to Voltaire's masterly work, that extraordinary panorama of universal history in two thousand pages, that attempt to give a rational explanation of the evolution of humanity from the time of Charlemagne to the beginning of the age of Louis XIV, Herder would have had to have approached it quite differently. Introduced by reflections on the fall of Rome, on the origins of Christianity, and on the non-European world — China, India, Persia, and Arabia in the time of Mohammed — Voltaire's work called for a work of similar scope. All the more so, as Herder would also have had to respond to Montesquieu, Hume, Ferguson, and Robertson. He chose the easiest solution. First of all, he distorted the meaning of Voltaire's work in order better to attack it, and then, delivering a long sermon and multiplying allusions, insinuations, allegories, and metaphors as well as appeals to the Bible, he attacked the eighteenth century as a whole. Herder could not bear the idea of a rational and secular interpretation of history, of history made by man without the intervention of Providence.

This was clearly something that Kant could not tolerate, and yet he did not react to this youthful work by his former pupil. He probably did not give it much importance, but ten years later he felt he had to enter the fray. This time, it was no longer a matter of attacks on Montesquieu or Voltaire, and often of dishonesty toward them, but a questioning of his own work. In putting the question of the intervention of Providence in history, Herder decided in favor of the Bible: it was Elohim (Hebrew for God) who made history. But the human race could not have had two origins: the one given in Genesis and the one described by Rousseau. In the difference of opinion between Rousseau and Herder, Kant took the side of Rousseau. In his *Opus postumum* we hear that "unreason and deliberate deception are Herder's trademark."²⁵ Kant was not wrong. Even in the light of the most recent scholarly analyses, his judgment has lost none of its cogency.

In opposition to Herder, Kant gave primary importance to the idea of the original contract and its relationship to the growth of enlightenment. Humanity, he thought, or at least the most advanced elements in it, had come out of its childhood. It could and should decide on its future through the power of reason; it could and should trace its own path. Man's coming-of-age was shown by the existence of criticism, the criticism of reason by itself according to its own essential principles, but also the criticism of the politicohistorical

reality according to the criterion of universality. The universality referred to here is individuals' real and present coexistence based on effective laws with which they endow themselves consciously, and knowing what they want, what they ought to want as finite and reasonable beings. Hence the decisive importance of the original contract and *Aufklärung*. The idea of the originating contract is identical to that of the general will and makes for progress in the world. This idea, acting in history, caused *Aufklärung* to come to birth and enabled it to continue its work. Thinking man knows himself to be free, and he wants his liberty to be reflected in political institutions, but he knows that not all men think: their education is in large part still to be undertaken; superstitions, mere survivals of the past, hamper them, and the principle of universality is not universally accepted as the only moral foundation of political life and the sole possibility of giving history a meaning.²⁶

Here there enters the idea of the general will, which Kant owed to Rousseau. Despite his admiration for him, Kant was not a Rousseauist in the strict sense of the term. He was basically optimistic: he saw man as progressing from a beginning of history in which man as a historical being was in a state of wickedness and not in a state of innocence. Despite this initial difference, Kant owed to Rousseau the concept of the primacy of practical reason and the ideas of the social contract, the general will, and freedom under the law. Kant, as we have just seen, came to this by a devious route, because he thought that only constraint could bring men to a state of peaceful coexistence that would finally make the existence of the authoritarian state superfluous. A decisive point had been reached, however: the social contract establishes the limits of all legislation; it is the principle of all political justice and the criterion of every law and every decision. Kant considered the structures of power, the principles of the representative regime and the separation of powers, and international law. The state of nature had disappeared between individuals within political communities: it survived between states. One had therefore to create a state of peace, a society of free states. Though it was obvious that the task could not be accomplished immediately, the goal of history was known, the path that led there could be found and be taken by men. Man could take in hand his future, which was no longer a destiny but a destination, freely chosen through the exercise of reason. Man, a finite being, said Éric Weill, can and should progress indefinitely; his forward motion should never cease; a moral being can have no rest.²⁷

For Herder precisely this was the main point, and this is what he rebelled against: man as master of his fate, creating with his own hands a world in his image, was for him a sacrilege. Philosophers as different from each other as Kant, Locke, and Rousseau agreed in giving extreme importance to the idea of

the social contract, the expression of the autonomy of the individual. Montesquieu, after Locke, refined the two instruments that in concrete terms could ensure liberty: the division of powers and the representative regime. Voltaire, exiled from Paris for many years on account of his fight for freedom of criticism and for tolerance, finally favored an English-style parliamentary monarchy. During all this time, Herder was virtually a stranger to political concerns. This was a turning point of paramount importance, for with him a veritable intellectual revolution took place.

While, following Hobbes and Locke and in the aftermath of the Glorious Revolution, the philosophes pursued the English line of thought on the rational and voluntary origin of society, while they developed the idea of the social contract in order to indicate its utilitarian origins and clearly state its aim, while they tried to trace the outlines of political legitimacy, the pastor of Bückeberg introduced the idea of the primacy of culture. Rousseau invented the idea of the general will, and Kant saw it as another way of saying that men must only submit to a law they have given themselves and in whose formulation they themselves have participated. That was the Kantian idea of the liberty of the people-as-lawgiver. From Hobbes in the mid-seventeenth century, through Locke and the Glorious Revolution to Kant in the time of the French Revolution, it was believed that the only purpose of the state was to allow each individual to enjoy his liberty and his possessions, or in other words to enjoy his natural rights. Society was a community of citizens that had to give itself the best possible regime: that is to say, a representative regime. Man was engaged in a process of infinite progress, history was made by man, and it had a meaning, for man was consciously moving toward liberty. These were precisely the things that Herder rejected outright: the origins of society as described by the school of natural rights, the idea of man creating society and the state with his own hands, the secular view of history.

That is the reason why the long review of *Ideen* in two parts that Kant wrote in 1785 has so great an importance in the history of ideas. When one reads this text carefully, one realizes why Herder was deeply hurt. Not only was there a basic disagreement, Kant did not seem to be convinced that his former pupil had produced a work of importance. He began conventionally by paying tribute to “our ingenious and eloquent author” and his “genius” in assimilating and integrating ideas drawn “from the broad sphere of the arts and sciences” — a formula that was not necessarily praise, any more than what followed: namely, that Herder’s work was not a true philosophy of history, for it lacked a conceptual framework. Indeed, such an enterprise would require “a logical precision in the definition of concepts or careful distinctions and consistency in the use of principles. . . .” Instead, one had “a cursory and comprehensive vision

and a ready facility for discovering analogies. . . . This is combined with an aptitude for arousing sympathy for his subject—which is always kept at an obscure distance—by means of feelings and sentiments. Kant continued to express reservations about an initiative whose execution was not entirely successful, and ended by giving his former pupil a lesson in methodology. He hoped that philosophy would guide him “not through hints but through precise concepts, not through laws based on conjecture but through laws derived from observation, and not by means of an imagination inspired by metaphysics or emotions but by means of a reason which, while committed to broad objectives, exercises caution in pursuing them.” In the second part, Kant was even harsher: he spoke sarcastically about so many fine pages replete with poetic eloquence; he gave the author lessons not only of rigor but also of style, and ended by hoping that in the future Herder, “who has so often deprecated all that has hitherto claimed to be philosophy, will now provide the world with a model of the true mode of philosophising—not in sterile verbal explanations, but by deed and example in this comprehensive work.”²⁸

The true axis of the debate, however, was the Christian philosophy of history developed by Herder and the extreme negation of human liberty that followed from it. Kant made a frontal attack on the heart of Herder’s historical philosophy, the transcendental intervention of Providence in the course of history. For Herder, whom Kant quoted at length, “the first human beings to be created were men in contact with, and instructed by, the Elohim, under whose guidance, through familiarity with the animals, they acquired language and dominant reason. . . . But how did the *Elohim* look after human beings—i.e. teach, warn and instruct them?”²⁹ Kant refused to view the origin of moral sentiments and the first beginnings of the whole of human history in the light of the biblical narrative. He saw history as a continual movement forward toward ever-loftier heights, where each generation, mounted on the shoulders of its predecessors, will in its turn permit the one that succeeds it to go further still. Herder attacked Kant harshly because he refused to accept the idea of a “final destiny.” He quoted him without naming him, and throughout books 8 and 9 of *Ideas* assailed the idea of progress. Kant responded with an important text in which he showed that true progress, moral progress, the progress of civilization, moves toward “a culminating point”: “But what if the true end of Providence were not this shadowy image of happiness which each individual creates for himself, but the ever continuing and growing activity and culture which are thereby set in motion, and whose highest possible expression can only be the product of a political constitution based on concepts of human rights, and consequently an achievement of human beings themselves”? In other words, “the destiny of the human race as a whole is *incessant progress*,”³⁰ and “the course of human affairs as a whole,” wrote Kant in the

conclusion of his *Conjectures on the Beginning of Human History*, another anti-Herderian piece which appeared in the year following the second part of his review of *Ideas*, “does not begin with good and then proceed to evil, but develops gradually from the worse to the better, and each individual is for his own part called upon by nature to contribute towards this progress to the best of his ability.”³¹

Kant continued his critical reflection on Herder by referring to his pet aversion, the man who had already given an account of the origins of humanity that was a horrible blasphemy in the eyes of a Christian, “the often misunderstood and apparently contradictory assertions of the celebrated J.-J. Rousseau.” On the one hand, said Kant, “in his essays on *The Influence of the Sciences* and on *The Inequality of Man*, he shows quite correctly that there is an inevitable conflict between culture and the nature of the human race as a *physical* species, each of whose individual members is meant to fulfill his destiny completely. But in his *Émile*, his *Social Contract* and other writings, he attempts in turn to solve the more difficult problem of what course culture should take in order to ensure the proper development, in keeping with their destiny, of man’s capacities as a *moral* species so that this [moral] destiny will no longer conflict with his character as a natural species.” In the same context, said Kant, “the history of *nature* thus begins with goodness, for it is *the work of God*; but the history of freedom begins with evil, for it is *the work of man*.” Thus, for Kant in the beginning there was a decline in relation to the original innocence: that is to say, a fall, a sin. But this fall of primitive man made possible the benefits of culture that give life all its value. As soon as man became conscious of his liberty, his reason spurred him on to develop his natural faculties. Man, who had “attained a position of *equality with all rational beings*,” with his new appetites and needs saw agriculture and property come into existence, or in other words, he entered into “the age of *labour and discord*.” It was then that there gradually developed “all human aptitudes . . . the most beneficial of these being *sociability* and *civil security*. This epoch also saw the beginning of human *inequality*, that abundant source of so much evil but also of everything good; this inequality continued to increase thereafter.” Men began to “enjoy the priceless asset of internal freedom,” and together with that, comfort and a better life, for “there can be no wealth-producing activity without freedom.”³²

Thus, human history proclaimed the victory of liberty. In his *Idea for a Universal History*, Kant asserts that “civil freedom” is “gradually increasing.” Liberty is on the march, and “restrictions placed upon personal activities are increasingly relaxed, and general freedom of religion is granted. And thus, although folly and caprice creep in at times, *enlightenment* gradually arises.”³³

We must say it again: here, we cannot examine in depth the question of

whether the Herderian critique was directed against the Enlightenment as it really was or against the Enlightenment as its enemies wished to see it, which in most cases was simply a poor caricature.³⁴ None of the attacks launched in the second half of the twentieth century, from poststructuralism to the various brands of postmodernism, succeeded in discrediting the achievement of its thinkers. In his great book published in 1940, Max Rouché showed how much Herder distorted and oversimplified the thinking of the philosophes, even while pillaging their works to better attack them.³⁵

Moreover, the much-disparaged rationalism of the eighteenth century was able to correct its own faults. Contrary to Taine's opinion, its major thinkers, from whom Herder drew constantly, rarely made a priori analyses or improper generalizations. On the other hand, it was the Enlightenment that introduced religious tolerance, the right to differ, sympathy for primitive peoples arising from voyages and discoveries, and pluralism, but without denigrating reason or the primacy of the individual. Voltaire urged respect for unfamiliar forms of beauty and alien tastes, and among his fellow countrymen, following Montesquieu, "the right to be Persian" — synonymous with a remote and bizarre culture — was recognized.

Montesquieu, who invented the concept of "the general spirit of a nation," was pillaged by Herder in the most flagrant manner. The supposedly Herderian concept of the *Volksgeist* was at the heart of Montesquieu's thought. Meinecke, who quoted Montesquieu with reverence, said so specifically when he referred the reader, for "the interpretations so far put upon Montesquieu's doctrine of the *Volksgeist*," to a book on Hegel published in 1920. This term indeed only appeared in that truly German form in Hegel in 1793, but it is possible that it was to be found a few years earlier in Johann Paul Friedrich Richter, known as Jean Paul, a writer closely connected with Herder and greatly admired by Carlyle. Until that time, in the second half of the eighteenth century, just after the appearance of *The Spirit of Laws*, the terms used — *Geist des Volkes*, *allgemeiner Geist*, *Nationalgeist* — taken from Voltaire and Montesquieu, recalled their French origin. Herder used the term "*Geist des Volkes*" in his *Ideen*.³⁶ Where the comprehension of the structures of a society and reverence for diversities and cultural, historical, and national particularities are concerned, where respect for the non-European world and understanding of the complex relationships between the constitutive elements of a community are concerned, the great work of the *président à mortier* of the parliament at Bordeaux could pass for a Herderian work. But this was not so — far from it. It was Hegel, who, as we saw, stated the reason better than anyone else: Herder's antirationalism was for him a way of attacking philosophy itself.

Was not *The Spirit of Laws*, together with *An Essay on the Manners*, a

decisive first attempt to create a philosophy of history? For Montesquieu was speaking of the spirit of laws and not of facts, unlike Bayle, for whom historical knowledge was still only a simple collection of unconnected facts and details with no internal logic. It was not by chance that Bayle gave his work the title *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, while in Montesquieu's work the mass of details was justified and dominated by a strictly intellectual principle. Laws could only be approached in a concrete manner, but one that only gained its true meaning when taken as a paradigm of universal relationships. Montesquieu was the first to express the idea of the "ideal type" in history, politics, and sociology: *The Spirit of Laws*, said Cassirer, is a theory of types. The first chapter of book 1 is one of the most famous texts in political thought, as is chapter 18 of *Considerations on the Causes of the Greatness of the Romans and Their Decline*. In this way, a new period began: the celebrated reflections on "blind fate," "primitive reason," "general or moral causes," and the relationships between general causes and particular causes, between material causes and spiritual causes, have nourished the whole of modern thought.³⁷ Where cultural and national specificity was concerned, the baron de La Brède had taught it to the eighteenth century long before Herder.

In *Another Philosophy of History*, Herder launched a spiteful attack on Montesquieu, all the more unjustified because it was strongly inspired by his work while suggesting that it was no more than a sketch, meager and simplistic, ending in a cul-de-sac. Herder saw Montesquieu as the man who developed "principles . . . with which a hundred different peoples and corners of the earth can be spontaneously tallied in two moments according to the basic arithmetic of politics." Despite this, for two centuries, people, even Cassirer, have quoted the beginning of a phrase in which Herder praised the author of *The Spirit of Laws* — "Montesquieu's noble gigantic work" — but they have generally forgotten the immediate continuation of this phrase, a long paragraph that is as venomous as it is absurd. This work, said the young pastor, "by the hand of one man alone . . . could never have become what it was meant to be: a Gothic edifice according to the philosophical taste of its age — *esprit!* — and often no more than that. [Everything] torn from its spot and place and spilled out upon three or four marketplaces beneath the banner of three miserable platitudes — [mere] words! — and empty, useless, indefinite, all-confusing *esprit*-words at that! A work that stumbles dizzily through the ages, nations and languages, circling them like the Tower of Confusion, and inviting everyone to hang his scraps, riches and hat on three puny nails. The history of all peoples and ages, this great, living work of God with all its ramifications, turned into a pile of rubble with three protruding peaks and capsules — though of course also with some very noble, worthy materials. Montesquieu!" A few pages further on,

Herder launched another volley, mocking “the great teacher and lawgiver of kings. . . . He has provided such a fine example of how to gauge everything with two or three words, to lead on everything towards two or three forms of government whose origin and whose strictly limited scope and timeliness are readily visible.” After this rejection of Montesquieu’s method, there comes the supreme reproach: “How pleasant, nonetheless — and this, too, is fate — to be able to follow him, in the spirit of the laws of all times and peoples, as he moves beyond the confines of his own people!”³⁸

Yet, if anyone had a feeling for the various forms of historical existence, a sense of the specific, the particular and the singular, it was surely the French jurist. He never wanted to impose the same form of government on all countries. He began the first book of *The Spirit of Laws* by stating that “laws must be so in keeping with the people for which they are made that it is very much a matter of chance if those of one nation can suit another.” A law is relative to sociological, economic, political, and cultural conditions. Montesquieu thought that legislation must be adapted to the specific conditions of a country: its climate, its physical conditions, its way of life, its religion, the wealth of its inhabitants. Herder took a great deal from book 19, chapter 10 (“On the Character of the Spanish and That of the Chinese”), chapter 5 (“How One Must Be Careful Not to Change the Spirit of a Nation”), and chapter 4, in which Montesquieu taught Herder “what a general spirit is”: “Climate, religion, laws, maxims of government, examples from the past, manners and morals, from which a general spirit resulting from all this is formed.” Meinecke was not mistaken when, quoting book 19, chapter 4, he praised Montesquieu’s concept of an *esprit général*, as well as the idea that each period had its *génie naturel*).³⁹

After Herder, Burke embarked on a similar critical enterprise. Leo Strauss convincingly demonstrated that in his first book, published in 1757, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, Burke opposed not only the rationalism of the moderns but rationalism as such. Strauss thought that Burke’s opposition to rationalism had both a traditional and a modern character. Strauss saw that this essay, Burke’s “only theoretical effort,” led toward “a certain emancipation of sentiment and instinct from reason, or a certain depreciation of reason.” For the Chicago philosopher, the new element in Burke’s critique of reason was his rejection of reason as the best instrument for setting up a constitution. Among the ancients, a constitution was the product of reason: even if its aim was not determined by man, its fabrication was. To the contrary, Burke rejects the view that constitutions can be “made” in favor of the view that they must “grow”: no founder, no “wise legislator” can make a constitution.⁴⁰ Indeed, what one had

here was a rejection of rationalism, a rejection that was no longer traditional at all and was in the forefront of the modern revolt that took place in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries against the individualistic and rationalistic criticism put out by the Enlightenment. Burke's whole argument had a decidedly new character that went far beyond the ancient *consensus gentium*. When Burke set the judgment of the individual in opposition to the collective intelligence of past ages, the accumulated wisdom of the generations that came before us, he meant by this that man is not a rational being, and that society is not a collection of individuals but a body. This body has a constitution, a structure: that is to say, a number of built-in characteristics. It follows that a "constitution" in the sense of a regime, or a collection of charters, laws, and legal arrangements that govern the life of a country, could not, as was thought by Locke, the American colonists, and the French of 1789, be produced all at once, through the will of a single generation, at a particular moment in the life of a people.

Burke clearly did not have the same preoccupations as Herder, he was not a philosopher like Jacobi, and his antirationalism was not of the same kind. Nor was he a formidable jack-of-all-trades like Voltaire, nor did he have anything approaching the genius of Rousseau. He was a politician who was also a political thinker, for he recognized the power of thought as an instrument of political action. He was not a conformist: in that enlightened age, he did not fear to proclaim the bankruptcy of reason, which he considered much inferior to the instincts, or to give a truly reactionary interpretation, in the literal sense of the word, to the revolution of 1689. We have just seen that he wrote his *Philosophical Enquiry* in order to assert the impotence of reason: "The great chain of causes, which links one to another, even to the throne of God himself, can never be unravelled by any industry of ours. When we go but one step beyond the immediate sensible qualities of things, we go out of our depth. All we do after is but a faint struggle, that shows we are in an element which does not belong to us. . . . As if I were to explain the motion of a body falling to the ground, I would say it was caused by gravity; and I would endeavour to show after what manner this power operated, without attempting to show why it operated in this manner." In his preface to the second edition of the work, in 1759, he seemed to repeat in anticipation the words of Herder: "We must not attempt to fly, when we can scarcely pretend to creep." Elsewhere, he wrote: "Whenever the wisdom of our Creator intended that we should be affected with anything, he did not confine the execution of his design to the languid and precarious operation of our reason; but he endued it with powers and properties that prevent the understanding and even the will; which, seizing upon the senses and imagination, captivate the soul before the understanding is ready

either to join with them, or to oppose them.”⁴¹ In his first essay, intended as a criticism of Rousseau, Burke attacked the abusive use of reason made in his time: “Even in matters which are, as it were, just within our reach, what would become of the world, if the practice of all moral duties, and the foundations of society, rested upon having their reasons made clear and demonstrative to every individual?”⁴²

For Burke, history was synonymous with nature: reality, consecrated by history, corresponded to the natural order of things. It could happen that Burke could deny being an enemy of reason, something that was far more problematic, for not only did he not accept the verdict of reason unless it conformed with that of history and did not contradict experience (which was another way of saying the established order),⁴³ he could never accept the idea that reason, which leads naturally to a desire for change, could play any role in history other than a subordinate one. As history was blind, change could only be unconscious and imperceptible. In concrete terms, the Burkian cult of history, “the very lamp of prudence . . . the guide of human life,” resulted in a refusal to pass a value judgment on the existing order.⁴⁴

It was also in this theoretical work on the beautiful and the sublime that Burke attacked Locke and his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. It is true that he also said that “the authority of this great man is doubtless as great as that of any man can be” — an evaluation quoted by Strauss — but the continuation of this sentence, which Strauss did not quote, informs us that this authority “seems to stand in the way of our general principle.” This is not surprising, for it is difficult to see in what respect Burke followed Locke and in what way he accepted his authority. In reality, Burke, who refused to consider the ultimate aims of human existence, considered politics not only a complex matter but also an enterprise whose mystery could not be fathomed by human reason. Lord Acton, the great liberal-conservative thinker of the end of the nineteenth century, who had begun by regarding Burke as an inexhaustible mine of political wisdom, ended by rebelling against his skepticism. He rightly thought that, for Burke, not only was political science, unlike economic science, impossible, but his skepticism was necessarily allied to an extreme conservatism, a tendency to defer to success, to look for what ought to be solely in what actually existed, very close to Hegel’s “die Weltgeschichte ist das Weltgericht.”⁴⁵ Acton had well understood the dangers of Burke’s conformism, and he took fright at his antirationalism, but he did not see that Burke had just invented a new form of conservatism — revolutionary conservatism.

It is necessary to go back to Locke to understand Burke’s aversion to the Rights of Man, to the America of 1777, and to the France of 1789. Locke appeared, with Hobbes, as the founder of a political school of thought based

on the idea that, in politics, the happiness of the individual was the only sure and reliable criterion. If Locke was not, as is often said, the inventor of the individual and the first great prophet of the individual's emancipation, if he was not the first to proclaim the revolt of the individual against religion — Machiavelli and Hobbes preceded him in this — he was the first to build a coherent political system on these foundations. Locke's secularity was the product of his psychology, which rejected from the sphere of politics not only religion and tradition but the whole of the ancient and, when all is said, mysterious production of the national genius. For this gradually accumulated national treasure, Locke substituted utilitarianism, the simple welfare of the individual. Burke was the first thinker to be totally anti-Locke, and he rejected his rationalism, his atomism, his optimism, his conception of the contract, and obviously the first postulate of the *Essay on Human Understanding*, which is that all knowledge is empirical. Whatever its weaknesses may have been, the Lockian psychology of the tabula rasa was to play a tremendous role in the development of modern thought. For if man comes into the world full of inherited principles, unchangeable instincts, and traditions that are his from birth, he will clearly never be anything except what his ancestors have made him; he will be their prolongation and resemble them. He will never be able to change his fate, and the world will remain what it was, at least in its main lines. The idea of progress could not come to be born in a world dominated by theology, which is basically pessimistic.

In opposition to this, in Locke the individual is molded by his environment, by the conditions of his existence, by the education he receives: the philosopher of the revolution of 1689 gave the world the gift of a truly revolutionary theory. With his help, it became possible to change the face of society in a single generation. Progress, a new theory that could not have existed in the past, at the end of the eighteenth century became a practical question, a goal accepted as a real aim of political action. Thanks to Locke, the notion that men are by nature the same in all times and places became an accepted idea, like the view that in the state of nature, however one understands "nature," man is free and equal to his fellows.⁴⁶ At the time of the Glorious Revolution, individualism and utilitarianism became the two cornerstones of the campaign waged by the men of the Enlightenment.

Locke's essays provided British liberalism with its conceptual framework for two centuries. They formulated the first principles of individualism and hence of modern democracy: one finds there in essence the potential for the liberal democracy of our time. Like all the theoreticians of the school of natural rights, Locke began by considering how man was in his natural state: "To understand political power right, and derive it from its original, we must

consider what state all men are naturally in." According to Locke, "The *state of nature* has a law of nature to govern it, which obliges every one: and reason, which is that law, teaches all mankind, who will but consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions." Thus, in the state of nature, men have "perfect freedom to order their actions, and dispose of their possessions and persons, as they think fit, within the bounds of the law of nature, without asking leave, or depending on the will of any other man." The state of nature is "a state also of equality, wherein all the power and jurisdiction is reciprocal, no one having more than another: there being nothing more evident, than that creatures of the same species and rank promiscuously born to all the same advantages of nature, and use of the same faculties, should also be equal one amongst another without subordination or subjection." It follows that the limits of liberty and equality are determined by reason. However, this state of nature in which man is free, "equal to the greatest, and subject to no body," subjected only to the law of reason, is unable, precisely because all are "kings as much as he, every man his equal," to provide the guarantees of peace and security that would allow him to enjoy his natural rights. "First, there wants an established, settled, known law, received and allowed by common consent to be the standard of right and wrong . . . , [s]econdly, in the state of nature there wants a known and indifferent judge . . . ," and "thirdly, in the state of nature there often wants power to back and support the sentence when right, and to give it due execution."⁴⁷ This was the origin of society.

At the heart of all political thought since Locke is reflection on the origins of society. The view of the state of nature creates the principles on which the social organization is based; it dictates the individual's place in society and plays a role of the first importance in the power structures considered suitable for a good society. Because of the importance of this question, we must look again at the triangle Locke-Herder-Burke. Herder also went back, according to the usage of his time, to the origins of society, but those origins were at the antipodes of those of the school of natural law. Neither in Herder nor in Burke is there an individualistic state of nature that allows one to conceive of society as the artificial product of the freely expressed will of men who draw up a contract between themselves, first of society and then of government. In Herder, one does not find at the beginning the individual man but an already established society, patriarchal and authoritarian, living in the fear of God, which he sees as the ideal society. Thus, Herder began with a rehabilitation of the Bible, directed first of all against Voltaire, who presented the traditions of certain peoples outside the Christian world—the Chinese, the Persians, the Hindus—as older than the Bible. It is with a gaze full of adoration at the age of

the patriarchs, conceived as the origin of the species, that *Another Philosophy of History* begins. Herder sang the praises of “the history of the earliest developments of the human species, as described to us by the oldest book.” That epoch was the cradle of humanity. This history related by the Hebrew Bible, he said, only seems short and apocryphal to those who are captive to “the philosophical spirit of our age, which despises nothing more than that which is miraculous or concealed” but which “precisely for this reason . . . is true.”⁴⁸

Thus, Herder sought to go back to the beginnings in order to capture “humanity in its first inclinations, customs and institutions. . . . The eternal foundation for the education of mankind in all ages: wisdom instead of science, piety instead of wisdom.”⁴⁹ This text is of great importance, as it was for “the education of mankind” that Herder wrote *Another Philosophy*. The Bückeburg tract was intended as a complete alternative to both Locke’s *Second Treatise* and Rousseau’s *Second Discourse*. Like Locke and Rousseau before him and like Thomas Paine after him, Herder went back to the beginnings in search of the truth, and in order to discover the nature of man and the principles of his conduct. The method was the same, but where Locke, Rousseau, and Kant found the rights of man, where they saw the appearance of a rational being capable of mastering the world, of molding his existence according to his needs and natural rights, where they saw a free creature, Herder saw the omnipotence of the Creator. Man was made to follow the teachings consecrated by the holy scriptures, which described the creation for him and showed him the way; he was made to abide by the rules of traditional morality.

Herder recalled “these heroic beginnings of the human species’ formation” in order to stand against the “ruins of world [profane] history” and “the hastiest reasoning about it à la Voltaire.” “I shudder with joy,” he said, “as I stand before the holy cedar of an original progenitor of the world! . . . This man full of strength and the feeling of God,” possessing all the power that “a concentrated, quiet, healthy drive of nature could [provide].” That was the ideal: “The calm yet nomadic way of life of the fatherly patriarch’s hut,” a family in which “the wife was created for him,” and children unto the third and fourth generation whom the father of the family “led with religion and justice, order and happiness.” This “realm and tent of the patriarch,” said Herder, “will forever remain the golden age of mankind in its infancy.”⁵⁰

But, “by one of our age’s deceptions,” that is to say, through the habit of seeing everything in the light of “our own condition,” of viewing everything in accordance with “our European terms (and perhaps emotions),” of stating everything “in the artificial language of our politics,” this regime is described as despotism. In fact, even if it is true that, in the patriarch’s tent, fear was the driving force of this regime, one should not let oneself “be deceived by the

words of the expert philosopher” (Herder was referring here, as we read in a footnote, to Montesquieu and his “hoards of followers and imitators, slavish herd”). Another footnote cast aspersions on Nicolas-Antoine Boulanger, the author of *Recherches sur l’origine du despotisme oriental*, Voltaire, Helvétius, “etc. etc”; the number of wicked souls who thought that authoritarianism could have a universal significance regardless of time, place, and specific conditions was too great to mention them all. To all those who represented the spirit of the age, Herder remarked haughtily, there is “in every human life an age when we learn nothing by dry and cold reason.” In this age of the infancy of mankind, as in the infancy of each human being, where socialization comes about through “the so-called prejudices and impressions of education,” what “you call despotism” was in fact, contrary to the belief of the “cold philosophy” of the eighteenth century, only “the paternal authority to rule over house and hut.”⁵¹

Like the champions of royal power from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries onward, Herder identified power with paternal authority. Locke had devoted the whole of his *First Treatise* to his opposition to Robert Filmer, the advocate of unlimited royal power, who had made this idea the cornerstone of his system. The idea that society is not comparable to a family or a tribe — an enlarged family — and that nothing whatsoever about governmental authority can be deduced from the authority of the father of a family, is a major milestone in the birth of rationalist modernity and liberalism. For the founders of liberalism, there was an essential difference between civil society, based on a contract between free individuals, and the family or the tribe. At the beginning of the 1770s, after Locke and Montesquieu, when Voltaire and Rousseau were still alive, the reestablishment of this identity between the two types of community, which seemed to have been swept away by the school of natural rights and the first outlines of constitutionalism, seemed to belong to another world. But in fact this was already a move that introduced new criteria of social organization and laid the foundations of another modernity. Kant understood this, and he considered Herder’s thinking sufficiently dangerous to launch his critique. Herder, in effect, negated the progress made by the school of natural rights in the emancipation of the individual, and in so doing created the most formidable of the weapons of war used against liberalism.

Page 8 of *Another Philosophy* (in the Hackett edition) is a sort of microcosm of the whole of Herder’s argumentation, full though it is of contradictions such as one finds not only in the work of 1774 but also, in a certain way, in *Ideas*. The human race in its infancy, like every individual in each period, needed paternal authority: this was useful, good, and necessary. But Herder went further and made this much-admired period of infancy into a model for all men at all times.

Thus, contrary to his own declared intentions, he formulated principles that he made into universal principles. The time of the patriarchs thus became a criterion of behavior for the coming generations: "How, without demonstrating anything, it forged into eternal forms that which was right and good, or was deemed to be such at least; how together with the splendor of the deity and the love of the country foundations were laid that could not have been laid in any other way. . . . Centuries have been built upon them. . . . [There] they lie yet! And happily so, as everything rests upon them."⁵² This, then, was how a given society in a specific period, in flagrant contradiction to the idea of the equal value of all periods, became a model for the whole of humanity.

Even when he attacked Boulanger, Herder could not do otherwise than recognize the fact that this "Orient, . . . ground of God," and "the delicate sensitivity of these regions, with the quick, soaring imagination that so readily clothes everything in divine splendor," nevertheless ended by creating a despotism that "produced the most terrible effects; the most terrible of all, as the philosopher will say, being that no Oriental, as such, can yet have any deep concept of a humane, better constitution." But at the same time, Herder sought to demonstrate that "in the beginning . . . under the gentle government of the father . . . the human spirit received the first forms of wisdom and virtue with a simplicity, strength and majesty that . . . has no equal, no equal at all in our philosophical, cold European world." Patriarchal society was based on religion, the element in which everything lived and moved, and on the father, who, like a king, was the representative of God. Does one have to conclude, "according to the spirit and the sentiment of our time" — here a footnote again refers us to Voltaire, Helvétius, and Boulanger — that all this was necessarily the work of swindlers and scoundrels? For "our philosophical part of the world, for our educated time," the religious sentiment has become something shameful, and, what is worse, the patriarchal order is "entirely impossible for our part of the world," yet "the most ancient philosophy and forms of government would originally have had to be theology."⁵³

These texts need to be read carefully. Contrary to what is generally believed, this was not a lesson in method or in pluralism; Herder was not only stating facts in order to explain them in terms of the necessities of a particular period and the specific conditions that prevailed at that time. What Herder reproached Voltaire and the other enlightened philosophes for as a group was their judging a different world according to the criteria of their age and not seeing it from the inside. In reality, this requirement ruled out the possibility of making any value judgment, but this requirement was really only theoretical. Herder himself did not submit to the rules of an impossible method. He made very harsh value judgments and set up a clear hierarchy of values, first of all in relation to his own

time and then when he tried to introduce into the heart of the eighteenth century norms that he considered to have a universal value. The only difference between Herder and Voltaire was that the latter viewed as disastrous the values that the former deemed ideal for the human race. Religion was a good example: Herder was not saying that religion was good simply for the time of the patriarchs, he was saying that it had an eternal value. His greatest regret was that his age had entered into a period of decadence in which it could no longer feel the greatness of religious sentiment.

This was the great difference between Herder and Locke and all the other theoreticians of the school of natural rights. According to the latter, men created society in order to preserve their lives, their liberties, and their possessions. This was the basis of political legitimacy and the structures of power. Society and the state were thus the product of a voluntary decision and had a sole objective: to provide men with the means of preserving their natural rights: "The great end of men's entering into society" is "the enjoyment of their properties in peace and safety." For this purpose, "the first and fundamental positive law of all commonwealths is the establishment of the legislative power." No law can claim legitimacy if it does not have "sanction from that Legislative which the public has chosen and appointed." Without this, "the law could not have that, which is absolutely necessary to its being a law, the consent of the society." "For law, in its true notion, is not so much the limitation as the direction of a free and intelligent agent to his proper interest, and prescribes no farther than is for the general good of those under that law." And further on he says: "The end of law is not to abolish or restrain, but to preserve and enlarge freedom . . . for liberty is to be free from restraint and violence from others: which cannot be, where there is no law."⁵⁴

The *Second Treatise* clearly stated the principle of utility; it formulated the principle of the responsibility of rulers and laid the foundations of the system of majority rule. Section 97 laid the foundations of democracy: "And thus every man, by consenting with others to make one body politic under one government, puts himself under an obligation, to every one of that society, to submit to the determination of the majority, and to be concluded by it."⁵⁵ Locke's liberalism established the right of men to govern themselves, to change the system of government in accordance with their needs and the functioning of the existing system. The absolute criterion remained the same: in a word, he created a democratic potential that the Americans had no trouble in developing and in translating into concrete terms. In France and elsewhere in Europe, the *Encyclopédie*, that "engine of war" of Enlightenment thought, popularized Locke's work: "No man has received from nature the right to command others. Liberty is a gift from heaven, and every individual of the same species

has the right to enjoy it as soon as he has the capacity to reason,” stated Diderot. In that century that believed itself “destined to change every kind of law,” it was held that “the prince receives from his subjects themselves the authority he has over them, and this authority is bounded by the laws of nature and the state. The laws of nature and the state are the conditions on which they have submitted or are said to have submitted to his rule.” Consequently, if the terms of the agreement are no longer met, “the nation regains . . . the right and full liberty to make another [agreement] with whomever it pleases and in whatever way it pleases.”⁵⁶ These articles of faith were re-adopted in America, as they were, almost word for word, by Richard Price in London in the sermon that called forth a diatribe from Burke and was one of the direct causes of the publication of his *Reflections*, as well as by Paine in his response to Burke’s pamphlet.⁵⁷ They expressed the spirit of the time.

Consequently, in writing his pamphlet in the last months of 1789, Burke immediately turned his attention to what was most urgent: fighting his Battle of Britain.⁵⁸ He felt that it was above all necessary to contain the revolution of the rights of man so that it would not penetrate the British Isles. In order to do so, the establishment of the new regime in France had to be presented as an event unique of its kind, something against nature, something truly monstrous. With all possible haste, one had to prevent any possibility of connecting the Glorious Revolution with the one that had just put an end to the Old Regime in France. At the same time, one had to cast a veil of oblivion over that other revolution that had just taken place on the other side of the Atlantic and claim that the events in America were merely the result of a misunderstanding. The first part of the *Reflections* was devoted to this purpose. For that reason, the point of importance here is not only what Burke said to the English reader but also what he obscured.

Indeed, the reader for whom the *Reflections* were the only source of information would be ignorant of the fact that at the moment when the Old World was crumbling in Paris, the colonists in America were not only giving themselves a new identity but also laying the foundations of a new nation, a new society, and a new state. The “English in America,” former subjects of a hereditary monarchy, had become citizens of the United States, and after giving themselves a Declaration of Independence, had elected a Congress and a president. This reader would not know that this Declaration of Independence, like all the other declarations of rights and constitutions produced by the various states of the Union, was based on the principles of natural law and was a practical application of Locke’s thought. The reader would not know that a rupture had taken place, and that men who had begun by fighting for their British freedoms had ended by fighting for liberty as such. If Burke had been

the liberal he has so often been portrayed as being, particularly in the last years of the twentieth century, he would have mentioned the principles which the founders of the United States had drawn on and which were the ideological armor of the last stages of their rebellion against the metropolis. If Burke had really been a progressive Whig, he would probably have mentioned the name of John Locke, and, after him, that of Publius, the collective pseudonym of the three authors of *The Federalist*. The total absence from his work of the author of the two *Treatises of Government* to whom the American rebels never stopped referring, as they did to Montesquieu, is logically connected with his interpretation of the events that took place in England a hundred years earlier.

For nobody understood better than Burke the relationship between Locke and the founding fathers of the United States. Voltaire said of Locke that "never was there a wiser, more methodical person"; d'Alembert put him on the same level as Bacon, Descartes, and Newton.⁵⁹ Burke, however, rejected Locke, whose heritage, as he well knew, had been adopted by Paine and the authors of *The Federalist*, by Price and the members of the Revolution Society in London, by Charles Fox's Whig parliamentarians, and finally by the authors of the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the constitution of 1791. The same applied to Montesquieu. In the *Reflections*, Burke mentioned Montesquieu once, in reference to his observation that "in their classification of the citizens, the great legislators of antiquity made the greatest display of their powers, and even soared above themselves." Montesquieu was mentioned a second time, in "Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs" of August 1791, where at least he was described as a "genius . . . with a Herculean robustness of mind," but this "man gifted by nature" was invoked only because he held out "to the admiration of mankind the constitution of England," and not in order to consider his teachings as a whole, as was done in America.⁶⁰ Montesquieu's rationalism, his sociological analysis, his ideas on the balance of powers that obviously did not rule out a republican regime were repugnant to Burke, just as he could not forgive Locke for visualizing a system that did not necessitate a hereditary monarchy.

Having been appointed parliamentary agent for the colony of New York in 1771, Burke, who loathed "metaphysical distinctions" of any kind ("I hate the very sound of them"), refused in 1774 to enter into any discussion of the question of the Americans' rights. He demanded the pure and simple annulment of the system of taxation imposed on the colonists for fear that otherwise they would question the very idea of British sovereignty over America.⁶¹ A year later, on March 22, 1775, he gave his second great speech on the colonies, in which he praised the love of liberty of these descendants of the British living in America. The liberty they loved, like their ancestors, who also, from earliest

times, had fought for liberty chiefly in the matter of taxation, was liberty “according to English ideas, and on English principles. Abstract liberty, like other mere abstractions, is not to be found.”⁶²

Burke’s last speech concerning the colonies was delivered on April 3, 1777, when, after the partial suspension of habeas corpus in the United Kingdom at the beginning of the year, the question of America had become a British question of the first importance. Burke feared that the American conflict would weaken Britain in the international arena and be “an oppressive burthen upon the national finances,” and he feared even more that conditions would be created in which “armies, first victorious over Englishmen, in a conflict for English constitutional rights and privileges, and afterwards habituated (though in America) to keep an English people in a state of abject subjection, would prove fatal in the end to the liberties of England itself.” That is why Burke recommended acting with caution: in his “Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol” he emphasized practical measures to end the conflict. “The bulk of mankind,” he said, “on their part are not excessively curious concerning any theories, whilst they are really happy.”⁶³ A much better politician than George III, he understood that in order to defuse and neutralize the American bomb, one had to eradicate the immediate causes of the discontent of these subjects of the Crown living in America. That had been his position from the beginning of the conflict. Time was of the essence: it was only by rapidly ending the conflict and clearly satisfying the rebels and by preventing them from going any further along the catastrophic path of innovation that one could nip the American experiment in the bud. Stopping the confrontation was an absolute priority, for as the conflict developed, the colonists began to put forward a new ideology. They increasingly stopped demanding their historical privileges and began to appeal to reason, and to fight for the right of individuals voluntarily to create a new society and new power structures. The dissolution of the connections of the thirteen colonies not only to the government of Great Britain but also to its people began a process in America of refounding society and the state. With a little imagination, one could visualize the situation that had come into being in America as a kind of exodus from the state of nature similar to that described by Locke: the Americans were forming themselves into a new political body. They created the first modern democratic system in a vast country; they elected their representatives to the two chambers of Congress, a president, and an incalculable number of public servants, from judges of the peace to governors of states. The Americans wrote a Constitution, and the rights of man became the basis of a new social and political organization. Moreover, their interpretation of the British constitution was that of the progressive Whigs adapted to the needs of the colonies: that is to say, it was a Lockian interpretation of British freedoms.

It was thus only logical that, from the moment the English in America became citizens of the United States, after invoking the principles of the rights of man and making them the foundation of their independence, they ceased to be of interest to Burke. From 1777 to 1791, he acted as if America had been swallowed up by the sea. In order to preserve the unity of the empire and assure British commercial interests, and in order to defend the traditional freedoms of the British, Burke had fought on behalf of these subjects in revolt against arbitrary royal power. Moreover, in standing up to the king on the classical grounds of taxation, the colonists were a not inconsiderable reinforcement for the Whigs in the British parliament, but, contrary to another persistent myth, Burke never supported the American Revolution. The artificial and voluntary nature of society strongly affirmed by the Americans was deeply repugnant to him. No one hated more than he did the American “We the people.” Similarly, his struggle for the rights of the populations of India suffering the abuses of Governor Warren Hastings’s administration was a defense not of the rights of individuals but of an organized community, its elites and traditions, and hence its “constitution.”⁶⁴

For this reason, one does not find in Burke any trace of the famous electoral campaign at whose conclusion the Constitution of the United States was adopted. This first great manifestation of modern democracy was as repugnant to him as the representative system that resulted from it. He thought it better not to speak of it at all than to recognize, by the very action of refuting it, that a revolutionary movement had not only come into being but succeeded. *The Federalist*, whose contents Burke, attentive as he was to the evolution of the situation in America, could not have failed to be aware of, seems, as far as he was concerned, never to have existed. The American Constitution may not have been truly democratic, as in many ways it still is not,⁶⁵ the liberalism of Hamilton, Madison, and Jay may have been covered with a thick layer of conservatism, but for Burke it was already far too much. The inalienable rights invoked by the Americans, their universal character (except with regard to blacks), the principle of popular sovereignty, the idea of a social contract as the sole source of legitimacy, the elective system and the contractual nature of the government, the republican philosophy, and the constant reference to Locke — all this he found intolerable. The idea of the sovereignty of the people, despite the fact that it was limited by the terms of the contract, by the Bill of Rights, and by the Constitution, was based on the contract that had created the society. A new nation had been born, and the historical continuity had been ruptured. For Burke, America was definitely lost.

Indeed, the American ideology that had been coming into existence throughout the eighteenth century was, according to Thomas Jefferson, a synthesis of

the “freest principles of the English Constitution with others derived from natural right and natural reason.” On the eve of independence, this synthesis was now solely based on natural right and reason. The idea that liberty is natural to men is found in the constitution of Virginia, which is a classic example of a bill of rights. Nearly all the states of America had, as in the constitution of Massachusetts in 1780, formulated the principle that the aim of every political institution was “the protection of natural rights”; everywhere it was acknowledged that the political body was created by “a voluntary association of individuals” through a “social contract.” Everybody knew that American independence was based on the Lockian principle of the voluntary social compact of individual men, that the introduction of these principles into the constitutions of the new American states signified the creation of new societies, the abrogation of the British past, the revolutionary erasure of historic continuity, and the construction of a society, government, and nation from the foundation upward.⁶⁶ In America, the natural laws, so much discussed since the middle of the seventeenth century, became the laws of civil society. In England itself, William Blackstone, in his famous *Commentaries on the Laws of England* published between 1765 and 1769, explained the aims of all societies in terms that hardly differed from those of the founders of the United States, for the simple reason that he drew on the widely accepted broad principles of Lockian liberalism. Quite naturally, Burke explicitly disapproved of Blackstone.

More than anyone else, Burke understood the capacity for dissolving the existing order inherent in the philosophy of natural law; in America, a process of atomization had come about. He appreciated to the full the following observation by Paine, and understood its implications: “The independence of America, considered merely as a separation from England, would have been a matter but of little importance, had it not been accompanied by a revolution in the principles and practice of governments.”⁶⁷ Burke had observed the influence of Enlightenment thought in America, but in the 1770s he hoped that the evil would be snuffed out or at least circumscribed and limited to the New World.

For Burke, this second liberal revolution assumed the dimensions of a real violation of history, or, that is to say, a violation of nature. He feared that the example would spread, especially as the colonists had demonstrated that hateful innovations could be very successful. Until the end of the 1780s he still hoped that, dwelling as they did on “the remote shores of the Atlantic,” the colonists would not constitute an immediate danger. But, following the revolution in France, he understood that a similar disaster could overtake England. That is why, when the French Revolution broke out, he returned to the question of America, declaring, “Until now, we have seen no examples of consider-

able democracies.”⁶⁸ There is no doubt that the memory of the year 1776 weighed heavily on 1789. Burke feared and despised democracy; in its arrival he saw the end of civilization. He refused to countenance it even when he thought it was penned up at the other end of the world.

That is why the writer of *Reflections* was right when, speaking of himself in the third person, he claimed in his “Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs” that he had never changed his ideological opinions: “On the American War he never had any opinions which he has seen occasion to retract, or which he has ever retracted. He indeed differs essentially from Mr. Fox as to the cause of that war. Mr. Fox has been pleased to say, that the Americans rebelled ‘because they thought they had not enjoyed liberty enough.’ . . . This Mr. Burke never believed. When he moved his second conciliatory proposition in the year 1776, he entered into the discussion of this point at very great length; and from nine several heads of presumption, endeavoured to prove the charge upon that people not to be true.” Burke was right to recall that in 1776 he came to the conclusion that the colonists had taken up arms “from one motive only; that is, our attempting to tax them without their consent,” and he was firmly of the opinion that in revolting they were on a purely “defensive footing.” According to him, the Americans were in the same situation as existed in England in 1688, with “a legal monarch attempting arbitrary power.”⁶⁹ He was no less firmly convinced that the only intelligent path for Great Britain to follow was to revoke “its bill of taxes,” not only in order to avoid aggravating the situation in America, but also in order not to endanger Britain itself.

This explains why, in the midst of the French Revolution, at the time when this new revolution was breaking up the established order, Burke, knowing that a misunderstanding had arisen, especially among his old Whig friends, took the trouble to go back to his former lines of defense. He maintained that if he had thought “that the Americans had rebelled merely in order to enlarge their liberty, Mr. Burke would have thought very differently of the American cause.” Indeed, in 1777 he had violently attacked those who used “the kind of reasoning with which the public has been amused, in order to divert our minds from the common sense of our American policy,” and who discussed political liberty as if it were metaphysical liberty. These people “disputed whether liberty be a positive or a negative idea,” without asking themselves whether man has any rights by nature, and whether the individual was not dependent on “the alms of his government” for all that he possessed, including his very existence.⁷⁰

On the eve of his death, closing the circle of his thought, Burke returned to the subject of America once more. He saw the creation of the United States, the American alliance against the British monarchy, as a monumental error on the

part of Louis XVI, not, as is often thought, because of the cost of the war, which weakened his kingdom, but because of its political and ideological implications. The very birth of the United States created an entirely new kind of danger. That was the real meaning of his "Second Letter on a Regicide Peace": "Louis the xvith could not with impunity countenance a new Republic; yet between his throne and that dangerous lodgement for an enemy, which he had erected, he had the whole Atlantick for a ditch."⁷¹ Despite the marginality of America, despite the existence of the European monarchies, the influence of the American Revolution was fatal. One had to draw the proper conclusions: if this primitive republic, a land of peasants and fishermen, was able to cause such a disaster, what would happen to the existing order, indeed, to Christian civilization, the social structures and hierarchies, the order of chivalry, if one accepted the presence of an infinitely more powerful republic in the heart of Europe?

This "Second Letter" is of great importance, for it shows that, contrary to the claims of his loyal disciples from Genz and Rehberg to the neoconservatives of our time, Burke did not see any essential difference between the two revolutions. On both sides of the Atlantic the evil was the same, but its proximity and intensity made the French version a mortal danger. If Burke believed he could relate to America with silence if not with disdain, in the case of France the only solution was a cordon sanitaire and an ideological war for the destruction of the new regime. It was a war, he said, "between the partisans of the ancient, civil, moral, and political order of Europe against a sect of fanatical and ambitious atheists which means to change them all. It is not France extending a foreign empire over other nations: it is a sect aiming at universal empire, and beginning with the conquest of France."⁷² Nurtured on an "adulterated metaphysics," "the faction is not local or territorial." It was a general evil that "exists in every country in Europe. . . . The centre is there [France]. The circumference is the whole world of Europe wherever the race of Europe may be settled. Everywhere else the faction is militant; in France it is triumphant."⁷³ The universal revolution now had a capital and a general staff; the same arguments were to reappear after the Soviet Revolution. Only the center of the evil had shifted. At the time of the cold war, it was the major argument of the ideological crusade against communism.

Burke tried to convince his fellow countrymen that the French Revolution was an "unexampled event," a "revolution in sentiments, manners, and moral opinions."⁷⁴ The design, he said, is "wicked, immoral, impious, oppressive; but it is spirited and daring; it is systematick; it is simple in its principle; it has unity and consistence in perfection." Apart from the wish to destroy the European order as a whole, the "principal feature in the French Revolution" and

the aim of the “fanatical atheism” ruling in Paris was the “utter extirpation of religion.”⁷⁵ That is what made a war “just and necessary” — a war launched by the “Christian powers” for “the purpose of preserving social and political order amongst all civilized nations” and defeating “the evil spirit that possesses the body of France.”⁷⁶ The “evil spirit” — the expression recurs several times in two pages of text — is the soul of “the present government in France”; it “stamps upon its ambition and upon all its pursuits, a characteristic mark which strongly distinguishes them from the same general passions, and the same general views, in other men and in other communities.” This spirit “inspires into them a new, a pernicious, and desolating activity” that has consequently made France “formidable.” It follows that not only can one never “make peace with the system,” it is precisely because it is the embodiment of evil that one is “at war with its existence.” In *Reflections*, Burke spoke of imposing “a most severe quarantine” on France; in his final piece of writing he already called for a campaign to destroy the entire regime.⁷⁷

From the beginning of his career, Burke was overcome with terror at the universal character of the Enlightenment, which had begun to sweep away the old order. In 1789 one had to get to the bottom of the problem, to its source. While erecting a cordon sanitaire around the ideas coming from America, one had at the same time to give 1689 a specific, particular, inimitable British character, one that sprang from the depths of the national history and that was above all extremely limited. The meaning of the Glorious Revolution had to be modified in such a way that the change of dynasty in England would no longer be perceived as the founding event of liberalism, and that the event would cease to be seen as the first successful revolution of the Enlightenment, followed by two other revolutions of the same kind, and would simply become an “avoided revolution.” That is why the British debate on French affairs was based not on the events and affairs of the immediate past but on ones that were already a century old.

At the time Burke launched his campaign against the principles of 1789 and claimed that the French Revolution was based on principles totally alien to those of the Glorious Revolution, he was not asserting his fidelity to the revolution of 1689.⁷⁸ On the contrary, he was cutting himself off from it. In the Britain of 1790, he was not a conservative in the true sense of the word but a doctrinaire with a messianism that was revolutionary, as the conservatism of the generation of the turn of the twentieth century was a century later. In reality, he was the originator of the first major revolt against liberalism, all the more significant because it developed in the freest country of that period. There is no real ambiguity or ambivalence in Burke’s thinking, and the conflicting interpretations that exist are derived from a reading of the *Reflections*

based on a false assumption. Burke was not simultaneously a liberal political author and a counterrevolutionary. He was not a representative of the British liberal tradition — far from it. The British liberal tradition was based on the rationalism of Hobbes and Locke, on the principles of the school of natural rights, and on a belief in the artificial, rational, and voluntary nature of society. Burke loathed these principles, and he refused to nurture the first shoots of democracy and the sovereignty of the people as the heirs of Locke wanted to do. And finally, he was not an opponent but a founder of modern historicism.⁷⁹

In the England of 1789, the advocates of the rights of man favored a liberal interpretation of the British constitution, comparable to that which prevailed in the United States, and they saw the fall of the Old Regime in France as the birth of liberty, comparable in scale and in political and moral greatness to their own revolution. In short, they were loyal to the classical conception of British liberalism. The liberals whom Burke attacked in the person of Pastor Price and the men of the Revolution Society saw the events of 1689 as the practical application of the natural rights set forth by Locke and acclaimed by all the progressive Whigs from the end of the seventeenth century onward. It was precisely this Lockian interpretation of the Glorious Revolution that was the object of Burke's rancor.

When Richard Price ascended the pulpit in the Chapel of Old Jewry⁸⁰ on November 4, 1789, to praise the revolution in France, comparing it to the Glorious Revolution, and when the members of the Revolution Society then sent an address to the French National Assembly based on the principles set forth in this speech, this action was hardly an innovation. Far from it: they all had the feeling of taking up more or less banal ideas. The wide acceptance of these ideas and the status of Pastor Price were precisely the reason for Burke's anger. For Price was not just anyone. In 1777 he had written a strongly pro-American work, *Observations on the Nature of Civil Liberty*, in which he expressed the view that the founding of the United States was a revolution of the rights of man.⁸¹ This work won him an attack not only from a Burke before his time, Josiah Tucker, but from Burke himself.⁸² As John Pocock points out, Price had a way of provoking responses from conservatives: it was in response to a letter from Turgot to Price that in 1787 John Adams wrote *A Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America*. Ten years before Burke, Tucker, who was also an English churchman who corresponded with Hume and Adam Smith and was interested in the new political economics, accused Price of denying the legitimacy of any system of government whose aim was not the protection of the natural liberty of individuals. In other words, he claimed that an insistence on the principle of natural rights destroyed the moral bonds that made possible the existence of society

with its economic and commercial activities. According to Pocock, Tucker made this accusation against Locke as well as against Price, which Burke did not.⁸³ But in his *Letter to the Sheriffs of Bristol* of 1777 Burke had attacked Price, though not by name, as one of those people who “have split and anatomised the doctrine of free government, as if it were an abstract question concerning metaphysical liberty and necessity.”⁸⁴ Thus the controversy between Burke and Price in the first year of the French Revolution was rooted in old differences of principles at the time of the American rebellion, and Price’s activities in favor of the measures taken by the National Assembly in Paris were part of a long struggle that this nonconformist clergyman had been engaged in since the 1770s.

This is the source of the common error of failing to see the significance of Burke’s campaign against Price. Burke attacked Price in order to avoid having to confront the formidable figure of Locke. There were many who saw Locke as the greatest name in political philosophy in the century that began in 1689 and ended in 1789. Rousseau was an ambiguous figure, Kant was still at the height of his activity and already subject to the attacks of German antiliberalism. Locke already belonged to history, and the dead always have a certain advantage: with the passage of time, the great become even greater. In 1790 as in 1777, Locke was virtually untouchable. Burke knew that a frontal attack on the philosopher who had dethroned Descartes would not only accentuate his isolation and marginalization within the Whig faction but, by preventing him from laying claim to the Whig heritage, would cause him to be totally ejected from the Whig camp.

That is why Burke chose not to mention Locke in his *Reflections* or in any of his writings of the 1790s, though in reality his whole argument was directed against the principles of the *Second Treatise*. Moreover, it was Price who led the fight in England, and it was he who had just published his sermon in Old Jewry under the title “A Discourse on the Love of Our Country.” If successful, Price’s action would eventually have resulted in the separation of church and state. Together with John Priestly and other “radicals,” Price campaigned to free dissidents from the Church of England from the restrictions that had been imposed on them at the end of the seventeenth century. Though enjoying, since the Glorious Revolution, the freedom of worship advocated in Locke’s *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, the dissidents, not to mention the Catholics, of course, were excluded from the Act of Toleration. In fact, anyone not belonging to the Church of England was excluded from the body of citizens. This situation to which, in the tradition of Locke, Price was objecting, was based on a discrepancy of a theological nature, but one whose social implications were of great importance. Burke did not want the status of the church to be reduced

to that of a voluntary community of people professing the same opinions, just as he could not conceive of society as a simple collection of citizens. In 1790 he attacked Price who, taking his cue from the redefinition of the status of the Church of France by the revolution, assailed the unique status of the Church of England. In demanding a total equality of rights for the Protestant dissidents, Price was in fact demanding an equality of civil rights.

Burke reproached the English liberals, especially those, like Fox, who regarded the fall of the Old Regime in France as the most important event in history, with seeing modern British politics as having been created by 1689 and Locke's interpretation of it, and consequently as being based on the principles of the Enlightenment. The liberals recognized as their own the principles that signified the end of the Old Regime and made man's will the sole source of political legitimacy. Thus, they believed that the only legitimate government that existed was the one that had gained the assent of the people, and that the king of Great Britain, responsible to his people, was therefore the only legitimate sovereign in the world. Basing their argument on the Glorious Revolution, the liberals claimed for society the right to procure for itself a government and if necessary to discharge it should it prove unworthy. This very idea — popular sovereignty — filled Burke with "disgust and horror." In 1688, he said, the two Houses uttered "not a syllable of a right to frame a government for themselves." Moreover, the change of dynasty took place through an act of "the flower of the English aristocracy" and not through a popular uprising. For that reason, the real significance of the Glorious Revolution was that "what we did was . . . a revolution, not made, but prevented."⁸⁵

Thus, unlike the liberals who saw the year 1689 as the beginning of a new era, Burke viewed the coming of William of Orange as the restoration of the traditional freedoms of the British, which "*entailed* inheritance derived to us from our forefathers . . . an estate specially belonging to the people of this kingdom." These benefits were "an inheritable crown; an inheritable peerage; and a House of Commons and a people inheriting privileges, franchises, and liberties, from a long line of ancestors." The Magna Carta of the thirteenth century was connected to another charter of liberties, dating from the time of Henry I, and both were only reaffirmations of laws that had existed in the kingdom at an even earlier period. In the face of the "madness" of the "pretended rights of man," in the face of the "monstrous tragic-comic scene" that was taking place in Paris, "the people of England," he said, "looks on the frame of their commonwealth, *such as it stands*, to be of inestimable value," and is faithful to the unique entity represented by "our state, our hearths, our sepulchers and our altars." For him, the revolution of 1688 had no purpose other than to assure "the future preservation of the same government."⁸⁶

This interpretation of the Glorious Revolution produced by Burke, and largely accepted for the past two centuries in all conservative circles of all disciplines, still remains the dominant interpretation. However, it is not and never has been the chosen path of British liberalism. For if the English Bill of Rights did in fact restore certain ancient rights like the rights of Parliament in the matter of taxation, it was essentially a radically new document. The term “radical” in this context is not an anachronism: it appears in English from the middle of the seventeenth century. The Bill of Rights was the product of an enormous ideological effort that was reflected in hundreds of tracts and pamphlets calling for a refoundation of the monarchy. The Convention Parliament operated on the basis of the theory of a governmental contract which had been formulated during the Civil War, and which, for that reason, was far from original in 1689. The reformers in fact formulated a theory of limited power that Locke made famous. His two *Treatises* really summarized the arguments that had been developed in the half-century that preceded 1689 and that reappeared in 1776; meanwhile, these arguments were codified by the greatest philosopher of his time. In this respect, it is correct to say that to the degree that 1776 was the second English Revolution, 1689 was the first American Revolution. The principles were the same: namely, the source of political power was the people; royal power was limited by a contract and by the monarch’s oath to respect the law. The monarch exercised power through the trust of the people, who were the holders of the power. The violation by the monarch of the terms of the contract made the monarch into a tyrant and removed from the people their obligation of obedience. In such a case, the contract was annulled, and the power returned to its legitimate holders, the people. These arguments, well known both at the time of the Civil War and at the time of the American War of Independence, were also current at the time of the Glorious Revolution.⁸⁷

At that time there was a significant body of literature that provided material for the debates of the Convention Parliament and aimed at reform of the monarchy.⁸⁸ Most of the measures advocated by the committee of thirty-nine members of Parliament appointed to prepare the Declaration of Rights, measures considered absolutely necessary to secure the laws and liberties of the nation, were not to be found in the final document, probably because of the objections of William of Orange. Two important measures were adopted, however: those dealing with legislation and the army. The prince expressly opposed them and threatened to return to Holland. He thought that the royal powers had been drastically curtailed, with the result that a new legal situation had been created. Following long-drawn-out political maneuvers, a compromise was reached, but it was an arrangement that finally gave the victory to the

reformers. Ancient rights under attack from James II were restored, and at the same time a new monarchy was founded. If the Declaration of Rights read to the new sovereigns on February 13, 1689, and accepted by William and Mary before they were proclaimed king and queen had not come into existence, and if it had not been confirmed by the Bill of Rights, the revolution of 1689 would only have been a coup d'état, as some people today believe.⁸⁹ In reality, it was a two-sided revolution: both a restoration and a leap forward. The Bill of Rights founded a new monarchy and went far beyond a change of sovereign. That was how contemporaries felt, and it was also the feeling of the American colonizers when they invoked the Bill of Rights in 1776. It was in this way that Price, Paine, Hamilton, and Jefferson, like Locke and the reformers of 1689, understood the events of the end of the seventeenth century. It was their interpretation that formed the British liberalism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Burke, for his part, represented the camp of rejection; he was in the tradition of those who in 1689 wanted simply to crown a new monarch and thought that England as it was represented the ideal of a well-ordered society and a well-governed state.

Certainly, Burke did not deny that all was not perfect, inasmuch as nothing in human existence can claim perfection, but he saw nothing that needed to be fundamentally changed. Despite his protestations that he was opposed not to improvements and reforms but only to changes, he never offered a single example of a reform he considered desirable or even acceptable. On the contrary: the existing order, the product of history and the divine will, had to be preserved. This was a universal principle: changes should be marginal and slow, and take place in an "almost imperceptible" manner. Only after long periods of time, if not centuries, would one notice them. In any case, there was no need to resort to rebellion: Europe as a whole was flourishing, and in the final analysis it owed this happy state of affairs to "the spirit of our old manners and opinions."⁹⁰ The French people had "made their way . . . to a bad constitution, when they were absolutely in possession of a good one. They were in possession of it the day the states met in separate orders. Their business, had they been either virtuous or wise, or had they been left to their own judgement, was to secure the stability and independence of the states, according to those orders, under the monarch on the throne. It was then their duty to redress grievances." The French had the good fortune to live under a government that gave them only "graces, favours and immunities"; there was nothing that "should have made them throw off their allegiance to their sovereign, as well as the ancient constitution of their country." Moreover, if their immediate past did not offer a solution, they could always derive their claims "from a more early race of ancestors."⁹¹

The term “constitution” in Burke does not mean the formal structure of government, it means the entire social structure of a country. He regarded the structure of British society and its regime as an absolute marvel. Whereas other conservatives close to Burke, such as the American John Quincy Adams, made a distinction between the structure of the government and the structure of society, and were very critical of the British system of government and the evils of British society, especially corruption, Burke saw nothing wrong in the British reality. That Britain had to be preserved as it was, with both its social structure and its governmental structures. Yet the Britain of his time had a semifeudal character that seemed unsatisfactory not only to the British liberals but also to Hegel, who was by no means a great revolutionary. Hegel can conceivably be interpreted not as the philosopher of the Prussian state but, as Éric Weill maintains, as the philosopher of the state as such, “of the State *as it is*, not an ideal imaginary state.” This theory could be described as “the theory of reason realized in man, realized *for* itself and *through* itself.”⁹² This, however, could not be the position of Burke, who was not a rationalist and could not have erected the structure of a state that was cold and logical in its authoritarianism. The old Britain, precisely because it had a political system that defied common sense, a system in which liberty was synonymous with privilege, in which inequality was regarded as natural and was equated with history, corresponded exactly to his ideal.

Like Burke, de Maistre was convinced of the impotence of reason when it came to “leading men.” He did not wish to “insult” reason, but common sense demonstrated the superiority of faith. Reason, or, if one prefers, philosophy, “having eaten away the cement that binds men together, there is no longer any moral binding.” That is how the crime of assassinating Louis XVI could be committed: it was not a matter of the death of a human being who did not deserve this fate, it was a blow struck at *sovereignty* itself. The state of disintegration that French society had reached was shown by the fact that the king went to his death without anyone raising his voice, either in Paris or in the provinces. Not all the French wanted the death of Louis XVI, but the vast majority of the people wanted “all the acts of folly” that preceded January 21, 1793.⁹³

In Carlyle, half a century after Burke and one generation after de Maistre, the source of the evil was still the same: rationalism and individualism. Thought, said Carlyle, “is an ever-living, ever-working Chaos of Being.” He thought that man had been put on earth not to ask questions but to work: “Work is the mission of man in this earth.” For Carlyle, the inferiority of reason was self-evident: “Logic is good, but it is not the best.” “The healthy Understanding, we should say, is not the Logical, argumentative, but the Intuitive, but the end of Understanding is not to prove and find reasons, but to know and believe.”⁹⁴

Already in *Sartor Resartus*, his novel devoted to the theory of symbols, Carlyle was categorical: "By Symbols, accordingly, is man guided and commanded, made happy, made wretched," and "Not our Logical, Mensurative faculty, but our Imaginative one is King over us."⁹⁵ The masses instinctively recognize the exceptional man and follow him: "We do not quite understand thee; we perceive thee to be nobler and bigger than we, and we will loyally follow thee."⁹⁶

There is, however, one passage in *On Heroes* that made Cassirer declare that though he expressed himself in mystical terms, Carlyle was never an irrationalist. All his heroes — prophets, priests, and poets — were also depicted as deep and authentic thinkers.⁹⁷ It is true that Odin, whom the Vikings saw as the "king of the gods," and who solved the great riddle of the universe for them, was described by Carlyle as a thinker. It is also true that Carlyle believed that in every period in the history of the world, the great founding event behind all the others was always the appearance of a thinker on earth. But is not the argument here that thought as a social force is precisely the attribute or even the monopoly of very exceptional men? Is it not only with them that it can play a leading role and engender that flash of genius of which Luther, Napoleon, and Goethe were capable? Among the majority of mortals, that is to say, among all men except for the giants who are the subject of his book, "the Understanding" is the "window," and "Fantasy is the eye."⁹⁸ Do not these expressions seem to have been taken directly from Burke's *Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*?

After Herder, Burke, de Maistre, and Carlyle, Taine in his turn put his finger on the source of the trouble: the individual's claim to exercise absolute control of his fate and of human affairs in general through the power of reason. Taine believed the disaster was caused by the spirit of the age, "the independence of reasoning reason, which, discarding the imagination, freeing itself from tradition, relating badly to experience, makes logic its queen, mathematics its model, talk its medium, polite society its audience, commonplace truths its business, man in the abstract its subject and ideology its formula."⁹⁹ In his great chapter on Carlyle, he lavished praise on intuition: "Insight is in the race, and this faculty is a kind of philosophical discernment. If need be, the heart replaces the brain. The inspired, passionate man penetrates into the depths of things; he perceives their causes from the reverberations he receives from them, he embraces totalities through the lucidity and speed of his creative imagination; he finds the unity of a group of things through the unity of the emotion that they give him. . . . Intuition is a complete and living analysis; the poets and the prophets, Shakespeare and Dante, Saint Paul and Luther, were systematic theoreticians without knowing it."¹⁰⁰

This idea was central to the long and detailed exposition given in *The Ori-*

gins. There Taine showed that, before 1789, there had been a great intellectual revolt against all certitudes, all faiths, all political, social, and religious institutions. One saw the triumph of the spirit of the century of Enlightenment and the “age of reason” (with the ironic quotation marks always in place), that age that claimed “that previously the human race had been in its childhood [and] that now it had reached [its] ‘majority,’” that age in which “the truth was finally manifested,” and in which, for the first time, one would “see its reign on earth.” The reference to Kant is patently obvious. Taine continued: by its nature, truth is universal, it applies to everyone; it therefore has a supreme right, being the truth. Through these two articles of faith, said Taine, “the philosophy of the eighteenth century resembled a religion: seventeenth-century Puritanism or seventh-century Mohammedanism.” But this new religion, which was as strident as its predecessors, differed from them in that it imposed itself not in the name of God but in the name of reason. The ascendancy of reason was an unparalleled phenomenon that undermined and overturned an edifice in which all the stones held together: “laws that were observed, authorities that were recognized, a prevailing religion” rooted in immemorial custom. Faith and obedience were an inheritance; the royal will, the first form of public authority, had a lineage of eight centuries and was thus quite simply a hereditary right. Religion, which commanded men to submit to the established authorities, drew its legitimacy from an eighteen-century-old tradition. The divine will was the “ultimate primeval rock” supporting “hereditary prejudice,” the foundation of the established order, which “like instinct, is a blind form of reason. And its legitimization is confirmed by the fact that, in order to become effective, reason itself has to borrow its form.”¹⁰¹

Here Taine made a lengthy observation, most important for an understanding of Anti-Enlightenment thought. While the Enlightenment saw reason as an attribute of all human beings, an instrument they could always use in all circumstances, and the sole universal criterion for judging good and evil in political matters, their liberal-conservative critics, themselves complete rationalists in their scientific work, regarded reason as the privilege of scholars, only of value in the area of high culture. In social life, on the other hand, reason caused disaster. Consequently, “reason would be wrong to object to prejudice running human affairs, since in order to run them, it would itself have to become a prejudice.” For “a doctrine can only become active by becoming blind.” In order to become a social force, in order to dictate human conduct, “it must settle in people’s minds as a fixed belief, a confirmed habit. . . . It must be encrusted in the immobile depths of the will.”¹⁰²

In his decisive, unhesitating denial of the capacity of reason to mold social life or to create institutions, in his inability to accept the autonomy of the individual, Taine followed the reasoning of Burke and de Maistre. This was

also the reasoning of Renan, Carlyle, Meinecke, and Croce: on basic questions, the enemies of the Enlightenment all held the same principles. In the four concise pages of the preface to *The Origins*, Taine put forward his credo, a true antithesis of Enlightenment thought. The six hundred pages that followed were merely an illustration. The first principle was very simple: "A people, if consulted, may conceivably say what form of government it likes, but not the form it needs." The nature of a "political house" depends on manners and morals, peculiarities, the character of its occupants. If elsewhere, in other countries, "political habitations" survived indefinitely, it was because none of them "were built all at once, under a new owner, according to the sole measurements of reason." For "suddenly to invent a new, fitting, lasting constitution is an enterprise beyond the capacity of the human spirit." A suitable constitution "has to be *discovered* if it exists, and not put to the vote." But in fact the choice has already been made: "Nature and history have chosen for us in advance"; the political system suitable for each people has been determined "by its character and its past." This idea recurs throughout the work: man is not a free agent, or, in other words, freedom of choice does not exist. Man is a product of hereditary prejudice, his social and family environment, his animal instincts, and his bodily needs. Thus, Rousseau's concept of liberty such as one finds in his *Social Contract* is for Taine a miserable abstraction without any bearing on reality. The doctrine of natural rights claimed that "a society built in this way is the only true one, for . . . it is not the product of a blindly followed tradition but a contract between equals, examined in full clarity and agreed upon in full liberty." The implementation of this doctrine could only lead to disaster.¹⁰³

According to Renan, France was the only country that had had to pay the ultimate price for rationalism in all its horror. The reasons for this French singularity were the rationalist and materialist nature of the French Enlightenment and its tendency to "declare anything whose immediate reason cannot be perceived to be absurd." Twenty years later, Renan summed up the nature of the trouble: "France proceeded philosophically in a matter in which one should proceed historically." In seeking to transcend the framework of national life, which by its very nature is "something limited, mediocre, restricted," and in seeking to do something "extraordinary, universal, . . . one destroys one's homeland, a homeland being a complex of prejudices and fixed ideas that humanity as a whole cannot accept." For peoples only exist "inasmuch as they are natural groups formed by an approximate community of race and language and a community of history and interests." "A nation," said Renan — Herder, Burke, and de Maistre had already developed this organicist idea — is "like a human body."¹⁰⁴

With the passage of time, it was the harm caused by the revolution that

came to preoccupy his thinking, and his tone hardened: "The day France cut off its king's head, it committed suicide," he wrote just after the 1870 defeat by Prussia.¹⁰⁵ In his important preface to his volume of essays entitled *Questions contemporaines*, Renan, like Burke and Taine, condemned those "who in the final years of the eighteenth century, prepared a world of pygmies and rebels." And in the same breath, he denounced "the bankruptcy of the Revolution," "the social constitution arising from the Revolution," and "a code of laws that seems to have been made for an ideal citizen who was born a foundling and died unmarried."¹⁰⁶ Renan claimed that, because of the principles of the French Revolution, "society is not anything religious or sacred. It has only one aim, and that is to give the individuals that compose it the greatest possible well-being, without concern for the ideal destiny of humanity." In this way, there came into the world those agents of disintegration and social death: egoism, and property conceived not as something of moral value but as a possession appraisable in terms of money. In other words, individualism, utilitarianism, and "the shameful hedonism of recent years" were responsible for the decadence.¹⁰⁷

To all these sicknesses, one should add another, not the least among them, contracted in the eighteenth century: the tendency to see all great political struggles as a matter of life and death. Thus, every thunderstorm became a deluge, and, immediately taking things to an extreme, one learned at every turn to wager the fate of the whole of society.¹⁰⁸

Of course, the events of 1789 did not necessarily have to lead to disaster. If the French had confined themselves to convening the States General and had done so once a year, "that would have been quite in order; but Rousseau's false policy won the day." So here, as in Burke, de Maistre, and Taine, as later in Sorel, Maurras, Barrès, and Berlin, and in a very different yet nevertheless quite similar way in Carlyle, the chief culprit was once again identified. We see that Renan did not take the part of the Third Estate; he did not say that the transformation of the States General into the National Assembly was justified and even necessary because it corresponded to the realities of the hour. In 1870 he still thought, like Burke, and despite the American example, that the system that prevailed at the beginning of the seventeenth century was still in 1789 well suited to the needs of the largest European country. One should not let oneself be overwhelmed by the people, and one should follow the example of England, "the most constitutional of countries [which] never had a written, precisely worded constitution."¹⁰⁹

Instead of that, the French followed Rousseau; they fell into the great error of "his tendency to abstract organization, without taking into account either previous rights or liberty." It was to Rousseau, he said, that one owed the

emergence of “the revolutionary school, properly speaking . . . [which was the one] that gave the French Revolution its definitive character.” Thus, “believing they had created abstract rights, they created servitude.”¹¹⁰ Child of the “materialist” and “Rousseauist” Enlightenment, hostile to history and tradition, the revolution was for Renan perhaps not a “totality” in the Burkian, Maistrian, or Maurrassian sense of the word, but he could scarcely avoid being drawn down that slippery slope. The desire to “make an a priori constitution” based on Rousseau’s thought was the original error, itself derived from his “in several ways very false idea of human society.” Thus, “the French Revolution made the mistake of all revolutions based on abstract ideas and not on previous rights.”¹¹¹

One thing must be said immediately: like Burke, Renan did not oppose Locke to Rousseau. Like Burke, Taine, and Carlyle, he rejected the whole tradition of natural rights and declared his rejection of democratic and egalitarian individualism. This was the starting point of his critique of the civilization of his time. The eighteenth century, he said, “was too dominated by the idea of the inventive power of man.” Man “resembles the worker of the Gobelins who weaves from the other side a tapestry whose design he does not see. . . . Oh, he is such a good animal, man! How well he wears his harness!” Following Burke, whose ideas he repeated almost word for word, Renan saw each of us as “the heir of an immense sum of acts of devotion, of sacrifices, of experiences, of reflections which constitute our heritage, and are our link with the past and the future. No philosophy is more superficial than the one that, taking man as a selfish and limited being, claims to explain him and show him his duties outside the society of which he is part.” From *L’Avenir de la science* and throughout his life, Renan never ceased to denounce the root of the evil: the “theory that may well be described as materialism in politics,” which views “the happiness of the individual as the whole object of society.”¹¹² That was the source of the individualism and the utilitarianism that were the great misfortune of the democratic tradition in France.

In his more violent and highly colored style, Carlyle made the same accusations before Renan. The war on the Enlightenment was not the product of circumstance: Carlyle’s reaction to his world was hardly different from that of the French after the battle of Sedan or that of the generation of the turn of the twentieth century in all the great European countries. In August 1850, Carlyle described the world of his time as “an immeasurable Swine’s trough.” The only morality that prevailed in it was that of pigs: “It is the mission of universal Pignood, and the duty of all Pigs, at all times, to diminish the quantity of unattainable and increase that of attainable.”¹¹³ That, said Taine, was the mire in which Carlyle immersed modern life, especially British life, drowning simul-

taneously and in the same filth the positive spirit, the taste for comfort, industrial science, the church, the state, philosophy, and law.¹¹⁴

The modern decadence was thus that of a materialistic, “mechanical,” and utilitarian civilization. The victory of matter over spirit and the desertion of metaphysics, first by the French—the land of Nicolas Malebranche, Pascal, Descartes, and Fénelon no longer had anyone other than people like Victor Cousin and Abel-François Villemain—were the great signs of the times. Metaphysics itself, since Locke, was mechanical. The philosophers of the present time were no longer a Socrates or a Plato but a Bentham, who believed that happiness depended entirely on circumstances external to man. That, said Carlyle, was why, even in the most civilized nations, one hears only one cry: give us good institutions, good political arrangements, and happiness will come automatically. The modern conception is that everything in our universe is a matter of clashes of forces and interests, and in relationships between men there is nothing whatsoever that suggests divinity. Not only had men lost faith in the invisible and were interested only in the visible, the material, and the practical, not only was the nineteenth century not an “age of religion,” it was a period little able to appreciate the good and the beautiful, with Benthamite utilitarianism, the practice of virtue with an eye to profit and loss, as its dominant principle.¹¹⁵

The Political Culture of Prejudice

Man as conceived by the Enlightenment was a giant; as conceived by its enemies, he was a dwarf. Herder was the first to introduce this view of humanity, and a few years later de Maistre simply followed in his footsteps. The Lutheran pastor set out to demonstrate the insignificance of man, and he built his whole system on that foundation. The Herderian revolt was aimed at the very heart of Enlightenment thought: as he said in *Another Philosophy*, “First of all, as regards the excessive homage paid to human reason, I should like to say, if I may, that it was less and less reason, but rather a blind fate casting and directing things, that contributed to this universal change of the world. . . . If this is so, where does it leave your idolatry of the human spirit?” Who, in fact, guides human destiny? Who “laid out Venice here . . . and who thought through what this Venice, alone in this place, could and ought to be for all the earth’s peoples throughout a millennium? He who cast these islands upon the morass, who led the few fishermen here . . . was the same one who sowed the seed so that there might be an oak at that other time and place, who planted a hut along the Tiber so that there might be Rome, the eternal capital of the world. This same one now leads forth the barbarians so that they might annihilate the literature of the entire world, the library at Alexandria. Another time, the same one lets an emperor’s city [Constantinople] be destroyed by them, so that the sciences, which were not being sought there and had long

remained idle, might flee to Europe. Everything is grand destiny, not reflected over, not hoped for, not caused by human beings. Can you not see, you ant, that you are merely crawling on the great wheel of doom?" A little further on, he said: "Human being, you have always been just a small, blind instrument, [used] almost against your will." In the last page but one of the work, Herder came back to the same idea. To the question, "What are you, O single human being, with all your inclinations, abilities and contributions?" he replied in the first person, "The very limitations of my earthly point of view, the blindness of my glances, the failure of my ends, the riddle of my inclinations and desires, the defeat of my powers by the whole that is a single day, [let alone] an entire year, nation or age — precisely this assures me that I am nothing, whereas the whole is everything! What a work it is, this whole containing so many shadowy clusters of nations and ages, colossal figures with barely a perspective or view, so many blind instruments that are acting in a delusion of freedom and yet do not know what or what for!" Finally, human beings "are merely passing by now, through the world — shadows on earth."¹ De Maistre took up this idea exactly: for both of them, history was a text written by God, a drama he causes men to play.

All the theoreticians of the Anti-Enlightenment, down to the form of liberal communitarianism that flourished in the second half of the twentieth century, saw the primacy of society as the basis of civilization. Burke thought that "the great mysterious incorporation of the human race" was part of the "mysterious process of nature . . . not of our making." Having come into the world in "dark and inscrutable ways," we only know "that the awful Author of our being is the author of our place in the order of existence; and that having disposed and marshalled us by a divine tactic . . . he has, in and by that disposition, virtually subjected us to act the part which belongs to the place assigned us." It follows that "we have obligations to mankind at large, which are not in consequence of any special involuntary pact." That is how Burke understood the nature of social relationships: as analogous to the reciprocal moral duties of parents and children who, "without their actual consent," are bound to one another by a kind of tacit agreement implicit in the nature of things.²

In this way, society appears to be an actual organism, a body whose parts are bound through an adherence "in this manner and on those principles to our forefathers," and the relationships between its members are immutable. Thus, "in this choice of inheritance we have given to our frame of polity the image of a relationship in blood; binding up the constitution of our country with our dearest domestic ties; adopting our fundamental laws into the bosom of our family affections; keeping inseparable, and cherishing with the warmth

of all their combined and mutually reflected charities, our state, our hearths, our sepulchres, and our altars." The practical conclusion soon follows: "Our political system is placed in a just correspondence and symmetry with the order of the world, and with the mode of existence decreed to a permanent body composed of transitory parts; wherein . . . the whole, at one time, is never old, or middle-aged, or young, but, in a condition of unchangeable constancy, moves on through the varied tenor of perpetual decay, fall, renovation, and progression."³

This "society is indeed a contract," but a contract at the opposite extreme from a deliberate product of individuals acting freely in accordance with their needs and interests. It is not at all utilitarian, as Locke and Rousseau would have it. Far from it: all Burke's writings tend to destroy the idea of a social contract. In reality, Burke uses the term "contract," a code word of Enlightenment thought, in order to divest it of its content. The Burkian contract produces nothing new; it is not a beginning, for in Burke's eyes every beginning is in itself an aberration. It merely reflects the natural order of things; it is "a partnership not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born," and "each contract of each particular state is but a clause in the great primaeval contract of eternal society . . . according to a fixed compact sanctioned by the inviolable oath which holds all physical and all moral natures, each in their appointed place." Thus, any change of regime would truly be a crime, for "the whole chain and continuity of the commonwealth would be broken."⁴ Burke is emphatic: never "can any set of men attempt to dissolve the state at their pleasure." In fact, it is ridiculous, where Burke is concerned, to speak of a contract in the proper meaning of the word. Whereas in Hobbes and Locke the idea of a contract was that of a rational and voluntary decision, in Burke the "consent of every rational creature is in unison with the predisposed order of things. Men come in that manner into a community with the social state of their parents, endowed with all the benefits, loaded with all the duties of their situation." These "social ties and ligaments, spun out of those physical relations which are the elements of the commonwealth, in most cases begin, and always continue, independently of our will."⁵ Society has always existed, which means that it can neither be created nor refashioned according to the needs of the individual. It is not even composed of individuals, it is composed of bodies. The whole question is, How can one prevent men from destroying this product of the divine will as manifested in history?

For this, one needs religion. "Man is by his constitution a religious animal," and "religion is the basis of civil society, and the source of all good and of all comfort." Burke regarded "the consecration of the state by a state religious

establishment” as a necessity inherent in the nature of the social organization. Here he laid down a principle of great importance: “All persons possessing any portion of power ought to be strongly and awfully impressed with an idea that they act in trust; and that they are to account for their conduct in that trust to the one great Master, Author and Founder of society.” The idea of a mandate — “trust” — was a Lockian principle, but for the author of the *Second Treatise* the recipient of the mandate was answerable to the people and not to the “great Master.” That was the whole difference: “Our church establishment . . . is first, and last and midst in our minds. For taking ground on that religious system, of which we are now in possession, we continue to act on the early received and uniformly continued sense of mankind.” That, he said, is why the English people considered the religious establishment “the foundation of their whole constitution, with which, and with every part of which, it holds an indissoluble union. Church and state are ideas inseparable in their minds.” The basis of civilization, of morality, of social life, and of the family, religion is likewise a pillar of the state. Far from relegating it “to obscure municipalities, or rustic villages . . . we will have her to exalt her mitred front in courts and parliaments.” Religion was a factor of stability and continuity, assured by the “old ecclesiastical modes and fashions” of education in which “very little alteration has been made . . . since the fourteenth or fifteenth century,” and which were “favourable to morality and discipline.” Consequently, “our education is in a manner wholly in the hands of ecclesiastics, and in all stages from infancy to manhood.” This relationship continues after school and university, with ecclesiastics playing the role of mentors to young noblemen in their travels abroad — an important stage in the formation of elites — so that “with them, as relations, they most constantly keep up a close connection through life.”⁶

It was in this same spirit that Burke defended the rights of the Irish Catholics. It was not the defense of individual rights that interested him but the protection of the traditional rights of an existing collectivity. Catholicism was a fundamental element of the Irish identity; it was integral to its history; it was the basis of the solidarity of Irish society. As a result, it contributed to the stability and continuity of the established order. It was thus a barrier against the infinitely greater danger that threatened England: the subversion coming from France. For if one did not immediately put an end to all religious feuding, it was not the Roman Church, the Scottish Church, the Lutheran Church, or the Calvinist Church that would be victorious, one would instead see the triumph of “the new fanatical religion . . . of the Rights of Man, which rejects all establishments, all discipline, all ecclesiastical, and in truth, all civil order.” Thus, all churches had a common interest in defending themselves against “this new, this growing, this exterminatory system.”⁷

Thomas Paine immediately understood the meaning of one of the “continual choruses of Mr. Burke’s book . . . ‘Church and State.’” He said, “He does not mean some one particular Church, or some one particular State; and he uses the term as a general figure to hold forth the political doctrine of always uniting the Church with the State in every country, and he censures the National Assembly for not having done this in France.”⁸ It was no accident that all the British liberals as well as the writers of *The Federalist* and their heirs in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries condemned what Paine called Burke’s “antipolitical doctrine of Church and State” and sought a separation of the two. Nor was it an accident that all the enemies of the Enlightenment, of the rights of man and of society conceived as a simple community of citizens, invoked religion. Thus, Burke, like de Maistre, believed that the “atheistical fanaticism” in Paris that was “inspired by a multitude of writings” and that “filled the populace with a black and savage atrocity of mind” had created a situation in which religion was humiliated, the wealth of the church confiscated, the royal house ridiculed, the people brought out into the streets, and “smugglers of adulterated metaphysics” put in power.⁹

The Burkian conception of religion, however, was highly ambiguous. On the one hand, when Burke insisted on the role of Providence in history, he seemed to recognize the existence of a divine order and of a religiously revealed truth. The liberal interpretation of his thought tends to see Burke, like Philo and Cicero, whom he went to the trouble of quoting, as belonging to the Platonic tradition and expounding the doctrine of a divine *jus naturale* of which human laws are merely a manifestation.¹⁰ Rodney Kilcup also believes that Burke thought that the makeup of human nature is an expression of a superior will to which we are all subject. In this way, the moral law is not imposed on man but is immanent within him. Kilcup claims to find in Burke the idea that human nature is unchanging, and men remain what they have always been in every age. For that reason, Burke also considered the causes of evil to be unchanging.¹¹ But, on the other hand, if one looks closely, one comes to the conclusion that he regarded “the spirit of a gentleman and the spirit of religion” to be the two mainstays of order and conservation, and it generally seems that the function of religion is above all to serve as a tool.

Thus, Lord Acton, though a strong admirer of Burke, criticized his dangerous conception of history. Acton thought that truth and the eternal order are revealed in religion, not in history, and are the criteria by which history itself is judged. According to him, Burke’s position was the opposite: truth is to be found not in metaphysics but in men’s lives, and it is only through studying life that one can apprehend it. Acton believed that Burke was only half inclined toward immanence; his other half associated religion with history.¹² In

reality, both views exist in Burke and are not incompatible, being rooted as they were in his antirationalism. With great consistency, Burke rejected any attempt to link our capacity of moral comprehension with reason, as reason, he held, is incapable of grasping the essence of things. In the final reckoning, it seems that Burke did not recognize the existence of permanent, eternally valid moral principles for the guidance of political conduct. Though the divine will was theoretically a moral obligation for man, that will could only be discovered in the unfolding of history. It was therefore contingency that governed history, and also governed public morality. In any case, moral and religious truths were a matter of sentiment.¹³ In this way, one sees how antirationalism, in practice rejecting Christianity, could give rise to relativism. Burke's thought thus went down the same slippery slope as Herder's. Religion was no longer a revealed truth but a means to cohesion and social well-being, and one thus arrived at the position of Barrès, Maurras, and Spengler. Maurras, the leader of a political movement that continually invoked Catholicism, was finally rejected, at least temporarily, by the Vatican.

Unlike Acton, Burke regarded religion as a weapon of war against the "declaration of rights" of the French revolutionaries, who "systematically destroyed every hold of authority by opinion, religious or civil, on the minds of the people." Religion was a bulwark against the "sort of institute and digest of anarchy" that made it possible to "lay the axe to the root of all property." To this destructive process, Burke opposed "the real rights of men," the advantages they enjoy within the framework of society. "Civil society" is undoubtedly "made for the advantage of man. . . . It is an institution of beneficence." Men "have a right to do justice. . . . They have a right to the fruits of their industry. . . . They have a right to the acquisitions of their parents; to the nourishment and improvement of their offspring." They also have a right "to consolation in death." But now we come to the main point: "In this partnership all men have equal rights; but not to equal things. He that has but five shillings in the partnership, has as good a right to it, as he that has five hundred pounds has to his larger proportion. But he has not a right to an equal dividend in the product of the joint stock." This is something that would never have entered the mind of Locke or even Madison. As soon as one enters the political realm, the inequality of rights that is the basis of Burke's social thinking becomes a total, absolute denial of any rights whatsoever: "As to the share of power, authority, and direction which each individual ought to have in the management of the state, that I deny to be amongst the direct original rights of man in civil society; for I have in my contemplation the civil social man, and no other. It is a thing to be settled by convention." Two years later, in August 1791, when the Constituent Assembly was just finishing its work, Burke

summed up his position: "The pretended *rights of man*, which have made this havoc, cannot be the rights of the people. For to be a people, and to have these rights, are things incompatible. The one supposes the presence, the other the absence, of a state of civil society."¹⁴

Burke had employed the same reasoning on the eve of the French Revolution, in the opening of the trial of Governor Warren Hastings. The only equality that exists, he said, was the moral equality of beings created in the image of God. Natural rights, unrelated to social realities, were mere "abstractions," the code word for any principle destructive of the existing order, and one that signified an absolute condemnation of individualism, equality, and liberty as defined from Locke to the French Declaration of 1789, and including its affirmation in the various American Declarations of Rights. When Burke realized how anachronistic his statements appeared to the Whig leaders, he invoked "a rational and manly freedom," while attempting to gain acceptance for his cult of history and opposition to progress, which already ten years earlier had placed him on the extreme right of the Whig party where the authentic Whig tradition was concerned.¹⁵

Burke held that as a rebellion of the individual against God and nature, of reason against history and society, the French Revolution was diabolical. He was undoubtedly not unaware of the significance of the Reformation, and he knew that Hobbes and Locke had created the theory of natural law for the "reformed" individual. However, as long as the British social order was not disturbed by the Glorious Revolution, as long as the independence of the United States could be interpreted as the result of the incompetence of the Crown, the trouble was confined to the work of Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau. But as soon as the insurrection of the individual took on the dimensions of a disaster that he felt threatened, through the power of a vulgar utilitarianism, to engulf an entire civilization, Burke launched the first great communitarian and nationalist revolt.

However, his defense of the community against the individual, of the specific against the universal, of local cultures and organized communities against the claims of reason, did not make him a blind advocate of history. Burke undoubtedly opposed the claims of reason, promoting history and tradition in their place, but not any history and any tradition. In making his choice, he was the first to trace a path taken by the great names of the conservative revolution of the end of the nineteenth century: that is, history is made up of various and contradictory traditions. It is not uniform and has more than one teaching to offer. Burke acted as if the Civil War and the execution of Charles I were not part of English history. But, in fact, where movements of protest and dissidence, political radicalism and egalitarianism are concerned, the history of

England before the Glorious Revolution was very rich, much more so than that of France. The Levellers and the Diggers, figures like Hugh Peter, John Ball, and Thomas More, the author of the famous *Utopia*, represented an English tradition that Richard Price could easily claim as his own. Did not the Levellers make progressive demands like reform of the law on debt, the abolition of tithes, the separation of church and state? Did not the Diggers, with their plans of agrarian communism, have social and political objectives that enabled a democratic consciousness to develop in a country in process of change? But why should one go back to the dissidents who wished to make England an egalitarian republic if even the Lockian tradition was unacceptable to the author of the *Reflections*?

Burke was not so naïve as to believe there was a single tradition, or that the experience of the past could be unthinkingly applied to the needs of the present.¹⁶ On the contrary, in the case of revolutionary France, the theorist of ideological war warned against “those infatuated Princes, who in the conflict with this new and unheard-of power, proceed as if they were engaged in a war that bore a resemblance to their former contests. . . . Here the beaten path is the very reverse of the safe road.”¹⁷ Burke knew that history was a dynamic process and that changes in men’s lives were inevitable, but the solutions to specific situations had at all costs to correspond to the great objective of assuring the survival of a Christian civilization. It was therefore imperative to preserve the social hierarchy, to limit political participation as far as possible, and to nip in the bud any tendencies, however limited, to a democratization of political life. Making the right choices: that for Burke, as for his successors in the twentieth century, was the meaning of “taking the path of tradition.”

The same principle applied to the great periods of the past. Like Herder, Burke particularly favored the Middle Ages. In the midst of a world that cultivated skepticism and denied faith, a world in revolt against the established order, a world that preached the autonomy of the individual, Burke—like the Catholics de Maistre and Maurras who abhorred the individualistic Reformation that finally led to the Enlightenment, and also like the Lutheran pastor Herder—turned toward the age of faith, stability, respect for hierarchies and social classes, and of harmonious social relations. What was more natural when one lived in a period that made doubt into a virtue and waged war on religion, on natural inequalities, on order? What was more natural, when a whole world was collapsing, than to return to the age of chivalry, of a well-ordered way of living, of the harmony of social relationships that were accepted, respected, and regarded as unchanging? Medieval society, considered a body and based on reciprocal dependence, understood the value of communal life and the beauty of the corporative order. Thus, a vision emerged

of a world where man was held within the framework of his family, his clan, his community, his city, and finally his nation.

Indeed, "men come in that manner into a community with the social state of their parents, endowed with all the benefits, loaded with all the duties, of their situation. If the social ties and ligaments, spun out of those physical relations which are the elements of the commonwealth, in most cases begin, and always continue, independently of our will; so, without any stipulation on our part, are we bound by that relation called our country." It follows that "our country is not a thing of mere physical locality. It consists, in a great measure, in the ancient order into which we are born." "Next to the love of parents for their children, the strongest instinct both national and moral which exists in man is the love of his country," he said in his impeachment of Hastings; the nation is the supreme expression of the idea of continuity.¹⁸ Thus, in the course of time a national community develops that becomes conscious of itself; forms of behavior, sentiments, opinions, and prejudices come into being that become an integral part of the national character. A person born in a national community absorbs the national temperament, and molded by the ancestral prejudices and habits, he acquires a second nature.¹⁹ A nation's prejudices and sentiments are part of a natural order to which all men are subject.²⁰ A nation's inherited prejudices have a moral significance that can only be overlooked by atheists and fools. Finally, if changes were to take place in the lives of nations and states with each new fashion, men would hardly be better than summer flies: individuals pass like shadows, nations and the species remain.²¹ The comparison of individuals to shadows that run across the world of history is, as we saw at the beginning of this chapter, a major Herderian theme.

Burke was one of the very first founders of the nationalist ideology and one of the very first European thinkers to appreciate the power of integration. The nation is the ideal type of the organic community: molded by history, it has an objective existence and is answerable to criteria totally independent of the individual will and reason. To the same degree that he abhorred the rights of man, the rights of the individual taken outside his social and cultural context, Burke was the defender of established communities, of historical nations whose rights were threatened. He opposed the annexation of Corsica by France and the dismemberment of Poland. The nation, a true living organism, was distinct from the people, a word whose democratic connotation greatly disturbed him. Burke feared and despised the people, a collection of individuals always ready to demand rights, the abhorrent rights of man, and to forget the duties of obedience to and respect for the established order. He was one of the first to understand that organic nationalism was a barrier against the democratic tide. The preservation of the established order was not a value in itself, but it was the

means through which, by blocking the liberalism of the rights of man and democracy, decadence could be halted. Obedience, in Burke, is always the basis of his conception of the state: that is what government depends on.²² Do we not have here the great principles of the campaigns waged by the Maurrasians and the other radical authoritarian elements throughout the first half of the twentieth century? Was that not what the Bismarckian Meinecke always admired in Burke?

The aims that Burke set himself were the same as those of de Maistre, and the way de Maistre expressed them was hardly different from the way Herder or the "venerable Burke" did.²³ "As soon as man discovered his nothingness," said de Maistre, "he took a great step forward." At that point, man realized his dependency; he understood that "while he could plant an acorn, for example, . . . he could not create an oak-tree." The trouble was that in the social sphere he believed that he was "the direct author of everything he did: in a sense, this was the trowel that thought it was the architect." Nothing was more incorrect, thought de Maistre, than the famous phrase with which the *Social Contract* begins: man is not free; it is the opposite that is true. Against Rousseau, that most pernicious of writers, he invoked Aristotle, who went "so far as to say that there are men who are born slaves, and nothing is truer than that." Inequality is natural, and Aristotle's correct conclusions were based on history, "which is experimental politics." History teaches us that man "*is too wicked to be free.*"²⁴ De Maistre, like Taine later on, saw the man who was no longer in the grip of the church as a potent rebel, a potential Jacobin who would always find society unjust and its ordering contrary to reason. That meant that it was absurd, if not criminal, to speak of the sovereignty of the people: men cannot invent "the most sacred, the most fundamental" thing "in the moral and political world" any more than they can constitute nations.²⁵

Of course, a Christian like de Maistre could never have conceived of a determinism that would make any individual responsibility impossible. Men are "freely slaves; they operate both voluntarily and necessarily": "We are all attached to the throne of the Supreme Being by a flexible chain which holds us without enslaving us." However, "as our fearful inclination to evil is a truth proclaimed by all ages," the "lamentable dogma" that follows is unequivocal: man "cannot be *wicked* without being *bad*, nor *bad* without being degraded, nor degraded without being punished, nor punished without being guilty." It follows that society exists through the fear of punishment and the fear of God: "Punishment governs the whole of humanity; punishment preserves it. . . . The entire human race is kept in order by punishment." "Humanity only survives through the hangman and religion. The hangman, like the soldier, also a professional killer, is a noble executioner, a real cornerstone of society, with-

out whom all order would disappear.” In fact, only the Catholic Church can sustain the fear of punishment: no human institution can last if it does not have a religious basis, the source of discipline and respect for authority. Man needs a master, he needs a religious education, he must put faith before science, and above all he must recognize that God, “who is the author of sovereignty, is also the author of punishment.” There must therefore be “a moral revolution in Europe,” for if “the religious spirit” is not strengthened, “social connections” will be dissolved.²⁶

The greatest solvent that has ever existed is individualism. Until the sixteenth century, Christianity had been Europe’s religion as a “political institution,” and the basic principle underlying religion “was the infallibility of its teachings, resulting in a blind respect for authority and the abnegation of all individual reasoning.”²⁷ Protestantism was “the insurrection of individual reason against general reason.” In freeing the people from the yoke of obedience, it was not only a religious heresy but also a civil heresy: it unleashed “a general pride against authority, and put discussion in place of obedience.” Born fully armed, Protestantism was rebellious in essence, antisovereign by nature: “It was the deadly enemy of any national [collective] reason. Everywhere it substituted individual reason; that is to say, it destroyed everything.” De Maistre, who did not have a direct knowledge of Herder, showed that Condorcet, whom he regarded as the most odious of the revolutionaries and the most passionate enemy of Christianity as well as being well disposed to the Reformation, knew what he was doing when he marveled at the consequences of the principle of free inquiry: nothing could withstand this appeal to individual reason. Protestantism provided the principle; the men of the Enlightenment delivered the results. There was a remarkable affinity between Protestantism and Jacobinism, which was “the *sans-culottisme* of religion”: both of them preached the sovereignty of the people. “One invoked the word of God, the other the rights of man.”²⁸ A century after de Maistre, Maurras repeated the same arguments virtually unchanged.

The point is that reason disorganizes society. It cannot “take the place of the foundations” that are ignorantly “called *superstitious*”; it cannot replace “the power of custom, the prestige of authority.” Like Burke and Herder before him and like Taine, Barrès, and Maurras after him, de Maistre made prejudice into a bulwark against reason. Because it had violated “all prejudices and all customs,” the revolution could only result in tyranny.²⁹

Accordingly, de Maistre, like Burke, made a “general rule”: “*Man cannot make a constitution, and no legitimate constitution can be written.*” The diplomat from Savoy returned to this principle innumerable times. He attacked Locke and Paine, the first because he saw law as the group expression of

individual wills, and the second because he declared that “*a constitution does not exist until one can put it in one’s pocket.*” Never had anyone written and never would anyone write *a priori* the collection of basic laws of a civil or religious society. A constitution has no real origin, just as one cannot say how a society came into being: “Nothing great has great beginnings.” Society, according to de Maistre, “is as old as man,” and that “imaginary state . . . ridiculously called *the state of nature* never existed.”³⁰

That is why the French were mistaken in making a constitution for “man. But man does not exist in the world,” said de Maistre in one of his best-known texts, which delighted not only Maurras but also Berlin and the communarians of the end of the twentieth century. “I have seen in my life French, Italians, Russians, etc. I even know, thanks to Montesquieu, *that one can be Persian*; but as for *man*, I declare that I have never met him in my life.” Maurras took up this idea, making it more extreme in order to give it a nationalist sense and make it a basic element of his ideology. In the second half of the twentieth century, Isaiah Berlin also praised the writer of *Considérations sur la France* for having stated what he considered a great truth, to which de Maistre added that the only certain thing about the origins of man was “original sin, which explains everything and without which nothing can be explained.”³¹

“The eighteenth century had no misgivings, it did not doubt anything,” said de Maistre: it believed that man could make laws and create power structures as he wished. But man can only make rulings that can be annulled, and as for law, it only has real authority if one believes it to be the product of a superior will, so that its essential nature “*is not to be the will of everyone.*” De Maistre thought that the foundations of political constitutions existed before any written law, and that a constitutional law can only be the confirmation of a preexisting unwritten right. “The essence of a basic law is that nobody has the right to abrogate it.”³²

That is why de Maistre, who believed that in order to keep men on the right path one needed the continual presence of the hangman, looked enviously at the British system. The writer whom Berlin saw as the founder of fascism proves to be an admirer of the British constitution, the product of an infinite number of circumstances that after several centuries created “the most complex unity and the finest balance of political forces that has ever been seen in the world.” In a note at the bottom of the page, de Maistre went further still, and quoted Tacitus after Cicero: “The best of all governments would be one produced by a mixture of the three powers balancing one another; *but this government will never exist, and if it appears, it will not last.*” Not only did de Maistre adopt this view of the political ideal as his own, he assured his readers

that British common sense could make its system of government last much longer than one could imagine “by constantly abandoning . . . theory, or what are called *principles*, for the lessons of experience and moderation, which would be impossible if the principles were written down.”³³

De Maistre should not be taken for something he was not. He was not a mere reactionary as has always been claimed; he was not a crusader straight from the time of Saint Louis any more than he was the founder of fascism. Common sense, in de Maistre, keeps reason in check: through common sense, “happily previous to sophism,” he tried to situate the norms of behavior outside man. His justification was history, or “experimental politics” — an expression that Maurras was to make famous in the twentieth century — and thus the only source of truth, which the eighteenth century, that century for which “all realities were lies and all lies realities,” rejected in the name of absolute reason. As long as common sense, history, and religion held reason in check, as long as the words “*Church and State*” were not banished from the language, the British political system, he thought, would survive. Burke had said the same, and de Maistre had a splendid understanding of the thinking of the author of *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. De Maistre maintained that the English would never have asked for the Magna Carta if the privileges of the nation had not been violated, nor would they have asked for it if these privileges had not existed before the charter. The British constitution “*only moves by not moving*”: this Maistrian formula admirably conveys the meaning of Burke’s political writings, as it does that of de Maistre’s own. Burke knew all the failings of the system, but, according to him, attempting to correct it would be tantamount to creating the danger of total collapse. Such a complex structure could only change through an almost imperceptible process of accumulation spread over centuries. De Maistre said exactly the same: if they decided to make a law in England to give the Privy Council a constitutional existence, to define its powers so that it would not abuse them, it would destroy the state.³⁴

France also had a constitution that closely resembled the British one: “All influences were well balanced, and everyone was in his place.” The leading figures of French law bore witness to this, as did a connoisseur like Machiavelli, although he was an ardent republican, as de Maistre pointed out. The writer of *The Prince* thought that the government of the French kingdom was “the one most tempered by laws.” A particular characteristic of the French monarchy was its theocratic quality: “Nothing is so national as this element.”³⁵

Next in line after Herder, Burke, and de Maistre was Hippolyte Taine: the preservation of a culture of prejudices and the negation of the autonomy of the individual were the alpha and omega of his thought. This was the meaning of his idea that man is the product of his race, his milieu, and his time. Already in

1907, Alphonse Aulard, the republican historian of the French Revolution, saw that this famous theory of Taine's set out in the preface to his *History of English Literature* came directly from Montesquieu and Auguste Comte, and above all from Herder. Indeed, in the thirteenth book of Herder's *Ideas* one finds the formula "the totality of circumstances of place, time and nation," and in book 15, the formula "the place, the time and the circumstances." Here Herder showed how "nations change in accordance with the place, the time and their inner character: each bears within itself the harmony of its perfection, not comparable to others."³⁶ Aulard, who was familiar with the first French translation of *Ideen*, by Edgar Quinet, also went back to the original German text and quoted Herder, adding another quotation: "What is the main law we have observed in each of the great phenomena of history? This is what I think it is. Everything on our earth has been what it could be in accordance with the situation and the requirements of the place, the circumstances and the nature of the time and the native or accidental genius of the peoples." Aulard, however, was convinced that Taine, while drawing on Herder, had "confined himself to paradoxically taking to an extreme this theory that Herder had indicated with finesse and a sense of proportion," for where Herder had spoken of a "national character" or a "national genius," Taine, by speaking of a "race," had exaggerated and distorted Herder's views. Aulard rightly insisted on Taine's dependence on Herder: the idea of the subjection of man to the totality of the natural and cultural, historical and sociological conditions in which he developed was the Herderian idea par excellence. But if Aulard, in praising his "wise skepticism," showed so much generosity to Herder, it was really in order to disparage Taine, whom he accused of having distorted the German author.³⁷ In reality, if it is true that the word "race" does not appear in Herder, which is hardly surprising, if only because the eighteenth century was scarcely familiar with this concept, the idea of a "national character" was not so different. In the context of the period, this term had more or less the role that "race" had in the nineteenth century. The first elements of a certain cultural and ethnic determinism were clearly apparent: the ground had been well prepared for the arrival of a generation familiar with social Darwinism and Arthur de Gobineau's racism.

Taine's thought, however, did not really derive from Gobineau. The dominant influence was that of Herder and Burke, to which that of Charles Darwin was later added. Indeed, Taine's formula "the race, the milieu, the moment" can be found in his notes from 1850 onward, when he was a young student at the elitist École Normale. Neither François Léger nor André Chevrillon mention the origin of these notes, but then Taine, like Renan, was by no means in the habit of always giving his sources.³⁸ He had read Montesquieu and no

doubt also knew Abbé Dubos. Thanks to Michelet and Quinet, he could also not fail to know Vico and Herder. Thus, throughout the 1850s Taine's thinking about the mental habits of the European peoples followed Herder's ideas on the "character" and "genius" of nations. In both cases, men's behavior was explained by the world to which they belonged and by which they were formed. When Herder said, "The original character of a nation is derived from its family traits, its climate, its type of life, its education, its first efforts and its habitual occupations," he was preparing the way for Taine. The difference was in the distance between the concept of "character" and that of "race." The Herderian concepts were still those of a cultural determinism; Taine introduced a real racial determinism. He was not the first in France to do so: a certain type of racial thinking existed at the time of the Restoration. Renan likewise adopted the Herderian view of ethnic differences almost in its entirety. He went further than Herder, and the inequality of races became a fundamental element of his own philosophy of history. However, Herder himself was never truly faithful to the principle of the equality of all ethnic groups. The very idea of young peoples to whom the future belongs and of peoples on a downward path introduces a clear hierarchy that is not impossible to translate into terms of racial inequality as conceived by Renan and Taine. Nearly a century after Herder, when social Darwinism was spreading rapidly and cultural determinism was turning into biological determinism, the very meaning of cultural determinism changed profoundly. This process also owed a great deal to Taine's desire to make history into what Aulard called a science analogous to physiology and geology.³⁹

This, indeed, was Taine's dominant idea: following Herder, who also saw the world of history as part of nature,⁴⁰ his aim was not only, as is often thought, to make history into a science but also to see it as part of the natural order. From the very first pages of *The Origins*, Taine declared he had "no other purpose" and, placed before his "subject as before the metamorphosis of an insect," he asked for a historian to be allowed "to behave like a naturalist." Already in his *History of English Literature* he saw "man as a continuity of nature."⁴¹ In this respect, he thought of himself as the heir of Voltaire and as being directly in the tradition of the great step forward in the eighteenth century when "the moral sciences broke away from theology and were welded like an extension to the physical sciences." Taine said that whereas the thinkers of the previous century had begun with dogma, the writers of the eighteenth century began with man, and criticism found its guiding principle: since the laws of nature were "universal and unchanging," it followed that "in the moral world as in the physical world, there was nothing that did not conform." By this means, one found "a sure way of distinguishing myth from truth." Further on, Taine reaffirmed this

principle: the observation of biological laws is a methodical necessity, and “human history is a natural thing like everything else; its direction comes from its own elements. There are no external forces that guide it, but internal forces that make it; it does not move toward a goal but produces a result.” For that reason, all historical phenomena — social structures, the nature of regimes, economic conditions — are neither the result of chance nor something arbitrary but “have conditions from which we cannot escape.” This means that “the social and political form that a people can take and in which it can *remain* is not subject to its arbitrary choice but is determined by its character and its past.” Elsewhere he stated that the world was a “unique being,” and he gave us another text that well sums up his naturalistic, deterministic, and finally racist conceptions: the idea that “the outside expresses the inside, history manifests psychology, and the face reveals the soul.”⁴² This essential idea is undoubtedly the basis of a determinism without which the racism of the twentieth century would be difficult to imagine.

Organicism, that supreme form of subordination of the individual to the collectivity, is one of the great “leading ideas” of Anti-Enlightenment thought. Quite naturally, Taine took the path initiated by Burke and Herder. Here we encounter an ill-understood and little-recognized phenomenon: the rise of the revolutionary Right was only possible because the “aristocratic” revolt had provided the conceptual framework for the great popular movement of rejection of the Enlightenment. When it became a mass phenomenon, the revolt against the Enlightenment pursued the same principles. Thus, one can see how the great lines of thought of Burke and Taine converged, and the special flavor of the latter’s work is due above all to the fact that Taine had experienced the influence first of all of Herder and then of Darwin. For Taine as for Burke, society was an “old building whose foundations are a matter of chance, whose architecture is incoherent and whose repairs are visible.” The product of successive generations, it was truly “a scandal for pure reason,” for it was “the work not of logic but of history.” There was also another reason for this. Society was not the result of an agreement, of an understanding among its members. The individual “never consented” to any of its social forms, its laws, institutions, manners, and morals; “others, his predecessors, chose for him, and enclosed him in advance within the moral, political and social forms they desired.” Consequently, society was an organism, a “living body” formed in the course of the centuries by innumerable generations that succeeded one another.⁴³ All these men, so very different from each other, were far from being independent individuals “making a contract among themselves for the first time.” For eight hundred years, said Taine, echoing Burke, they and their forebears had “formed a national body”; they made up a community that

enabled them to survive and to build up “the whole heritage of well-being and enlightenment they now enjoyed.” Thus, “each individual in this community is like a cell in an organized body,” and “the cell only comes into being, subsists, develops and attains its personal ends through the health of the whole body.” This was the principal line of thought in the development of Taine’s work: “A civilization constitutes a body, and its parts hold together like the parts of an organic body.”⁴⁴

Here we come upon the famous metaphor celebrated by all the nationalists: society resembles a tree, “whose trunk, thickened by age, preserves in its superimposed levels, in its buds, in its curvings, its branches, all the deposits of its sap and the imprint of the innumerable seasons it has passed through.”⁴⁵ The nation is this tree that is many hundreds of years old: for eight centuries the French, “together with their ancestors, have formed a national body.”⁴⁶ The same applies to the state and the family, “those two principal products of human association.” Whereas the family is “a natural, primeval restricted state,” the state is “an artificial, later extended” family, which in Taine’s opinion, as in that of Herder, Maurras, and Spengler, owes nothing to individuals, their desires, or their needs. The family, like the state, is based on authority. What creates a family if not “the sense of obedience whereby a wife and children act under the direction of a father and husband?” What creates a state “if not the sense of obedience whereby a multitude of men come together under the authority of a leader?”⁴⁷ With Taine, as with Herder, one might suppose one had returned to the time of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century theorists of divine law and the natural character of society opposed by Hobbes and Locke. But, in fact, what we have is a very modern definition, whose purpose is to deny free choice and the autonomy of the individual as the basis of any social or political organization. Taine returned to this idea several times: the state is a natural association that exists before the individual, so that “one enters it forcibly, as soon as one is born, before one has any self-awareness or knows anything.” Thus, the individual’s participation is “tacit” and has no need to be expressed by “a vote”; it is “previous, innate, sometimes indestructible, since it is psychological.”⁴⁸ Taine said that in fact there was no real distinction between the state, a judicial institution, and society, or in other words the national community. Every form of social organization is an organism created by history, and thus independent of human will.

Deferring to the verdict of history obviously does not mean the same in Burke as it does in Taine, who concluded his major work a century after the fall of the Old Regime. The revolution was by then an integral part of French national history, but for Taine, as for Maurras after him, and as in the time of the Vichy National Revolution, it always remained a foreign body. A respect

for history meant a respect for a history of which the French Revolution did not form a part and which excised from French history the events that happened after 1789. This is also the real significance of the inductive method in politics whereby politics are said to be governed by history. In practice, this means that any questioning of the existing order inevitably leads to disaster. Taine admired the British model in its Burkian version, which it has been customary, from the beginning of the nineteenth century to the present day, to praise fulsomely as a classic expression of “experimental politics” and the “inductive method,” of an empiricism tied to a living reality. This supposedly historical and natural conception, under the pretext of only carrying out reforms that are required, totally rejecting “impractical” reforms and settling for a policy of “delays, deals and compromises,”⁴⁹ is in Taine, as in Burke, nothing but a way of leaving things as they are, providing that this situation is to one’s liking.

To counter the ideas of enlightened thought, one had to make it clear that each generation is no more than “the temporary manager and responsible trustee of a precious and glorious heritage that it receives from the previous one, with the duty of transmitting it to the next one.” In each society, said Taine, there is “a residue of truth, . . . a residue of justice, a small but precious remainder . . . that tradition preserves.” Thus, the act of refounding a society that took place in the first months of 1789 could only have been an aberration, a crime against history and nature, that in Taine, as in Burke and in Maurras, had taken the place of Providence. The product of history, built up century after century by successive generations, society is a tissue of traditions and hereditary prejudices, a patiently erected structure with deep roots. The French did not have to create their form of society; it had existed for eight centuries. They had “une chose publique” (a public sphere). It is absurd, said Taine, to speak of a contract between individuals, except to say that “their quasi-contract was already made, concluded in advance.” This meant that the only agreements that Taine recognized were those that, as in Burke, confirmed previous rights. His interpretation of the Bill of Rights was based on that of Burke, de Maistre, Rehberg, Gentz, and the German Romantics. Once again one heard of “real” men, of concrete situations and established institutions, and once again the assertion was made that the historical agreement of 1689 had never had any purpose other than to confirm the gains of the past.⁵⁰ There was thus no better policy than to accept the existing order as all previous generations had done, following the teachings of nature. All this was true until 1789: if Burke stopped there, Taine and Maurras had to go back a hundred years, to the day before the summoning of the States General. A century after 1789, they still did not feel that enough time had passed to shroud the French

Revolution in a veil of respectability. In the time of the Vichy regime, a hundred and fifty years after the Declaration of the Rights of Man, Maurras never thought of defending the Third Republic in order to preserve the established order; his followers were only too happy to be its gravediggers. The same applied to Spengler in Weimar Germany and Croce on the eve of the Italian's fascists' seizure of power. The thinkers of the Anti-Enlightenment were not conservatives, but revolutionaries of a new kind.

Following Burke, Taine placed prejudice at the center of his philosophy of history. This would-be scientist practiced an antirationalism that yielded nothing to that of Burke before him or that of Barrès, the truest representative of the spirit of the turn of the twentieth century. According to him, "hereditary prejudice is a sort of reason that is unaware of itself"; it is collective reason. Here Taine went even further than Burke: "Like science, it is based on a long accumulation of experience"; it is the foundation of civilization; it makes a "herd of brutes" into a "society of men." Its disappearance would take man, deprived of "the wisdom of centuries," back to "a state of savagery."⁵¹ For Taine and Burke, hereditary prejudice, the core of their philosophy of history, was the basis of politics.

In this way, Taine asserted the individual's position of dependency on society. Society brings to bear on him all the weight of the ages, if not of perpetuity. Man is not only *not* free, he is subjected to a whole tradition, and "he has to submit." It follows that "each individual is born indebted to the state, and until he is an adult his debt never stops growing." Here Taine went a step further: the state, he said, is the guardian of the community. The distinction between the state and the community is not clearly made. Immediately after this, Taine made the comparison, which we have discussed here, of a man within his community to a cell in a human body. Society "is his creditor," and it always will be. The true French are of this nature, and one immediately sees "how different they are from the simple, indiscernible, detached monads that the philosophers persist in substituting for them." Rousseau's social contract was designed not for them but for abstract men belonging to no century and no country, "pure entities hatched under the wand of metaphysics." In the historical world, the real world, men are profoundly different, and what suits some is not suitable for others. Every society is made up of men who form part of "a whole mental and moral structure—a hereditary, profound structure bequeathed by the original race." What all these men have in common "is a prodigiously thin residue, an infinitely diminished extract of human nature." That, said Taine, was precisely reflected in the view of man of his period, which, "according to the definition of the time," saw the individual as merely a "being with a desire for happiness and a faculty of reason." Taine employed all

the riches of the French language, every synonym, and all possible imagery to say one and the same thing: that society is not the result of an agreement but a “*permanent foundation*” to which men bring their contribution generation after generation, “on condition that the foundation remains intact.” In this succession of generations, no individual, no group, no incumbent has the right, in endangering the deposit he has received, to wrong “all his predecessors whose sacrifices he frustrates and all his successors, whom he defrauds of their hopes.” Imposing on a people norms alien to its history means substituting “a philosophical phantom, an empty, insubstantial simulacrum” for the “real and whole man.”⁵²

“In this long view of things,” the good of the collectivity was the aim of all political action, and was the sole criterion by which the qualities of an institution could be judged. No constitution was good, useful, and legitimate or bad, harmful, and illegitimate in itself, for “there is none that by right is pre-established, universal and absolute.” There was only one criterion: whether “it dissolved the State” or whether “it maintained the State.”⁵³ It was thus a matter not only of the individual’s commitments and obligations to the collectivity as a civil society (a liability from which it is difficult to see how he could ever be freed), but also of his debt to the power structures, the regime, the institutions, and in the final analysis the nation. A century after the fall of the Old Regime, Taine’s positions were no less extreme than those of Burke: in incorporating Hegelian elements and social Darwinism, his thinking had only hardened. The subordination of the individual to the state, the guardian of the established social order, was one of the unchanging features of the revolt against the Franco-Kantian Enlightenment.

The primacy of society was thus not only a fact but also a necessity rooted in human nature. Society, the nation, the state, prejudices, norms of behavior, and all the other constraints of life in common were so many safety valves preventing man from reverting to what he was originally, “a restless, ravenous, vagrant, hunted wolf.” In reality, civilization is a sort of straitjacket that in normal times more or less succeeds in subduing this animal, “very like the monkey . . . originally a cannibal,” that, with its “persistent basis of brutality, ferocity and violent and destructive instincts,” is governed by the “raw power” of “irresistible currents of passion,” surges of emotion, contagious fits, and epidemics of credulity and suspicion, and is a being whose “pullulating dreams develop of their own accord into monstrous phantasms.” For Taine, there could be no doubt whatsoever: it is animal instinct and man’s physical needs that dictate human behavior, at least where the great mass of people compelled to earn their living from manual labor is concerned. “As halting as reason is in man, so rare is it in humanity.” Or, again: “Not only is reason not natural to

man or universal in humanity, in the conduct of man and humanity, its influence is small." Except in the case of "a few cold intelligences like Fontenelle, Hume, Gibbon," its role is secondary, and the true "masters of man are his physical temperament, his corporal needs, animal instinct, hereditary prejudice, imagination."⁵⁴

Nor was this all. Taine was convinced that "strictly speaking, man is insane, just as the body is sick, by nature." Only the organs of law enforcement, the "policemen, . . . tollgates and warders," can subdue man's feelings of rebellion and revolt and his excessive self-love and dogmatic reasoning, those "two roots of the Jacobin spirit," that "subsist, indestructible and subterranean," in all countries and seek to "overturn the ancient historical foundations." To preserve society, the ultimate sanction, the only truly effective means is "the policeman armed against the savage, the madman and the brigand that exist in every one of us." In this world where peace can only be maintained through fear, it is absurd to speak of the rights of man, of the freedom of the individual, of democracy, or of the sovereignty of the people. De Maistre, Maurras, and Spengler thought the same. Faith in the individual was the great sin of the revolution, and the true source of evil was the application of Rousseau's thought: "In accordance with the teachings of *The Social Contract*, they make it a principle that every man is born free and that his liberty has always been inalienable." This means applying to human existence "pure reason, which discovered the rights of man and the conditions of the social contract": that is to say, "speculative reason and practical foolishness." The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen was simply a collection of "abstract dogmas," "metaphysical definitions," and "axioms that are more or less literary, that is to say more or less false, sometimes vague and sometimes contradictory . . . good for a formal harangue but not for practical use." It was a document addressed to an abstract man, "a mere automaton, whose mechanism was known," and it failed to consider the nature of the "real man," the "living character" "one sees in the fields and in the street." In the human creature, it saw only "an abstract being created by books." Finally, as a result of the constitution, "spontaneous anarchy became legal anarchy. . . . It is the best example . . . since the ninth century."⁵⁵ Neither Burke and Carlyle before him, Renan in his own time, or Croce and Meinecke after him said anything else.

Besides the strong-arm policeman, the other tried and tested bulwark was religion. With the exception of Herder, a Protestant preacher, none of the great liberal critics of the Enlightenment had faith, but they all saw religion as a tremendous civilizing force, an important element in social stability, and a source of moral strength. In Taine as in Burke, the source of European morality and hence of European civilization, conscience, and honor was to be found

in Christianity and feudalism.⁵⁶ Religion, said Taine, is by its nature “a meta-physical poem accompanied by belief”; it keeps alive “our moral conscience, which is our inner light.” For hundreds of generations it was the sole path of access to the divine; it is “an organ both precious and natural” and enables man to embrace “the vastness and depth of things.” It implants the individual within a community: the church is a social force, “too deeply entrenched a plant to be uprooted.” The first pages of *The Origins* are devoted to praise of Christianity and of religion as a discipline and a civilizing force. It was the church and the clergy that after the conquest by the Germanic tribes saved Europe from barbarism and prevented it from becoming a “Mongol anarchy”; it was once again the church that “through its innumerable legends of saints, through its cathedrals and their structures, through its statues . . . through its services with their still transparent meaning, brought close the ‘kingdom of God’ and set up an ideal world on the edges of the real world.” In this way, “savage beasts became docile,” and the church discovered from the beginning the great secret of social life: it learned to domesticate the individual and preserve the established order. Having promised “the kingdom of God,” the church “preached a tender resignation to the will of the heavenly Father, and inspired patience, gentleness, humility, abnegation, charity.” It ended by creating a living society, the only one capable of surviving the wave of barbarians. At the end of the second volume, one thousand two hundred pages later, Taine summed up: “In all branches of private and public life, a Church has an immense influence, and is a distinct and permanent social force of the first order.” Rarely has the role of the church as a pillar of the established order been better described. In 1789, on the eve of the great disaster, the churchmen, together with the nobles and the king, “had the dominant position in the State, with all the advantages,” which “they had deserved” for a long time. “Indeed, through an immense, centuries-long effort, they had built up, one after the other, the three main foundations of modern society.”⁵⁷ All that is great in Europe, whatever remains of it, was the product of this world of monasteries and châteaux, of nobles and servants of the church.

In order to show what a disaster the French constitution was, unlike Burke who did not say a word about the American Constitution, and unlike Renan, who had little admiration for the American Constitution but understood it much better, Taine compared the United States favorably to revolutionary France. Undoubtedly, he interpreted the Declaration of Independence of July 4, 1776, in his own way, and apart from the first sentence, which he regarded as simply “a formal statement for the benefit of the European philosophers,” he saw the text as a whole and the Constitution of March 4, 1789, with its eleven amendments as concrete measures limiting the powers of Congress and

guaranteeing “the fundamental liberties of the citizen.”⁵⁸ Taine saw no philosophical basis to these documents, no series of principles, and as in Burke, Locke and natural rights were not mentioned.

The emphasis Taine placed on the dependent nature of the individual meant that it was illusory to speak of liberty in the classical liberal sense of the term. Taine’s liberalism was “blocked” liberalism of the Burkian variety, or communitarian liberalism. The individual should not be left to his own devices, for when one tried to translate the view of things called the autonomy of man into concrete terms, one had the French Revolution with its massacres. It was then that the “slaughterer of September” (1792) appeared, the bloodthirsty Jacobin, who in order to stifle any remaining humanity in himself, proliferated murders — “Dante’s demon, at once bestial and refined, not only a destroyer but a hangman.”⁵⁹ Finally, Taine said that with the arrival of the Paris Commune, one reached “the ferocious and lustful gorilla.”⁶⁰ That, according to the spiritual family to which Taine belonged, is what the Declaration of the Rights of Man finally came down to. From the end of the nineteenth century, the dehumanization of the ideological enemy that began with Burke was expressed on the one hand as hatred of the people, and on the other as the possibility of excluding alien groups from the consensus. The definition of the consensus could change according to need. With the coming of racism and Darwinism, this dehumanization took on a new dimension.

In a less prophetic style, Renan developed the same idea: “Society is not an atomistic gathering of individuals formed by repetition of a unit. It is an already established unit; *it is original*.” “In the perspective of an enlightened philosophy, society is a most providential phenomenon; it was established not by man but by nature itself. . . . Man in isolation never existed. Human society, the mother of all ideals, was the direct product of the supreme will that wished the good, the true and the beautiful to have contemplators in the universe.” Already in *L’Avenir de la science*, his most liberal work, Renan said, “Man is not born free . . . he is born part of society; he is born under the law. . . . Man, like a plant, is naturally wild. . . . One is only man through intellectual and moral culture.” Renan considered society to be hierarchical: “All individuals are noble and sacred, all beings (even animals) have rights; but all beings are not equal. They are all members of a vast body, parts of an immense organism that accomplishes a divine task. The negation of this divine task is the error into which the French democracy easily falls.” The human order “is the direct product of the supreme will.” Its ultimate purpose was not to “bring contentment to the majority” but to enable intellect and moral life to exist. Originally Renan thought that “keeping part of humanity in a state of brutality is immoral and dangerous.” At that time he wished “to give everyone a place at the

banquet of enlightenment.”⁶¹ From the 1850s onward, very little remained of these liberal inclinations of the previous decade.

The reason democracy was contrary to the aims of human existence was that the latter could only be founded on an inequality comparable to that to be found in nature: “Human life would become impossible if man did not give himself the right to subordinate animals to his needs. It would hardly be more possible if one clung to the abstract conception that envisaged all men as having at birth the same right to fortune and social rank.” A respect for inequality is the precondition for a civilized life, for a sound social order and a political system that can assure national greatness: “The great virtue of a nation is to support a traditional inequality.” Not only would an equality of conditions “be the end of any virtue,” “no society is possible if one adheres strictly to the idea of distributive justice with regard to individuals.” Equality between social classes is as little in accordance with the nature of things as equality between the sexes or the suppression of property, heredity, or nobility. It is impossible for all to enjoy to the same degree the riches provided or produced by society, or for all to reach the same degree of refinement, but it is necessary that there should be men of leisure, educated, virtuous, well-bred: “One puts an end to humanity if one does not acknowledge that whole classes have to live from the glory and enjoyment of others.” And further on he said, “Nature wanted the life of humanity to be on various levels. . . . The coarseness of a number is necessary to the good breeding of a single individual.” The church, he said, had understood this well, and religion has the task of explaining these mysteries, just as it has to provide consolation to all those who are sacrificed in this world, for if it is “unjust that one man should be sacrificed to another man . . . it is not unjust that all are subordinated to a higher goal accomplished by mankind.” This was the great law that the church had to teach us: “It is the sweat of many that permits a noble life for a small number. However, it does not call the latter privileged and the former deprived, for it sees the work of humanity as indivisible.”⁶² If one eliminates this principle, one is left with mediocrity and selfishness, or in other words, materialism and democracy.

Renan ended by reconciling himself to the republic, or rather he resigned himself to not fighting the republican regime, and he opposed Boulangerism both out of fear of a confrontation with Germany and out of disdain for populism and vulgarity. He did not, however, reject his life’s work. He never came to accept the intellectual foundations of democracy and never embraced the heritage of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. He never abandoned his fight against “the deplorable principle that one generation is not binding on the next one, so that there would be no chain from the dead to the

living, no guarantee for the future." He never tired of saying that "the conscience of a nation resides in the enlightened part of that nation, which carries along and commands the rest."⁶³ From the beginning of his work to his very last writings, Renan remained convinced that "all that is wrong with humanity comes . . . from a lack of culture." That is why democracy is ruled out: the "native bestiality" of half of humanity makes it "impossible to like the people as it is." If democracy triumphed, "it would be worse than the Franks and the Vandals." In concrete terms, this means that universal suffrage is illegitimate, as "stupidity does not have the right to govern the world." It follows that someone has to assume "the guardianship of the masses," and that is the function of the aristocracy.⁶⁴

Carlyle endorsed this view, and sometimes it is difficult to tell whether he or Renan is the author of a passage, so much do the ideas and the way they are expressed resemble one another. According to Carlyle, if the world wishes to avoid total disaster, "these days of universal death must be days of universal rebirth." The rebirth could only happen through a return to the natural order of things, beginning with a recognition of the true nature of the individual, his limitations and his duties: "This is the everlasting duty of all men. . . . To do competent work, to labour honestly according to the ability given them; for that and for no other purpose was each one of us sent into this world."⁶⁵

Man, claimed Carlyle, has two natures: one dynamic and the other mechanical. All that is low, like utilitarianism, stems from his mechanical nature; all that is great stems from his dynamic nature: Christianity "arose in the mystic deeps of man's soul." It is through his dynamic nature that man has the need to submit to what transcends him, to obey his superiors and seek order and hierarchy: "No nobler or more blessed feeling dwells in man's heart." It is man's urge to obey those he considers better than himself that makes him a social being: it is in society that "morality begins," and it is in society that man for the first time feels what he is and becomes for the first time what he is capable of being.⁶⁶ That is why true liberty is not freedom to dispose of oneself without interference from others; it is not emancipation or autonomy in relation to others but obedience to the laws of the universe, obedience to those wiser than oneself, and recognition of one's own limitations. This is the only real liberty that exists; it is not even conceivable outside this "obedience to the Heaven-chosen."⁶⁷ With regard to the rights of man, Carlyle maintained that all men are justified in demanding and seeking their rights. But whether justified or not, they do so in any case: Chartisms, radicalisms, French Revolutions are the proof of it. It would also take other forms. The rights of man are undoubtedly just, but no more than the following observation: "Use every man according to his rights, and who shall escape whipping?" Moreover,

men's *rights* count for little in relation to their real power and their capacity to exercise their *mights*. These vary considerably from one place to another and from one period to another, which means that it is absurd to speak of universal and eternal rights of man. Finally, Carlyle summed up his thought: of all the rights of man, the only "right of man" that can never be questioned is the right of the ignorant to be guided and willingly or forcibly kept on the right path by those who are wiser than them.⁶⁸

This principle, which Carlyle considered a safety valve for European civilization, was expressed in Burke in a less brutal but hardly less explicit formula: prescription, prudence, and prejudice. The principle of prescription was the basis for the principle of virtual representation, which is discussed in the next chapter. In substituting virtual representation for an elective regime, Burke thought he had erected a bulwark against democracy. Moreover, where he was concerned, the very existence of an institution was the proof of its legitimacy and its ultimate justification. He saw the British constitution as a phenomenon whose legitimacy was founded on its antiquity, an antiquity that gave it a quasi-sacred character. By virtue of the principle of prescription as defined in civil law, any possessor of an asset after a certain period of time becomes its legal owner, even if at a certain moment proof is obtained that possession was gained through fraud and violence. Burke was convinced that property and power were always originally a form of usurpation, and without the principle of prescription, the established order was liable to be constantly questioned, so that the stability of public order required the question of the origins of rights and legitimacy to be excluded from all political debate. For Burke, the principle of prescription was part of the natural order of things. Ten years after he had put forward this principle in his speech of 1782 on the reform of the representative system, he returned to this theme in the midst of his campaign against the French Revolution. In an important text, a letter on Irish affairs addressed to his son, he based all rights, all relationships between men, all legislation on "the solid rock of prescription": "the soundest, the most general, and the most recognized title between man and man . . . a title which is not the creature but the master of positive Law . . . , a title which though not fixed in its term, is rooted in its principle, in the law of nature itself and is indeed the original ground of all known property."⁶⁹

Prejudice, prudence, and prescription assert men's inability to create a world different from the one that exists. "Prudence" is really the capacity to listen to the voice of history, or quite simply the contrary of rationalism and universal principles.⁷⁰ However, antirationalism, as we saw earlier, also creates a relativism of values. Burke believed that moral values were dependent on circumstances.⁷¹ Whatever the case, if the French had exercised prudence,

they would have conformed to “a fixed constitution” instead of arrogating to themselves the power to make a new one. This principle was fully observed by the English: “Instead of casting away all our old prejudices,” said Burke, “we cherish them to a very considerable degree, and, to take more shame to ourselves, we cherish them because they are prejudices; and the longer they have lasted, and the more generally they have prevailed, the more we cherish them.” In Burke, prejudice really takes the place of reason: “Prejudice is of ready application in the emergency; it previously engages the mind in a steady course of wisdom and virtue, and does not leave the man hesitating in the moment of decision, sceptical, puzzled, and unresolved.” Thus, “we are afraid to put men to live and trade each on his own private stock of reason; because we suspect that this stock in each man is small, and that the individuals would do better to avail themselves of the general bank and capital of nations and of ages.”⁷²

The threads that linked Burke and Herder to Carlyle, Taine, Renan, Barrès, Maurras, and Spengler were only very rarely weakened. Thus, they all agreed that the right and privilege of the uneducated was to receive orders and carry them out, and the great virtue of the humble and of common folk was to listen to their heart and not to reason. It was the literary, rationalist cabal, with its assault on the Christian religion, that was held to have brought about the revolutionary disaster, and it was this same intellectualist cabal that at the end of the nineteenth century was said to have been responsible for the decadence of France and the Western World. Civilization was always in danger, and the forces of rationalist and democratic disorder were always at work.

The incapacity of reason to guide man in society remained the cornerstone of Anti-Enlightenment thought. Burke’s criticism was directed against all forms of rationalism, and his aim was to expose the intellectual and moral inferiority of individual judgment. In insisting on the great fragility of reason, Burke was attacking the very idea of the rights of man. Liberty as a natural right of the individual did not exist where he was concerned; there were only “liberties,” that is to say, privileges, and these were viewed as an inheritance. All attempts at a reconstruction of the social and political order such as one had in France in the spring of 1789 were condemned in advance as “mechanic philosophy” or “the metaphysics of an undergraduate” that could only produce “a geometrical and arithmetical constitution.”⁷³ But it was not only a matter of the French Revolution: at all costs, the Glorious Revolution had to go down in history as simply a restoration of the old order. Burke, totally ignoring realities, called the French to a restoration comparable to the one that, according to his interpretation, had happened in 1689. Once again, one sees here how this “pragmatist” rejected the verdict of history when its judgment was not in agreement with what he thought it should be. Thus, taking up the most extreme positions of the higher

aristocracy, especially those of the king's brothers, he envisaged quite simply a return to the situation that prevailed in 1614, when the States General convened for the last time. He preached a cult of tradition, but the question that became famous at the end of the nineteenth century — “Which tradition?” — had no less cogency a hundred years earlier. The tradition that Burke adopted was the one represented by the revolt of the nobles in 1787–1788 against the plans for reform of the state put forward by the ministers of Louis XVI. Very knowledgeable about France and a professional politician, Burke could not have failed to be aware of the dramatic situation of the royal government. He could not have failed to understand the necessity for reform, but he could not allow it to be anything other than a restoration. Was he not opposed, during those very years, to all plans for a reform of the British system?

The central axis of Burke's thought, as of Maurras' a century later, was the idea of order. By “order” he meant a political and social order based on a moral order of divine origin. There was undoubtedly a universal moral order, for there was a human nature that all people had in common,⁷⁴ but this moral equality had no bearing on politics. Burke denied the very existence of universal values of a political kind. Liberties were apportioned in an arbitrary and unequal manner, and their purpose was the defense of the privileged classes. A defense of privilege, however, was not automatically a defense of an aristocracy of birth but a defense of the established order as a whole, of which the bourgeoisie was an integral part. That was the significance of Burke's “Letter to a Noble Lord,” where he seemed to take the part of the bourgeoisie against the pretensions of the higher nobility. But this was only an illusion. In this text concerned with Burke's own affairs, where he defended himself against the accusation of having accepted a royal pension as the price of betraying Whig principles, he played the role of the defender of talent against the aristocracy of birth, but in reality one does not have here, as has sometimes been thought, the reactions of a man who has risen to the top through his own efforts and expresses his contempt for the well-born.⁷⁵ Not only in *Reflections* but also in his “Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs” he saw “a true natural aristocracy” as “as essential integrant part of any large body rightly constituted.”⁷⁶ Twenty years earlier, in 1772, in a letter to the Duke of Richmond, he described the nature of the relationship that should naturally exist between the aristocracy and the rest of the country. In a tribute to the aristocracy, he declared: “You people of great families and hereditary trusts and fortunes are not like such as I am, who, whoever we may be by the rapidity of our growth and even by the fruit we bear . . . are but annual plants that perish with our season, and leave no sort of traces behind us. You, if you are what you ought to

be, are in my eye the great oaks that shade a country . . . from generation to generation.”⁷⁷ This classical metaphor recurred in Taine and Barrès.

In a similar frame of mind, Burke pursued his campaign to preserve the status quo. The majority had no more right than the minority to change the political structures of a country: “The votes of a majority of the people . . . cannot alter the moral any more than they can alter the physical essence of things.” It followed that “the constitution of a country being once settled upon some compact, tacit or expressed, there is no power existing of force to alter it, without the breach of the covenant, or the consent of all the parties.”⁷⁸ This, according to Burke, was the source of political legitimacy. In the context of the events of 1789, this meant in practical terms that it was legitimate and acceptable that the king, the nobility, and the clergy should each have the right of veto over the will of the representatives of the rest of the nation.

In his praise of experience as a criterion, Burke made himself the guardian of the social, political, and economic order with its privileges and inequalities; he defended a political participation kept to the minimum, whose essential function was to assure the permanence of what exists. Accordingly, he described “the science of government” as “so practical in itself, and intended for such practical purposes,” and he lauded “practical wisdom” as opposed to “theoretic science.”⁷⁹ It was precisely the bourgeois and capitalist order that was the established order, and he claimed that experience showed that this order had to be protected by a government free from the shackles of democracy. Burke favored a *laissez-faire* regime and at the same time, a system of strict order. He wanted a strong government; he thought that “no government ever yet perished from any other direct cause than its own weakness.”⁸⁰ He maintained that the idea put forward by “these new Whigs” that “the sovereignty . . . did not only originate from the people . . . but that, in the people the same sovereignty constantly and unalienably resides; that the people may lawfully depose kings . . . that they may set up any new fashion of government for themselves”; and that a contract which “does not pass to posterity” could only lead “to the utter subversion, not only of all government, in all modes, and to all stable securities to rational freedom, but to all the rules and principles of morality itself.” Nothing, he believed, could be more destructive of order, more contrary to nature, than the imposition of the will of the majority or the idea of a contract reflecting the will of the people. It was really a matter of saving the people from itself. “Government,” he said, “is a contrivance of human wisdom to provide for human *wants*. . . . Among these wants is to be reckoned the want . . . of a sufficient restraint upon their passions. . . . This can only be done *by a power out of themselves*; and not, in the exercise of its

function, subject to that will and those passions which it is its office to bridle and subdue. In this sense the restraints on men, as well as their liberties, are to be reckoned among their rights.”⁸¹

One must therefore unhesitatingly adhere to the principle that the people must not, “under a false show of liberty . . . exercise an unnatural, inverted domination.” Nothing is more contrary to the natural order of things than to rely on the majority: the majority can never speak on behalf of the people. The people only truly exists where it is subjected to the “habitual social discipline, in which the wiser, the more expert, and the more opulent conduct, and by conducting enlighten and protect, the weaker, the less knowing, and the less provided with the goods of fortune. When the multitude are not under this discipline, they can scarcely be said to be in civil society.”⁸²

The rehabilitation of prejudice as something essential to social discipline, central to the ideology of the antirationalist form of modernity that we have just seen in Burke, is also central to Herder’s thinking. According to Herder, prejudice represents the particular quality, the special treasure, of a nation or a period, and is a source of happiness and vitality. All prejudices are thus good and honorable to an equal degree. Reason has no hold over prejudice, and thanks to that very fact it is a bulwark that protects the nation. “One must also venerate, use and employ prejudices,” he wrote in the notes that in the Suphan edition follow his *Journal*.⁸³ In *Another Philosophy*, he developed his thought: “Prejudice is good in its time: it makes men happy. It pushes peoples together at their center, making them stand firmer upon their roots; more flourishing in their way, more virile, and also happier in their inclinations and purposes.” Which brings us to his conclusion: “The most ignorant, prejudiced nation is in this sense often the first: the age of dreamy wanderings and hopeful journeys abroad is already sickness, flatulence, bloatedness, premonition of death!”⁸⁴

One is not surprised to discover how very conservative Herder’s social conceptions were: “Freedom, sociability and equality, such as they are germinating everywhere now, have brought about many evils through their thousand-fold abuse,” he wrote. A page earlier, he already said: “It is well known that the concepts of human freedom, sociability, equality, and universal happiness have come to light and spread out. The consequences may not be immediately beneficial to us; often the bad may appear, at first, to outweigh the good. However!” Like Taine and Croce after him, he regretted the spread of the Enlightenment among all strata of society. In the midst of the second section of his work, where he made his harshest criticisms of the spirit of the Enlightenment, complaining of its “mechanical” character and rationalism, and where he celebrated instinct, Herder used an analogy that became a classic of anti-democratic ideology: “Is the whole body meant to see? Must not the whole

body suffer when the hand and foot wish to be the eye and brain?" That is how he perceived society as conceived by the school of natural rights: peoples were becoming "so many great, philosophically-governed herds."⁸⁵ Herder viewed natural rights as artificial rights, invented ready-made by the philosophers, or, as Burke put it, by the philosophical cabal that had sworn to destroy Christian civilization.

Herder thought that for the past century the natural order of things had been reversed, an "abyss of irredeemable evils" had opened up: one that could be compared to the disaster that overcame Germany in Luther's time when it was devastated by the Anabaptists and other fanatics: "Now we have the general confusion of the social classes, the upward drive of the low-born seeking to replace their withered, proud, and useless superiors. . . . The strongest, most necessary fundamentals of mankind are being abandoned; the great mass of debased vital fluid is running very low." Everything tended to erode social connections, to distort natural relationships: "Philosophy, freethinking, abundance, and an education towards all this that is spread more and more deeply and widely from link to link." Wherever one looked, one saw ruins piling up: "Barriers and border posts are torn down, so-called prejudices of class, education, even of religion, are trod underfoot and mocked to their further detriment. Through one and the same education, philosophy, irreligion, enlightenment, vice . . . we are all made what our philosophy praises and cherishes so. . . . Master and servant, father and child, youth and the most foreign maiden—we are all made brothers!"⁸⁶ There is nothing surprising about this scathing irony, this way of ridiculing brotherhood on the part of the Protestant pastor. Brotherhood, when it was not Christian but based on philosophical values or a social leveling, was regarded as fundamentally evil.

This other modernity attacked the Enlightenment for its materialism: another idea that was to have a great future in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. "Materialism" is the classic code word for the rejection of liberalism and democracy, the autonomy of the individual, and the conception of society as a group of individuals governed by laws that they provided for themselves. Thus, Herder hoped for "a less sensuous mankind, more like itself," which meant a society close to the medieval model. Instead of this, one saw a continual degradation of the relationships between human beings. "Have not sociability and casual intercourse between the sexes eroded the honor, decency and discipline of both parties? All around the world, have not the locked [doors] been burst open for class, money and pleasantries? But what suffering this has meant for the first bloom of the male sex and for matrimonial and motherly love and child-rearing, the noblest fruit of the male sex! How far has the damage spread?" On the following page, he contemplated with despair

“the upward drive towards reasoning, abundance, freedom and insolence” causing a disastrous deterioration in the traditional sources of authority. Lastly, even the hope of a renewal was considered impossible, as “the very sources of amelioration and recovery, of youth, vitality, and improved education are blocked!”⁸⁷

If there was one thing that Herder detested, it was equality. His campaign against equality was waged under the cover of a campaign against “uniformity” and a call for pluralism. In attacking uniformity and making himself the apostle of pluralism, Herder took part in the campaign against the unifying of legislation and the abolition of privileges, including the most hated ones: inequality before the law and inequality in the matter of taxation. The aim of the campaign of the philosophes against certain customs, including judicial ones, rooted in age-old traditions, was to eliminate the most glaring injustices, those whose existence in eighteenth-century society had become intolerable. Herder, for his part, defended the guilds detested by the philosophes and abolished in France by Turgot in 1776,⁸⁸ and he opposed all the plans for unifying legislation proposed by Voltaire. As the latter said: “Will they always judge the same case differently in the provinces and in the capital? Why should the same man be right in Brittany and wrong in Languedoc? What can I say: there are as many legal systems as there are towns.”⁸⁹ Herder adopted diametrically opposite positions: he exalted the “ancient tradition” and “senseless prejudice” so much despised by the philosophers, and declared ironically, “At our bars of justice, instead of . . . each case being treated on its merits,” the new philosophy had introduced a “pretty, easy, free kind of judgment . . . casting aside what is individual, what is peculiar to the thing itself, in favor of a bright and splendid universality, and instead of acting as a judge, being a philosopher (the flower of the age!).”⁹⁰ Here it was once again Montesquieu who was the target: indeed, there are few writings that represent better than these the vast difference between Enlightenment thought and its antithesis. Montesquieu thought that “knowledge makes men gentle; reason makes them disposed to humanity; only prejudices cause them to renounce it.”⁹¹ Herder, on the contrary, attacked the “political science” that, instead of dealing with the specific, concrete needs of each country, took an “eagle’s view” that distorted everything.⁹² In order to satisfy a people’s requirements, the law, he said, “is supposed to fit as its suit of clothing.”⁹³ That is why Herder regretted the disappearance of the way of thinking of “the ages and peoples . . . when everything was so narrowly national.”⁹⁴ We see that the foundations of cultural nationalism had already been laid.

Carlyle was a similar case. There is a commonly accepted idea that the

writer of the *History of the French Revolution* has a unique place in the British political landscape. Setting aside his prophetic and deliberately archaic style that strongly recalls Herder, his lavish use of Germanic idioms and passages written as though meant to be delivered by a preacher from a pulpit, Carlyle's thought, if one looks closely, is not so different from that of Burke. Burke's fiery messianic rhetoric also finds its natural continuation in the work of Carlyle. The latter undoubtedly belongs to the tradition of the antirationalist modernity that is unfriendly to democracy, being a negation of the autonomy of the individual, the rights of man, the sovereignty of the people, and equality. At a distance of half a century, Carlyle's antidemocratic attitudes closely resembled Burke's: if Carlyle abhorred the British system of government of his time, it was precisely because it no longer resembled the system admired by Burke. A House of Commons recruited in the same way as the one of which Burke was a member, an all-powerful aristocracy of merit rather than birth, a recognized hierarchical system, a head of government of the stature of a William Pitt would have gained the allegiance of Carlyle without difficulty. No one would have recognized his own thinking better than Burke in the "principle of permanent contract instead of temporary" that Carlyle said should be fundamental to all social organization.⁹⁵

First of all, Carlyle saw the universe as both a monarchy and a hierarchy, governed by the Almighty with an eternal justice: this was the model for all "Constitutions." The laws of nature, of which democracy is precisely the opposite, require superior people, nobles, to lead the less noble, and that is the reason why democracy is an imposture, the most scandalous thing ever seen on earth, intolerable to God and man: "Bankruptcy everywhere; foul ignominy, and the abomination of desolation." Thus, inequality is natural and universal suffrage absurd: most of the population can only be asked about simple, practical questions: "On certain points, I even ask my horse's opinion." The same applies to the rest of the population, but in any matter of importance, the masses "full of beer and nonsense" are completely at a loss. Can a ship sail without a captain through a vote of the crew?⁹⁶ This metaphor recurs innumerable times, and it makes the salient point: democracy means there can be no hope of finding captains, heroes able to govern men.⁹⁷ Rowdy and raucous democracy was never able to achieve anything: this was always the case, from the days of Rome and Athens onward. It was always a small minority that though its wisdom and its capacity for farsightedness enabled progress to be made. Cromwell's Puritans were a good example: a tiny minority, "the authors or saviours . . . of whatsoever is divinest in the things we can still reckon ours in England." On the other hand, "Did you never hear of

‘Crucify him! Crucify him!’? That was a considerable feat in the suppressing of minorities.” Moreover, one saw how easily democracy degenerated into despotism at the time of the French Revolution.⁹⁸

Here one seems to be reading Taine and Renan on the one hand, and on the other hand certain features of the writings of the twentieth-century totalitarian school. In his chapter on Carlyle in his *History of English Literature*, Taine depicted him as being in revolt against a world without God: “All truth in this universe is uncertain. Only profit and loss, pudding and the praise of it, are visible to the practical man. There is no longer any God for us. God’s laws have been transformed into the principles of *the greatest possible happiness*, into parliamentary expedients. . . . This is truly the infected area, the heart of the universal social gangrene that threatens all modern things with a horrible death. . . . Man has lost his soul. . . . We only believe in observation, statistics, in coarse and tangible truths. . . . We have no moral convictions. . . . We are selfish and dilettantish. We no longer see life as a noble temple but as a machine to yield decent profits, or as a hall for sophisticated entertainments. . . . Rapacious merchants are our aristocracy. . . . Our Constitution makes it a principle that, in order to find the true and the good, it is enough to get two million imbeciles to vote. Our Parliament is a great word mill. . . . Beneath this thin envelope of conventions and phrases, irresistible democracy rumbles on.” According to Taine, the danger, as Carlyle saw it, was all the greater in that the smallest hitch in industrial production threw hundreds of thousands of workers onto the street; hunger would overturn “the flimsy barriers that are giving way; we are approaching the final collapse, which will be open anarchy, and democracy will bestir itself in the ruins, until the sense of the divine and of duty will rally men to the cult of heroism, until it founds its government and its Church, until it finds a way of bringing to power the most virtuous and the most capable.”⁹⁹

Already in his work on English literature Taine showed little sympathy for democracy. “In the whole of the civilized world,” he said, “democracy inflates or causes an overflowing, and all the molds into which it runs are fragile or transitory.” “However,” he said of Carlyle, “it is strange to present as a solution the fanaticism and tyranny of the Puritans.” Taine claimed that it was not possible to build a society and a regime, a whole political culture, on excitement, bouts of fever, and explosions: “Mysticism is a good thing, but only when it is short-lived. Extreme conditions are produced by violent circumstances: great disasters are necessary to produce great men, and you have to look among shipwrecks if you wish to find rescuers.”¹⁰⁰

The same applied to periods of history. After a period of great intensity, one had its opposite: “The asceticism of the republic produced the debauch of the

restoration;" "the chivalrous and poetic piety of the great Spanish monarchy drained Spain of men and thought. The preeminence of genius, taste and intelligence reduced Italy, in one century, to voluptuous inertia and political servitude."¹⁰¹ With the nineteenth century, another period of decadence began, produced by democracy.

Taine, like Burke, saw democracy as a form of "universal delirium." From 1789 onward, "in every practice of the established regime, in every measure of the administration . . . there was nothing that was not of a tyrannous nature. . . . Depraved sensations, delirious conceptions! For a doctor these would be symptoms of mental derangement." Thus, "thanks to one of the ha'penny catechisms of which there are thousands in the countryside and in the suburbs, a village attorney, an official at the gate, an inspector of goods, a sergeant in his barracks becomes a legislator and a philosopher; he judges Malouet, Mirabeau, the king, the Assembly, the Church, foreign Governments, France and Europe. Subsequently, on these lofty matters that had seemed to be perpetually out of his reach, he makes proposals, he reads addresses, he is applauded, and he admires himself for being able to reason so well and with such big words."¹⁰² Taine, like Burke, far preferred the system that filled Parliament with members who, as Paine put it, had "sprung from the filth of rotten boroughs" and those who were merely "the vassal representatives of aristocratical ones."¹⁰³ Finally, "the class appeared which, tied to the soil, had fasted for sixty generations in order to feed the other classes, and whose gnarled hands are constantly stretched out to take hold of this soil whose produce they grow." Taine adds: "We shall see it in action."¹⁰⁴ Criticism of democracy, combined with a real fear and hatred of the people, which explodes in his description of the Jacobins, is one of the constant elements in Taine's work. With the revolution, with the abdication of the elites and the arrival of the man of the people on the scene of history, with that "rebellion of mules and horses against men under the guidance of monkeys with the larynxes of parrots,"¹⁰⁵ European civilization was threatened with extinction.

In the last part of the first volume of *The Origins*, Taine drew the practical conclusions from his long-drawn-out reflections on the political ideal. Needless to say, he rejected democracy in every form. The Swiss cantonal system and the American system, which he described, contrary to all reality, as pure democracy, were equally dangerous, and always for the same reason: it was government of the majority, "the direct government of the people by the people." For as one already knew, democracy was not suited to "civilized, hard-working people"; it was the prerogative of "the displaced, the idle and the coarse." It quite naturally degenerated into the "radical democracy," of which Sieyès, as infatuated with his speculative ideas as Rousseau and as unscrupu-

lous as Machiavelli, was the incarnation.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, universal suffrage, that “stupid adoration of number,” that “leveling machine,” that “refuge of the demagogic monster,” inevitably excluded the elites, the notables, and the educated people, and put in power a government of “uncultivated minds, stupefied by the routine of manual work and numbed by a preoccupation with the physical requirements” of these “paralytics and people blind from birth.” In this way, one had a government of the “overalls” in place of that of the “suit”; the reign of the “numerical majority” came into being, and the political regime was hopelessly corrupted.¹⁰⁷ The only good system of government is that in which power is in the hands of “an upper class” free of any financial cares, for whom ruling is not a career: the nobility, the bourgeoisie, and the clergy. It is this “superior elite,” educated, rich, and often prepared from childhood for the hard task of governing, that has the natural capacity to lead the country. The example to imitate is that of the English gentry and not that of the American politicians.¹⁰⁸ Gathered around a hereditary monarch¹⁰⁹ and free from competition and struggles for power, such an elite could give France the only regime that would be worthy of it. When at the end of his life he came to the conclusion that a restoration of the monarchy was not possible, Taine, like Renan, accepted the republic, but he never renounced his opposition to the heritage of the Enlightenment or to democracy.

*The Law of Inequality and
the War on Democracy*

The war on democracy that began at the end of the eighteenth century was waged unceasingly from then on. The revolt against reason, against natural rights, against the autonomy of the individual showed up in Burke's long campaign and fixed the broad lines of this course of action for at least a century and a half. Anything was allowed, anything was legitimate, after the British defeat in America, that could block the tendencies to democratization in the European world, including the preservation of a political and ultimately social order that was unjust, based on patronage, and corrupt in the extreme. In order to prevent any danger of democratization, Burke made the preservation of inheritance into a supreme virtue. A century later, the end remained the same, but the means had changed: Maurras, Croce, or Spengler did not attempt to ensure the permanence of the existing order, since by then it was democracy, but tried to shatter it while holding up as an ideal a distant, if not mythical, inheritance.

The best way to understand the intellectual mechanism of this revolt, which was directed as much against the ideology of democracy as against its institutions, is to follow Burke's progress and to look at the principles, so much admired in our day, of which he is said to have been the depository. We must therefore examine the actual positions he adopted in Parliament at Westminster, particularly with regard to the plans for reform presented to the House

of Commons by the pillars of the political and social establishment, among whom were at least two of the greatest names in the history of modern Britain.

In Burke's time, there was nothing similar to the British parliament, and during the long premiership of Sir Robert Walpole (1721–1742), the government had become more dependent on the Commons. However, the prime minister, as the guardian of the Whig system, carried corruption as a system of government to its perfection. After his fall, corruption continued to be rife. Members of Parliament as well as voters were bought, which did not improve the political climate or the attitude of the public. This climate, although not the methods of government, changed with the arrival of a new generation, of whom William Pitt the Elder, who engineered the victory in the Seven Years' War, was the principal figure. Pitt, in fact, was the very symbol of the England considered by Burke the very model of perfection. An orator of great talent, with a character of iron, he entered political life by the main gate of patronage, corruption, and already a certain kind of nationalism. His frail health prevented him from taking up a military career. He chose politics and got himself "elected" member for Old Sarum, one of the famous "rotten boroughs" or "pocket boroughs."

Old Sarum was a very old Saxon town where William the Conqueror had built a castle. Its decline began in the thirteenth century, and by the sixteenth century the town had practically ceased to exist. Its cathedral was dismantled stone by stone and was reconstructed in identical form a few miles away in Salisbury, which is where the bishopric was also centered. In the eighteenth century the borough had only a few inhabitants and five houses, according to some sources (only two or three according to Thomas Paine), but always sent two members to the House of Commons.¹ This borough had always been the client of the family of William Pitt, who was to become Lord Chatham in 1766. As the list of boroughs, that is to say, parliamentary constituencies, had been closed in the time of Elizabeth I, the great new economic centers like Liverpool and Manchester were not represented in the House of Commons, and would not be until the suppression of the rotten boroughs in the reform of 1832. Even after that, the proportion of voters to the total population was one to twenty-two.

The British parliament was admirable from the point of view of the representativeness of the government, which reflected both the power of the monarch and the will of the parliamentarians. Compared to the arbitrary nature of monarchical rule in France, Prussia, or Russia, Britain was undoubtedly, as Montesquieu thought, the freest country in the world. In the 1770s, however, with the rebellion in America and the founding of the United States, the criteria for liberty evolved. One began more and more to compare the reality to the

system envisaged by Locke. The ideologist of the Glorious Revolution recommended a division of powers and responsibility of the rulers toward the ruled, but not the mixed and deeply corrupt kind of system found in Britain. Moreover, this parliament scarcely commanded the respect of those to whom the method of electing members of Parliament mattered, and who were beginning to think that the aim of representation was to express the will of the entire population, not merely that of a caste. Burke was not one of these.

Throughout the eighteenth century, the great, wealthy families, whose elder sons were in the House of Lords and whose younger sons were in the House of Commons, were the patrons of the parliamentary constituencies and the boroughs. The rural nobility was their client and the merchant class their ally. They were all enriched by the political system. It is true that on the eve of the French Revolution there was a certain lessening of corruption, especially during the second administration of the Marquis of Rockingham in 1782, but two facts have to be pointed out: the rotten boroughs were left untouched, and the measures to lessen corruption were taken not on the initiative of the Whig leaders and their clients but through pressure from the political movement known as “radicalism” or “Wilkism,” after its promoter, the member of Parliament John Wilkes. The law of 1782 excluding from Parliament members who were also officials was his work, not that of the prime minister. Over the years, one can see there was a certain progress in parliamentary practices: from 1771, reports on debates were published and could be discussed in the press. Many newspapers were founded at that time, including the *Times* (1785). From 1782, the head of government declared his program when assuming office.

Patronage and political corruption, however, always remained the backbone of this regime in which, in order to govern, one needed the support of the Commons, but in which the quasi-totality of the population was unrepresented. Until 1784, the party in power was still the Whig party. For Burke, the fact that fifteen thousand voters controlled half of the seats in the Commons was part of the natural order of things. He saw nothing wrong in the total number of men with the right to vote being no more than four hundred thousand, or in the fact that the will of Parliament was really that of the aristocracy. He was not disturbed by a situation known to everyone, which throughout the eighteenth century gave rise to several plans for reform. Moreover, he himself had no reason to complain of a system that had worked so well for him. Entering Parliament as the representative of the pocket borough of Wendover in the county of Buckinghamshire during the first Rockingham administration, Burke himself was a pure product of Whig patronage. However, his status as collaborator of the prime minister, to whom he was private secretary

before the latter took office, was not enough to secure him a seat. Burke owed his first parliamentary seat to the connections of a member of his family, William Burke, who was close to an Irish peer, Lord Verney, a great landowner in Buckinghamshire and the representative of that county in Westminster. Verney was really the “master” of Wendover. Burke was “reelected” there in 1768, but after the dissolution of Parliament in 1774, Verney, short of money, was forced to put the four seats he disposed of in the county up for sale, including that of Burke, who did not have the means to repurchase his seat. His patron Rockingham came to his aid and offered him the seat of his own “family borough” of Malton in Yorkshire. It was at that point that Burke received the offer of the seat of the capital of the west of England, the city of Bristol.

The Bristol merchants, who dominated local politics, were suffering from the American crisis. In fighting for the preservation of the integrity of the empire, Burke, agent of the colony of New York, showed that he understood the importance of the American connection for the commercial prosperity of Britain.² For the notables of the port of Bristol, reconciling the sovereignty of Great Britain with the needs and rights of the Americans or buying peace in the colonies in order to gain prosperity in their region came to the same thing. Burke, who in his “Appeal to the Electors of Bristol” of October 13, 1774, committed himself explicitly to championing the electors’ interests, was their man.³ But the idyll did not last long: shortly after the founding of the United States, Burke understood that he had lost his chances of keeping his seat in Bristol. When he found he had to look for another constituency in 1780, he fell back on Rockingham’s earlier alternative solution and finally became the member for Malton. It is very likely that if the reform of 1832 had taken place fifty years earlier as Charles James Fox, who was the parliamentary leader of the Whigs, William Pitt the Younger, and Richard Price had wanted, Burke’s parliamentary career, to judge by his inability to take root in Bristol, would have been quite different.

We should now look at Burke’s ideas on representation. His lofty conception of the state and the public good in his speech of November 3, 1774, has been widely praised. “Parliament,” said Burke, “is not a congress of ambassadors from different and hostile interests, which interests each must maintain, as an agent and advocate, against other agents and advocates; but Parliament is a *deliberative* assembly of *one* nation with *one* interest, that of the whole — where not local purposes, not local prejudices, ought to guide, but the general good, resulting from the general reason of the whole. You choose a member, indeed; but when you have chosen him, he is not a member of Bristol, but he is a member of *Parliament*.”⁴ This statement had a clear practical

motive: Burke's wish to limit as far as possible the harmful effects of representation. That was the reason why when in April 1780 Fox went so far as to call for annual elections and an increase in the number of members he found in his path an unyielding Burke. A hundred new members would have enabled the House of Commons to be freed from the influence of those elected in the service of the Crown. In May, during the long debates that took place throughout the spring of 1780, a proposition to that effect was presented to the House with the support of Fox. Burke continued to oppose it energetically.

He believed that "popular election is a mighty evil. It is such and so great an evil that, though there are few nations whose monarchs were not originally elective, very few are now elected. There are the distempers of elections that have destroyed all free states. To cure these distempers is difficult, if not impossible; the only thing, therefore, left to save the commonwealth is to prevent their return too frequently."⁵ Burke wanted a parliament, but one that neither in its recruitment nor in its functioning depended on the will of the voters, however limited the electoral body might be. Once again, he declared his conviction that the British system of representation was "as nearly perfect as the necessary imperfection of human affairs and of human creatures will suffer it to be."⁶ An electoral body as limited as possible, elections as infrequent as possible: that was the way to limit the damage. The system that Burke really favored was that of "virtual representation," which was one of the great principles of his political thought. It was a nonelective form of representation, a representation of society by the established elites, the best elements in the natural order of things. These were the natural leaders of the people and had to speak on its behalf: "Virtual representation is that in which there is a communion of interests, and a sympathy in feeling and desires, between those who act in the name of any description of people, and the people in whose name they act, though the trustees are not actually chosen by them. This is virtual representation. Such a representation I think to be, in many cases, even better than the actual. It possesses most of its advantages, and is free from many of its inconveniences; it corrects the irregularities in the literal representation, when the shifting current of human affairs, or the acting of public interests in different ways, carry it obliquely from its first line of direction. The people may err in their choices; but common interest and common sentiment are rarely mistaken. But this sort of virtual representation cannot have a long or sure existence, it has not a substratum in the actual. The member must have some relation to the constituent."⁷ This "relation" could hardly be distinguished from that which the great Whig noblemen or their clients like Burke had with their rotten boroughs. They had lived in the area for a very long time; they knew its inhabitants, their way of thinking, and their customs; they were

experienced in governing and in the conduct of public affairs. Unlike the mass of illiterates, they were highly educated. Was not governing the natural privilege of this social class that had shown itself so well able to retain possession of its lands and at the same time to appropriate the new surge of economic activity, the product of the early stages of the industrial revolution? Was not the system that allowed Burke to go to Westminster as the member for Wendover and Malton, and to see his son succeed him in Malton in 1794, or permitted Pitt the Elder to enter the House of Commons as the “representative” of Old Sarum, a thousand times better than one that would have forced them to seek the votes of the inhabitants of Sheffield, Birmingham, and Manchester, the great new manufacturing centers, and to be accountable to them or run the risk of being dismissed like domestic servants?

That was the reason why when in May 1782 Pitt the Younger took up an idea proposed by his father twelve years earlier and presented to the Commons a plan for a redistribution of seats, a revision of constituencies, and an enlargement of the electorate, Burke opposed it with all his might. Lord Chatham, the first William Pitt, who died in 1778, saw the representative system as it existed as “the rotten part of the constitution.” His son feared that, if left as it was, the regime, becoming absurd and not merely venal, would end by losing its legitimacy. For how much longer, at a time when universal white male electoral suffrage had become usual in America, would a situation be tolerated where a few hundred especially rich and powerful personalities would control nearly half of the seats in the House of Commons, and where constituencies were bought and sold like a piece of merchandise in the market?⁸

Despite the fact that at this period Fox was secretary of state for foreign affairs in the Rockingham cabinet, he collaborated with the most liberal Chathamites on the projects for political reform. Opposite this liberal wing, Burke, who had been the mentor of the hard faction among the Rockinghamites since his entry into political life, played the role of a doctrinaire adhering to the principles of a hard conservatism. He flatly rejected the modest reforms of the Pitt proposal, dictated by common sense and the inherent logic of the representative system. The aim of these reforms was to eliminate the most glaring abuses, not in the name of equity or natural rights, but simply in order to ensure the smooth functioning of the regime. Price, in fact, said nothing different, but he also brought up the tradition of Locke, which for Burke made the question still more dangerous.⁹

The reform plan of 1782 did not come to fruition, despite the fact that Pitt the Younger became prime minister in 1783. The opposition of the king and the cabinet proved insurmountable, but what especially concerns us here is that, in a matter of prime importance, Burke supported the most antiliberal

positions of the time. Now that it was no longer a question of America or Ireland but, very concretely, a question of the government of Great Britain, he and the antiliberal Whigs whose theoretician he was had nothing to offer except an unshakable attachment to the defense of the established order. Burke's defense of the colonial empire has enabled him to pass for a liberal, for it has not been realized and is still not acknowledged that when he attacked the government of George III on the American and Irish questions, it was not in order to defend the rights of the individual or the rights of man but in order to oppose a policy that Burke deemed disastrous for the nation. In order to snuff out the rebellion in the colonies, in order to avoid the risk of seeing the Catholic question become a danger for the country, a conciliatory policy was needed. Conciliation was a means of preservation in just the same way as, a few years later, war against revolutionary France would also be a means of preservation. The same applied when one came to the question of reform of the parliamentary system. Burke opposed any changes, and in any attempt to improve the situation he saw an attack on the constitution, a sacrilege.

Indeed, all the main themes of *Reflections on the Revolution in France* are already to be found in Burke's speech of May 7, 1782, directed against Pitt the Younger.¹⁰ Burke's reaction to the events of May 1789 could only surprise those who, like Fox, were unable to draw the necessary conclusions from his previous writings and political activities. His style might put one off the scent, but the content leaves no room for doubt: he viewed the British system as a totality, and he fought for the preservation of the existing order for fear that, in view of the influence of the Enlightenment, if one touched any part of the edifice, the entire structure would collapse.¹¹ An extension of the right to vote might make the House of Commons, that exclusive club made up of people of the same milieu, into an institution whose reactions were unforeseeable. Who knows where the process of democratization would end? What would happen if the rotten boroughs disappeared and their seats were given to the industrial towns? Who could foresee, in that age of madness when America was in revolt, and in Paris the intellectual authority had fallen into the hands of the disciples of Rousseau, and in England the reformers were exerting enormous pressures, where the seemingly innocent plans of well-intentioned guileless fellows like Fox and Pitt the Younger would lead to? In the *Reflections*, when he understood the marginality of his position, Burke put forward a theory of the advisability of gradual change, which he reproached the French for not adopting. But during the great British debate on electoral reform, a perfect example of progressive change, he totally rejected any proposal of reform, however slight, for fear that it might affect the system as a whole.

The fact that both Pitts, themselves great beneficiaries of the system, nev-

ertheless thought of broadening the base of political participation, made no difference. While being aware of the deficiencies of the system, Burke always remained true to that form of representation. He is usually praised for his conception of the general interest, worthy of a great statesman, his refusal to submit to pressure groups and local interests, but in fact, in displaying his total independence of his voters, he asserted a principle that he saw as the very foundation of true parliamentarianism. He refused to be accountable; he hardly even agreed to listen. Antiliberal, ferociously antidemocratic, an out-and-out elitist, he considered himself a natural leader, responsible before God and history, but not before actual men living at a particular moment, the one when he held the seat for Bristol in the House of Commons. Each person had his role: the quasi-totality of the population did not count politically, and its role was simply to work and produce—Carlyle, Renan, Taine, and Spengler said much the same with equal conviction. The 2 or 3 percent who were well-to-do and had the right to vote were the people: they had the privilege of recognizing a natural leader and sending him to the House of Commons. These men provided themselves with a master rather than a representative, and as Carlyle, following in the footsteps of Burke, would later say, their sole privilege was that of obeying.

This was the only way to nip in the bud any movement toward democratization and in this way preserve the natural order of things. In order to do this, Burke once again brought up the “Constitution,” in a text of an inimitable style entirely devoted to the good of the people and the greatness of Parliament: “I will not deny that our Constitution may have faults, and that those faults, when found, ought to be corrected; but, on the whole, that Constitution has been our own pride, and an object of admiration to all other nations.”¹² It followed that each element had to be examined in relation to all other parts of the whole. Burke regarded the British system as a living organism: in his view of history, any strain, any modification, like any excision, was comparable to a surgical operation that could endanger the entire body.¹³ Theoretically, he never rejected the idea of an evolution, but when it was a matter of taking practical steps, he never found any fault sufficiently serious to justify an intervention in the smooth functioning of that work of art unique of its kind, the British constitution.

In reality, “constitution” was the code word for the trench warfare that he was to engage in for the rest of his life. To that end, all means were good: now it was no longer only texts, rules, or five-century-old customs that were untouchable but even manipulations of the electoral system that went back only a few dozen years. When they corresponded to Burke’s concern for the conservation of the social and political order, these arrangements also suddenly

assumed a sacrosanct character. In 1716, the Triennial Act of 1694, which limited the duration of parliaments to three years, was abolished, and by the Septennial Act the duration of each session of the House of Commons was extended from three to seven years. Here it was not a matter of habits and rules handed down from the distant past but of arrangements to promote the stability and efficacy of the Commons, the Whig oligarchy's chief means of domination. As seats in Parliament were bought and sold, this reform also aimed at considerably reducing their cost. But the attempts of George III to regain control of Parliament made the great Whig noblemen counter the authoritarian tendencies of the monarch by advocating a more frequent appeal to the electorate. In 1771, Lord Chatham proposed a return to the triennial system, and during the 1770s proposals for the shortening of the duration of parliaments were brought up every year. In 1780 a new motion introduced by John Sawbridge, a Wilkite radical, was defeated after a strong speech delivered by Burke.¹⁴

The profound disagreement between Burke and Fox on the crucial questions of parliamentary representation, the composition of the House, and the way its members were chosen reflected the difference between an authentic Whig, who was liberal and open to the future, and a hard, convinced enemy of the Enlightenment, hostile to any measure to promote a democratization of political life. When the process that put an end to the Old Regime began in France and Burke condemned the action of the Third Estate, he used the same type of arguments in his "Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs" of August 1791 that he had used between 1780 and 1782. "It is current that these old politicians knew little of the rights of men," he told the heirs of Locke. According to him, the philosophy of natural rights was totally alien to the British liberal tradition. In his opinion, the only kind of Whiggism worthy of the name was the one that he himself represented, the one that was true to the "political opinions . . . which our ancestors have worshipped as revelations," whereas the Whiggism of the reformers, of all "those who have coined to themselves Whig principles of a French die," was a betrayal.¹⁵

Burke had no illusions and had a clear understanding of the root of the problem: the driving force behind the reforms was the ideology of the Enlightenment. He said that it was absurd to speak about the British constitution to nine-tenths of the reformers, "for they lay down that every man ought to govern, himself, and that where he cannot go, himself, he must send his representative; that all other government is usurpation, and is so far from having a claim to our obedience, it is not only our right, but our duty, to resist." Burke did not deny the reality; he knew that the House of Commons did not represent the people viewed as a collection of individuals; it was not the result of the

freely expressed right of the individual to procure himself the institutions of his choice: "Nobody pretends it, nobody can justify such an assertion." But, by discrediting the Commons, he said, "the great object of most of these reformers is, to prepare the destruction of the Constitution," or in other words, to prepare the destruction of the political culture of prejudices. In defending this political culture, Burke could only find one argument to use against the reformers: the constitution's quasi-sacred character. "Our Constitution is a prescriptive constitution; it is a constitution whose sole authority is that it has existed time out of mind . . . prescription is the most solid of all titles, not only to property, but, which is to secure that property, to government." The principle of prescription also implied another great principle: "A presumption in favour of any settled scheme of government against any untried project that a nation has long existed and flourished under it." The constitution that existed in Britain, he said, "is a deliberate election of ages and of generations; it is a constitution made by what is ten thousand times better than choice; it is made by peculiar circumstances, occasions, tempers, dispositions, and moral, civil, and social habitudes of the people, which disclose themselves only in a long space of time."¹⁶

As Burke saw it, the House of Commons, the House of Lords, the Crown, and the judiciary were all prescriptive. The powers of the representatives and those of the electors were all defined by prescription, and the existing system was at least five hundred years old. This was obviously quite untrue with regard to the method of election and the distribution of the electoral constituencies, and debatable with regard to the constitutional order resulting from the revolution of 1689. Burke was aware of the far-fetched nature of his argument, and he knew that he defended the established order not because it was established but because the order as it existed reflected his idea of what was politically desirable. He knew that his argument that "your Constitution is what it has been" could only convince those who were already convinced, and would not convince those who rebelled against a system that had fallen so low that the expression "degenerate constitution" was current usage. "To those who say it is a bad one, I answer, look at its effects. In all moral machinery, the moral results are its test."¹⁷ Judged by this criterion, he considered the constitution perfect.

Thus, in the face of a reform movement that was beginning to be of a considerable scale, Burke took the most radical course: he rejected everything. Rejecting everything meant rejecting the ideology of natural rights, rationalism, the autonomy of the individual, optimism, Locke, and the principles of the *Second Treatise*. As any concession could snowball, he launched his campaign with the help of a two-sided argument: first, experience teaches that life

is good in England, and its laws and institutions are envied throughout the world. Second, who can claim that a people's happiness depends on the way its parliament is elected? Are the counties that send representatives to Westminster happier, freer, and wealthier than those that are not represented? Is life better in Stafford than in Newcastle or Birmingham? Are the roads, the canals, the prisons, the police, better in Cornwall or Wiltshire than in industrial Yorkshire? The same themes recur in *Reflections*: "Cornwall elects as many members as Scotland. But is Cornwall better taken care of than Scotland?" To all those who, like Paine, complained of the absurd inequality of a system in which a relatively unpopulated county like Rutland and a rapidly expanding manufacturing center like Yorkshire both sent two members to Parliament, Burke replied, "You have an equal representation, because you have men equally interested in the prosperity of the whole, who are involved in the general interest and the general sympathy."¹⁸ This form of representation was even better, as these men were not bound by the local interests, passions, and cabals associated with representatives in the usual sense of the word. In this way, the general interest was preserved and the health of the social body as a whole was assured. The idea of the general interest does not differ enormously from Rousseau's concept of the general will. There is a general interest independently of the sum of particular interests, and this interest is not discovered or expressed by individuals or their representatives: it is the interest of society constituted as a body. In Rousseau, however, it is obedience to the laws that binds the society together: each citizen participates in their creation. This means that men only obey laws that they have given themselves. In Burke, on the other hand, society is the product of history without any relation to the will of individuals.

That, he claimed, was the reason why nobody in the past had ever sought to pass judgment on the British constitution and "accuse it of every defect and every vice, — to see whether it, an object of our veneration, even our adoration, did or did not accord with a preconceived scheme in the minds of certain gentlemen. . . . It is for fear of losing the inestimable treasure we have that I do not venture to game it out of my hands for the vain hope of improving it." Burke always denied rejecting change, but said that "even when I changed, it should be to preserve," and "I should be led to my remedy by a great grievance." He saw no "grievance" in the British system, however. He accepted in principle the idea of progressive change — for who could theoretically reject any possibility of improvement? — providing these changes took place so slowly that they were virtually imperceptible. This corresponded to his conviction that "a spirit of innovation is generally the result of a selfish temper, and confined views." Whereas the Revolution Society, through Price, condemned a

system of representation whose inequality was a “defect in our constitution so gross and palpable” that it endangered British liberty itself, Burke thought that “our representation has been found perfectly adequate to all the purposes for which a representation of the people can be desired or devised.” Price demanded a “pure and equal representation”; Burke replied that the existing system fulfilled its role perfectly, and it was due to “that old-fashioned constitution” that the country had prospered so long.¹⁹

Contrary to a naïve idea that is very common, Burke was opposed neither to theories nor to abstract and general ideas. He was merely opposed to theories and values not in keeping with his conception of what is politically desirable. That is why he launched his campaign against the Enlightenment many years before the French throne tottered. But the French crisis, precisely because of the archaic character of the political and social structures, filled him with terror. The specter of America returned in all its horror: the aristocracy, in refusing to give up its privileges, set the Third Estate not only against royal despotism but also against the nobility and clergy. We know that Jacques Necker had the secret ambition of setting up a regime as close as possible to that of Britain. But if the *cahiers de doléances* (books of grievances) expressed a desire for liberty in the sense of a rejection of royal despotism common to all social classes, the bourgeoisie regarded equality of rights as inseparable from liberty. From then on, the revolution was to be the conquest of equality of rights.²⁰

The revolutionaries who associated equality closely with liberty also considered rights more important than authority. Burke, for his part, thought authority more important than rights. In his “Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs,” he insisted on the coherence and consistency of his thought. From the very beginning, he was one of the great champions of antirationalism; he detested the rights of man; he feared and despised the masses and admired the “chivalrous” order, or in other words a system based on the domination of an aristocracy of birth. Bourgeois in his economic thinking, he strongly disliked the political and moral ideas introduced by the liberal bourgeoisie, most of all that of equality rights. In this he was truly the first representative of Anti-Enlightenment modernity. Indeed, the idea that one can divest liberalism of its intellectual and moral values while preserving its economic concepts was the basis of the revolutionary Right at the turn of the twentieth century.

In Burke’s time, however, there was as yet no need to cultivate the masses, so that he was able to express his thoughts openly. He called the people “*a swinish multitude*.” Other expressions scattered in his writings and in connection with the French Revolution, especially the execution of the king and queen, give a similar picture. He speaks of “an unthinking and unprincipled

multitude, degenerated even from the versatile tenderness which marks the irregular and capricious feelings of the populace.” The people is a sort of innumerable-headed monster that exercises “the tyranny of a licentious, ferocious, and savage multitude without laws, manners or morals, and which, so far from respecting the general sense of mankind, insolently endeavours to alter all the principles and opinions, which have hitherto guided and contained the world.” That is why he thought that “the French Revolution is the most astonishing that has yet happened in the world,” and the events that took place in Paris signified nothing less than the end of a civilization.²¹

It was a civilization that kept the individual under control: Burke said it a century before Taine. More than by the execution of Louis XVI, Burke was horrified by the autonomy of the individual in all its aspects. In the social sphere, for example, he opposed any reform of the institution of marriage that would weaken parental authority. Here, he showed how any weakening of the structures of obedience and authority in favor of individual liberty threatened to turn society into “a multitude of the profligate and the ferocious.”²² This text dates from 1781. In the political sphere, Burke in 1793 reiterated once again his habitual attacks on the principle of the sovereignty of the people, and on the idea that the Glorious Revolution of 1688 could in any way be compared to the barbarous revolt against all ancient and prescriptive forms of government, that diabolical invention that France owed to Rousseau and that the New Whigs risked importing into Britain. He stigmatized the new forms of political participation that were coming into being as a result of the Parisian horrors. Did one not see isolated individuals—not representatives of organized territorial or professional communities—coming together in clubs and permitting themselves to debate the merits of the British constitution? Tomorrow, would they not impose their will on the government of the realm?²³ Burke readily spoke of “the madness of the common people’s dream that they could be anything without the aid of better fortunes and better heads than their own.”²⁴ There were “different kinds of citizens,” as a result of which social classes were natural and necessary. Thus, “to be attached to the subdivision, to love the little platoon we belong to in society, is the first principle (the germ as it were) of public affections. It is the first link in the series by which we proceed towards a love of our country, and to mankind.” It naturally follows that “in all societies, consisting of various descriptions of citizens, some description must be uppermost. The levellers therefore only change and pervert the natural order of things.” When one allows associations of tailors and carpenters, wig makers and tallow chandlers to govern the state, one commits “the worst of usurpations, an usurpation on the prerogatives of nature.”²⁵

Men, he thought, like animals, are divided into species and classes. Here

Burke gives us a text which has not been noticed by his apologists, but which is of considerable importance for understanding his thought. He rails against “the metaphysical and alchemical legislators” who act without regard for “the different kinds of citizens” and end by confounding “all sorts of citizens . . . into one homogenous mass.” Unlike the devotees of this “metaphysics of an undergraduate” and “mathematics and arithmetic of an exciseman,” the framers of the constitutions of the ancient republics knew that men were divided into groups like “so many different species of animals.” The legislator of ancient times knew that “the coarse husbandman should well know how to assort and use his sheep, horses and oxen, and should have enough common sense, not to abstract and equalize them all into animals, without providing for each kind an appropriate food, care, and employment,” and would have been ashamed if “he, the economist, disposer and shepherd of his own kindred, subliming himself into an airy metaphysician, was resolved to know nothing of his flocks but as men in general.”²⁶

One might think one was reading one of the less sophisticated social Darwinists of the turn of the twentieth century, but this assimilation of the human species to the animal world was made in the context of a reference to Montesquieu, and through him to the ancient republics. From Montesquieu, Burke adopted his praise of class structures, but not his idea that authority should be “distributed” — that is, divided up — and he admired the ancient world for the inequality that prevailed there.²⁷ Moreover, Montesquieu regarded these structures as necessary for democracy, whereas Burke considered democracy a phenomenon against nature. And if Burke sought out the ancient world, it was in order to avoid speaking of the youngest republic where they were trying, precisely, to construct a political order based on the sovereignty of the people. This was taking place in a society in which there was infinitely greater mobility than there was in Europe, and where there was no nobility or aristocracy of birth, only an aristocracy of wealth. The American society that Burke knew was a class society, effective power was in the hands of the elites, but nevertheless, the character of this society was at the opposite extreme from the stratification of the societies in Europe, where inequality, inscribed in customs, usages, and laws, was the basis of the established order. Burke knew this very well, and he eschewed comparisons. Once again, in order to avoid having to face up to the existence of a democratic republic, he behaved as if the United States did not exist. He far preferred to appeal to the authority of Aristotle: had he not said that on many points democracy bore a striking resemblance to tyranny?²⁸

To attempt to get the people to participate in the conduct of public affairs was thus to commit a real crime against God and “nature.” The people must

be held in by the power of social structures and the force of prejudice. The French Revolution was a revolt against prejudice and thus against civilized society, and if such a calamity was possible, Burke said it was because “the age of chivalry is gone. That of sophisters, economists and calculators, has succeeded; and the glory of Europe is extinguished for ever.”²⁹ By the “age of chivalry,” Burke meant a civilization based on values of service, dedication, obedience, proud subordination. It was only in a world in which “that sensibility of principle” was gone, where “a king is but a man, a queen is but a woman,” that the people could presume to “exercise an unnatural inverted domination.” The National Assembly, composed of a mass of “obscure provincial advocates, stewards of petty local jurisdictions, country attorneys, notaries,” “the whole train of the ministers of municipal litigation” and “curates,” was sinking into a state of total decadence. “Flushed with the insolence of their first inglorious victories . . . ,” said Burke, “they have at length ventured completely to subvert all property of all descriptions.” But “it is to the property of the citizen . . . that the first and original faith of civil society is pledged.” No legislative body “had any right whatever to violate property,” for this “robbery,” this “enormous and shameless act of proscription,” is tantamount to setting up “an unheard-of despotism.” “Hereditary property” and birth have the right to “some . . . pre-eminence,” and are a necessary shield against the schemes of the “petulant, assuming, short-sighted coxcombs of philosophy.”³⁰

Since the time of Burke, from the first days of the French Revolution down to the cold war, and, in many respects, down to our own day, the idea that the demand for equality, destructive of the natural and moral order, leads to anarchy has been one of the great constant factors and the main driving force in the thought and actions of all the thinkers of the antirationalist form of modernity. For Burke, as we have just seen, the worst of injustices was power wielded by the multitude, the worst of oppressions was that practiced by the majority: “An absolute democracy” is not “to be reckoned among the legitimate forms of government.” Absolute democracy and democracy-as-such were synonyms for Burke, used without distinction at a distance of a few lines. He claimed that everywhere and always democracy leads to the tyranny of a party. Finally, Burke predicted that if the revolution overcame all the local resistances it provoked, it would “establish a very bad government—a very bad species of tyranny.”³¹ This idea has been repeated, almost word for word, from Renan and Taine to Isaiah Berlin and the other thinkers of the cold war.

Another aspect of the question of inequality was the matter of slavery. The problem of the slave trade reached Burke indirectly, through a debate in the House of Commons on the Royal African Company, whose administrative

practices had been criticized by the parliamentary Commission for Trade and Plantations. The company's practice of using funds given to it by the state for the maintenance of British forts and garrisons on the African coast in order to keep a commercial monopoly came in for special censure. In the course of this debate, the member of Parliament David Hartley, one of the best-known British abolitionists, launched a violent attack on the slave trade. Burke, a great advocate of commercial freedom, made a heated defense of the company, its methods, and the results it obtained. To be sure, he did not disapprove of the proposal of another member of Parliament, Temple Luttrell, who asked for a comprehensive investigation of the matter, and he also thought that the evidence provided by Hartley, who exhibited a pair of handcuffs in the chamber to demonstrate the conditions in which the slave trade was carried on, was sufficiently convincing for the House to consider whether these conditions should not be alleviated. However, he declared: "Africa, time out of mind, has been in a state of slavery, therefore the inhabitants only changed one species of slavery for another." He regretted that in passing from African slavery to European slavery, the change was usually for the worse, which was "certainly a matter of reproach somewhere, and deserved serious consideration."³² This "serious consideration," however, by no means implied the possibility of abolishing slavery and ending the slave trade.

It was the same in his great speech on conciliation with the colonies, where he did not go beyond a simple allusion to this "inhuman traffick." In 1778, he acknowledged that he was not an "advocate" of activities that traded in human beings rather than manufactured goods, but he nevertheless praised the African Company. Two years later, he took it upon himself to formulate a "Negro code," with the aim of humanizing the slave trade. While recognizing that morality and religion required the abolition of the trade, he insisted that such a radical measure could not be undertaken lightly: one would have to wait for a moment when this could be done "without producing great inconveniences in the sudden change of practices of such long standing." Meanwhile, he added, "Taking for my basis that I had an incurable evil to deal with, I cast about how I could make it as small an evil as possible."³³

These texts are interesting in more than one respect. The man who devoted seven years of his career to fighting Hastings, who defended the rights of the Irish, did not refer to slavery more than three or four times. Once, he did agree to do something more, but this was to produce a code for the transportation of slaves that any functionary of the African Company could have drawn up. Burke did not like slavery, but he did not demand its abolition. The slaves were simply unfortunate individuals and not an established community; Africa was not for him, like India, a continent that called to mind customs, elites with

their liberties and privileges, ancient traditions and laws inscribed in a history several thousand years old. Nor was it Ireland, grouped around its churches, eager to defend the rights of a community whose roots went back to the time of the Christianization of Europe. Burke could not conceive of Africa in the same terms: he saw slavery as rooted in ancient custom, and if it disturbed the conscience of the good Christian he was, it was nevertheless part of history and a time-honored practice. It could not be ended in an arbitrary fashion.

Carlyle held a similar view, but expressed in a more modern and hence a harsher manner. For him, slavery as such did not exist. In an important article, "The Nigger Question," devoted to this burning issue at a time when in France the Second Republic was once again abolishing slavery, and when the abolitionists were tremendously active in Britain and the United States, Carlyle sought to demonstrate that the only existing slavery was the one that, by reversing the natural and thus only true hierarchy, made the weak the master of the strong, caused the submission of the great and noble-spirited to the wretched and mediocre, and made wisdom subordinate to foolishness. The great misfortune of his time, he thought, was this inversion of values, which claimed that nothing would be more legitimate than to see Judas Iscariot as the equal to Jesus Christ. With reference to this general principle, Carlyle considered the particular case of "the Negroes." As a human being, he felt the slave trade and the exploitation and oppression of blacks to be repugnant, and he understood the fury of the abolitionists, but to seek an equality of whites and blacks he saw as another form of perversion of the natural order. This was true in the West Indies, as it was everywhere else. No act of Parliament could put an end to slavery, for the simple reason that the subjection of an inferior to a superior being exactly corresponded to a just and proper natural order in keeping with the laws of the universe. Nothing was more untrue than to claim that God had created men equal. Moreover, not only was the fate of a servant for life often more desirable than that of a servant who is engaged by the month, or through a contract that can be canceled the same day, but slavery was not necessarily a condition one could not escape from. On the contrary, a generally recognized price should be fixed that would allow a black slave, through his character, work, and savings, to purchase his freedom. In this way, one would have proof that he deserved it.³⁴

Like Renan and Taine, Carlyle saw imperialism as a blessing. "The Nigger Question" is among other things a panegyric to the civilizing actions of white men. Before Jamaica could produce any plant of value, before the jungle could become arable land, many thousand British had to be buried there. All the riches of the West Indies lay there, buried in the jungles and the marshes, waiting for "the white enchanter who should say to them, Awake!"³⁵

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the extraordinary power of the idea of inequality was revealed in all its plenitude in the thought of Renan. When, in *La Réforme intellectuelle et morale de la France* of 1871, his great pamphlet very comparable in its inflammatory style to Burke's *Reflections* or to de Maistre's *Considerations*, he declared that "equality is the greatest cause of political and military weakening that exists," he was only taking up ideas he had developed for a long time, not only in *La Monarchie constitutionnelle en France*, an essay published in the year preceding the 1870 defeat, but also in *L'Avenir de la science* and his *Histoire générale et système comparé des langues sémitiques*. In the thinking of the Anti-Enlightenment there is a great consistency and an equally great continuity and logic. We saw how Burke, in *Reflections*, did no more than to apply to the situation that emerged in 1789 the principles he had defended ever since his first book and his first political engagement. Similarly, Taine, in *The Origins*, returned to the great themes of his *History of English Literature*, which dates from some time before the fall of the Second Empire. In Renan as well, the positions adopted were not inspired by the dramatic events of 1870. He held, like his predecessors, that "the great virtue of a nation is to support a traditional inequality." That was the secret of "virtuous races" and "feudal races."³⁶

The defeat at Sedan only provided the concrete proof of this reality. Inequality, Renan believed, is the law of the universe: "Not understanding . . . the inequality of races, France has come to conceive of a kind of universal mediocrity as social perfection."³⁷ Renan did not wish to be the spokesman of the bourgeoisie. On the contrary, he detested bourgeois "materialism," and deeply disliked the inversion of values that had taken place in the July Monarchy and then in the Second Empire, that "state of society in which wealth was the nerve center of things," called "plutocracy." Such a social condition was deplorable, not only because in those circumstances "one can do nothing if one is not rich," but also because of the reaction of the poor. One should not conclude from this observation that Renan was interested in the underprivileged for their own sake: it was just that the instability they caused was a mortal danger for society. Precisely because he wished to be the champion of continuity and inequality — inequality in all conceivable forms — he looked for a way of neutralizing the masses. A government of the rich was the worst means possible for accomplishing this. Hence, the inequality he envisaged was one of birth or intellectual ability, not of wealth. Inequality of birth included ethnic inequalities, and the ideal social inequality was one based on a hereditary aristocracy. Renan's definition of liberalism was unambiguous: "A true liberal is not worried that there is an aristocracy above him, even a disdainful one, providing that this aristocracy allows him to work without hindrance at what he con-

ceives as his right. To his mind, there is only one true equality, equality of duty: the man of genius, the noble and the peasant being validated by one and the same thing, and that is virtue.”³⁸

Like Burke, Herder, Carlyle, de Maistre, and Taine, Renan loathed bourgeois and utilitarian values. He said that people had undoubtedly never lived more comfortably than between 1830 and 1848. Can one say, however, that “during this period, humanity was enriched with many new ideas, and that morality, intelligence and true religion made real progress?” What really happened was that the world entered into an “age of decadence.” In 1876, he said, “We live on the shadow of a shadow. From what will they live after us?” The idea that periods of peace are disastrous because nothing great is done in them was common among the thinkers of the Anti-Enlightenment up to the Second World War. Thus, Renan regretted the fate of his generation, which did not have the good fortune to “have a generous struggle on which to exercise its youth.” It was a generation surprised by the slightest rainstorm, whose only horizon and perspective on the future was “timidly to conserve what our fathers have done.” Periods of calm were not entirely without value, but they had “no feeling of militant humanity”; they could produce nothing that approached “the bold creations of those extraordinary times when the elements of mankind in turmoil appear on the surface one after the other.” And finally, “Woe to the generation . . . that thinks life is a rest and art is enjoyment!”³⁹

Of liberalism, though, Renan retained first and foremost the idea of limited government, particularly in economic matters. Thus, in his *Philosophie de l'histoire contemporaine*, an essay inspired by former prime minister and historian François Guizot's *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de mon temps*, Renan took up the classic liberal position and asked “governments . . . to practice laissez-faire.” Later, without mentioning Tocqueville but paraphrasing him, he said: “The tendency to practice much government and revolution are not two contrary things. . . . It is liberty that is the opposite of both.”⁴⁰ However, the liberty referred to by Renan was not the kind envisaged by Tocqueville, who was fascinated by the American experiment. Renan's liberty was the privilege of an aristocracy, whether one of birth or of merit. It was not a natural right as defined by Locke and as practiced by the Americans.

Consequently, Renan believed the decline would continue as long as liberalism was viewed as a political system promoting universal individual rights rather than the right of an intellectual elite to freedom of expression. Freedom was not an end in itself for Renan if the result was to promote mediocrity: “What is the use of being free to speak and write if one has nothing true or new to say? . . . The spirit is never bolder and prouder than when it feels a hand weighing on it a little. . . . We should therefore concentrate on thinking a little

more freely and intelligently and a little less on being free to express our thought." They thought more freely, more boldly in the time of Herder, Goethe, and Kant under an absolute government than in France, "which only understood external liberty, not freedom of thought."⁴¹

Moreover, liberty was not the main factor — it was not even one of the most important factors — in the progress of humanity. Public liberty was guaranteed better in the nineteenth century than it was in the period when Christianity came into being, but if "Jesus appeared in our time he would be sent to a reformatory, which is worse than being crucified. One too easily supposes that liberty is favorable for the development of truly original ideas." In *L'Avenir de la science*, Renan multiplied criticisms of liberalism and made the whole liberal system subordinate to the progress of knowledge: "The most liberal institutions will be the most dangerous as long as what has so well been described as *the slavery of ignorance* will prevail." Or in other words, as long as liberty and reason would depend on "an unintelligent people," liberalism and democracy would have no *raison d'être*.⁴²

Thus, the right to liberty was limited in Renan to that tiny minority on which science, art, and high culture in general depended. It was the function of the elite to maintain "the tradition of a good quality of life" (he used the term "elite" and not "aristocracy," which shows once again the modernity of his thinking).⁴³ In *La Réforme* he devoted several eloquent pages to a defense of the liberty of this elite and proposed a kind of division of labor. Do not interfere with what we think and write, he told the politicians. Leave us the universities, and we shall give you total control of the people and the country schools. Only the intellectual and scientific elite, not the hereditary aristocracy, the landowners, and the moneyed bourgeoisie, were able to lead men to the ultimate goal, "the realization of the perfect." There were very few people who despised the "materialistic age" ushered in by "the rule of business people, industrialists, the working class . . . , Jews" as much as Renan.⁴⁴ He could find no words harsh enough to stigmatize the French aristocracy — that of past centuries as well as that of the restoration of the monarchy in the first half of the nineteenth century — which had failed in its essential duty ("For the nobility, Versailles was the tomb of all virtue") and had not given rise to liberty. In the same context, Renan also settled accounts with Christianity. If it contributed much to the respect for the dignity of man inherent in its doctrines, it did not bring about political liberty. From the fourth century, it forged a close alliance with Roman despotism, and if, from the time of Gregory VII, the Papacy rendered a service to liberty by preventing the formation of excessively strong secular powers, the popes sought to be leaders of Christendom and tried to create a kind of "Christian caliphate."⁴⁵

In his *Philosophie de l'histoire contemporaine*, Renan seemed to take up some of the most advanced aspects of *L'Avenir de la science*. "Liberty," he said, "is at all times the basis of a lasting society." And further on, he said: "Only liberty gives individuals a reason to live, and only liberty prevents nations from dying." In the final analysis, however, Renan's liberalism envisaged liberty as a privilege and not as a value pertaining to natural rights. The liberty desired by Renan, and also by Taine, was not simply a liberty enshrined in history, as has often been said, but one enshrined in a very particular history, that of the Germanic Middle Ages and later of Protestant Europe.⁴⁶ Naturally enough, Renan detested the utilitarian, "materialistic," and individualistic English liberalism of Locke, Bentham, and the two Mills, and felt much closer to Burke.

Against "the eternal French error of a distributive justice whose balance would be maintained by the State," Renan set the example of societies that, like Prussia, his ideal, he saw as "especially noble." In these, he said, the individual was "taken, raised, fashioned, trained, disciplined, and constantly called upon by a society that descended from the past and was molded in ancient institutions." In these communities, where the individual gave a great deal to the state, and where "whole categories were sacrificed" and "condemned to a sad existence without any hope of improvement," "each person on his level was the guardian of a tradition that was important for the progress of civilization." The sacrifice of the mass of people to enable a minority to fulfill its social functions, create civilization, produce its riches, and profit from them was the natural and necessary order of things. Generations of laboring peasants were necessary to ensure the existence of the bourgeoisie, which in turn made possible that of the noble, freed from the material cares of existence and so able to devote himself to the duties of leadership. "Humanity," said Renan, "is a mysterious chain" that democracy can only distort, thus undermining civilization.⁴⁷

Renan never strayed from the idea of the primacy of society, that cardinal principle of Anti-Enlightenment thought. "Nothing in the moral universe is explicable from the point of view of the individual," he said in *L'Avenir de la science*. In a few tightly packed pages, he set forth the essence of his political thinking. The aim of life, he said, is not enjoyment; the aim of society is not happiness, neither that of all nor that of a few; it is not material well-being but "intellectual perfection." Thus the state is not a board of charity but a "machine of progress." The sacrifice of the individual, on the model of ancient sacrifice, that of a man for the nation, is the sine qua non of social organization and the progress of mankind: "A society has the right to what is necessary for its existence, whatever apparent injustice to the individual is the result." It

follows that “inequality is legitimate whenever inequality is necessary for the progress of humanity.”⁴⁸

This position is consistent: equality is only conceivable if the good of the individual is the final objective of all political and social action. But since, in the social sphere, “the individual disappears,” as “the needs of society, the interests of civilization take precedence over everything else,” inequality “is natural and just, if one sees it as the essential law of society, the at least temporary precondition to its perfection.” The only true law that exists “is the progress of humanity. No law overrides this progress, and conversely, progress legitimizes everything.” For that reason, since the freedom of the individual — which means outstanding individuals and not ordinary people — and competition are the precondition for any civilization, “the present injustice is better than socialism’s ‘hard labor.’” Among the inequalities necessary to the progress of humanity — those that are part of “the work of nature and the necessary organization of things” — are the subordination of animals to men, the inequalities that the sexes have “between each other,” and the “hierarchy of men according to their degree of perfection.” Thus, “if it was necessary to the existence of society, slavery was legitimate, for in that case, the slaves were the slaves of mankind, slaves of the divine enterprise.” It was thus once again a form of sacrifice, Renan said twenty years later, to which those whom nature had condemned to inferiority had to submit. “The subjugation of all inferior races” was in any case essential to the civilizing mission of the superior races, for “just as conquests among equal races are to be condemned, so the regeneration of inferior races by superior races is part of the providential order of mankind.” Thus, once again, “the conquest of the country of an inferior race by a superior race which sets itself up there in order to rule it” not only is in no way shocking but also can be for the benefit of humanity. This was the case with the Germanic conquests of the fifth and sixth centuries, and this was the case with India colonized by Britain for the greater benefit of the Indian population, the British, and humanity-at-large. At present, he said, the work of conquest should be continued by the occupation of China. Renan summarized his thinking as follows: “Nature has made a race of workers, and that is the Chinese race, . . . a race of tillers of the soil, and that is the Negroes, . . . a race of masters and soldiers, and that is the European race.”⁴⁹

Even if he thought that slavery in America was “abominable,” he was convinced, like Burke and Carlyle, that blacks could not be treated with more than a minimum of humanity. One had to “behave well toward them,” as animals also had their rights; “one had to console them for the uncouthness nature had forced on them.” Renan maintained, like Carlyle, “that the Negro was created to serve the great purposes willed and conceived by the Whites.”

His obvious conclusion was that “men are not equal; races are not equal”; and “questions of rivalries between races and nations” would long remain central to history, at least in the “parts of Europe that can be called the Old World.” He therefore believed that “in abolitionism there is a profound ignorance of human psychology.” Similarly, he was convinced that, in the future, the “*education of the savage races* would be one of the greatest problems for the European spirit.”⁵⁰

Renan’s view of the social body had two aspects: a determinism still rooted in Herder’s philosophy of history, and then a perspective that already had a clearly biological character. It is no accident that Renan said at the beginning of his study of the Semites that “the Semitic languages must be viewed as corresponding to a division of the human race. The character of the peoples that spoke them is marked in history by traits as original as the languages that served as a formulation and limit of their thought.”⁵¹ This idea was the basis of his explanation of the characteristics of Semitic religion and of the qualities of the different races, Semitic, Germanic, or Celtic, which were responsible for their political peculiarities, the features that distinguished them from one another. There followed a hierarchical and inegalitarian classification of races.

Already in *L’Avenir de la science* Renan insisted on the fact that “the three characteristics that distinguish the Indo-Germanic peoples from the Semitic peoples” are that the Semitic peoples “have *neither philosophy, nor mythology, nor epics*.” Further on, he said, “What a distance there is between this vast divinization of natural forces that is the basis of great mythologies and this narrow conception of a world shaped like a vessel in the hands of a potter. And that is where we have gone to find our theology!” In an essay entitled “*L’Avenir religieux des sociétés modernes*,” published in 1860, Renan continued his attempt to minimize the place of the Jews and the Semites in Western civilization. “From the day they gave the Europeans the Hebrew Bible, from the day they taught Reuchlin and Luther Hebrew, they no longer had any essential task.” This was especially true because, according to him, Christianity was “not the continuation of Judaism, but a reaction against the dominant spirit of Judaism that took place within Judaism itself.” First the Greek and Roman element and then the Germanic and Celtic element took over completely, so that Christianity developed in a direction very remote from its origins. Renan insisted strongly on this point: he adopted the ideas of Friedrich Schleiermacher, who loudly declared that Socrates and Plato were closer to Jesus Christ and the Christians of his time than they were to the Jewish tribes of the time of Joshua and David, or to “the Jews of the Pharisaic line (the true Jews), narrow, hate-filled, driven by a strong spirit of exclusion.” Renan thought that the future development of Christianity should take it further and further from

Judaism, so that “the genius of the Indo-European race would predominate within it.” For the good of civilization, one had to free oneself from the greatest weakness of the Jewish and Muslim societies, which was their inability to conceive of a separation of the spiritual and the temporal, an idea that was “the salvation of Christian Europe” and the basis of liberty. The unity of the two spheres gave rise to theocracy, and these two forms of “Semitic civilization” did not recognize civil government as understood by Christian Europe. For the Jews and the Arabs, government was derived from God, an idea that delivered up the Muslim peoples to despotism and “created the terrible state of society that one has seen in Islam for the past six or seven hundred years.” Theocracy, which ascribes a sacred origin to government, was a “hidden poison” that could only “produce absolutist regimes.” Although Renan thought it would be a mistake to forget the service the Jews and Arabs did for humanity in freeing it from the ancient mythologies, he claimed that “this was a negative service, which only gained its true value through the excellence of the European races.” Islam, “which fell on less fertile soil, was really more harmful than useful to the human race.” Christianity only avoided the danger of the dryness and “disheartening simplicity” of Islam because it was able to oppose the Semitic element, so that this element “was more or less eliminated.” Christianity was saved by the Indo-Europeans; if it is to be free, it will be due to the future that the “Germanic peoples” bestow upon it and to “the invasion of the world by the Anglo-Saxons.” Europe was saved by “the Germanic principle that power . . . is the property of the person who wields it . . . for in this way of seeing things, everything becomes a matter of personal right: everyone has his charter; everyone is a king in his own fortress.” It was the idea of sovereignty conceived in this way that “gave the world liberty.”⁵²

In view of this essay published in a volume intended for the general public, the description of the Semitic race in the first chapter of the *Histoire générale et système comparé des langues sémitiques*, a large, tedious work that is little read but is considered to be Renan’s major achievement, hardly comes as a surprise. Renan said in this work that the Semites were undoubtedly responsible for “at least half of the intellectual achievement of humanity”; “they always had a superior sense of the word *religion*,” but “*science* and *philosophy* were virtually alien to them,” with the result that “the Semitic race, compared to the Indo-European race, really represents an inferior combination of human nature.” The ten or so following pages were devoted to a closely knit analysis of all the faults, weaknesses, and defects of the Semitic race, which Renan summed up in a few clear and unambiguous formulations. He was so convinced of the relevance of his ideas that he reiterated in this book the formulas used in *L’Avenir de la science*: “Thus, the Semitic race is known

almost entirely for negative characteristics; it has neither a mythology, nor epics, nor science, nor philosophy, nor fiction, nor plastic arts, nor civil life; in everything, there is an absence of complexity, of nuance, an exclusive sense of unity." And further on he said: "In all things, the Semitic race seems to us an incomplete race through its very simplicity. If I may say so, it is to the Indo-European family what monochrome is to painting, or what plainsong is to modern music." The Semitic race does not have "that lofty spirituality that only India and Germany have known"; its consciousness is "clear, but not very wide. It understands unity marvelously but cannot attain multiplicity. Monotheism sums up and explains all its characteristics." These characteristics are unalterable, for, like Herder, Renan thought that "a nation's characteristics cannot be changed." Renan's essentially ethnic "philosophy of history" finally nurtured an immense anti-Semitic literature of the century that followed the publication of the work, and his ideas recur sometimes word for word among those of the famous ideologists of anti-Semitism, from Toussenel and Jules Soury to Barrès, Maurras, and Drumont.⁵³

Once again, one sees the great consistency of Renan's thought. "It would be pushing pantheism too far to put all races on an equal footing," he said. The ideas that appear in *L'Avenir de la science* were presented just as forcefully a quarter of a century later in *La Réforme*, in the "Lettre à M. Strauss" of September 16, 1870, and in the "Nouvelle lettre à M. Strauss," published a year later, on September 15, 1871: the idea of the nation was strongly associated with race. Even immediately after the loss of Alsace-Lorraine, Renan did not hesitate to maintain that "nationalities are natural groups determined by the race, history and will of populations." A year later, he went still further: "Indeed, we deny as a fundamental misrepresentation of fact the equality of human individuals and the equality of races. The higher parts of humanity must dominate the lower parts. Human society is a building of several stories where gentleness and goodness must reign (man is bound to this even toward animals), but not equality." That, he said, was why "an irremediable decadence of the human race is possible. The absence of sound ideas on the inequality of races could bring about a total degradation." Within the same race, inequality takes the form of an inequality of classes, which is an "absolute injustice," but this does not apply where the inequality of races is concerned: "Just imagine what the world would be like if it were populated only by Negroes!" Whatever the case, inequality in all its forms "is the secret of humanity's movement, the stroke of the whip that makes the world go forward." It followed that democracy, which denied "the inequality of races and the legitimacy of the rights conferred by racial superiority," was a negation of civilization.⁵⁴

It is clear that at this stage of his development Renan was still close to Gobineau, despite the fact that he tried to obscure his debt to this major ideologist of racism whose influence in France was finally much stronger than is generally admitted. In this Renan differed profoundly from Montesquieu and Tocqueville.⁵⁵ The enlightened view of the factors that mold a society held by the founders of historical sociology was not comparable with Renan's idea when he claimed that "races and climates simultaneously produce the same differences in humanity that time creates in its process of development." For him, the racial factor was decisive, the psychological study of races was of primary importance, and racial characteristics gave rise to political behavior. Renan undoubtedly placed himself in the Herderian tradition when in 1871 he described his state of mind as follows: "There is a view of historical ethnography that dominates my thinking more and more." It was from this perspective that he contemplated the France of the Middle Ages, that "Germanic structure raised up by a Germanic military aristocracy" like the one he so admired and envied in Bismarck's Germany.⁵⁶

In Renan's biological determinism there was, however, a certain duality of thought. In his preface to the *Histoire générale des langues sémitiques*, he noted, "Judgments on races must always be hedged around with many restrictions: the primary influence of race, however tremendous a role may be ascribed to it in human affairs, is counterbalanced by a mass of other influences that sometimes seem to dominate or even completely extinguish that of race."⁵⁷ Whatever his classification of races may have been, whatever meaning he gave to the term "civilization," which to some extent corresponded to that of "race," one thing is certain: Renan was always profoundly convinced of human inequality.

The defeat of France in 1870, however, forced him to adopt a somewhat different attitude. Thus, his famous lecture of March 11, 1882, entitled "What Is a Nation?" became the manifesto of a liberal nationalism at the opposite pole from Renan's previous positions: "The fact of race, all-important at the beginning, thus increasingly loses its importance. . . . Race, as we historians understand it, is thus something that comes and goes. The study of race is of primary importance for the scholar dealing with the history of humanity. It has no application in politics."⁵⁸ Indeed, in view of the necessity of confronting Germany with principles different from those of the history, culture, and traditions of the victors of the Franco-Prussian War, Renan, responding to the demands of the hour, retraced his steps. He now assumed the role of the natural spokesman of a France that in the face of a victorious Germany had only the principles of 1789. He still admired Germany, the land of an aristocratic and authoritarian Old Regime, just as he did in the darkest days of

1871, but he did not wish to become an émigré in his own country. Faced with the cultural and intellectual determinism on which the German intellectuals based their annexation of Alsace-Lorraine, Renan fell back on peoples' right to self-determination. The first signs of this evolution can already be found in the "Nouvelle lettre à M. Strauss," but it is only in "What Is a Nation?" that this new direction was clearly stated. Renan accepted the republic out of patriotism, for in the historical situation of the 1880s, to involve the republic in a new foreign war or a civil war would have meant hurting France badly. Whereas Nietzsche, out of a horror of democracy, detested nationalism, Renan, out of nationalism, reconciled himself to the Third Republic but never accepted democracy.

"Enervated by democracy, demoralized by its very prosperity, France has expiated its years of straying in the cruelest manner." These are the opening words of Renan's *Réforme*. Renan thought that the defeat of 1870 provided the definitive proof that was hitherto lacking: with that defeat, France paid the price for the Enlightenment and democracy. If Rousseau and the French Enlightenment were the background for that disaster, the 1848 February "crime" — here Renan quoted the philosopher Victor Cousin — the universal suffrage bestowed on France, which never asked for it, by the revolutionaries, and a few months later the workers' revolt, "the baptism of blood of the days in June," created a situation in which "the soul and spirit of France were clearly imperiled." That is how the Second Empire came into being, of which Renan said: "That miserable government was undoubtedly the result of democracy. France wanted it; it took it out of its own innards. The France of universal suffrage will never have any that is much better."⁵⁹

In several pages of scathing criticism, Renan passed judgment on the vision of society formulated by the French Enlightenment and the French Revolution, by the school of natural law and the rights of man, and by the whole of the political tradition to which he gave the name of democracy: "A country is not merely the sum of the individuals that compose it: it is a soul, a consciousness, a person, a living outcome." It needs "a head that watches over things and thinks while the rest of the country is not thinking and scarcely feels." This, he felt, was something that universal suffrage was never capable of providing: the fortuitousness of birth was always "less than the fortuitousness of elections. Birth generally brings with it the advantages of education and sometimes a certain superiority of race." The most mediocre man was better than "the collective outcome of thirty-six million individuals, each of whom counts as a unit." Therefore, a country that had no outlet other than "direct universal suffrage" would be "an ignoramus, an ass, unable to decide on any question wisely."⁶⁰

In this matter, Renan made statements that recall not only Burke and de Maistre but also Treitschke. The German nationalist historian explained the refusal of imperial Germany to take the wishes of the populations annexed in 1870 into account as follows: against the wishes or interests of a majority of the living, he invoked the past generations, history, culture, the objective will of the nation as a body.⁶¹ Renan expressed himself in a similar way, applying this principle to politics in general: "The main thing is not that a particular desire of the majority should be fulfilled: the main thing is that general interest of the nation should triumph. The numerical majority may want injustice, immorality; it may want to destroy its own history, and when that happens, the sovereignty of numbers is quite simply the worst of errors."⁶² These ideas, which Burke and Carlyle expounded and which Maurras and Croce were to take up with the same conviction, became commonplace at the end of the nineteenth century.

Here it is necessary to point out once again that Renan's duality was a matter of circumstance and not of principle. Already in 1869, before the Franco-Prussian War, he attacked the ideological trend which threatened to carry the day, and which he described, as always, as the "democratic spirit." By this he meant "the idea of equal rights for all, the way of viewing government as a mere public service that one pays for, and to which one owes neither respect nor gratitude, a sort of American impertinence, the pretension . . . of reducing politics to a simple consultation of the will of the majority." To reduce the principle of government to "what the greatest number considers its interest" was to embrace a "materialistic conception," something especially loathsome. The state, he said, is not "just an institution for policing and public order. It is society itself: that is, man in his normal condition. . . . It must not just leave things alone; it must provide man with the means for his improvement." The state has duties: "it is an instrument of progress," but it is neither a charitable institution nor a hospital. It must enable society to achieve its goal, which is "the full and complete realization of all facets of human life." For this, a collective effort is necessary. The state has to be "a truly directive force," he wrote in *L'Avenir de la science*.⁶³

After the defeat, with the perspective provided by the passage of a quarter of a century, Renan was still more explicit. He saw two different political cultures. Comparing France and Prussia, he deplored "the tendency of French liberalism to diminish the State for the benefit of individual liberty." Renan regarded victorious Prussia with envy and wished that France could imitate it, although he was fully conscious of the price to be paid: "The State in Prussia was far more tyrannical than it ever was with us: the Prussian, raised, disciplined, sermonized, instructed, regimented and always watched over by the

State, was much more governed (and no doubt much better governed) than we ever were, and he never complained." Thus, in a time of crisis, the truth revealed itself: "All our weaknesses had a deeper cause, a cause that has not disappeared: ill-understood democracy. A democratic country cannot be well governed, well administered, well ordered." Democracy gives rise to mediocrity: "France, as a result of universal suffrage, has become deeply materialistic. The noble concerns of the France of yesteryear — patriotism, the enthusiasm for excellence, the love of glory — have disappeared with the aristocratic classes that represented the soul of France."⁶⁴

The reason for this was simple: only elites could govern. The common mass, he said, was "heavy, vulgar, dominated by the most superficial view of interest." Its two constituents were the worker and the peasant. The worker was not educated, and the peasant thought of nothing but the purchase of land. Neither of them understood when one spoke to them of France's past, of its genius, of military honor, of the taste for greatness. Both of them cared very little about science and art. An "extraordinary awakening of material appetites that had taken place among the workers and peasants" was paralleled by a "bourgeois materialism that only asked to quietly enjoy its accumulated wealth." The result was a "pure political materialism" rooted in "simple bourgeois platitudes," and in this way "the tradition of a national politics" was being lost in France throughout the nineteenth century. Finally, "While we carelessly descended the slope of an unintelligent materialism . . . the old spirit of what we call the Ancien Régime was alive in Prussia, and in many respects in Russia as well." It was Prussia, "preserved from industrial, economic, socialist and revolutionary materialism, that overcame the virility of all the other peoples."⁶⁵

Renan regarded the feudal regime as the ideal one, and monarchy as the natural regime for France, and indeed for all civilized societies. The whole of his essay *La Monarchie constitutionnelle* and several significant pages of *La Réforme* were devoted to defending this idea. What Renan envisaged was not a monarchy that was a sort of "hereditary presidency" but a monarchy that was "a divine manifestation for those who believe in the supernatural, and a historical manifestation for those who do not."⁶⁶ This monarchy was hereditary, it "did not come out of a town hall," it embodied "the genius and interests of the nation" and was the actualization of a historical right. A "philosophical and historical right (or a divine one, if you will)" meant that "social authority is not wholly derived from society." This idea was of great importance. Renan wished to say that there were norms and laws created by history, a body of rules of behavior called "rights" that "the nation has to follow." Here he strongly asserted the primacy of history over reason. He did not easily resign

himself to the use of the adjective “divine,” which he put in parentheses, and which he described as “an unfortunate expression” brought into vogue by “the publicists of fifty years ago.” But, apart from that, Renan joined forces with Burke and anticipated Maurras. He agreed with them on the main point: the necessity of waging war on “the crude and superficial philosophy” of the rights of man, which ultimately led to the suppression of monarchy. All the thinkers of the Anti-Enlightenment were equally convinced that the source of the evil was this “materialist philosophy,” which rendered the monarchy redundant when it was a *sine qua non* of national greatness.⁶⁷ In 1792, the revolutionary government revolted against the institutions that assured the continuity of “good things” that, although they were privileges, were nevertheless “organs of national life,” like the “feudal towers” that “were an inheritance of the whole of society.” In so doing, the revolutionaries rejected “all traditional subordinations, all historical pacts, all symbols. Monarchy was the first of these pacts, one going back a thousand years: a symbol that the puerile philosophy of history then in vogue was unable to understand.”⁶⁸

This Burkian idea of a historical contract that the human will could not annul was still considered by Renan to be the height of wisdom, as it would be by Maurras and his school. Just like Burke and de Maistre, Renan embraced “the idea of the Middle Ages that the more ancient a pact was, the more it was worth.” Just like his British predecessor but using the concepts of his time, he condemned the contemporary positivism that rejected metaphysics, and he refused to acknowledge that the fundamental pacts of a society, those that assured its perpetuity, were “independent of the will of individuals, pacts transmitted and received from father to son like an inheritance.”⁶⁹

Renan’s ideal was not, however, an absolute monarchy on the French model: far from it. Like Carlyle, he was under the spell of the German and Protestant heritage, to which he opposed the French Catholic, authoritarian form of monarchy. Impelled by “its taste for uniformity and the theocratic tendency that Catholicism has within it,” France produced that “thing against nature in Christian Europe . . . that Oriental despot, that anti-Christian king,” Louis XIV. Although he did not deny that the Old Regime was deeply guilty, he nevertheless abhorred the murder of Louis XVI that ended the “holy fable” of “the great Capetian monarchy.” The killing of the king was “the most hideous act of materialism” that could be imagined: coming from Renan, this was the supreme insult. His ideal, like that of Herder and Carlyle, was the individualistic and free feudalism that, as Carlyle also believed, finally gave rise in Britain to the parliamentary regime and the separation of powers. “The spirit of the Germanic peoples,” he said, taking up an idea that originated with Herder, “was the most absolute individualism. . . . The final outcome of this principle

was feudalism.” The France of the Middle Ages was also a Germanic construction: its military spirit derived from its Germanic character. Since that time, France had made a great effort to rid itself of all the elements bestowed by the Germanic invasion, “up to the Revolution, which was the last convulsion of that effort.”⁷⁰

Disdaining its Germanic heritage, France wished to annex Languedoc and Provence, and it wanted to remain Catholic. It never ceased paying the price for this double catastrophe. “Our racial foundation is the same as that of the British Isles,” said Renan. If it was Protestant and was freed from the influence of the Mediterranean South, it could have remained a serious, active nation, and could finally have produced a parliamentary regime. Moreover, Catholicism, that other major source of weakness, “causes transcendent mysticism to flourish side by side with ignorance. It has no moral efficacy; it has disastrous effects on the development of the mind. . . . Supernatural beliefs are like a poison that kills if one takes too strong a dose of it. Protestantism mixes a certain amount in its beverage, but the proportion is small and is therefore beneficial.” Seeing Herder, Kant, and Fichte, who said they were Christian, Renan expressed a wish to resemble them but asked, “Can I do so within Catholicism?”⁷¹

The decadence produced by the dilution of the Germanic element caused harm in England as well. How far off was the obstinate, intractable, proud nobility of those men of iron Pitt, Castlereagh, Wellington! How different was the England of those days from that of “the pacific and very Christian school of economists” that dominated public opinion in the second half of the nineteenth century! It was the “Celtic spirit” that had gained the upper hand: softer, more likable, more human, it lacked the quality of greatness. This tendency was disastrous, especially as only the feudal and military “Germanic race” was capable of overcoming democracy and socialism. In moments of pessimism, Renan found even the prospect of saving Europe through a Germanic revival problematic: “A series of unstable dictatorships, the Caesarism of a low period: that is all that seems to have any chance in the future.”⁷²

However, even the absolute, Catholic type of monarchy was preferable to mediocre and leveling democracy, to the salon culture that gave rise to a feeling of “civilization despair,” to the “nullity of bourgeois life,” especially in the provinces. Nothing was lower than the “vulgar bourgeois.” Thus, France had a special place in relation to England, where feudalism and Protestantism had invented a parliamentary system, and to Prussia, to which feudalism and Protestantism gave the individualism of the old nobility and the independence and might of a military aristocracy. Renan thought that in many ways France was the victim both of the bitter war on local authorities and provincial liber-

ties waged since the time of Philip the Fair and his jurists, who based themselves on Roman law in the fourteenth century, and of the Renaissance, which brought about a return to antiquity in politics, as in other spheres. If the tendency that drove France toward “a despotic conception of the State” had become universal, liberty “would have been lost forever.” It was the “vigorous reaction” of “the countries where the Germanic element was dominant” that had saved Europe.⁷³

Carlyle, that other great contemporary who never tired of praising the virtues of Germany, saw the victory of Prussia as a victory over anarchy, and Bismarck’s policies and achievements as an opportunity for France and an extraordinary lesson for the whole world. He believed it was only right that “noble, patient, deep, pious and solid Germany” should become “Queen of the Continent,” and he viewed this victory over “vapouring, vainglorious, gesticulating, quarrelsome, restless and over-sensitive France” as the most hopeful event that had occurred in his lifetime.⁷⁴ One sees that the admiration for Germany of the great critics of the Enlightenment seldom wavered.

Renan was hurt, after 1870, by Treitschke’s arrogance and David Strauss’s scarcely moderated pan-Germanism, and he called for “the reconciliation of the two halves of the human spirit,” France and Germany, but his Germany, he said, was that “personified by the genius of Goethe.” “Nobody has loved and admired” that “great Germany more than I,” he wrote to a German correspondent in 1879. “Germany was my mistress,” he declared once more in his preface to *La Réforme*, but here again, the Germany he loved was “the land of Kant, Fichte, Herder, Goethe.”⁷⁵ And yet he felt he had to accept the divine judgment manifested at the battle of Sedan: the French defeat represented the victory of a feudal, military political culture that Renan extolled, but at the same it was the defeat of his country. The dilemma faced by the French enemies of the Enlightenment can be seen here for the first time. The second time was in 1940: for them, it was not an ill-prepared and badly commanded army that was defeated, but democracy, universal (male) suffrage, liberalism, and utilitarianism. It was the defeat of Rousseau, of the encyclopédistes, of the revolutionary philosophy, of individualism, of the idea that society is simply a collection of individuals, and the state a tool in the hands of the individual. According to Renan, the revolutionary mechanism set in motion in 1789 resulted in 1830, and especially in February and June 1848. The popular masses saw no reason to set aside the great demand for equality the moment the bourgeoisie’s aspirations had been satisfied. Soon property itself was questioned and its legitimacy challenged.

Consequently, from that time onward, Renan devoted all his energies to opposing the evil responsible for the decomposition of French society: “The

mechanical materialism of the scholars of the eighteenth century seems to me one of the greatest errors one can make." For the rejectionists of the Enlightenment, to liberate the individual from history and culture was a sin against civilization: that was why Renan was filled with admiration for "nature, which deceives individuals for the sake of an interest that transcends them." The desegregation that followed the Declaration of the Rights of Man, individualism, the fall of the elites and the transfer of power to a new set of people lacking the capacity to rule a great country was the beginning of the modern decadence. The "geometrical" spirit that governed the principles of 1789, the rebellion against history, egalitarianism were a pure negation of the natural order. The organicism promoted by Renan was the only basis on which a healthy society could be constructed: the philosophy of the Enlightenment was the opposite. Its idea of progress, its demand for happiness were at the opposite extreme from Renan's view of the forces that drive men forward: "The great agent of the world's progress is pain. . . . Well-being only gives rise to inertia; discomfort is the principle of movement. Only pressure makes water rise, directs it. . . . What can be said of an animal prototype can be said of a nation, a religion, of every great living thing. It can also be said of humanity, of the whole universe." Renan was fond of comparisons with the animal world, with all the consequences they entail: "Absolute equality is as impossible among mankind as absolute equality among the species of the animal kingdom."⁷⁶

In almost the same terms as Carlyle, Renan said that the idea that "society only exists for the well-being and liberty of the individuals that compose it" was "a miserable contradiction" opposed "to the designs of nature." Nature "sacrificed whole species so that others could find the proper conditions to live." That was why "sectarian and jealous democracy" was "at the opposite extreme from the ways of God." "The objective to be pursued by the world, far from leveling outstanding persons, must on the contrary be the creation of gods, superior beings, whom the other conscious beings will worship and serve, and be happy in serving them." "The redeemer, the Messiah, cannot come out of a country given over to egoism and base enjoyment." Without the slightest hesitation, Renan repudiated in his *Dialogues*, written in 1871 and republished in 1876, the convictions he held in 1869, when he still accepted "the philosophical principle that every man has the right to enlightenment." As a result of the feelings of terror aroused in him by the 1871 Paris Commune, which he saw as democracy-in-action, he wished to leave the masses in ignorance, "for it is to be feared that a population that has received primary education . . . will not want . . . to accept masters." But "the aim of humanity," he said, "is to produce great men. There can be nothing without great men; salvation will come through great men. The work of the Messiah, the libera-

tor, will be accomplished by a man, not by the masses." Like Carlyle, he thought that "we must conceive of these future masters as incarnations of the good and the true; it will be a joy to subordinate ourselves to them." That is why "it would be absurd and unjust . . . to impose on men by a sort of divine right masters who would in no way be superior to themselves." In order to obtain results comparable to those produced by the Germanic conquest, this elite would have to be created by "improved methods," and then "this superiority of race" would "once again become real." Already in *L'Avenir de la science* Renan claimed that great men "give a language and a voice to the mute instincts which, bottled up in the crowd . . . seek expression," and that, serving as scouts for the great army of humanity, in their "nimble and adventurous" way forward, they catch sight of "smiling plains and lofty peaks" ahead of others. Therefore, "since God did not wish all to live the true life of the spirit to the same degree," in the natural order of things "the other conscious beings would worship and serve" these "superior beings."⁷⁷

Renan drew the practical consequences of this theory in *La Réforme*: "The reason necessary to govern and reform a people cannot emerge from the masses. Reform and education must come from a force that has no interest other than that of the nation, while being distinct from the nation and independent of it." Rebelling against the divine will ("All conscious beings are sacred but they are not equal"), democracy, a pure product of the Enlightenment, consecrated the victory of the exorbitant pride of rationalism. Committing oneself to the sovereignty of the people is "the error that weakens a nation the most."⁷⁸ Renan never ceased to prefer the government of a single person, providing he was worthy of it, to that of the majority. "An assembly is never a great man," he said, and he added in the same breath, "One needs a permanent aristocratic center preserving art, science and taste from democratic and provincial boorishness," for "since the masses are blind and unintelligent, to depend only on them is to go from civilization to barbarism." On innumerable occasions, Renan returned to this favorite theme of his. He lashed out at "the low thoughts of a materialistic crowd, uniquely concerned with its gross appetites."⁷⁹ In its essence, the antidemocratic argument remained the same from the end of the eighteenth century onward.

It was also democracy that produced the two French military dictatorships. Renan thought that Napoleon's dictatorship was one with the French Revolution, and the Second Empire was one with the Second Republic: it was not the external clothing of a regime that counted but its internal structure. The two empires were the product of what Renan described as democracy and materialism. The two dictatorships had their origin not in coups d'état but in one form or another of the popular will. It was this principle that was defeated

in 1815 and 1870, and this was the proof that democracy was the opposite of the principles on which the political structures that assure national greatness can be based. Democracy neither disciplines nor instills morality: on the contrary, it is a negation of discipline; it will never make war. War is “a good criterion of what a race is worth.” Similarly, democracy will never give sufficient authority to scholars, and it is in fact a negation of intellectual labor. Finally, “Democracy is the strongest solvent of all virtue that the world has known up to the present.” That was why decadence was inevitable: not only France but the entire world, with the exception of Prussia and Russia, were “taking this path of materialism more and more”; France “was getting flabby and was losing its ancient vigor.” In this way, “the era of mediocrity in all things” had begun.⁸⁰ The Franco-Prussian War was the proof of it. Prussia’s victory was the victory not only of science and reason but also that of “the Old Regime, of the principle that denies the sovereignty of the people and the right of populations to decide their fate,” ideas that “far from strengthening a race, disarm it.”⁸¹

That is why the problem still remained. If Aristotle was right and there were really two kinds of men, “those who have their *raison d’être* in themselves and those who, having their *raison d’être* outside themselves . . . are *slaves by nature*,” the successes of democracy are “conquests of the spirit of evil, the triumph of the flesh over the spirit.” To prove Aristotle wrong, to show that “an undeniable progress has invalidated this aristocratic theory,” and that “all men have the principles of morality within themselves,” one had to “educate the people,” for if one did not raise the intellectual level of the people soon, one would find oneself “on the eve of a terrible barbarism.” Those who wanted to preserve the people in its present state should beware, for “one day, the beast could pounce on them.” In concrete terms, “universal suffrage will only be legitimate when all of us have that degree of intelligence, in the absence of which we do not deserve to be called men.” But since the people had not attained, and probably would not attain in the foreseeable future, a cultural level that would enable democracy to be something other than a return to barbarism, the practical conclusions remained unchanged. This question broached in 1849–1850, twenty years before the Paris Commune, remained one of Renan’s principal political preoccupations, if not the main one. In his preface to the 1890 edition of *L’Avenir de la science*, he described the effect upon him of the coup d’état of 1851, “making me disgusted with the people, whom on the second of December I saw reacting in a bantering way to the signs of mourning of the good citizens.” The bottom line was that “the masses only have the right to govern if they know better than anyone else what is best. The government *represents* reason, God, if you wish, . . . but not a mere

number.” This meant that “governing for the sake of progress” was “governing by divine right.” That, he said, was why “I will never recognize the sovereignty of unreason,” reaching the conclusion that “mankind will need to be done good to despise itself for a long time to come.”⁸²

From the first edition of *L'Avenir de la science* to his preface to the 1890 edition, Renan was consistent in this matter. In 1848, in a few pages that represented the core of his political thought, he formulated the principles from which he never diverged: “The aim of humanity is not to allow individuals to live at ease, but . . . for perfection to take on flesh.” For that reason, if liberty and equality are viewed as natural rights when the organization of society is regarded as a tool in the hands of the individual, that is not the case at all when seen from the only point of view that matters, that of the interests of civilization: “From the point of view of the species, government and inequality are in agreement. Some brilliant personification of humanity — the king, the court — is better than a general mediocrity.” The age of Louis XIV, whom Renan did not like, and whom, as we have seen, he did not hesitate to criticize severely, was nevertheless preferable to a state “where all interests would be assured, all liberties would be respected, and everyone would live at ease.” That civilization was very open to criticism, but it produced “the great marvel of royal France, Versailles.” Forty years later, in the text in which he summed up his thought, Renan insisted on the fundamental unity of his work: “Inequality is inscribed in nature. . . . A State that would give the greatest possible happiness to the individual would probably be, from the point of view of the noble pursuits of mankind, a State of profound degradation.”⁸³

Hatred of the people was again expressed in the first and most famous of his philosophical dramas, *Caliban*. The revolution in Milan that made Caliban its leader illustrated the bankruptcy of all previous revolutions from 1789 to 1871, including those of 1830 and 1848. Two classical themes of Renan’s political thought are to be found in this drama, in its scathing and cruel style, with regard to the people: the people of Milan demanded equality and rebelled against the natural order of things in which the rights of the best, strongest, and most intelligent are affirmed.⁸⁴ Like the thinking of Burke and Taine, and like that expressed in a more radical way by Carlyle (who nevertheless showed compassion for the sufferings of the masses of the population), Renan’s thinking was dominated by a fear of the people.

Renan’s philosophy of history was a source of inspiration for the rebels of the turn of the century. Certain aspects of his work were criticized, but the work of Barrès, Édouard Drumont, Maurras, Jules Soury, and Paul Bourget sprang up in a soil well prepared by Renan and Taine. Moreover, the rebels of that period were aware of it. The debt to Renan of all the political movements

based on the rejection of the rights of man, French anti-Semitism in particular, is indisputable. Ferdinand Brunetière already charged Renan with “being, in the second half of the nineteenth century, one of the patrons and instigators of anti-Semitism,” worse than Voltaire, for, as a linguist and ethnographer, he “sought to turn the differences between the Aryan and the Semite into oppositions, incompatibilities and basic, irreducible hostilities.” Brunetière continued, quoting Renan at length: “The Jew, until our time . . . *wanted the advantages of a nation without being a nation, without having the responsibilities of a nation.*” And, further on: “The regime of the ghetto is always deadly. The practices of Pharisaism and Talmudism made this reclusive regime the natural state of the Jewish people. *The ghetto, for the Jewish people, was less a restraint imposed from outside than a consequence of the Talmudic spirit.*” Brunetière drew the obvious conclusion: “The writer of *la France juive* never said anything else.” Indeed, it would be difficult to imagine the success of the anti-Semitic movement in France, of Drumont, Barrès, and Maurras, down to the racial laws of October 1940, without the respectability that Renan gave to the idea of the inequality of races and the inferiority of the Semites.⁸⁵

Brunetière thought that, in the final analysis, “one could hardly imagine a more ferocious conception of history,” and “contempt for humanity has never been expressed more cynically” than in the work of Renan.⁸⁶ In an opposing assessment, in a chapter in his *Essais de psychologie contemporaine* entitled “The Aristocratic Dream of Monsieur Renan,” Paul Bourget, a famous writer and a follower of Maurras, was enthusiastic about *La Réforme*, which he called “the strongest case that has been made in the last hundred years against democracy,” and about the *Dialogues*, which, he said, “contain a complete plan for the subjection of the majority to an elite of thinkers.”⁸⁷ From Burke, who constantly attacked Voltaire’s and Rousseau’s “party of humanity,” to Renan and to Bourget’s generation of the turn of the twentieth century, a hatred of the people remained one of the major features of Anti-Enlightenment thought.

Carlyle shared Renan’s contempt for the man of the people, and had a similar cult of the superior individual. Moreover, he shared with him an infinite admiration for Germany. The writer of essays on Jean Paul, Goethe, Schiller, and Frederick the Great among others, and the translator of Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister*, Carlyle showed a fascination with Germany from the beginning of his career, and was the greatest admirer of German culture that Britain ever produced. No nineteenth-century Englishman was as much influenced by Fichte, Goethe, Novalis, and German Romanticism in general as Carlyle was. Taine claimed that with him the ardor of a novice often resulted a lack of clear-sightedness, especially with regard to Goethe, whose paganism must have

been disturbing for a Puritan, and that in the case of Jean Paul, that “affected buffoon” whom he made out to be a giant, it verged on the ridiculous.⁸⁸ A well-known writer in his time, Johann Paul Friedrich Richter was no buffoon, and Herder, for example, to whom he was relatively close, was undoubtedly well aware of it. It was this intellectual milieu that gave rise to Carlyle. Even in France, of which, like Herder, he was a harsh critic, often ridiculous in his unfairness (for he regarded that country as a concentration of all possible evils), he was very soon accepted.⁸⁹ Famous in Germany, he also rapidly became well known in the United States, particularly in the South, where, as the Civil War approached, his notoriety increased. His *The French Revolution: A History* became a model for both Michelet and Taine, although neither of them acknowledged it. His most important works were rapidly translated, and an impressive bibliography built up.

What was the cause of Carlyle’s enormous popularity? His success can be explained less by the intrinsic quality of his work than by the fact that its nonconformist character corresponded to the aspirations of a very large part of the educated public. His period of activity was that between the two Reform Bills, that of 1832 and that of 1867, which progressively set the rotten political system of the old England celebrated by Burke on the path to democratization. It was in London, the capital of the first industrial power in the world, where under the intellectual influence of John Stuart Mill and Macaulay, the heritage of Locke and Bentham was beginning to be translated into the practical terms of universal male suffrage, and at the time when the British proletariat, the largest and best organized in Europe, was beginning to reap the first fruits of its long struggle for equal rights, that Carlyle launched his attack. The triumphal reception that the British public gave his great historical work, *The French Revolution*, published in 1837, made his reputation, which was not the case with his first books, his *Life of Schiller* (1823–1824) and his semiautobiographical *Sartor Resartus* (1833–1834), where the seeds of most of the ideas he later developed are already to be found.

In *Sartor Resartus*, the German professor Teufelsdröckh, who was Carlyle disguised as a philosopher of clothes, regarded all that exists, all human institutions, and men themselves as garments or visible symbols of the inner reality of the world. That was why clothes had to be kept in good condition. A worn piece of clothing, for instance, the nineteenth-century Protestant Church, the garment without which the social body—the body described by Carlyle in this book—would crumble into dust, needed reform, as happened to the Catholic Church in the sixteenth century. In other words, the “garment” had to correspond to the needs of actual life.

The novelty of his language, inflammatory, picturesque, and eccentric in the

extreme, played a role in the curiosity that surrounded the series of lectures given by Carlyle in 1840 on his theory of the hero, which was also his conception of the universe. However, contrary to what was often thought in the aftermath of fascism, it was not the appeal of his style or the moralizing tone (common enough, after all, in Victorian England) that gave him his success.⁹⁰ Carlyle's fame was due not to his extravagance but to his dark prophecies of the decline of Christian civilization, to the radical nonconformism of his thought, and to his contempt for the rights of man, or, if you will, his uncompromising revolt against the principles dear to the Enlightenment. At the time when nineteenth-century Britain seemed to be celebrating the triumph of the scientific spirit, liberal rationalism, and the principles of utilitarianism, Carlyle proposed a return to faith and religion as a social force. Far from being an anachronism, Carlyle's mysticism presaged things to come, and his antirationism looked forward, like Burke's, to the future. His success was very comparable to that of Spengler.

Thus, just when, in the decades following the French Revolution, the idea of a world without God was gaining ground and political equality was beginning to become a reality, just when the first organized labor movement, Chartism, was waging the struggle for civil rights, the British educated public gave an ovation to the greatest enemy of democracy that Britain had known since Burke. His great political essays, some of the most significant of which were written in the aftermath of 1848,⁹¹ promoted the classical themes of "blocked" liberalism: the rejection of democracy, the call for government by an elite of talent and intelligence (ideas taken up by Renan and Taine and followed by all the Maurrasians), scorn for a dried-up aristocracy corrupted by money, the cult of the Middle Ages (the heroic period of Europe), and the cult of the great man, or "Captain." These themes were accompanied by a hatred of American democracy, industrialism, and "materialism," and an idea that, after its eclipse in the eighteenth century, was to have a great future: that of natural slaves.

Taine showed that, through this "herald of German literature," "German ideas were able to become English." It is true that Taine considered this transformation almost a natural one, so much did "the religion and poetry of the two countries correspond to one another," and so much, as a result, were "the two nations like sisters." He felt that "Carlyle's mysticism had the same kind of power" as that of Shakespeare, Dante, Saint Paul, and Luther; he "translated German philosophy in a poetic and religious style." Taine said that "he spoke, like Fichte, of the divine idea of the world, of the reality that lies behind all appearances"; "he spoke, like Goethe," of "the spirit that eternally weaves the living robe of the Divinity." But what "distinguished this mysticism from others was the fact that it was practical," for "the Puritan seeks God, but, at

the same time, he seeks his duty."⁹² In reality, Carlyle spoke like that other young Stürmer, Pastor Herder.

Carlyle's attitude to democracy can be summarized in a succinct formula to be found in one of his most typical pamphlets: "Democracy . . . what is called 'self-government' of the multitude by the multitude . . . is by the nature of it, a self-cancelling business; and gives in the long-run a net result of zero."⁹³ Indeed, if nine out of ten people are idiots, what kind of wisdom can one expect to come out of the ballot boxes in which they deposit their voting slips? Political equality would mean that the vote of a black West Indian (a "Quashee Nigger") would carry the same weight as that of Socrates or Shakespeare. In 1867, when, under the guidance of Benjamin Disraeli, Parliament passed the second Reform Bill granting universal male suffrage, Carlyle lashed out: he saw it as the diabolical work of the "superlative Hebrew Conjuror" who led the whole of the British elite "by the nose, like helpless mesmerized somnambulant cattle."⁹⁴ Burke at the end of the eighteenth century, Renan and Taine a hundred years later, and Spengler, Maurras, and Croce at the beginning of the twentieth century used the same kind of argument. They all thought that the path of renewal required a fight to the finish against the idea of equality and against democracy, its principles and institutions.

Carlyle developed his ideas in terms very similar to those used by Renan: "Whom Heaven has made a slave, no parliament of men nor power that exists on earth can render free." Wherever society puts him, whether he lives in a house where the rent is ten pounds or a mansion where it is ten thousand pounds, he will always be the same. Lit by a brighter light, his physiognomy will only appear the more hideous. These natural slaves are everywhere the overwhelming majority, and the free men, those who obey the laws of the universe, are a small minority. Not to recognize this reality, not to draw the practical conclusions from it is an act of rebellion against God and nature. For, whether he is aware of it or not, or whether or not he recognizes it, "a man *has* his superiors, a regular hierarchy above him; extending up, degree above degree, to Heaven itself and God the Maker, who made His world not for anarchy but for rule and order!" The first rebel against this divine order was Satan himself.⁹⁵

The principal purpose of "The Present Time," the great essay that Carlyle published in February 1850, with its prophetic style of undeniable force, was not only to demonstrate the vice, the nullity, and the nothingness of democracy, as Croce would say half a century later, but also to convince the reader, stunned by a torrential eloquence, of the reversibility of the process initiated by the French Revolution. This universal "big black Democracy" that had arisen, despite being a reality, was neither inevitable nor eternal. But in order

to oppose it effectively and so limit its harmfulness, resist it, and control it, one had to understand its essence. One should not allow oneself to be misled by the American example. The enormous wealth of the United States enabled Americans to dispense with government and to indulge in rhetorical exercises in democracy. Moreover, in what way, exactly, did America deserve to act as an example? By what, apart from its resources, its cotton industry, and its dollars, did it acquire that distinction? What great thought had it produced? There was nothing in America that could convince one of the value of democracy.⁹⁶

Here one should point out two important features that connect Carlyle with the generation of the turn of the twentieth century. First of all, there is his view of the French Revolution, closer to reality than that of Burke or of Taine in *The Origins*. As a “philosopher of clothes,” he could not, where the revolution was concerned, ignore the great principle put forward in *Sartor Resartus*: when the relationship between reality and appearance becomes unsatisfactory, there is an imperative need to change one’s clothes. The great French revolt, whose spirit he tried to capture, was a necessity, like the Reformation: “The Reformation might bring what results it liked when it came, but the Reformation simply could not help coming.” Moreover, neither Luther nor Protestantism could be held responsible for the wars that followed the Reformation: “the false Simulacra [manifestations in the church] that forced him to protest, they are responsible.” In Britain, John Knox’s Scottish Reformation resulted, “after fifty-years struggling,” in the “beautiful Revolution of Eighty-eight.” It was to this revolution of 1688 that one owed the “Habeas-Corpus Act, Free Parliaments, and much else.” But if the Glorious Revolution decreed liberties, it was the Puritans who secured them. Here Carlyle gives us a text much closer to Locke than to Burke. Indeed, this text sounds strange coming from the writer of “The Nigger Question,” “Chartism,” and “Parliaments”: “We have our Habeas-Corpus, our free Representation of the People; acknowledgement, wide as the world, that all men are, or else must, shall, and will become, what we call free men; — men with their life grounded on reality and justice, not on tradition, which has become unjust and a chimera! This in part, and much besides this, was the work of the Puritans.”⁹⁷

Thus, the “war of the Puritans” was not just another of those civil wars in which English history abounds but “a section of that great universal war which alone makes-up the true History of the World — the war of Belief against Unbelief! The struggle of men intent on the real essence of things, against men intent on the semblances and forms of things.” That is where the true greatness of the Puritans lay, and where the true reasons for their revolution are to be found: they fought for liberty, not that of paying taxes in the way they wanted but of practicing their religion. The Puritans fought for the truth as they

conceived it, not as the authorities asserted it to be. That was something that a century that was “rather barren” could not understand. The eighteenth century, which condemned Cromwell, the greatest of the Puritans, a man who “stood bare” and “grappled like a giant, face to face, heart to heart, with the naked truth of things,” could only conceive “the first right of man” as being “not to pay-out money from your pocket except on reason shown.”⁹⁸ But a “just man will generally have better cause than money in what shape soever, before deciding to revolt against his government.” A righteous man, a Puritan, would say, “You may take my purse; but I cannot have my moral Self annihilated. The purse is any Highwayman’s who might meet me with a loaded pistol: but the Self is mine and God my Maker’s; it is not yours; and I will resist you to the death . . . in defence of that!” That was the reason for the Puritans’ revolt. “Really,” said Carlyle, “it seems to me the one reason which could justify revolting, this of the Puritans. It has been the soul of all just revolts among men.”⁹⁹

Here Carlyle turned to the French Revolution: “Not *Hunger* alone produced even the French Revolution; no, but the feeling of the insupportable all-pervading *Falsehood* which had now embodied itself in Hunger, in universal material Scarcity and Nonentity, and thereby become *indisputably* false in the eyes of all! We will leave the Eighteenth century with its ‘liberty to tax itself.’”¹⁰⁰ This text, which attempts both to explain and to justify the uprising of the 1790s, is aimed as much against a Burkian interpretation of these events as against Bentham’s utilitarian explanation. The events of 1789, said Carlyle, cannot be explained solely by economic distress, for nothing great or deep can be explained by material interests alone. In placing the French Revolution on the same level as the Puritan revolution, he paid it the greatest possible tribute as far as he was concerned. The idea that the French Revolution was likewise a revolt against a rotten political and social order was by no means alien to him. Thus, in *On Heroes*, he wrote some very fine pages on this “third and final act of Protestantism” that followed the insurrection of the English Puritans. Unlike Burke, Carlyle saw the French Revolution as one of a series of successive revolts inaugurated by Luther.

Carlyle was not a politician blinded by a commitment to a fight to the finish for the preservation of a “chivalrous” civilization based on poverty and exploitation. He saw the French Revolution as a momentous event, “the explosive confused return of mankind to Reality and Fact, now that they were perishing of Semblance and Sham.” He understood that “this new enormous Democracy asserting itself here in the French Revolution” was “an insuppressible Fact, which the whole world . . . cannot put down.” Unlike Burke, Carlyle despised the Enlightenment but admired the French Revolution, perceiving it as a revolt against a universe “turned into a machine” by a skeptical

philosophy, a world that “was as if effete now” and could no longer produce great men. But great men are indispensable to mankind, and the French Revolution, with its famous slogan “la carrière ouverte aux talents” (all careers open to those who are able), was a way of correcting this terrible deficiency caused by that supremely decadent age, the eighteenth century. But at the same time, Carlyle said: “Neither have I any quarrel with” the revolutionary myth of “Liberty and Equality; with the faith that, wise great men being impossible, a level immensity of foolish small men would suffice. It was a natural faith then and there.”¹⁰¹

He said that even if sansculottism was savage, its call to arms “frightful, half-infernal, was a great matter.” The French Revolution, he asserted, was not, as a theory held by “considerable parties of men in England and elsewhere” until recently claimed, “a general act of insanity”; it was “a true Apocalypse, though a terrible one, to this false withered artificial time.” Despite its horrors, the revolution was a return to truth, “a Truth clad in hellfire, since they would not but have it so!” A little further on, Carlyle explained what he understood “that universal cry of Liberty and Equality” to mean. It was the rejection of authority wielded by worthless, incompetent men. Submission to “*such* Authorities” “is false, is itself a falsehood”: this usurpation was intolerable to the revolutionaries, and they came to believe that great men did not exist. They therefore decided that “no Authority” was “needed any longer.” Their faith in liberty and equality represented this rejection of falsehood. “I find it very natural, as matters then stood,” said Carlyle. The events of 1830 were a sequel to the French Revolution: “The sons and grandsons of those men, it would seem, persist in the enterprise: they do not disown it; they will have it made good; will have themselves shot, if it be not made good!”¹⁰² Finally, the Reformation, Puritanism, and the French Revolution were shown to be three different aspects of one and the same revolutionary process, or, if one wishes, one and the same crisis of moral deliverance.

In a certain way, this respectful attitude was also adopted for a short time by the young Renan. And as for Taine previous to *The Origins*, he went further still.¹⁰³ In his foreword to Carlyle’s *History of the French Revolution*, the Sorbonne historian Alphonse Aulard defended Carlyle against Taine’s attacks. Aulard recalled that in his essay on Carlyle written in 1864 and later incorporated in his *History of English Literature*, Taine, speaking of the revolutionaries, gave the following answer to his eminent predecessor: “They were as devoted to abstract liberty as your Puritans were to divine truth.” Not only, said Aulard, did Taine, in speaking in this way, himself refute his later work on the French Revolution, the accusation of bias he made against “this poet-historian” was unfounded, as Carlyle sought neither to “glorify nor to dis-

parage the Revolution, but to interpret it by looking into its very soul, as much with sympathy as with intelligence.”¹⁰⁴ Throughout his introductory essay, Aulard, a convinced supporter of the Third Republic and a violent and often unfair critic of Taine,¹⁰⁵ described Carlyle as an extraordinary historian of the revolution, in awe of the greatness of his subject and the heroism of the French people. Unlike Burke, who saw the beauty of the young Marie-Antoinette as the living symbol of the former France, Carlyle, he said, described how “dumb Drudgery staggered up to its King’s Palace, and in wide expanse of fallow faces, squalor and winged raggedness, presented hieroglyphically its Petition of Grievances; and for answer got hanged on a ‘new gallows forty feet high.’” And Carlyle immediately reached a conclusion that one will find neither in Renan nor in Taine nor in any of the other nineteenth- and twentieth-century critics of the French Revolution: “History, looking back over this France through long times . . . confesses mournfully that there is no period to be met with, in which the general Twenty-five Millions of France suffered *less* than in this period which they name Reign of Terror!”¹⁰⁶

In response to Taine’s version of events, Aulard drew attention to the way in which Carlyle saw the French Revolution as the greatest movement of faith since the Crusades; the revolution was something that seemed to him perhaps of greater importance than its excesses: “It is a faith undoubtedly of the more prodigious sort . . . and will embody itself in prodigies. It is the soul of that world-prodigy named French Revolution; whereat the world still gazes and shudders.” More than anyone else until his time outside the Republican camp, he eulogized the beliefs and convictions of the men of 1793: “A whole People, awakening as it were to consciousness in deep misery, believes that it is within reach of a Fraternal Heaven-on-Earth.” He admired “the French Sansculotte of Ninety-three, who, roused from long death-sleep, could rush at once to the frontiers and die fighting for an immortal Hope and Faith of Deliverance for him and his.”¹⁰⁷ He wondered at this force that, despite all obstacles, caused the “fire of Jacobinism” to keep burning, and made soldiers with shoes of wood and pasteboard and “booted in hayropes” go into battle in the dead of winter. But the French Revolution consisted not only of the soldiers of Year Two but also of the representatives of the Convention and the new generation of men of war: “A new General Jourdan, late Serjeant Jourdan . . . ci-devant Serjeant Pichegru, ci-devant Serjeant Hoche, risen now to be Generals.”¹⁰⁸ Unlike Burke, Taine, and Renan, Carlyle did not hate the people, providing it was not allowed to rule. The people could also give rise to greatness and produce exceptional men. He felt closer to the people than to the rich and pleasure-loving nobility and bourgeoisie, or to the political elites incapable of running their societies. The writer of *On Heroes*, who prided himself on being

the only person of his time to recognize true greatness, could not fail to perceive the heroic aspect of the French Revolution.

Aulard was right in saying that, for Carlyle as for Michelet, the people was the true hero of his *History of the French Revolution*. It is very likely that Michelet, who claimed that Carlyle's production was worthless, was in fact deeply inspired by his work. The people in revolt, the millions of starving wretches who made up the French campaign rising up against privilege, the night of the Fourth of August, the enrollment of the masses, the sansculottes in the field, the rise to the top of soldiers from the ranks, the fight against the combined forces of Europe: all this struck Carlyle's imagination. He could disparage the Enlightenment, revile democracy, hope for the appearance of a hero-dictator, but he could not admire the Old Regime. More than anyone else, he was sensitive to greatness: Rousseau, Napoleon, Hoche, the Jacobins in their worst excesses were the kind of individuals who made history, who prevented their age from being what the nineteenth century became: a "strange" time, inferior to most civilized ages.¹⁰⁹ In the time in which Carlyle lived, a time of which he said not only that "the faith of men is dead" but also that the "sense for the true and false is lost" and "unlistening multitudes see not but that it is right," a time in which talent and intellect no longer existed and the elites flaunted their baseness and mediocrity, only a revolution, in his opinion, could have saved civilization.¹¹⁰

Carlyle, like Burke, believed that man aspires to order, and every human enterprise can be described as an attempt to create order. A great man is a missionary of order, a son of order, and his mission is to promote order. That is why periods of insurrection and revolution will always necessarily end with the appearance of a Cromwell or a Napoleon, "our last Great Man." Everywhere men require a leader; everywhere they want to be the loyal subjects of a master, a king. This is a basic feature of human society. It was on this conviction that Carlyle based his hopes for the future: the mediocrity of his time, the anarchy that prevailed, would inevitably come to an end. In order for this to happen, one only needed to return to the natural order of things and let history take its course. Since "the History of the World . . . was the biography of Great Men," those leaders of men, their models and examples, it was necessary, for the good of humanity, to put an end to the pernicious farce of democracy and return to government by small minorities. England was saved by Cromwell and his men, a small heaven-sent minority. There is a "natural necessity" for putting an "Able Man" at the head of a country. Thus, hero worship is the cornerstone of any society, the very heart of social relations, and the precondition for its emergence from a state of asphyxiation. In a word, it is "the basis of all possible good, religious or social, for mankind."¹¹¹

But the hero was not just anyone. "A messenger he, sent from the Infinite Unknown with tidings to us. . . . Direct from the inner fact of things. . . . It is from the heart of the world that he comes; he is portion of the primal reality of things." His "heroic quality" is entirely due to inspiration; thus, "the Hero is he who lives in the inward sphere of things, in the True, Divine and Eternal, which exists always, unseen to most, under the Temporary, Trivial; his being is in that; he declares that abroad . . . in declaring himself abroad. . . . Intrinsically it is the same function . . . which all manner of Heroes . . . are sent into the world to do." Since it is "the spiritual always that determines the material," since it is "the unseen and spiritual" that determines "the outward and actual," just as in the past the hero could be a god (Odin), a prophet (Mohammed), a priest (Luther, Knox), or a poet (Dante, Shakespeare), so the "Man-of-Letters Hero must be regarded as our most important modern person." The hero can be one or the other of these, depending on the world he is born into. A truly great man can become any kind of hero: "The grand fundamental character is that of Great Man; that the man be great." Only the great man, the authentic hero, can penetrate "the sacred mystery of the Universe; what Goethe calls 'the open secret'": "that divine mystery, which lies everywhere in all Beings, 'the Divine Idea of the World,' that which lies at 'the bottom of Appearance,' as Fichte styles it; of which all Appearance, from the starry sky to the grass of the field, but especially the Appearance of Man and his work, is but the vesture, the embodiment that renders it visible. This divine mystery *is* in all times and places; veritably is." What is the universe if not "the realized thought of God"? Finally, "it is a pity for every one of us if we do not know it, live ever in the knowledge of it. Really a most mournful pity; — a failure to live at all, if we live otherwise!"¹¹²

In a few closely packed pages, Carlyle stressed what he owed to Fichte. According to him, the German philosopher saw reality as a mass of appearances, beneath which there lies an essence, "what he calls the 'Divine Idea of the World.' To the majority of men, this essence is not perceptible, for most of them only see its shell. The hero, in this case the man of letters, is sent into the world to make manifest this Divine Idea. Accordingly, "in the true Literary Man there is thus ever . . . a sacredness: he is the light of the world; the world's Priest; — guiding it like a sacred Pillar of Fire." "In this point of view," said Carlyle, "I consider that, for the last hundred years, by far the notablest of all Literary Men is . . . Goethe." He did not, however, devote this chapter on the hero as man of letters to him, he devoted it to Samuel Johnson, the eighteenth-century Scottish poet Robert Burns, and Rousseau. This, he said, was because "they were not," like Goethe, "heroic bringers of the light, but heroic seekers of it."¹¹³

This was the basis of hero worship. Whether prophets or poets, all heroes, in all times and places, are sent to us to reveal the “divine mystery, . . . that sacred mystery which he more than others lives ever present with. . . . Whoever may live in the shows of things, it is for him a necessity of nature to live in the very fact of things.” For the hero is an essentially sincere person: “I wish you to take this as my primary definition of a Great Man.”¹¹⁴

The difficulty Carlyle found in reconciling this conception of the hero with its realization, whether in Cromwell or Napoleon, does not really matter. The main point was that hero worship corresponded not only to the need for the sacred but also to the need for sovereignty. Carlyle was aware, no less than de Maistre before him and Maurras at the turn of the twentieth century, of the intellectual and political break represented by Protestantism. The revolt against the Papacy brought it about that each individual became his own pope, which meant that henceforth nobody had to defer to the authority of any “hero” whatsoever. Thus, Protestantism was in fact a revolt against the various forms of spiritual sovereignty, and English Puritanism was the second phase of this process. The French Revolution, which held out the promise of the abolition of all earthly and spiritual sovereignties, was the third phase. Thus, the revolution seemed to imply the end of all obedience of a human community to a single individual. “I should despair of the world altogether, if so,” said Carlyle, but “one of my deepest convictions is, that it is not so.”¹¹⁵

Governing is not a privilege. Far from it; it is a duty that is incumbent, as in the Middle Ages, on the best and the bravest. A land that is still governed by this principle is a happy land. A true aristocracy is accepted and liked, because it is human nature to honor and admire the best. At a time when the world was going down the slippery slope of false aristocracies and all kinds of Chartisms, French Revolutions, Napoleonisms (this in blatant contradiction to Carlyle’s championship of Napoleon, “last of the Great Men”), and Bourbonisms, finally reaching Louis-Philippisms, the emergence of a true, authentic aristocracy was a precondition for Europe’s survival. A country can only be well governed by a natural elite (Carlyle repeated this idea endlessly): a landed nobility fulfilled this role in its time, but the days of William the Conqueror, a “strong man” whom Carlyle never tired of praising, were far off. The responsibility for ruling society now fell upon an aristocracy of talent, grouped around a leader, a true “Könning” or “Able-man.”¹¹⁶ “Find in any country the Ablest Man that exists there,” who will necessarily also be “the truest-hearted, justest, the Noblest Man,” “raise him to the supreme place,” and “you have a perfect government for that country; no ballot-box, parliamentary eloquence, voting, constitution-building, or other machinery whatever can improve it a whit.” A perfect government of this kind, said Carlyle, has “a divine right over me.”¹¹⁷

The question that finally arises is that of the future that awaited Carlyle's hero. The admiration and reverence surrounding the hero, the quasi-sacred character of his authority, was precisely the great innovation of modern dictatorship. The hero was the instrument of Providence and history, the man of destiny. He played a supernatural role, and his powers were commensurate. In the nature of things, the hero was the agent of the eternal metamorphosis to which society is subject.¹¹⁸ This natural and unique gift, this extraordinary virtue, this capacity to lead men without giving explanations, Max Weber called "charisma."

To do Carlyle justice, it should be pointed out that for him, always and in all circumstances, the superiority on which the principle of inequality was based was a moral and spiritual superiority totally independent of social status. The elite that he envisaged was an elite of character, merit, and talent ruling through its moral and intellectual qualities. It was not an elite of fanatics, brutes, and murderers. Moreover, Carlyle had no desire to return to the period preceding the Reform Bill of 1832; he was not a conservative. He despised the old England of Burke and, no less, that of the Tories of his time, but he also abhorred parliamentarianism and utilitarian liberalism. He had no respect for the British constitution, which he regarded as the symbol of the modern incapacity to govern; he was disdainful of the king and Parliament and of the Old Regime.¹¹⁹ The past that caught his imagination, like that of Herder and Renan, was the chivalrous Middle Ages and not the two or three centuries preceding the revolutions of the eighteenth century. The selfishness of the English aristocracy, whether it derived its wealth from the land or engaged in commerce and industry, the reign of money, capitalism, and the shameful exploitation on which the industrial might of his country was based were repugnant to him: "A high class without duties to do is like a tree planted on precipices."¹²⁰ The elitism he advocated, like that of Taine and Renan, was an elitism on a universal level, though he believed, like Renan, in the superiority of the white man.

Not only did he despise the parasitical aristocracy of his time, he also had a deep sense of the misery caused by the industrial revolution. He understood the alienation of the millions of workers crowded into the new industrial centers who had become a simple market commodity, and the tragedy of their continual fight against hunger. One of his major essays, *Past and Present*, was entirely devoted to the distress of the workers, a defense of the British proletariat and manual labor, and—here we see the Puritan speaking—the religious and sacred character of work. The poverty and misery of the workers' lives was a tragedy, as much physical as moral, which affected the whole of society. He thought that no spectacle was more tragic than that of the industrial worker subjected to the power of money: "Supply-and-demand is not the

one Law of Nature; . . . Cash-payment is not the sole nexus of man with man, — how far from it!" In the past, he said, "sisterhood, brotherhood, was often forgotten; but not till the rise of these ultimate Mammon and Shotbelt Gospels did I see it so expressly denied."¹²¹ And elsewhere he said: "It is the feeling of injustice that is insupportable to all men . . . no man can bear it, or ought to bear it. . . . The real smart is the soul's pain and stigma, the hurt inflicted on the moral self." He maintained that the workers had this feeling of profound injustice; they knew that their fate was not in accordance with their rights, that it was not what it ought to have been, nor was it what the future had in store. But salvation could not come from the right to vote and parliamentary democracy, as democracy was a system based on the principle of "no-government and laissez-faire."¹²² Carlyle undoubtedly had a sense of social concern that was lacking in Renan, but he combined it with a hatred for democracy. In this he was an eminently modern figure who served as a bridge between the aristocratic and plebeian rejection of the Enlightenment. He considered democracy as much a moral and intellectual disaster as a political one, but at the same time had a profound aversion for the market economy and practiced a populism worthy of the twentieth century.

In some respects, Carlyle understood his time very much better than did his contemporaries Tocqueville, Taine, and Renan. "The working classes," he said, "cannot any longer go on without government." "Liberty, I am told, is a divine thing. Liberty, when it becomes the 'Liberty to die by starvation' is not so divine!" He saw the policy of laissez-faire, laissez-passer as a failure of government and an abdication before the difficulty of governing and regulating human affairs. The state had a positive function: it "exists here to render existence possible, existence desirable and noble, for the State's subjects," and when it fulfills its responsibilities it can "expand into whole continents of new unexpected, most blessed activity." It should be headed, however, not by the chatterboxes of Parliament but by the much-celebrated hero, or, in Carlyle's favorite expression, which recurs here, the "Able-man."¹²³ Carlyle had a holy horror of the high-flown culture, the cult of the word, the platitudes and superficiality that prevailed at "our Etons and Oxfords." Was it by training lawyers and taking up the culture of attorneys that one expected to produce leaders of men, bearers of a "heroic wisdom"? He could have reconciled himself to democracy if there was any possibility that the best people, whatever their social origin, could have come to power. If Parliament could have been composed of men of talent from the lowest classes, if the ballot box allowed a person such as Robert Burns, the son of a poor farmer, a noble spirit born in poverty, to take office, democracy would have a meaning, and we could "be saved." Otherwise, the parliamentary verbiage was a sign of death.¹²⁴

Hostile to capitalist exploitation, Carlyle described in a most striking man-

ner the degradation and humiliation caused by poverty. He saw the condition of the workers as a state inferior not only to that of the American slave but to that of a plow horse. None of his contemporaries outside socialist circles had ever before expressed himself with such virulence: "A man willing to work, and unable to find work, is perhaps the saddest sight that Fortune's inequality exhibits under the sun." Carlyle gave as an example Burns, for whom "this Earth, so wide otherwise," provided no shelter. Throughout their lives, the poet-peasant and his family struggled to survive: the fate of the man who looks for work and cannot find it, the fate of the two-footed worker, is far less enviable, said Carlyle, than that of the four-footed worker. The horse always has food and shelter, whereas millions of humans are deprived of it. In Ireland, for thirty weeks in the year a third of the laboring population did not find sufficient third-rate potatoes to live on. It was no longer a question of whether these British whites, always on the verge of starvation, had a life worth living in either the temporal or the spiritual sense, but of whether they could survive at all. And yet "sanspotato" was made of the same stuff as the most senior servant of the Crown.¹²⁵

Carlyle also envisaged reforms that, at that period, were considered by only the most advanced reformers. Education is a right and a necessity for man. This, he said, is so obvious that "it is a thing that should need no advocating." Carlyle believed that access to culture — "to impart the gift of thinking to those who cannot think, and yet who could in that case think" — was "the first function a government had to set about discharging." In a style that would not have shamed Louis Blanc, the socialist leader of 1848 Revolution and the father of the "right to work," he demanded state intervention in the struggle against social evils. If only we invested in the campaign against poverty the means and energy we invest in maintaining an army capable of intervening in the four corners of the world! Is it not a disgrace to see a prime minister raise twenty thousand pounds to kill Frenchmen, and not find a hundredth of this sum to keep Englishmen alive? In the same vein, Carlyle demanded regulation of hours of work, reform of conditions of housing and work in factories, and services for emigration to the colonies run by the state: "Interference has begun: it must continue, must extensively enlarge itself, deepen and sharpen itself," despite the native conservatism of the British system of government and the British people.¹²⁶

For Carlyle, this was not only a moral question. The term "sanspotato" announced the coming revolution. He was conscious of the nature of "the struggle that divides the upper and lower in society over Europe": he saw the class struggle in Europe and particularly in Britain as a reality that required new forms of social relationship.¹²⁷ The gravity of the question of labor de-

manded radical measures, but classic laissez-faire liberalism, parliamentarianism, universal suffrage, and the law of the majority were all bankrupt. He saw capitalism not only as evil in itself but as the source of all the social evils of his time and a real abdication on the part of those whose social function was to govern. The solution to the great social conflict that threatened Europe was thus a strong government embodied in an exceptional, just, and capable man: the heroic visionary. Carlyle viewed Cromwell as the ideal leader: his rule was consecrated "by the Sword and Bible," the two "emblems of Puritanism," and that consecration "we must call a genuinely true one."¹²⁸ That is why reforms aimed at democratization could only end in disaster.

That is where Carlyle's modernity lies, and it shows how the transition to the twentieth century took place. His attack on the parliamentary system, the symbol of rampant democratization, forms the link between Burke's criticism and that of the generation of the turn of the twentieth century. Like Croce, but also like Maurras, Barrès, and Spengler, Carlyle saw an authoritarian government as the only way of responding to the crisis of modernity: a moral and intellectual crisis, but also a social crisis unprecedented in history. Millions of famished, workless men refused to yield to the brutal force of capitalism. They refused to accept the argument that tries to convince a plow horse that in the long run a steam engine creates more work, or that if there is no more employment here, it exists in abundance elsewhere in the world.¹²⁹ They expected nothing good to come from a parliament which was given up to idle chatter, and whose incapacity to manage the affairs of the nation was inherent in its very nature. A parliament could be a consultative body, but it could never govern without leading to anarchy. In history, there were only two examples of parliaments that ruled with some success: the British Long Parliament at the time of the English Revolution and the National Convention during the French Revolution.¹³⁰

The Intellectual Foundations of Nationalism

The antirationalist form of modernity, as we have seen throughout this book, stressed all that divides and isolates people, all that is specific to them and unique about them, and opposed all that could unite them. This second modernity also marked the birth of nationalist ideology, and the true founding father of this ideology was Herder. His direct influence continued to be felt even in the mid-twentieth century. A reading of Herder also raises the great question posed by the two centuries since the French Revolution, which still in our own day remains one of extreme actuality: Is a liberal nationalism conceivable? Can it now, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, become a historical reality? We shall see that the idea of a nation of citizens conceived as a political and not as an ethnic body did not survive the first years of the French Revolution. This political and judicial view of the nation was nipped in the bud by the Herderian revolt against the Enlightenment. It was the Herderian vision of a cultural, ethnic, and linguistic community that was to become the ideal of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth, not that of a community of individuals united by reason, their interests, and the defense of their rights.

No less than in the case of Plato or Rousseau, an interpretation of Herder reflects the general evolution of ideas. The case for a cosmopolitan Herder was very eloquently expressed, with far more sophistication than is generally the

case, in Lionel Gossman's remarkable work on German culture, *Basel in the Age of Burckhardt*. In Gossman's opinion, Herder's cosmopolitanism reflected a pluralistic view of times, nations, and cultures. Each age, each people, and each culture marked the realization of a different aspect of humanity, and humanity was not a universal phenomenon appearing in a variety of accidental guises. On the contrary, humanity could be actualized only in and through history. As a result, each historical manifestation of humanity had to be thought of as at once related to all the others and yet unique and uniquely valuable. In the same way, the individual was perceived as a personality, a part of a larger cultural and historical whole, neither fully separate from that whole nor completely identifiable with it.¹ However, this generous view of Herder's work that has prevailed in the past two centuries has been much exacerbated and even taken to an extreme as a result of the rise of antirational, multicultural, and communitarian ideas in the last thirty years of the twentieth century. Thus, the view of Herder as a patriot but not a nationalist, an apolitical man of letters, a multiculturalist and defender of the idea of the unity of the human race, an antirelativist and upholder of a universalism that, despite all appearances, he never abandoned, is today commonly accepted. In the second half of the twentieth century, and especially in the English-speaking world, Isaiah Berlin's admiring attitude toward Herder played a decisive role in the interpretation of his entire work. Everyone agrees, wrote Berlin in 1976, that Herder began his career with a routine defense of the ideas of the Enlightenment and shifted to the more reactionary position of a subordination of reason and intellect to nationalism, a hatred of things French, a reliance on intuition, and an uncritical faith in tradition. Is it, then, possible to maintain that Herder began as a cosmopolitan and ended as a nationalist? Not so, said Berlin: Herder never abandoned the Christian humanism of the German Aufklärung; he regarded Christianity as a universal religion embracing all men and all peoples, transcending all local loyalties in the veneration of the universal and the eternal.²

This point of view is hardly defensible, and in any case it could only be based on factors diametrically opposed to Berlin's argument. Herder could not have begun as an Aufklärer and ended as a nationalist, because it was precisely at the end of his life that he drew close to a certain cosmopolitanism, whereas he began his career with the *Journal* of 1769 and *Another Philosophy* of 1774. He pursued his campaign against the Enlightenment almost unceasingly throughout most of his life. Was there a real metamorphosis in the *Ideas for a Philosophy of the History of Mankind* (written between 1784 and 1791) or was it simply a change of tone rather than of content? Both interpretations are possible, although Herder's historical importance and extraordinary influence for a century and a half were due to his rejection of universalism and his fight

for cultural and ethnic particularism. Even Max Rouché, who as a result of a careful reading of the *Letters for the Advancement of Humanity* of 1796–1797, the work closest to the Aufklärung, insisted on the universalistic dimension of Herder's thought, and in a work published in the fateful year 1940 made great efforts to dissociate Herder from Nazi racial determinism, was unable to avoid conclusions unfavorable to a cosmopolitan interpretation of Herder as pronounced as that of Berlin. Basically, said Rouché, Herder was an ill-“liberated” German who, starting with the rationalist idea of ethnic and historical “climates” dear to Montesquieu, “prefigured the Hitlerian ideal of *Blood and Soil* whose conclusions he finally specifically repudiated.”³

Rouché's perspective is particularly significant for us. A French academic working on his monumental thesis when Nazism was in power in Germany and the countdown to war was in its final phase, Rouché was conscious of the extreme actuality of Herder but nevertheless wished to dissociate this great figure of German culture from intellectual Nazism, which saw him as its prophet, and his point of view differed profoundly from Meinecke's. Unlike Rouché, who could not write about Herder's revolt against the Enlightenment and French influence as if events in twentieth-century Germany had no connection with those of the end of the eighteenth century, Meinecke did not even mention the developments of his time. Rouché did not have the luxury of writing as if *Another Philosophy* did not exist, or as if *Ideas* was nothing but a long hymn of praise to “humanity.” In 1940, when his thesis was published, he was already confronted with the exorbitant cost of differentialism.

We cannot here go into the details of the various interpretations of Herder, an ambiguous and fascinating figure, that have been undertaken in the past two hundred years. From the often exceptional works of this author—less original, however, than his staunch admirers imagine—as well as from the literature devoted to him, there emerges the image of a many-sided writer. The two extremes of these interpretations are unsurprising. On the one hand we have an admirable Aufklärer, one of the brightest jewels of Western humanism, the founder of cultural anticolonialism, the assailant of French cultural imperialism, the savior of popular cultures and indigenous languages, the prophet of national liberation in Eastern and Central Europe; and on the other hand, we have the radical nationalist Stürmer. Regarded by some as the great ideologist of “humanity” (Humanität), and thus of an exemplary universalistic and cosmopolitan vision, of a gentle patriotism and a cultural nationalism without political implications, Herder has also been given a specifically Nazi interpretation on the lines of “The National Idea from Herder to Hitler.” Between these two extremes there are naturally other positions. No unprejudiced reading of Herder can accept only one of these aspects and reject the others.

The totally liberal Herder to be found in the pages Berlin devotes to him is no less artificial (and sometimes unrecognizable) than the false Herder invented by pro-Nazi intellectuals. The Herderian multidimensionality is thus a reality, but a time comes when it is necessary, without either indulging in naïve apologetics, which is also a form of perversion, or lapsing into aberration, to draw up a balance sheet. To what did Herder contribute? To a moderate correction of the Franco-Kantian Enlightenment or to a harsh and fundamentally destructive critique of this tradition? To the spread of the tradition of natural law and the rights of man or to a continual erosion of the idea of the rights of the individual? It is difficult not to notice that it was at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, when nationalism exploded on the European cultural and political scene, that the work of the bishop of Weimar made a strong comeback and became a subject of constant interest. Indeed, where is Herder's historical significance to be found if not in his contribution to the rise of ethnic nationalism?

In the final analysis, Herder had considerable influence both in the critical period of the Napoleonic Wars in Germany and later in France, and even more in Central and Eastern Europe, especially in the Slavic countries. In Germany at the turn of the twentieth century *Another Philosophy* was given such moral and intellectual importance that the work of 1774 began to be considered superior to the *Ideas*, viewed by some as a pale echo of the work of Herder's youth.⁴ Were not Meinecke and Spengler the continuers of Herder? Owing to the fact that the concept of the Volk was given a clearly biological meaning, *Another Philosophy* and the *Journal* were given a nationalist and finally racist interpretation during this period. Herder as the apostle of "humanity" thus disappeared and was replaced by Herder as the prophet of a hard nationalism. While there can be no doubt that after 1933 the meaning of Herder's work was distorted by Nazi propaganda, there is a clear difference between Alfred Rosenberg's vulgar perversion of his thinking and a legitimate reading that sees Herder as a leading figure of the Sturm und Drang movement and an inspirer of many variants of European nationalism, obviously including German nationalism. The fact that the best-known and most frequently quoted Herderian idea, that "every nation has its center of happiness within itself, as every ball has its center of gravity,"⁵ was utilized by Nazi ideology, did not prevent it from being a founding element of modern nationalism and the exact opposite of the definition of the nation given in the *Encyclopédie*. If one looks for a clear and concise definition that can be set against the one given by the French Enlightenment, it is in Herder that one will find it.

In Diderot and d'Alembert, a nation is defined as "a considerable number of people who live in a certain stretch of territory enclosed within certain limits and obey the same government." In Great Britain, Hume gave an almost

identical definition: "A nation is nothing but a collection of individuals." This rational, individualist, political, and legal definition, to this day unequaled as a foundation of a liberal view of the nation, is precisely what Herder opposed. But the Enlightenment was not all of a piece, and Montesquieu had a far less individualistic conception of society, from which Herder took a great deal. In a chapter entitled "On the Right of Conquest," devoted to the relationship between a conqueror and a conquered population, Montesquieu insisted on the essential difference between a collection of individuals and a society: the destruction of a society is not the same as the destruction of the men that compose it: "A society is the union of men and not the men themselves; a citizen can perish and the man remain." However — and this is the main point — Herder, like Renan, Taine, Barrès, and Spengler later on, went very much further, and when he made the world of history part of nature, a position that was readopted in the mid-nineteenth century, he parted ways with the Enlightenment: "Nature raises families," he said, "[and] a people is both a plant and a family, a plant with various branches."⁶

Thus, national particularism gained the upper hand. Tradition in Herder was both good and bad, but in the final analysis, the balance was on the side of its good qualities, for tradition reflected the soul of a people. Herder did not oppose nationalities to humanity-at-large, but he failed to deal with the problematics of the question, which he must have been aware of: pluralism, whether one likes it or not, produces differences, hierarchies, oppositions, and wars. It is not possible to ask peoples to shut themselves up within themselves in order to protect their specificity, to reject all foreign influences, and to regard foreign cultures as deadly dangers without arousing more hatred than love between them. In Herder, a generalized nationalism imposed a pluralistic view of history. As he saw it, uniformity was synonymous with death. That is why he thought that "our enlightened age" paid "the less-enlightened Greeks" an unintentional compliment in saying "that they never philosophized in a properly general and purely abstract manner, but always spoke in terms of small needs on a narrow stage."⁷

The thinkers of the Enlightenment — Voltaire, Montesquieu, Hume, Ferguson, d'Alembert, Iselin, and many others — believed that their criteria of philosophical judgment had a universal value, capable of questioning values sanctified by history. The accepted idea, which still holds today, is that in opposition to them Herder rejected this claim of the universality of the criteria not only of his period but of any period. The act of questioning the historical validity of values outside their context simultaneously casts doubt on the claim of any period to have discovered universally applicable truths. In 1774, then, one had with Herder a philosophy of history that sought to show the

impossibility of demonstrating the principle of the unity of history on the basis of such ideas as natural law. He held that each nation can legitimately claim to have its own criteria of wisdom, since there is a plurality of principles of truth at work in history. For that reason, a uniform principle cannot serve as a common denominator and be the factor underlying the unity of history. Only the Creator is able to perceive that unity.⁸

In the twentieth century, as we saw earlier, this critique of the unity of history was considered the starting point of modern historicism. For his admirers, Herder was the high priest of historical pluralism, able to recognize the validity of a plurality of values working in history. The values of each nation thus had their own validity relative to their specific context. This pluralistic principle enabled historicism to oppose all forms of “dogmatism” that made a system of values of limited historical validity into an absolute historical model. On the other hand, a more critical approach would see Herder as the father of “historical relativism,” a direct outcome of his pluralism. The infinite number of criteria, each valid in its own time and place, resulted in a relativism incapable of formulating coherent principles of universal validity. In its extreme form, the principle of the relative validity of each value within the context of its age gave rise to a new dogmatism that justified the most arbitrary practices, which were presented as the legitimate expression of a people and period.⁹ The twentieth century provided the proof that Herderism was not just an innocent intellectual exercise.

It was in his attacks on “the writer of the century, who without disagreement or dissent held court over his age,” that Herder laid down the broad outlines of the antiuniversalist and communitarian campaign of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Even though he recognized in Voltaire a “great writer” who “stands at the summit of the age,” Herder thought his contribution was, in fact, disastrous.¹⁰ Herder’s anti-Voltairian campaign grew fiercer as he multiplied his borrowings from the *Essay on the Manners*. For Voltaire, history was “a huge store” where “one had to pick and choose” and where “you took what was useful to you.”¹¹ History was thus to be understood not as a matter of memory but as a particular use of reason that could discover some useful truths. According to Voltaire, nothing reveals the utility of a truth as much as its contribution to the progress of the human spirit. Only what signifies progress and can serve as a model for the rest of the world is deserving of study.

Herder, however, rejected these fundamental elements of Voltairian thought — the principle of utility in the study of history, his idea of the function of language, his view of the nation — but took from him, without acknowledgment, the object that Voltaire, and before him, in Voltaire’s own words, “the illustrious Bossuet,” had assigned to the writing of history: the study of “the

spirit of nations,” “inclinations and customs,” or, in a word, the “character” of peoples and their governments.¹²

To the Voltairian epistemology of historical knowledge, which made a clear distinction between facts and myths, a procedure that had already displeased Vico, Herder opposed the following fundamental question: On the basis of what criteria can one pass judgment on the customs, laws, and political and social regimes of other peoples and cultures? The Voltairian method is a comparative method, enabling one to make choices and pass value judgments. Herder took the course opposite from Voltairian logic, setting against it a principle that effectively allowed neither value judgments nor comparisons. He attacked Johann Winckelmann for judging Egypt according to Greek aesthetic criteria, and he condemned Voltaire for seeing his own time as a criterion and model for the whole world. Here we have a methodology whose full impact would be felt only two centuries later. Herder and the other critics of the Enlightenment of his period and of the following century were only true to this method when it was a matter of opposing French influence and proclaiming the decline of France. Herder, Möser, who before him had published a book called *Of the German National Spirit*, and Fichte after Jena did not really claim an equality of all languages, periods, customs, and cultures. On the contrary: the superiority of the Germans, a young people endowed with a pure, original language, unencumbered with foreign borrowings, was asserted from the beginning, as was the superiority of the Teutonic Middle Ages and the superiority of the Lutheran Reformation to the Italian Renaissance. Even the preeminence of Christendom was not questioned, so long as the homogeneity of the nation was not threatened. For the Renaissance, Herder had a strong aversion, as for the work of Racine and Corneille, which he compared disadvantageously with Shakespearean drama.¹³ Sometimes he was caught up in a series of contradictions: he affirmed the greatness of the Crusades but did not fail to notice the harm caused by these expeditions of believers; the biblical poetry and the ancient Hebrews had his full attention, but the Jews of his own time were the object of a classic anti-Semitism. He condemned colonialism but placed the African very close to the monkey; he predicted a great future for the Slavs, but their inferiority to the Germans was affirmed with great force and conviction.

If, however, the principle of the absolute equality of all peoples, cultures, and periods was the hidden aspect of his thought, relatively little noticed by his contemporaries, the nationalist thinker immediately enjoyed a great vogue. Nearly two centuries had to pass before Herder would appear in an idealized form as the prophet of an innocent pluralism. Yet singularity and equality are two different things. The great mistake of certain commentators is that they

believe they can deduce the equality of nations from the specificity of each nation, though the opposite is the case. Particularism produces a sharp awareness of differences, not of equality. Here we must take an important further step: if particularism and singularity are responsible for the absence of criteria that would allow nations to be judged in relation to one another, it is because Herder saw nations as individuals. A comparative study of cultures and civilizations, peoples and periods would have the effect of effacing absolute specificity. If nations are individuals, what does history become if not the study of local and national particularities, each of which is independent of the others? Can one still speak of a universal history?

All the difficulties in interpreting Herder are due to the impossibility of having a universal history that is not a comparative history. His *Ideas*, in effect, is already a comparative history where inequalities are affirmed and particularities are subjected to a subtle but nevertheless clear hierarchy of nations. As for a hierarchy of values, one obviously existed from 1774 onward. Was not reason inferior to instinct and sentiment? Was not the Germanic invasion a tremendous leap forward in relation to the Roman Empire? Were not primitive ways superior to intellectualism? Was not the France of Louis XIV a striking example of a culture of imitation and artificiality? Would Carlyle or Spengler say anything else? Would Barrès or Maurras speak in any other way about Germany, and would Nikolaï Iakovlevich Danilevsky see Western Europe differently?

All kinds of difficulties and contradictions come to light in the profuse text of *Another Philosophy*, and in the *Journal*, works in which the author proclaims the decline of France, and in attempting to reject its influence, seeks to liberate Germany and the rest of Europe from French culture and literary models. As a result of opposing Voltaire, Rousseau, and Montesquieu, Herder developed the idea that a nation was an organism unique of its kind, an individuality whose customs, way of life, and forms of behavior were inaccessible to critical thought. A century later, Barrès said he was unable to understand the Parthenon or Plato because he had no Greek blood in his veins: as far as he was concerned, the Greek genius was impenetrable to a Frenchman from Lorraine. Herder did not go as far as that, but he thought that if access to the genius of a nation was possible, it was certainly not through reason. On this essential point, Barrès was undoubtedly his disciple.

As Herder said, in order to study “the character of a nation,” in order to understand “the whole living painting of manners of life, habits, needs, peculiarities of lands and skies . . . one would first have to sympathize with a nation to feel a single [one] of its inclinations and actions.”¹⁴ But even in that case, could one do so? If in Hume national characteristics were formed by institu-

tions and the values proper to a society, by moral factors without the intervention of physical factors,¹⁵ in Herder, one should not forget, nations were individuals, and the weakening of national characteristics, which were formed by history and nature, was a sign of adversity and degeneration.¹⁶ Why, asked Herder, had it not been noticed “what an inexpressible thing the peculiarity of one human being is, how difficult it is to say precisely what distinguishes him, how he feels and lives”? How can one describe the image this particular person has of the world? How, one may ask, does he see it? What are his feelings about it? How can one perceive “how different and peculiar all things become for him after his eye sees them, his soul measures them, his heart senses them”? “In the character of a nation there is such a depth,” a depth that “escapes the word so persistently” that one is faced with a dramatic question: If that is so, how would it be “if one had to capture the mighty ocean of entire peoples, ages and countries”?¹⁷

A nation is a totality, a living organism, and that totality finds its most perfect expression in language. The question then arises, If language is the storehouse of the thought of each nation, does thought still have a universal significance and vocation? Thought can only have universality if one accepts the Voltairian conception of the instrumentality of language. Herder, while focusing his interest on the particular, also had aspirations to universality, but he was a German first of all, and he thought that just as God alone could embrace the whole of mankind at a glance, so he alone could penetrate the spirit of foreign languages and cultures. This cult of the particular, the individual, and the specific, this new and original Herderian contribution, which gives a revolutionary meaning to the very idea of collective identity, was to play an important role in the rise of cultural and political nationalism. That is why Herder was a much more modern figure than de Maistre, and contrary to Isaiah Berlin’s opinion, Herder’s intellectual contribution to the war against natural rights and the principles of 1789 was much greater than that of the writer of *Soirées de Saint-Petersbourg*. De Maistre’s reaction was less dangerous because less credible, seeking to defend an Old Regime that one knew had gone forever, whereas Herder’s rejection of the Enlightenment heralded the rise of the new forces of nationalism. The nationalism of the turn of the twentieth century was undoubtedly based on Herder’s idea of the nation, not on de Maistre’s appeal to papal sovereignty.

We saw earlier that, despite the great clarity with which the idea was originally expressed, the accepted opinion is still that one of Herder’s greatest claims to fame, apart from his “invention of the historical world,” was his invention of pluralism and diversity. This explains his supposed respect for non-European peoples and cultures. Herder is thus contrasted with the Enlight-

enment's supposed Eurocentrism and supposed disdain for the non-European world. He is also made out to be the prophet of all civilizations and all periods.¹⁸ In reality, Herder's position was far less advanced than Voltaire's. He did not see all values as equal; he simply set up a different scale. To the rationalism, individualism, and secularism of the Enlightenment, he opposed the Christian, Germanic, and medieval alternative. Whereas for the philosophes progress was uniquely due to the human spirit, he saw the evolution of humanity as governed by Providence and the realization of a divine plan. Herder's system can be viewed as the final outcome of the Christian philosophy of history that, since the conversion of the Roman state and the evangelization of the barbarians, had tended to identify historical reality with the will of God, to the detriment of human liberty. After Vico, Herder was the representative of the Christian philosophy of history in the eighteenth century. That is the reason why the Far East is absent from *Another Philosophy* and has only a marginal role in *Ideas*.

On the other hand, no other author gave so important a place to non-European peoples as Voltaire. At the very beginning of *An Essay on the Manners*, he objected to the idea of the inferiority of the peoples of America and Africa, whom the Europeans regarded as savages: "The so-called savages of America are sovereigns who receive ambassadors. . . . They are acquainted with honor, which our European savages have never heard of." Not only do the Huron, the Algoquin, the Illinois, the Kaffirs, the Hottentots produce what they need themselves, "an art our bumpkins do not have, . . . they have a homeland, they love it, they defend it; they make treaties; they fight with courage, and they often speak with heroic energy." The second volume of the *Essay* gives a significant place to Asian countries and the Americas, including a description of the violent conquest and brutal Christianization of Central and South America. The pages on the splendor of the Incas and the barbarity of the Europeans leave no doubt as to which side Voltaire favored. The Europeans, he said, treated the Negroes "they bought in Africa and transported to Peru like animals for serving man" and did not consider "the inhabitants of the New World to be human beings."¹⁹

Similarly, Voltaire gave proper attention to the peoples of the non-Christian world. In the *Essay* he devoted the first seven chapters to China, India, Persia, and Mohammed's Arabia, and spoke respectfully and sometimes with high praise of the non-Christian religions.²⁰ China, he said, "has existed in splendor for four thousand years"; it developed the arts and sciences and created great cities (Peking "has about three million citizens"); the Great Wall, he said, "is a monument superior to the pyramids of Egypt," the country had about fifty million inhabitants as against a hundred million for the whole of Europe, and its agriculture was of an extraordinary richness. Voltaire lost no opportunity

to demonstrate the superiority of the Chinese to the barbarians who put an end to the Roman Empire. Emperor Hiao, he said, a monarch who tried to make his subjects enlightened and happy, was also a skilled mathematician who attempted to reform astronomy: "One never saw the head man of a Germanic or Gaulish settlement reforming astronomy!"²¹

Voltaire's scorn for barbarians, whether Christian or otherwise, knew no limits. He described Clovis as far more bloodthirsty after his baptism than before it, guilty of crimes that were not "lapses ascribable to human imbecility" but thefts and parricides.²² For Herder, these accusations were intolerable. One should notice how Herder and Voltaire described these northern peoples, especially those who have attracted the most attention: the Normans. According to Herder, "it is to their ways that not only England but a great part of Europe owes the splendor of its chivalry"; this text is not from *Another Philosophy* but from *Ideas*. The Normans brought "valor and physical force, skill and dexterity in all the arts later called chivalrous, and a great sense of honor and pride in nobility of origin."²³

Where these northern peoples, these Germanic tribes, were concerned, Herder not only had a blind infatuation but also indulged in all kinds of clichés that soon became famous and played an important role in the rise of the Germanic myth: "Their large, strong and handsome physiques, their fearful blue eyes, were filled with a spirit of faithful devotion and temperance which made them obedient to their leaders, bold in attack, resistant in danger, and thus highly regarded as allies and feared by other peoples, especially the decadent Romans." A few lines later, Herder continued: "The long-drawn-out resistance that several peoples in our Germany had to wage against the Romans undoubtedly increased their strength and their hatred for a hereditary enemy." Herder had an almost boundless admiration for the warlike qualities of the Germans, their rough lifestyle as nomads and hunters. These tribes did not all have the same customs or belong to the same civilization, but they had a common basis: what "the stout-hearted original German" possessed was "his Theut or Tuisto, Mannus, Hertha and Wotan: that is, a father, a hero, a land and a general." Herder ended this chapter on the "German peoples" with an obscure observation on the "political situation" of the Germans, which, he claimed, accounted for the slow progress of European civilization and which, with an outburst of very great clarity, also had a great future: "They were the ones that not only conquered, planted and organized most of Europe in their own way, but also defended and protected it; otherwise, all that developed there could not have developed. Their situation among the other peoples, their martial alliances and their national character thus became the foundation of the civilization, liberty and security of Europe." In all areas the Germans, "thanks

to the[ir] labor and loyalty,” played the role of pioneers. Their monasteries preserved the sciences, their emigrants became teachers in foreign countries, “and during all the aberrations of these centuries the indestructibly loyal and honest spirit of the Germans was evident.” Chastity was maintained among them better than elsewhere, and their morals were infinitely more sound.²⁴

At the same time, a few pages further on, Herder showed himself to be aware of the fragmentation caused by feudalism, and its disadvantages. Of all the afflictions experienced by medieval Europe, he said, men suffered “from nothing as much as from despotic feudalism. Europe was full of people but also full of serfs; the slavery they endured was all the worse for being a Christian slavery, governed by political laws and blind tradition, confirmed in writing and tied to the soil.” But, in drawing up the final balance sheet, Herder could not refrain from praising the greatness of “the German political organization, so natural and noble,” and of German customs, like the principle that every crime “must be judged not according to the letter, but in accordance with a living perception of the thing.” Other “customs of law courts and guilds” also demonstrated “the transparent, equitable spirit of the Germans.” The same applied to the state: “The principles governing collective property and the collective freedom of the nation were great and noble.”²⁵

The whole difference between Herder and Voltaire comes out clearly in the latter’s view of the conquerors of Roman Empire. The Normans, the peoples of Scandinavia and the shores of the Baltic, the “Germans” in general who, in Herder, rejuvenated the world in spreading across Europe, were denounced by Voltaire as “savages” for whom “brigandage and piracy were as necessary as carnage for wild beasts.” From the fourth century onward, they merged “with the waves of the other barbarians, who carried desolation as far as Rome and Africa.” Rome fell because there was no longer a Marius to stand up to the barbarians, as there were now more monks than soldiers: “Christianity opened up the heavens, but it lost the Empire.” The early Middle Ages were a time of “general ignorance,” and in “those barbarous times” there was nothing but “confusion, tyranny, barbarity and poverty.” Feudalism produced “a monstrous assemblage of members who did not make up a body. . . . Each castle was the capital of a small state of brigands.” The countryside was ravaged and the towns were devastated, and the peasants dragged into the wars were considered of less value than the horses. As for the laws and customs, including those of chivalry, they were rules for continuous civil war. The thirteenth century was a turning point: the Europeans passed “from savage ignorance to scholastic ignorance.” From that time, practically up to his own day, said Voltaire, scholastic studies were “systems of such absurdities that, if they were imputed to the people of Taprobane, we would think they were being insulted.”²⁶

The same was true of the church of his time. The origin of the Feast of the Holy Sacrament, said Voltaire, was the visions of a nun from Liège who in 1264 imagined every night that she saw a hole in the moon. She then had a revelation that taught her that the moon was the church and the hole was a feast that was missing. She and a monk composed the service of the Holy Sacrament, and the Liège feast was adopted by Urban IV for the entire church. From the opening pages of the *Essay* Voltaire talked about the “absurd fables” in which “most of the human race, . . . crazy and stupid,” finds a meaning, like those about “people who were supposed to have been born from supernatural relations between the divinity and our wives and daughters.”²⁷ It was poisoned arrows of this kind that must have made Voltaire hateful to Herder, not his supposed antihistoricism or his supposed European arrogance.

Unlike Voltaire, who sought to emphasize all the points in which the Europeans were inferior to the non-Europeans, Herder thought that the Christian countries were “the most important human world.” One year after the publication of *Another Philosophy*, he was even more explicit: “The leading countries in history have been precisely the ones where the Judaic and Christian revelations began and were propagated. Everywhere else human reason has been deadened.”²⁸ *Another Philosophy* disregards Africa, America, and the Far East, and *Ideas* shows a disdain for them that the unbiased reader cannot fail to notice. Elsewhere, Herder wrote: “A chain of tradition thus links Asia to Europe via Greece and Rome, and whatever lies outside that chain remains in shadow.”²⁹ This line was continued in Herder’s praise of Egypt. Herder attacked Winckelmann, whom he rightly saw as the foremost historian of ancient art, for judging Egyptian works of art according to Greek criteria; he harshly criticized Shaftesbury for venting his spleen on “Egyptian superstition and clericalism”; and he was again angry at Voltaire, this time together with Newton. They all behaved as if the only purpose of ancient Egypt was to serve as a stage toward the emergence of Greece or of our modern world. However, in demanding in opposition to adherents of classicism like Winckelmann or spokesmen of ideological modernity like Shaftesbury that Egypt should be judged according to its own criteria and not according to modern standards, Herder showed once again what his scale of values was. Addressing his contemporaries in the second person, as he often did, he said they had no right to oppose the “Egyptian spirit” with “your bourgeois cleverness, philosophical deism, easy frivolousness, cosmopolitanism, tolerance, pleasantries, law of peoples, and whatever other names you give to this stuff.”³⁰ For Herder, the “law of peoples” and tolerance, that is to say, universal values, an apprenticeship in liberty, a wish to gain knowledge of the world and become acquainted with other cultures, was part of the same miserable “stuff” as “easy frivolousness,” itself equated with philosophical deism.

Here, Herder was attacking the whole Enlightenment “philosophy” for universalizing its own norms and values and not concerning itself with the Other. This supposed sin of the Enlightenment, however, was never anything but an invention of its enemies. It is true that since the Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns, the first philosophes, particularly Fontenelle and later Voltaire, were convinced of the superiority of their age to earlier times, but only in one respect: as each generation had interiorized the achievements of the past and added its own contribution to this accumulated capital, the result was necessarily superior to all that had preceded it. This was true of all great periods, especially antiquity, but the great exception to this rule was the Middle Ages, viewed by all the thinkers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, of whatever nationality, as a time of supreme barbarism that was incapable of making any contribution to general progress. Herder had so strong a dislike for Enlightenment thought and such an aversion to French culture that his criticism loses much of its credibility. Moreover, when he claimed an equality of all periods, he first of all excluded the eighteenth century and then gave this claim concrete significance only with the rehabilitation of the Germanic Middle Ages. Herder distorted the historiography of the eighteenth century, and when he reproached it for carrying “into all the ages” a “one-sided, scornful, lying caricature,”³¹ he made himself ridiculous.

After Egypt came Greece, that “singular achievement of the human species,” which represented the adolescence of ancient humanity. But unlike “enlightened” writers who saw the Greece of Socrates, Plato, Pericles, and Phidias as an eternally valid model of greatness, the cradle of liberty, Herder maintained that Socrates “was only a citizen of Athens, and all his wisdom was only that of an Athenian citizen.”³² He spoke ironically about the man of the eighteenth century who envisaged a mythical Socrates, an “eternal Socrates” whose every word was “worthy of the world and eternity,” teaching “virtue with such brilliance and clarity as was beyond even Socrates and all his age,” encouraging “a love among all men that would, if it were possible, indeed be greater than that uniting lovers of the fatherland and citizens.” The Herderian ideal of the submission of the individual to the community can be seen very clearly here: it was their communal spirit that Herder admired about the Greeks, not Athenian democracy. His ideal was the famous epitaph of the Spartans who fell at Thermopylae, which, he said, “will forever be the example of supreme political virtue.”³³

Herder’s antipathy to Rome, which represented “the manhood of human strength and striving” (the later empire represented its decrepitude), was mainly due to one thing: “the walls that separated nation from nation were broken down.” Roman domination was “a storm that penetrated the innermost recesses of the national way of thinking of every people,” and this was

“the first step toward destroying the national character of them all.” Spengler followed this line of thought almost to the letter. Herder could not fail to recognize Roman greatness, but the Roman cosmopolitanism was abhorrent to him: “Could a mere boys’ prank be played in Rome without blood flowing in three continents?” In this way, the campaign against classicism and the cult of the Middle Ages began to develop. One should recall, in this connection, the longing for the Roman Republic aroused by classical studies in the eighteenth century. Herder did not have this longing for the early years of the republic, and his great concern was always for the national identities that existed in the vast empire, the “peoples under the Roman yoke” who “ceased, one might say, to be the peoples they were,” like the Egyptians stifled by the Greek and Roman presence. He had a liking for the little Greek city-states that, after founding foreign colonies, were able to produce an original civilization, “the bloom of youth of the human species,” and remain within their national framework. He undoubtedly admired “the Greek . . . love of liberty,” but did not say a word about the Athenian political system or the difference between Athens and Sparta.³⁴ It was not democracy, even of a kind limited to the propertied classes and idealized by generations steeped in classical culture, that he saw in Greece, its elected magistrates, its assemblies of the people, Pericles as depicted by Thucydides. For him, Greece simply represented the youth of national cultures, of communities that cultivated their specific identities. This perfect national community was succeeded by the Roman multinational monster.

“Nothing less than a new world was needed to heal the tear” of “the Roman world-constitution,” said Herder, and that new world was the North: “The South was flooded by the North.” The old classical world, inhabited by men who were becoming submerged in vice, was shaken by the arrival of a young people. Once again, Herder spoke of a renewal of the world and the birth of “a new man.” He saw with admiration the arrival of the Teutonic tribes, and was filled with amazement at “Providence’s way of preparing such a strange replacement of human forces.” This “whole new world” was “their work, their race, their constitution.” They brought not only “human forces” but also “what laws and institutions!” They “despised the arts and sciences, luxury and refinement, which had wrought havoc on mankind,” replacing them with “nature, . . . healthy northern intelligence,” and “strong and good, albeit savage customs.” Their laws “breathed manly courage, sense of honor, confidence in intelligence, honesty and piety.” As for the feudal system, it replaced “the welter of populous, opulent cities” with “building up the land,” thus creating “healthy and therefore happy people.” Their ideal ultimately “tended towards chastity and honor,” and “ennobled the best part of the human inclinations.”³⁵

The Herderian apologetics for the Germanic Middle Ages embraced almost every aspect of social and political life. The Lutheran pastor poured scorn on the "classic aesthetes" who view "the regimentation of our age as the ultimate achievement of mankind," lose no opportunity "to belittle entire centuries for their barbarism, wretched laws, superstition and stupidity," and condemn their temples, monasteries, schools, and guilds. At the same time, these misguided people "sing the praises of the light of our age, that is, its levity and boisterousness, its warmth in ideas and coldness in deeds, its seeming strength and freedom, and its real mortal weakness and exhaustion from unbelief, despotism and extravagance." Herder claimed that the Middle Ages should be judged "according to their very being and purposes, their pleasures and customs," and when one approaches them in the right way one sees that, despite the appearance of violence, they had "something solid and binding, noble and magnificent." Here he was referring to the nature of society; he deplored the disappearance of "our guilds" and derided the liberty of his time—that is, its individualism—and opposed to it the medieval values, norms, and social structures. It was a world, he said, where "lord and servant, king and subject were driven more strongly and closely together," where "the excessive, unhealthy expansion of the cities, those abysses for the vitality of mankind," was checked, and where "the scarcity of trade and refinement prevented self-indulgence and preserved simple humanity." It was a world where "the crude guilds and baronies created prideful knights and craftsmen, but at the same time self-reliance, security in one's circle, a manliness standing upon its centre." Here Herder took a further step and sang the praises of the "warring republics" and "self-defending cities" that were later to spring up on the soil prepared by the Middle Ages.³⁶

Herder agreed with Voltaire that the Middle Ages were a period of barbarism, but unlike Voltaire, he considered this barbarism a healthy vitality and approved of the creative disorder and effervescence of the time. He said that this time of "fermentation" was creative owing to its "Christian religion," which was "one of the world's driving forces." It would seem, however, that it was not so much the Christian Middle Ages that Herder was attempting to rehabilitate as the Germanic Middle Ages. He had no sympathy for medieval Catholicism: it was the fragmentation that he liked. Whereas in the ancient world "the strength of every individual national character had been lost," "in these centuries of fermentation" mankind disintegrated "into small attachments, divisions, and orders of subordination," and "many, many different parts."³⁷

Herder was not always true to his *Stürmer* conceptions: "The night of the medieval centuries," he wrote in *Ideas*, will never return.³⁸ However, he eulogized everything that Voltaire and other Enlightenment thinkers like Hume detested. In Voltaire's opinion, "when one goes from the history of the Roman

Empire to that of the peoples that destroyed it in the West, one is like a traveler who, on leaving a splendid city, finds himself in a desert full of thorns. Twenty barbarous jargons succeeded that fine Latin language that had been spoken from Illyria to Mount Atlas. In place of those wise laws that governed half our hemisphere, there were only savage customs. . . . Human understanding was deadened by the most contemptible and insane superstitions. These superstitions reached the point where monks became lords and princes. They had slaves, and those slaves did not even dare to complain. The whole of Europe wallowed in this state of degradation until the sixteenth century, and only emerged from it through terrible convulsions.”³⁹

Unlike Herder, a strong advocate of agrarian civilization, Voltaire, like Hume, appreciated the civilizing functions of cities as centers of life, science, and culture. In the chapter on England approaching the ninth century, he painted a flattering portrait of King Alfred, who knew Latin, had books brought over from Rome (as “there were none in England, which was very barbarous”), and laid the foundations of “the Oxford academy.” The last lines of the *Essay* were in praise of the “wonderful cities” from Saint Petersburg to Madrid, “built in places that were deserts six hundred years ago,”⁴⁰ to which Herder responded by praising the rough, healthy civilization of the Germanic peoples.

Herder, like Möser, saw the Germanic upsurge of the early Middle Ages as a prototype and model for the rebirth needed by the decadent civilization of the eighteenth century. Herder did not invent the myth of the liberating barbarians, but he did depict the Germanic tribes as having rejuvenated a world in decline. A new barbarian invasion was of course unimaginable, but a moral, intellectual, and national renewal, an awakening of organic nationalities was possible, just as it was possible that a communitarian, antirationalist, and antiuniversalistic civilization would succeed the civilization of the Enlightenment. The very word “barbarian” lost its pejorative meaning: Herder poured out his sarcasm on all the guilty parties — Hume, Robertson, d’Alembert, and Iselin were mentioned by name — for whom the dissolution of the civilization of the Middle Ages represented the ending of a nightmare that eventuated in the Renaissance: “The long, eternal night was enlightened by the morning of reformation and renaissance in arts, sciences, morals! The yeasts sank, and there arose our thought, culture, philosophy! . . . One was no longer barbarian.”⁴¹ Herder opposed the Renaissance precisely because it was antibarbarian and anti-Germanic and it reconnected with classical antiquity over the head of the Middle Ages. Moreover, he saw it as an Italian national myth. But what is still more interesting in the text I have just quoted is that this Protestant theologian did not hesitate to place the Reformation on the same footing as the Renaissance. In other words, Herder substituted the myth of the Germanic

antirationalist Middle Ages not only for the rationalist, classical myth of the Renaissance but also for the Protestant myth.

Despite his theory of the equality of all cultures, Herder, who rehabilitated the Germanic barbarians just as they were, did not hesitate to approve of the destruction of the Mediterranean culture by the men of the North. A revival of the Germanic and Scandinavian myths, which at that time were easily confused, reached its peak when Herder was beginning his career. In 1756, Mallet made the *Edda* known to the public at large, but it was Herder, a great admirer of this epic, who recommended German poets to use Nordic mythology, and a century later it was Wagner, heir to the Romantic philologists, who in fact brought about its revival in art. The case of Wagner clearly illustrates the connection that exists between racism and mythology: racism is the modern form of Germanic mythology, which the Stürmers always opposed to Greco-Roman mythology.

This cultural revival prepared the way for a political revival. The barbarians, in their relationship to Roman decadence, represented the same return to a healthy vitality that Sturm und Drang claimed to represent in relation to the French Enlightenment. The glorification of the Middle Ages related to a Germanic, pluralistic, national construction that was both mythical and new. The Middle Ages are not usually considered a period in which national communities flourished. Christian universalism, religious unity, and Latin as the universal language of culture are generally perceived as the characteristics of the Middle Ages. But this was not how Herder saw it: he liked “the blossoming of the spirit of chivalry,” though not the “Gothic buildings,” and it was above all “the multiplicity of kingdoms — so many communities of brothers living beside one another” — that he admired. At the same time, he by no means despised uniformity, on condition that it corresponded to his own vision of the good. This was a point that his interpreters, from Rouché to Barnard and Berlin, hardly noticed: uniformity was fine so long as the “brother-nations . . . all shared the same German descent, one constitutional ideal, one religious faith.” There was an extraordinary vitality in this world where each community, “struggling with itself,” was “moved and driven . . . by a holy wind” to engage in “crusades and the conversion of entire peoples.”⁴²

A few pages later, however, Herder condemned European expansionism for the disasters and destruction that it caused, and deplored the calamities brought about by “conversion or cultivation”; a few pages earlier he included the Crusades in these calamities. In book 19 of *Ideas*, his tone was even harsher: “The cross of Christ was carried as an instrument of death to all parts of the world.” Throughout book 20 he passed judgment on the Crusades (that “insane event,” that “folly that cost Christian Europe an indescribable amount

of money and men”), and on the Inquisition (“that criminal jurisdiction”).⁴³ He harshly condemned the Papacy, the campaigns against the heretics in the south of France, and the orders of chivalry founded in Palestine. He undoubtedly hated colonialism of any kind, including that carried on under the sign of the Cross.

In the final analysis, the Herderian ideal was an organic, corporative community in which the social classes constituted a hierarchy within a body. Herder contrasted this ideal society—the product of the Germanic conquests and of the totally new institutions brought in by the victors—this healthy society in which faith was supreme, to the realities of his time: a world without God, a permissive society, an absolutist and, what in his opinion was far worse, an enlightened regime, a centralized state, and a rationalistic and individualistic philosophy, destructive of natural social relationships. He saw the nation as a natural collectivity, whose existence throughout the Middle Ages he celebrated. It was an organic civilization, of which the “modern civilization” of his time was the exact opposite: a rationalist, “mechanical” civilization (the words “mechanical” and mechanism recur frequently in these pages to describe the mental outlook of modernity) that had succeeded the age that the philosophes had seen as a period of mere barbarism.

That is how the German national revival began. Herder glorified the invasions and exalted the ancient Teutons and the Middle Ages, seeing this civilization as the Germanic structure par excellence. He celebrated its laws and customs, its way of life, its morality, and, more generally, the mentality of those heroic times. This was the beginning of the tremendous effort made from that time onward to fight not only French cultural influence but also rationalism, universalism, and cosmopolitanism, the school of natural law, utilitarianism, free thought, and all proposals for rational reforms: that is, the entire intellectual infrastructure on which liberalism and democracy are based. With Herder and Burke, the war on the French Enlightenment assumed the dimensions it was to have throughout the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth. For the first time, national sentiment and the cult of the national past and national traditions were mobilized against reason and the autonomy of the individual. In the name of the national past, Burke eulogized the present that was passing away in order to block a future he perceived as the end of civilization; Herder repudiated the present for the same reason and with the same objective. Despite appearances, these ideas were neither reactionary nor traditionalist nor conservative. On the contrary, they were the principles that gave rise to a new idea of civilization and nurtured the cultural revolution of which Herder, in the heart of Europe, was the great protagonist. In the long run, that revolution was hardly less important than the industrial revolution.

It can be said that in many ways the growth of national sentiment among the masses was its result, and the revolutionary Right and the conservative revolution were its products.

Herder's dual complaint against the regime of Frederick II (the Great) was that it was insufficiently national and at the same time "enlightened." In many ways, Herder seems to have been the spokesman for a hard Germanic nationalism against a government that was more cosmopolitan, holding far more advanced ideas on religion and culture, than the people. One had a conservative people ruled by a Francophile monarch, writing in French and infatuated with Voltaire and his deism. It was undoubtedly these cosmopolitan and antireligious tendencies that offended the cultural patriotism of the Stürmer-pastor, for the Lutheran tradition was one of a provincial particularism strongly opposed to the modern state. In the twentieth century, the cult of local traditions would be an element in the struggle against liberalism and the law of the majority. Already in Herder's time, however, the Prussian regime easily gave the impression of being more advanced than the governments of Louis XV and Louis XVI. It was precisely in the "secularized" and centralizing character of the government of Frederick II that Herder saw the trouble, and the same would apply to Taine and Maurras in their relationship to the Third Republic.

What did Herder have to offer in place of enlightened despotism? Unlike the philosophes and unlike Kant, he could not propose an alternative based on the principles of natural law: he did not believe that man founded society or the state. If authoritarianism displeased him, he did not, for good reason, suggest any of the solutions provided by Locke, Hume, Montesquieu, or Rousseau. He reproached enlightened despotism for treating men like "lifeless cogs in a huge, wooden, thoughtless machine." He saw it as "the maw by which mankind is devoured in the name of 'tranquillity and obedience'—meaning, in reality, death and uniform demolition!"⁴⁴ However, in view of his social conformism, his respect for traditional hierarchies and established authorities, his admiration for the medieval guilds and freedoms, especially the Germanic freedoms of the early Middle Ages, Herder's opposition to Frederick the Great could not have implied a desire for reform of any depth. Herder was probably thinking of a modernized form of the guilds, of the organizational principles that existed "among the German peoples who did everything through guilds,"⁴⁵ of the local "freedoms" of the Hanseatic cities of which he had experience in Riga, that aristocratic republic which aroused his admiration. Indeed, the young preacher at the cathedral of Riga proved to be a devoted burgher: he expressed, like Burke, his attachment to the ancient institutions of the city and shared the grateful loyalty of the patricians of the city to the empress Catherine, calling her "the arbiter of Europe, the goddess of peace, a minister of philosophy on the

throne,” and predicting that the age would be named after her, as in the case of Peter the Great.⁴⁶

This loyal subject could hardly envisage anything other than a consultation of the monarch with the “natural” representatives of society. The participation of the people in public affairs, which Herder seems to have been demanding, was the participation of the nation as a body. The main thing was not that the subjects as a whole should participate but that the national spirit should be represented. It was a matter not of popular sovereignty or of any form of parliamentarianism but of the national soul and the spirit of the people impregnating the government: the rulers must be of the same culture as those who are ruled. What mattered, finally, was that the elites should be national, that, like the monarch, they should speak and write in the national language, and that foreign influence should be eliminated. Absolute monarchy as it existed in his time was repugnant to Herder, for it was the contrary of the medieval political and social order, and it destroyed the rights of noblemen, guilds, and corporations, as well as local “liberties,” which were nothing other than local privileges. What mattered to him was that the state should be a national state and that the genius of the nation should impregnate the state. For him, the family was the only pure product of nature, and the state had to be founded on the family: “Nature produces families: it follows that the most natural state is that of a single people with a single national character.”⁴⁷ And elsewhere he said: “The government of a people is a family, a well-ordered household. It relies on itself, for it was founded by nature, and its existence stands and falls only with the ages.” He called this the first stage of a natural government, maintaining at the same time that this was the highest and most permanent stage.⁴⁸ In other words, Herder considered the most primitive forms of political organization to be the ideal ones. This tends to discredit the idea that he bore no responsibility for the process whereby the idea of the nation led to the national state. In such a situation there was no reason why the genius of the nation should not be embodied in an absolute monarch. That is what emerges from the *Journal*, in which Herder contrasted Peter the Great, “who, so to speak, felt within himself all that the Russian nation could and did become,” with “Frederick, whose State is based solely on his personal plans,”⁴⁹ to the advantage of the former. To recognize, feel, and preserve a people’s soul was a sacred duty. If Russia had such hopes for the future, it was because it had not been touched by the Latin language, monastic civilization, or Roman Catholicism: “Only Russian history is based on historic relics [*Denkmale*] in the language of the country,” he said, whereas in the other countries of Europe “the language of the monks ejected whatever it could.”⁵⁰

Herder believed that “nations evolve in accordance with the place, the time

and their inner character. Each one bears within itself the harmony of its perfection, not comparable to any others." This formula was taken up by Taine (in the form of "the place, the milieu and the moment") to show precisely what Herder had wanted to demonstrate a century earlier: namely, the dependence of individuals on their cultural, historical, and ethnic context, the profound influence of the milieu on the thought and morals of all peoples, and the idea that each people has a particular spirit of its own, given once and for all, original and unchanging. Herder held that this special spirit exhausted itself as it was being expressed. The image he used to illustrate this idea was that of a plant that springs up, blossoms, and withers. Each people, each period of history, he said, "like any art and science and what not in the world ha[s] its period of growth, blossoming and decline."⁵¹

This veneration of the specific, this revolt against the modernizing rationalism of the philosophes, recurs innumerable times throughout *Another Philosophy*. The tongue-in-cheek irony of the following passage is a good example: "How wretched [the time] when there were still nations and national characters: what mutual hatred, aversion to foreigners, fixation upon one's center, ancestral prejudices, clinging to a scrap of land upon which we are born and upon which we are to rot away! Native ways of thinking, a narrow circle of ideas, eternal barbarism! Thank God that all our national characters have been erased! . . . We may not have a fatherland, none who are dear to us and for whom we live, but we are friends to all men and citizens of the world. All the rulers of Europe are speaking French already, and soon we will all be doing so. . . . National characters, where have you gone?"⁵²

The essence of the ideology of the Land and the Dead, of Blood and Soil is already there: men and peoples are defined not by their actions or their institutions but by their psychology.⁵³ We are prisoners of the context in which we are born, we cannot escape linguistic and cultural determinism, and we are only ourselves when we think, read, and write in our native language. Language is the means by which man becomes conscious of himself.⁵⁴ This was the natural man. Frederick II, who eluded the context in which Providence had placed him, merely mimicked a foreign people, culture, and language. The other aspect of this point of view was the replacement of a community of citizens free to mold society and the state as they wished, and to create for themselves a way of life that suited them, with a historical, ethnic, and cultural community.

This, precisely, was Herder's major contribution to European thought. This community, the nation, had an existence comparable to that of a person. Herder, as we have seen, viewed nations as individuals, each with a specific physiognomy and spirit, a "character" or constitution. This spirit had to be

preserved through isolation: "The greatest harm that can be done to a nation," wrote Herder in 1767, "is to rob it of the individual character of its spirit and its language. . . . Reflect on this, and you will see the irreparable loss that Germany has experienced. If only Germany at the end of the Middle Ages had been an island like Great Britain!" This principle was valid at all times, and for all peoples and civilizations. Isolation enabled them to safeguard their originality: it allowed them to preserve their "me," as Barrès would have called it, or, as Spengler would have said, to assert the self-sufficiency of all cultures. The supposed cosmopolitanism of Herder, his ideal of "humanity," was entirely theoretical and virtual, but his nationalism, on the other hand, his violent campaign against foreign influences, had immediate concrete results. The most immediate consequence of the Herderian revolution was the idea that to allow oneself to be subject to a foreign influence is a forfeiture. This German patriot was all the more convinced of this because he believed there was a profound difference between the Germanic genius and the Latin genius. If the French influence could have only disastrous effects, that was because it was a violation of the German spirit. The time had come, he said, for Germany to regain control of itself: "What is past is past, let us speak no more about it, but in the future let us follow our own path and draw from our own depths whatever can be drawn. Let them speak good or ill of our nation, our literature, our language: they are ours, they are us, and that is enough."⁵⁵

This was the beginning of a veritable holy war. Everything foreign or that came from abroad was deemed a threat to the integrity of the life of the nation, both public and private. Herder deplored the increasing disappearance, under the influence of philosophy and of modern and foreign customs, of the virtues of youthful timidity, bashfulness, and feminine modesty, and he disliked the role that women now played in social life. Everywhere, people spoke only of love, and morals were relaxed. Nothing in the cultural life of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries pleased him: neither the art, nor the music, nor the architecture, nor the theater, nor the literature. He detested the moderns' claim to inventiveness: it was Voltaire's historical work that he had in mind. To demonstrate the inferiority and superficiality of the French seventeenth century, Herder claimed that the characters in the theater of the classical period were pale copies of the figures in the court of Louis XIV, and he poured scorn on Corneille and Racine. From Bossuet to gardens à la française, from the opera to the *Encyclopédie*, whatever came from Paris lacked depth and originality.⁵⁶

In this way, the national consciousness to the east of the Rhine came into being and the desire to give political expression to cultural autonomy took root. This nationalization of cultural life united each people and divided the nations; it tended to confirm each nation in its tradition, to encourage xeno-

phobia as an intellectual stimulant, and finally to set up a principle of general relativity in which each nation opposed the others.⁵⁷

According to Herder, the supreme expression of the “spirit” and the “character” of a nation is its language. Under the influence of Hamann, but no doubt also of Rousseau, he began very early to take an interest in language. An essay of his on this question won a prize from the Berlin Academy. But, once again, it was in his confrontation with Voltaire that Herder developed his own ideas. In his introduction to the *Age of Louis XIV*, Voltaire indicated four outstanding moments in the history of Europe: the age of Pericles, the age of Caesar and Augustus, the Italian Renaissance, and the age of Louis XIV. The common characteristic of these four periods was a formidable flowering of the arts and literature within a particular nation. This poses a dual question for the historian: Why was there a spiritual flowering precisely at this period? Why was it limited to a particular nation? It is in the answer to this question, said Marc Crépon, that one sees the relationship between language and history.⁵⁸ Only the greatness and unity of a nation allow it to play a decisive role in history. The unity of a nation derives from its language, and its greatness from a certain level of achievement that is reflected in the genius of the language.

What, then, was language for Herder? It was first of all a perfectible tool of literature. Nations differ through the ability of their languages to further the progress of literature and the sciences, an ability that is not a natural attribute and is something that can be worked on and improved. A lack of efficacy is not an intrinsic deficiency but a sign that there is work to be done. Here there is an undeniable closeness between Herder and Voltaire. But if a language is understood to be only a tool, as it was in the case of Voltaire, it is replaceable. This idea was repugnant to Herder, for whom language was a means of gaining knowledge of the special character of a nation through empathy. Language was both the reservoir and the content of literature: in other words, Herder was propounding a theory of language as tradition. All that is stored up in a language, all that a language stores up, century after century, generation after generation, represents a people’s thoughts, those thoughts, precisely, that make its language a national language. Language is the legacy which each generation inherits from the one before, and which it must enrich in turn; it is the capital that each generation must make fruitful. But it is not only a reservoir, it is also contents; it is the storehouse, the thought of the literature of the past that must be worked over by the literature of the future. The history of the language is nothing but the work of tradition.⁵⁹

It follows that for Herder languages were not the products of human artifice; a people’s language is the very soul of that people in a visible and tangible form. Every nation thinks as it speaks and speaks as it thinks. Its

language is an organic whole that lives and develops like a living being. The character, the temperament, the ways of feeling and thinking, the specificity and originality of a people are expressed within it. It is never static; it lives the very life of the nation, and its development provides the key to the national history. All the characteristics of a language have their *raison d'être*.⁶⁰

In other words, language is the mirror of culture; it is “the dictionary of the soul,” it is the key to our understanding of man and his position in the universe.⁶¹ It follows that a people ought never to be deprived of its language. As soon as a language ceases to be merely an instrument and becomes a nation’s treasure, the expression of its soul and individuality and the vehicle of a tradition, its abandonment amounts to a betrayal. Lack of respect for a language begins to closely resemble a declaration of cultural war that carries the threat of annihilation.

Here we come upon an important element in Herder’s critique of the Enlightenment. For Voltaire, the genius of a language was not the genius of a people; it did not express a people’s character or some essential quality of its nature. The genius of a language lay in its “ability to say, in the shortest and most harmonious way, what other languages express less happily.” Languages are by their nature able to express the same things and only differ in their capacities, not in their content. This idea had two consequences: it not only sanctioned a comparison and a competition between languages but also — what for Herder was worst of all — sanctioned the domination of one language over all others. It gave the French cultural hegemony its legitimization: French could exercise its authority over cultured Europe, and French literature could serve as a model without affecting the genius of other peoples. This idea of genius shows that where Voltaire was concerned, the national community was not identical to the linguistic community. Ways of feeling, imagining, and thinking are not relative to each nation, and the things that each language is more able or less able to express are independent of the nation that speaks it. One is dealing with universal manifestations that historical or political circumstances, such as civilized manners and morals, permit certain languages to express with greater felicity. This ability is not intrinsic to the language but depends on a history that is precisely that of the progress of the human spirit.⁶²

This idea of spiritual progress is the basis of Voltaire’s conception of history. Voltaire did not think that every nation had the right to claim the full attention of historians; similarly, not all languages had an equal measure of genius, and a nation whose language lacked genius could do nothing better than to make use of another. The law of progress by no means excluded the domination of one language over another. It was a matter of the capacities of a language, and these capacities depended on external conditions that changed from one pe-

riod to another. If a people or a part of a people adopted another language, that people lost nothing of its identity: a national community could not be viewed as a linguistic community. For Voltaire, language, in the final reckoning, was merely a tool.

That is what Herder objected to. His criticism of Voltaire was really a criticism of the whole Enlightenment culture. In opposition to Voltaire's point of view, Herder maintained that one had to give the German language its rights, encourage the national literature, and by this means enable the German nation to find its rightful place in the world. For the German language to stand up to the French, language had to be more than merely a tool. Thus, Herder claimed that it was precisely language that represented national individuality, or the genius and spirit of a nation. The only "reservation" he had about his "praise of the Middle Ages," which he said he had made "regretfully," was precisely his dislike of the dominance of Latin at the time. As a universal language, the language of culture, the language in which all the affairs of the nation were conducted, it was useful "to the clergy as an educated class, but could only be harmful to the nations themselves." "Not only were the mother tongues . . . kept in an undeveloped state," but, "together with the language of the country, each time a large part of the national character was excluded from the affairs of the nation." Finally, "it is by cultivating its national language that a people can emerge from a state of barbarism."⁶³ It is difficult to overestimate the importance of this revolutionary conception of national identity.

Herder could not help stressing German superiority: "Our language has a more ancient poetry than that of the Spanish, Italians, French and English. Only our political Constitution has prevented this field from being reclaimed for centuries." German, far from being a harsh, outlandish, barbarous tongue, was the mold that German thought had fashioned for itself, and the only one that suited it perfectly. To touch the German language was to touch the German soul. That is why the adoption of French was poison for the German spirit: it falsified the spirit and heart of the people. Finally, Herder offered this exhortation: "See then," he wrote in 1794, "we have to struggle against a neighboring nation for fear that its language will absorb our own. Wake up, sleeping lion, wake up, German people, do not allow your palladium [protection] to be snatched away!"⁶⁴ This awakening, he said, could only come about through the use of German, the mother tongue, too often regarded during that period as the barbarous idiom of an uncivilized people. "We are what we are," he said. "For such a long time, we have been taken far from ourselves, torn away from ourselves, in the service of other nations, enslaved to them. Should we not take back the present time with a strong hand, and cry: 'Know yourself, for others know you and exploit you'? Take over yourself so as not to be taken over!"⁶⁵

But this was not all. Unlike the Latin languages, the daughters of Latin, which were only nieces of Greek, the German language, said Herder, was the sister of Greek. The Latin languages, those derivative languages, of recent formation, could not compare in nobility with a language as old as the people that spoke it, a people that had remained pure. Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, writing in 1887, claimed that this idea, which Herder merely touched on, was developed by Fichte in his *Addresses to the German Nation*, where the rector of the University of Berlin, basing himself on a comparison of languages, showed that of all the peoples of Europe, the German people was the oldest, the most unmixed, the noblest.⁶⁶

In reality, however, a hierarchy of languages, cultures, and peoples exists already in Herder, and this hierarchy is rooted in Herder's antirationalism, in his vision of the nation as an ethnic unit. Herder's multiculturalism, his totally theoretical ideal of *Humanität*, was not enough to ensure true equality among men. From the beginning of his career his literary patriotism, his campaign against foreign influences, and his defense of national cultures simultaneously took the form of a political nationalism. The use of philology, literature, and culture in general in the service of the nation was not Fichte's invention but Herder's. Because Herder was not a Prussian patriot but a German patriot, he can be misleading: cultural patriotism was in his day the only kind of patriotism that could ensure moral unity, which was then the only form of unity possible. His Germany was defined by the only concrete criteria available at the time: history, the culture and language, the Lutheran tradition, the Teutonic Middle Ages, or, in more general terms, the German "character," "spirit," and "genius."

It is interesting, in this connection, to examine the interpretation given in the last years of the nineteenth century by Lévy-Bruhl, a French scholar of German, a philosopher, and an anthropologist, who a few years later produced a work on the philosophy of Jacobi. At a time when French nationalism was beginning to become a political force, this eminent scholar of German literature looked at Germany as it emerged from the first volumes of Herder's *Works* edited by Bernhard Suphan and from Rudolf Haym's biography. He was not deceived and had a perfect understanding of the meaning of this manifesto of German superiority. Herder, he said, regarded the German character as essentially moral, and its two main qualities as "courage and fidelity." Sincerity, a respect for the given word, a horror of treachery, lies, and duplicity: according to Herder that was fidelity, that outstanding feature of the German character. Luther had already said, and Fichte would repeat, that the real cause of the Reformation was the German character that would not tolerate Italian mendacity. "People have wished, said Herder, to deny our nation

many spiritual qualities . . . but what has never been denied its brave citizens, its heroes, its good kings, is valor, fidelity, sincerity. Their word was worth more than an oath or a document stamped with an official seal. The lord relied on his vassals and the vassals on their lord: that is what we find in the old German proverbs." Immorality was repugnant to the German, debauchery he found intolerable: "We lack wit, we lack a frivolous nature; we lack a light touch to make immorality tolerable and agreeable." Eighteenth-century German vice was borrowed; it was not German.⁶⁷

After these flights of fancy, continued Lévy-Bruhl, which were all the more interesting when compared with the harsh criticisms that Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Rousseau, not to speak of other figures of the French Enlightenment, directed at their fellow countrymen, there came the following: Herder commiserated with the fate of the Germans, wretched at home and dogged by poverty. Thus, after the German as a paragon of virtue, one had the German as a victim. It was not only by the moral nature of his "character" that the German was distinguished from all other peoples but also by his wretchedness, the poverty to which he was subject. Herder did not advise the poor, the wretched, and exploited to rebel but counseled them to consign themselves to divine justice. From Luther's widow begging for help from the king of Denmark, from Kepler dying of hunger, to the "German Negroes" sold on the banks of the Mississippi and the Ohio, the national boast of this people so ill-treated and so patient was to forget itself and devote itself to the holy work of the progress of humanity. The sublime destiny of the Germans was to exist for others, not for themselves, to be an educative nation in the world.⁶⁸

From this followed conclusions that Herder and his contemporaries each elaborated in his own way, but they were all on the same lines. Every people, through its character and essence, had a special mission to accomplish in history. It followed that peoples whose mission was already accomplished had to make way for others whose turn had come. For Herder, this was part of the divine plan: "Providence herself . . . only wanted to fulfill her purpose by change, leading things along through the awakening of new forces and the demise of others."⁶⁹ According to Herder and his contemporaries, Germany still had an important mission to accomplish in the future. Fichte claimed that Germany's task was to find the proper form of the state, which would reconcile Christianity with the principles of modern society, but it was once again Herder who invented the idea of a "young people" that would appropriate the heritage of peoples that were exhausted. In the hundred and first of his *Letters for the Advancement of Humanity*, he declared: "We are latecomers on the scene, but we are all the younger for that. We still have much to do, while other nations enter into their rest, having produced all they can."⁷⁰ The French genius was

exhausted, it was condemned to repeat itself; the mission of France, which in the second half of the eighteenth century had entered into a period of decadence, was over, and that of Germany had begun.

From that time on, from Herder to Friedrich Sieburg, the writer of the famous *Gott in Frankreich*, translated as *Dieu est-il Français?* (Is God a Frenchman?), in 1930, Germany never stopped flaunting its youthfulness. This belligerent anti-French myth was Herderian in origin. Herder even went further: he claimed that his people had not only a superiority due to its youthfulness but an intrinsic superiority. A poem he wrote in 1797, "The German National Glory," promised the future to Germany because it was the land of humanity par excellence. The same theme recurred in his *Letters for the Advancement of Humanity*: German was the original language par excellence, and Germany the human nation par excellence.⁷¹ Thus, well before the humiliation of Germany in the Napoleonic Wars, "humanity" and Teutonism, humanity and nationalism were reconciled and even declared identical. Since the German national ideal and the ideal of humanity were interchangeable, Germany would have no difficulty in guiding civilized and Christian Europe, a mission that fell to it naturally due to the moral nature of the national character. Germany was thus a privileged nation. Fichte said that the Germans were the people par excellence; similarly, Michelet spoke of the mission of France. All the nationalists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries considered their respective peoples to have been charged with a universal mission.

At the same time as Herder bestowed on Germany an especially noble mission linked to its moral superiority, and proclaimed the decadence of the eighteenth century in general and particularly of France, he persisted in defending the principle of the equal originality and equal merit of all peoples. Each nation, as we have seen, was said to possess in itself its center of happiness; each had its own virtues and its special source of joy. Between nations and periods there was "a continuous progression and development," and humanity was compared in *Another Philosophy* to a river or a tree. The term "progression," like the image of the tree, recurs there more than once.⁷² But this egalitarian pluralism, which in principle assures each nation and each period an equal status, as all are deemed equally worthy of respect, ends up in practice as a belief in the decadence, the debility, the senility of the civilization represented by France and the eighteenth century, by the French and British Enlightenments, and in large measure also by Kantian philosophy. The idea of the exhaustion of European civilization, particularly in France, the idea that a French victory would be a defeat of Western civilization, the idea of cultural self-sufficiency, generally thought to have been invented by Spengler, were barriers against the rationalist Enlightenment erected by Herder himself and only developed by his successors.

The French influence detested by Herder was exemplified by the legal and political definition of the nation given in the *Encyclopédie*, a definition that made no reference to history or culture. The Voltairian spirit, the spirit of the *Encyclopédie*, of the school of natural law, was soon to take on the name of liberalism. Herder, for his part, had in this way founded a school that was to reach its zenith at the turn of the twentieth century. The image of civilizations each in turn passing through the phases of organic life—a concept usually associated with Spengler—is in reality a Herderian image. German cultural patriotism and the detestation of a rationalist civilization, based on the omnipotence of the individual and on a technical progress that the writers of the *Encyclopédie* considered the glory of the human race, merged in Herderian thought. A scorn for progress found its place quite naturally within a context in which Herder asserted the impotence of human reason.⁷³ Technical progress, he said, brought with it the great danger of a “mechanization” of politics and morality. “Mechanization” was really a synonym for a rationalization of political life, which would mean a victory either for the school of natural law or for enlightened despotism. Herder disliked both possibilities, as both destroyed old prejudices, traditional forms of behavior and ways of life, and religious faith. Moreover, as we have seen, in enlightened despotism he detested the enlightenment no less than the despotism.

It is against this background that one sees the whole difference between the way that the term “people” was used in France at the end of the eighteenth century and the meaning that Herder gave it. In France, the “people” or the “nation” had a legal, political, and social connotation whereby its members were placed in opposition to the rulers and the privileged classes. The word “people,” which from the beginning of the French Revolution was synonymous with “democrat” or “patriot,” became synonymous with “revolutionary” and the opposite of “monarchist.” The contrary happened in Germany: as the depository of the national values, the people were said to have withstood foreign influences, whether French or Latin. The idea that the spirit and taste of a nation were to be found in the part of the nation that had not been contaminated by foreign influences was quite common in Germany. In contrast to the Frenchified intellectuals, the people embodied the nation: the Herderian idea of a “popular poetry,” primal, denoting authenticity, was an element in the war of national liberation. The popular poet was defined by his national inspiration. At the same time as being original and spontaneous, genius according to Herder is the voice of its people and period. The great virtue of the poet was not his personal but his national originality. Even if a genius, he could only create poetry if guided by the spirit of his people. Already in Vico poetry was described as the most natural and spontaneous form of expression, the least contaminated by foreign elements.

In this way, the tradition of the *Encyclopédie* did not survive the last decade of the eighteenth century. After that, first in Germany and afterward in France, it became possible, in the name of the people, to oppose democracy on the grounds that it was based on universal and hence cosmopolitan values. When, in the final years of the nineteenth century, people began to say in France what had already been said in Germany, namely, that democracy was a foreign value inimical to the national traditions, it was no longer really a novelty. Following Burke, de Maistre, Renan, and Taine, one heard from Barrès, Maurras, and Sorel that liberal democracy posed a mortal danger to the country and to civilization. German nationalism began its existence with Herder, by turning inward; a century later, with Barrès, French nationalism did the same.

Here we should look again at the Herderian concept of Humanität. This term, which we have already come across on several occasions, can have more than one meaning. In the first part of *Ideas*, the ideal of humanity transcends the earthly sphere and has a cosmic significance. In this respect, it is a truly universal concept. Humanity and reason can also signify a religious spirit, inasmuch as reason is also self-control, resistance to the lower passions, and hence "freedom" with regard to oneself and a proper attitude to others. Finally, humanity is also love of one's neighbor and the brotherhood of man. The idea put forward by Rouché that humanity is in agreement with nationality precisely because it excludes nationalism⁷⁴ no doubt corresponds to Herder's intentions. From the beginning, however, the question at issue is whether cultural nationalism, the cult of national genius, of particularism, of all that separates men in daily life does not swing the balance in favor of conflict rather than in favor of what men have in common. National differences are living, concrete; the brotherhood of man cannot efface cultural and linguistic frontiers; not even Christianity can do it. Particularism, even in Herder's time, showed itself to be infinitely more powerful than the common denominator "humanity." Undoubtedly, nationalism, in the sense it was given in the twentieth century, was not what Herder intended, and he could in no way foresee its ultimate developments, but these developments were nevertheless foreshadowed in his long campaign for the preservation of national, psychological, linguistic, cultural, and historical particularities and in his struggle against French influence. The trouble was not only that this influence was foreign but also that it had a cosmopolitan character, which finally amounted to the same thing. An ideal of "humanity" derived from religion and not from a recognition of the equality of rational beings and of groups of individuals, all of whom possess natural rights, rapidly disintegrates, whereas national realities remain and turn into bastions of nationalism.

Having reached this point, we must explain the totally different attitudes of

Burke and Herder to the French Revolution. Like many Germans, Herder greeted the fall of the Old Regime with enthusiasm. In his works of the 1790s and in his correspondence, he hardly ever spoke of the revolution and never mentioned Burke's *Reflections*, although he did possess Gentz's translation. We know that he judged the revolution favorably until 1793, and described France's purely defensive war as "the first example of a holy and just war."⁷⁵

Jeffrey Barash thought that it was precisely in the years in which Burke launched his formidable attack on the French Revolution that the great principle of Herderian thought, the supreme importance of historical specificity and hence of a multiplicity of values, reached its final expression. According to Barash, the ideal toward which Herder's humanism tended was based on the conviction that each person, each people, each social group has certain necessary and innocent illusions that should never be disturbed within their own sphere or be made into universal criteria for humanity. Each people undoubtedly has the right to fight for its freedom, but its historical context maintains it simultaneously in truth and illusion, so that it never has the right to intervene in the political affairs of others in order to impose its idea of a free constitution on another people. "Each one," wrote Herder, "must gather the roses for the crown of liberty with its own hands. . . . The so-called best form of government . . . is certainly not suited to all peoples simultaneously, in the same way."⁷⁶

We see that in the second part of the Weimar period, when he wrote the *Ideas*, a certain duality had entered into Herder's thinking. Barash showed that at that time he added the term "Humanität" to the term "Menschheit" which he had used both in the title of *Another Philosophy* and in that of *Ideas*. However, it was only in his *Letters for the Advancement of Humanity*, right at the end of his career, that his conceptualization changed and the nature of Herderian humanity was more clearly apparent. According to Barash, the principle of cultural pluralism, which had worked chiefly in favor of Germany, now took on a truly universal dimension, and Herder adopted the principle of the equality of all the peoples in the world. It was also on this basis that he supported the right of non-European peoples to defend their own values, and wondered, "What does an evaluation of all peoples by us Europeans mean? Where is a means of comparison to be found?"⁷⁷

There are two observations to be made about this interpretation. First of all, nothing like this was said as clearly in Herder's major works, those that were to enjoy enormous popularity, especially his *Ideas*, where, as we have seen, Herder attacked the non-Europeans. And then, if there is no criterion for a comparison, does one not fall back into relativism? What does one have here, a relativism derived from Herder's long struggle against universalism or a spirit of tolerance? Do we have a vision of the unity of the human race where-

by, at the end of his life, he transcended the limitations of the national particularities of *Another Philosophy*? Barash, Berlin, and others thought that Herder's pluralism was inspired by his humanistic and religious convictions.⁷⁸ Would one not be equally justified, however, in seeing Herder as the thinker who, more than any other, inspired modern relativism through his violent campaign against the Enlightenment?

Second, had Herder in the 1790s become aware of the fact that, translated into concrete political terms, particularism poisoned the relationships between persons? Did he in 1789 understand the greatness of this revolution of the rights of man, and, what is more important still, did he perceive that the fall of the Old Regime was nothing less than the concretization of the philosophy of the Enlightenment that had changed the world, and that the world was a better place as a result? Or — what is probably much nearer the truth — did he see the events of 1789 as a local, popular, and above all national rebellion against a despotic regime for which he had no sympathy? It is likely that the idea of the nation-in-arms, the victories of Valmy and Jemappes, the victory of liberty achieved by a people in revolt fired his imagination. Unlike most modern commentators, Herder seems to have realized very early that if the French Revolution was possible, it was precisely because the nation had now become aware of its existence and its maturity, and had gained self-confidence. In revolutionary France, the state was one with the people, which Herder viewed as the ideal that he wished to attain for his own country. It is very logical to think that he understood that it was not the revolution that molded the people but that it was the people who made the revolution. The nation was a reality, and the fall of the Old Regime meant that a long process had reached its end. But Herder viewed these newly acquired liberties as the liberties of a collectivity, not as liberties of the individual. In the nineteenth century, the cult of the individuality of the collective became quite simply a negation of the autonomy of the individual.

Herder was not at all a gentle dreamer, innocent and naïve, who did not understand the function of war or of the state. He knew and understood the power of integration both of war and of the state. He understood that a martial spirit was a fundamental element of nationalism, whereas war filled the men of the Enlightenment with horror. "What a flourishing condition Europe would be in, without the constant wars that trouble it for very flimsy reasons, and often for a mere caprice!" exclaimed Voltaire.⁷⁹ He, like Kant after him, saw ending warfare as the duty of all civilized men. This, however, was not Herder's position until the 1790s, when "fatherlands against fatherlands in bloody struggle" became "the worst barbarism of the human language."⁸⁰ Earlier, when he mocked the Prussian army, Herder was attacking

an army in the service of dynastic interests, war for the sake of expansion and power. To the mercenary armies of the eighteenth century, he opposed “natural” armies, indigenous ones. Herder did not, like Voltaire and Gibbon, reproach professional armies for being costly, he reproached them for not being national. Whereas Voltaire and Gibbon thought it positive that dynastic wars left peoples indifferent and were only felt by them because of the increased taxes resulting from campaigns, Herder deplored precisely this indifference.

The same applied where the state was concerned. Herder, as we have seen, was aware of the function of force in history, and if he disliked the despotic states of his time, it was because his ideal was the authoritarianism of ancient times. He described this ideal with great clarity at the very beginning of *Another Philosophy*: “The rule by divine right of a dynasty” is “the model for all civil order and its institutions.”⁸¹ Herder was by no means antagonistic to power as such, he simply wished to replace the dynastic state with a national state on the lines of the ancient tribal political system. In this he was a great modernist: “The most natural State thus consists of one people with the same national character. Such a people can continue within it for millennia, and can, if the prince also born from this people so wishes, reach the end of its development in the most natural way. . . . Nothing therefore seems more obviously contrary to the purpose of government than the unnatural enlargement of states, the dreadful mixture of different kinds of men and nations under a single scepter.”⁸² This Herderian conception of the national state is of very great importance; contrary to the belief of Isaiah Berlin, Herder’s ideas were not limited to an innocent cultural nationalism. His demand for cultural autonomy immediately assumed a political significance and was translated into political terms. His work represented the first great manifesto of a cultural, ethnic, and state nationalism, certainly not racist in the modern sense but poles apart from the conceptions of the nation and the state of Locke, Hume, Voltaire, or Rousseau.

We have seen that for Herder peoples were products of nature, veritable species: the comparison of peoples to animal species in *Another Philosophy* was no accident. Nations, he said, were defined by race, language, and history, which were like natural frontiers that he regarded as providential frontiers. Nationalities had an objective, predestined, hereditary, ethnic, and philological existence and were not dependent on the individual will. Nations came into existence neither by becoming conscious of themselves nor by having a common political identity. The concept of nationalities derived from a belief in the existence of national geniuses. The literary nationalism that was the starting point of Herder’s thinking was not its conclusion. That is why his cultural and ethnic determinism could easily become racism and was poles apart from the

“enlightened” definition of the nation given in the *Encyclopédie*. Moreover, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to draw a dividing line between a cultural or vaguely ethical determinism and a racial determinism, between a literary nationalism with immediate political implications and the desire to preserve a national culture. Herder opposed the Prussia of Frederick the Great and French influence on behalf of German culture, not on behalf of the rights of the citizens. In twentieth-century Europe, this approach was not entirely different from a rejection of democracy and universal values in the name of national values. Where the necessity for a national state was concerned, chapter 9 of *Ideas* took up the principles set forth in *Another Philosophy*. A country needed cultural barriers just as it needed political frontiers. It needed a cultural individuality just as it needed a political individuality. Like the nation, the state also had an ethnobiological existence. Barrès, Maurras, and their schools in France and all the impassioned European nationalisms endlessly repeated this idea.

In the final analysis, a quarter of a century before the Napoleonic Wars, Herder saw the Enlightenment, French influence, and the decadence resulting from the negation of the national spirit as part of one and the same phenomenon. A recognition of this fact is essential for an understanding of the significance which Herderian thought immediately gained throughout Europe, and which would be the foundation stone of nationalism: namely, that the Enlightenment, the rights of man, individualism, and, quite simply, democracy endangered the nation, the country, and the national culture. Herder was the first to oppose the nation to the Enlightenment. The idea that the genius of each people is to be found among the common folk is a Herderian conception, in total contradiction to the conclusions that Voltaire reached in his work on China: “The spirit of a nation is always to be found in a small number of people that gives work to the greater number, is fed by it and governs it.” This elitist idea was based on the fact that the uneducated “populace” was “in all countries solely occupied with manual labor,” whereas “this spirit of the Chinese nation is the most ancient monument to reason that exists on earth.”⁸³ These few lines reveal the entire difference between the thought of the Enlightenment and its opposite: the spirit of a nation, for Voltaire, was an expression of reason and not a frame of mind. It was a function of the intellect and not of the natural instincts that are all the more natural for not being perverted by bookish culture, contacts with foreign countries, cosmopolitanism, and finally rationalism.

Another basic feature of this anti-Enlightenment modernity was the transformation that Christianity experienced under the influence of nascent nationalism. We have seen that Herder put forward a very revolutionary principle: to be subject to foreign influences is to degenerate. Just as every people has

to preserve its cultural and ethnic specificity, just as it must have a national government, so it must have its own religion. This was one of the foundations of nationalism. The historical approach, which in Herder was inseparable from nationalism in general, made religion subservient to the nation. However, more than in any other area, Herder was hesitant about this, and he displayed a duality here of which he found it difficult to rid himself.

On the one hand, if each people has a genius that cannot be communicated to others, if each people has its own country, its own ideas, and its own religion, all of which are equally necessary, it follows that to convert to a different religion is to betray one's own nation and harm the genius of another. Herder followed Montesquieu in saying that "the introduction of any foreign religion is very dangerous. It always destroys the national character and honorable prejudices."⁸⁴ Montesquieu saw this as a universal principle, however, whereas Herder hesitated between condemnation of the evangelization of the Germans and its defense. In book 10 of *Ideas* he praised the Germans for having adopted Christianity and having fought for it as they did "for their kings and their nobility," and for having demonstrated "a truly zealous devotion." Elsewhere, he praised the work of Saint Colomban and Saint Gall, who converted the Alemans, the founders of German Switzerland, and a little further on he spoke of the honor due to the "German nation" for having been "the rampart and bastion of Christianity," "the living wall against which the mad fury" of the Mongols, the Huns, the Tartars, the Hungarians, and the Turks was broken. In this fourth part of *Ideas*, Herder considered it fortunate that "Providence tipped the scale" between Judaism and Christianity, and that "with the disappearance of Judea the old walls, by means of which this people, which said it was the sole people of God, held itself back with inflexible rigidity from all the peoples of the world, were broken down." Herder continued: "The time of isolated national creeds full of pride and superstition had passed." Two possibilities now presented themselves, because this development, thanks to "the Romans' general spirit of tolerance" and Christianity's victory over Judaism, was "a great step forward, but also dangerous, depending on the spirit in which it was made. It made all peoples brothers through its teaching of a single God and Savior, but it could equally well make them slaves by imposing this religion like a yoke or a chain."⁸⁵

On the other hand, in giving equal value to all civilizations and in opposing all forms of conversion, he cast doubt on Christian supremacy. Since religions were also the product of a period, a country, and an ethnic group, conversion was tantamount to treason for some and oppression for others; it meant harming the genius of another nation. A condemnation of the evangelization of the American savages could be regarded as the triumph of tolerance or as the

triumph of relativity over ecumenical Christianity.⁸⁶ Yet if Christianity was the true religion of humankind, how could one refuse it the right to spread outside Europe? How can one explain the fact that this Protestant pastor could regret that Christianity had been imposed on the Germans? For in that same last part of *Ideas* in which he praised the victory of Christianity over Judaism, Herder expressed regret at the destructive influence of Christianity on the vitality, the manners and morals, and the fighting spirit of the Germans: "Nothing was more contrary to the life and activities of the Nordics than Christianity, with which the heroic religion of Odin came to a final end." Herder did not hide his sympathy for these Germans of the North, glorious conquerors of the Baltic coasts. He was aware that "the hatred of these peoples for Christianity was deep-rooted," and that "the religion of Odin was so integral to their language and mentality that, as long as a trace of its memory survived, Christianity could not take hold." Moreover, he showed admiration for the pagan resistance to this Christian invasion, and knew that this heroic resistance had been broken only by a drastic uprooting and by the imposition of terror on a whole civilization: "The monks' religion was implacable toward the legends, songs, customs, temples and monuments of paganism." Herder claimed that these northern peoples had been "bewitched into an acceptance of Christianity" by "the pomp and ceremony of the new religion." It was never a matter of faith but of "singing in the choir, incense, lights . . . church bells and processions."⁸⁷

In this way we have the consecration, in a circuitous manner full of ambiguities, of a view that meant an acceptance of the defeat of Christianity by nationalism. Herder defended the common faith represented by the Christian tradition against the critical spirit, but when it came to making a choice, he regretted the defeats that a "sad remnant" of the "German peoples" had suffered at the hands of Charlemagne: first the crushing of the Lombards and then that of the Saxons, forced in their turn to submit and, after cursing "the great image of Wotan," made to convert to Christianity. Thus, "free peoples" were tied "to the Frankish throne," which inevitably harmed "the spirit of their original organization."⁸⁸

Here again, a comparison with Voltaire is instructive. Voltaire showed Charlemagne, jealous of the liberty of the Saxons, making war on them for thirty years before they were totally subdued, for no reason other than a desire for conquest. The Franks, who were already Christian, pillaged, slaughtered, and massacred, and Charlemagne saw Christianity as a means to bind the vanquished to the yoke of the victors. Voltaire, whose sympathies lay with the pagan victims, precisely because they were victims, had a profound aversion to Charlemagne. Indeed, he was deeply horrified by the Germanic tribes in gen-

eral, because “those savages, on crossing the Rhine, turned the other peoples into savages.”⁸⁹ But since in this case they were victims of the very barbarism they inflicted on others, they deserved compassion. Voltaire was speaking as a man of the Enlightenment, an enemy of violence, who reproached Charlemagne for his barbarism, whereas Herder, as a German patriot, reproached this Romanized and Christianized Frank for being a foreign conqueror who came to destroy the pagan culture of the Saxons, the Germans of that period.

Herder's position with regard to Christianity is of primary importance, for it exemplifies the whole problematics of pluralism and the relativity of values. *Another Philosophy* presented a pluralistic, relativistic view of things, which Herder tried to tone down in *Ideas*, without really being able to do so. He was unable to escape the impossibility in which he found himself of being able to choose between the absolute values of Christianity and the negation of all absolute values that is basic to nationalism. The cult of national genius, his most original and lasting idea, and also his most pernicious, was much more than a defensive reaction to the French intellectual invasion, just as the French post-1870 nationalism was more than a simple defensive reaction to the defeat of France by Prussia. It is undeniable that with his theory of national geniuses Herder tended to reduce culture, together with spirit, to the status of a by-product of geography, biology, environment, and race. With him begins the cult of authenticity, of a return to roots in the face of the supposedly false and artificial civilization of the great European cities. In him there is already the conviction that all cultural life and even all thought is conditioned by milieu and ethnic group. This idea was invented neither by Taine, nor by Barrès, nor by Maurras, nor by Spengler, but by Herder.

Herder was the first to undermine the self-confidence of Western civilization, a phenomenon that was to have disastrous results in the twentieth century. The philosophes criticized their civilization, the elements of obscurantism that still existed within it, but they replaced the universal values of Christianity with other universal values, rational and secular ones, whereas with Herder one has the beginnings of a generalized relativity. Rousseau's *Second Discourse* was composed in the name of the individual and not of the tribe. The philosophes hated colonialism for its cruelty and its religious intolerance. There were many among them who, like Rousseau and Helvétius, attacked social injustices and the exploitation of the masses, but they did not cast doubt on the superiority of their civilization to antiquity or the Middle Ages, or to other cultures: “All these peoples,” wrote Voltaire at the end of his chapter on Japan in *An Essay on the Manners*, “were once far superior to our Western peoples in all the spiritual and manual arts. But how we have made up for lost time! The countries where Bramante and Michelangelo built Saint Peter's in Rome, or where Raphael

painted, or where Newton calculated the infinite, or where *Cinna* and *Athalie* were written, have become the foremost countries of the earth. The other peoples are only barbarians or children in the fine arts, despite their antiquity and all that nature has done for them.”⁹⁰ The philosophy of history of the men of the Enlightenment embraced a theory of progress that was also a defense of modern Europe on its way to the liberation of the individual. A future liberated from the shackles of history and religion, of old habits and prejudices, was assumed to be the right of every human being. Against this, Herder’s relativistic philosophy of history, in proclaiming the decline of the Enlightenment culture of the West, hoped for the victory of a communitarian civilization over an individualistic civilization believed to have resulted from the skepticism and spirit of denial characteristic of rationalism.

Herder’s oeuvre is the proof that a cultural and ethnic nationalism, based on taboos and ethnic myths, can only with difficulty coexist with universal values. Herderian nationalism first of all turns rationalism on its head and then shows that it cannot coexist with Christianity. On the one hand, it might seem that the term “Humanität,” which in Herder embraces all that he said about the nature of man and which “destines him for reason and liberty,” bears witness to its universal character.⁹¹ But on the other hand, a detailed analysis of *Ideas* soon demonstrates that this major work promotes the idea of the superiority first of the white race and then of the German nation. Thus, Herder’s supposedly most original achievement—that of striking a balance between particularist values and universal ones—appears to have been illusory. Particularism could not fail to have a cost; the cult of the individual and the specific was bound to have a consequence.

In refusing to compare different periods and peoples in *Another Philosophy*, in proclaiming the equal dignity of all cultures, and in declaring that every truth is limited to a certain ethnic group and period, Herder led the way to relativism and skepticism, to Spengler and Meinecke. Later on he became aware of the nature of the relativism in which he had involved himself and of his pluralism, for which he is admired in our time, whereas its exorbitant cost has been forgotten. He did his best to retreat from these positions at the end of his life, but he was now unable to wipe out the significance of his rebellion against the Enlightenment. He tried to reconcile many contradictions, but his readers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries had difficulty in following him. Even if one accepts the idea that he sought to create a system that struck a balance between opposite components, this was unable to survive the tempests of the Napoleonic Wars. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, not to speak of its end, very little remained of the Herderian ideal of “humanity.” But, in fact, even in Herder’s own work this ideal was not sufficient to bring

about the disappearance of the opposite ideal of cultural specificity and of mobilizing Nordic and ethnic, anti-Latin, anti-French, and anti-English myths. That is why patriotic and ethnic sentiment finally overcame Christian universalism, and why the campaign against the French eighteenth century never really ended, for Herder neither would nor could deny the principle underlying his thinking, which was that every thought is the expression of a people, an ethnic group, rather than the expression of a truth.

Thus, contrary to another commonly accepted idea, it was not the French Revolution that destroyed the unity of Europe by arousing national feelings: the revolution was preceded by the German rebellion against the Enlightenment. The principle of nationalities did not come from the French Revolution, it came from the German eighteenth century. Herder's vision of national geniuses ended by setting all nations against each other. His nationalism split the world into a multiplicity of fatherlands; he divided history into a series of isolated national destinies; he became a factor of Balkanization and cultural division without precedent in Europe. Herder took it upon himself to place the constitutive elements of Western culture — Christianity, Greco-Roman classicism, the medieval heritage — in opposition to one another, although he was always hesitant about doing so, for he understood the meaning of this dissociation. His ideal of "humanity" undoubtedly misled his nineteenth- and twentieth-century admirers: he divided men and women much more than he united them. Whereas Kant declared his conviction that "after many revolutions, with all their transforming effects, the highest purpose of nature, a universal *cosmopolitan existence*, will at last be realized as the matrix within which all the original capacities of the human race will develop,"⁹² Herder came forth as the greatest divider of Europe of his time. This was the true historical significance of the difference that exists between the rationalism and universalism of the Enlightenment and the particularist and ethnic revolt of the end of the eighteenth century.

The cult of national genius reflects nostalgia for the unanimity, the collective soul, that peoples uncontaminated by foreign influences or by rationalist civilization still possess. It enables one to set history against reason, and in opposing Germany, Russia, and the Baltic countries to France, Herder reacted against the individualism and rationalistic modernism of the Enlightenment. The attack on the Enlightenment has a logic, and it is difficult if not impossible to escape that logic. Thus, all that remains of truth is a multiplicity of national truths: Barrès spoke of a French truth and a German truth, a French justice and a German justice. When all is subjected to a historical or ethnic relativity, when no comparison is any longer possible and no scale of values exists, when reason is deemed incapable of perceiving the historical reality and only intu-

ition can do so, universal values necessarily disappear. Thus, nationalism, in giving rise to a sense of relativity, becomes a very grave danger for rationalist civilization. Historical relativity and ethnic relativity, the idea that no universal truth exists, represents an undermining of European values. These ideas came to a head at the turn of the twentieth century.

*The Crisis of Civilization, Relativism, and the
Death of Universal Values at the Beginning of
the Twentieth Century*

The relativity of values, cultural self-sufficiency, and the Herderian concept of the nation were the three main ideas on which the rejection of the Enlightenment was based at the turn of the twentieth century. The campaign against them became a real mass phenomenon at that time, and it increasingly took the form of a multidimensional popular revolt against liberal democracy. This is where the true originality of that period lay: the generation of the beginning of the twentieth century continued the campaign launched at the end of the eighteenth century, but adapted it to the conditions of a world that was being changed by new technologies as never before. The democratization of society, which Burke and de Maistre and Carlyle and Renan had done everything possible to prevent, had become a reality that Maurras and Spengler, Barrès, Croce and Sorel, and innumerable rebels of every kind wished to destroy in the name of civilization and the mother country. Maurras created a synthesis of Burke and de Maistre, Taine and Renan, while Barrès, Spengler, and Croce continued the line inaugurated by Herder and to a large extent by Vico. The two currents met and constantly interlaced, forming a two-faceted ideological reality whose outline could already be glimpsed from the end of the eighteenth century.

One of the first major figures to appear during those critical years was undoubtedly Maurice Barrès. Indeed, with the passage of time, the pivotal role

of the great author of *Les Déracinés* (The Uprooted) in the French and European thought of the period becomes increasingly clear. It was not only the French rebels of the period between the two world wars, those “revolutionary conservatives” and haters of liberal democracy, who advocated a “return to Barrès”; similar sentiments were expressed more or less everywhere in the European world. Barrès was well known not only in the Latin countries of Europe but also in South America, and his influence can clearly be traced as far as the Vienna of Hugo von Hofmannsthal and Hermann Bahr. But the most significant kinship with Barrès was clearly that of Ernst Jünger and Carl Schmitt: Jünger’s celebrated *Der Arbeiter* (The Worker) was a Barresian work attacking “machinism” and “modernity.” And as for Schmitt, his famous aphorism that “specific political distinction to which political actions and motives can be reduced is that between friend and enemy” made a classical Barresian distinction. Schmitt also said, thirty years after Barrès, using the French author’s terminology, that the political enemy “need not be morally evil or aesthetically ugly. . . . But he is nevertheless, the other, the stranger.” Schmitt and Jünger are the two classical representatives of the German “conservative revolution,” a form of German fascism which must be clearly distinguished from Nazism, and which played a crucial role in the fall of German democracy. The term itself, contrary to what is often thought, was coined in the Weimar period. The “conservative revolution” was the dominant ideology in Germany during the Weimar period, and it was then and not in 1949 that the concept was introduced. Hoffmannsthal, close to this school of thought, used it in 1927, and in 1932 a work on Sorel was published with this title.¹

Barrès reads like a logical sequel to Herder’s nationalism, his relativism, his aversion to “man,” his disdain for universal norms. A whole ideological corpus that had long existed, although its ideological significance was not always well understood outside Germany, came to fruition in those years, which will forever be remembered as those of the Dreyfus Affair. Suddenly, we see that antirationalism, relativism, vitalism, the cult of the popular unconscious, of national geniuses and characteristics, of “clinging to a scrap of land upon which we are born and upon which we are to rot away,”² as Herder put it, emerged as the Barresian concept of the Land and the Dead. The attack launched by Barrès, a century after Herder, on the eighteenth century, that great libertarian, hedonistic, but above all rationalistic century, had a concrete significance. The nation was now no longer seen as the collection of citizens of the first years of the French Revolution but was regarded as a body, a great family prostrated before its churches and cemeteries, communing in the cult of its ancestors and subject to a new morality.

“The Sense of the Relative” was the subtitle of *Scènes et doctrines du na-*

tionalisme (Scenes and Doctrines of Nationalism), a collection of lectures, speeches, and articles published in 1902, where, in view of the “orgy of metaphysicians . . . [who] judge everything in an abstract way,” Barrès insisted on “the necessity for relativism.” To these intellectuals, cut off from their ethnic and communitarian roots, he declared, “We will judge everything in relation to France.” According to him, truth and justice do not exist in abstracto: “There are no absolute truths; there are only relative ones.” Elsewhere, he explained his conception of relativism: “The relativist seeks to distinguish the conceptions proper to each human type.” There, summed up in a single phrase, was the classical Herderian conception of relativism that, a few years later, Spengler would adopt as his own. Man is the continuation of his ancestors; he depends on them. He is the product of a particular culture and locality, unique of their kind. “Our soil gives us a discipline, we are prolongations of our dead,” and consequently “nationalism means resolving each question in relation to France.” Barrès knew Herder only indirectly through Michelet, but he had a similar reaction to the Enlightenment, rationalism, and universalism. Closer to his time, his two great masters were Taine and Renan: they were the ones who taught him that it was only in this way that the country would regain “the moral unity” in which it was so lamentably lacking. Herder, Möser, and Burke, as we have seen, considered good laws to be norms of conduct specific to a particular culture, a particular society, produced by it and applicable only to itself. Barrès expressed the same idea in an almost identical way: “I can only accept a law with which my spirit identifies. The more honor I have in me, the more I rebel if the law is not the law of my race.”³ The term “race” is employed here in the very Herderian sense of a people or a historical and cultural community.

In the same way as a century earlier, the source of the sickness eating away at the society of his time was identified by Barrès as rationalism and the autonomy of the individual: “The individual! His intelligence, his capacity to grasp the laws of the universe! This has to be deflated. We are not the masters of the thoughts that arise in us. They do not come from our intelligence; they are forms of reaction that reflect very ancient psychological dispositions. Our judgments and reasonings depend on the milieu that surrounds us. Human reason is connected up in such a way that we all retrace the steps of our predecessors.” The tremendous harm the eighteenth century had done consisted in the idea that “the individual must subject all his prejudices to criticism and only accept his own evidence.” Those critical souls of the Enlightenment “listened only to their own reason. . . . They refused to pay attention to the teachings of collective reason.”⁴

Barrès thus launched a campaign against “seventeenth-century rationalism,” against “the spirit of the *Encyclopédie* that regarded the sole source of

truth to be the manifest reason that declares everything the world finds irrational to be unreasonable.” At the cost of self-contradiction, he rejected Diderot as well as Rousseau, whom he had formerly called a “genius” and “a second me.” When the historicist and communitarian schools began to prevail, Barrès said he found *The Social Contract* “profoundly stupid,” and that “the influence of such a man was inexplicable.” Rousseau’s great sin was to have wanted to “rationalize life,” which meant “sterilizing it,” for “the rationalist idea is antagonistic to life and its spontaneous forms.” Rousseau, he said, was guilty of constructing a system that was false because based on the idea of an “abstract man,” and he repeated the question that since Burke and de Maistre had become a classic in historicist, communitarian, and neoconservative thought, and in the second half of the twentieth century still delighted Isaiah Berlin: “What man? Where does he live? When did he live?” In this context — the attack on the rights of man — Barrès appealed to the authority of Taine and Burke. To a rationalism that “wished to ignore the eternal hills,” he opposed experience; to the power of individual reason, he opposed “the slowly formed treasure” of collective reason, itself formed by the forces of the national unconscious.⁵

The primacy of the unconscious and of instinct was strongly affirmed by Barrès from the beginning of his career. He thought that “instinct, far superior to analysis, creates the future,” and that life’s problems “are a matter of sentiment, hereditary in nature. It’s the old unconscious.” Instinct, intuition, irrational feeling, emotion, and enthusiasm were according to him the true forces that determined human conduct. Rationalism was a product of the uprooted, of all those who had lost the feeling of belonging to their natural ethnic and religious community; it blunted sensibility and killed instinct. Barrès consequently hated all universal norms: he rejected the idea of a truth that would be valid for all. As he saw it, “the totality of the relationships between given objects and a particular man, the Frenchman, are French truth and justice. And plain nationalism is nothing other than the knowledge of this principle.” Since moral values depended on the specific nature of each culture, in order to regenerate France, in order to restore the nation and the state, one had to “implant the individuals in the Land and in the Dead.”⁶

We have seen throughout the preceding chapters the profound influence of Herder and Burke on Renan and Taine. However, in order to grasp the full complexity of the movement of ideas in general, and the often surprising and always tortuous relationship between German nationalism and French nationalism, one must go back to Michelet. Barrès admired Michelet, for he had discovered a hitherto unnoticed aspect of the great republican historian, himself an enthusiast for the German historical school: Michelet’s view of culture,

history, and the nation was often closer to Herder's than to that of the *Encyclopédie* and of the writers and thinkers of the French Enlightenment. It was Michelet, that extraordinary transmitter of ideas, who introduced Herder to France, and it was he who discovered Giambattista Vico, "the founder of the philosophy of history, the Dante of Italy's prosaic age."⁷ In 1827, the young Michelet put out a first volume containing his adaptation of *New Science*, and in 1835 he published in a second volume an introductory essay on Vico together with his translation of the magnum opus of the Italian philosopher.⁸ Michelet's fascination with Vico, who thought that reason, a latecomer on the scene, had done nothing but dry up our souls, is very significant. Barrès, following in his footsteps, did not say anything else.

In 1825, Michelet met Edgar Quinet, who was working on his translation of *Ideas for a Philosophy of the History of Mankind*. This led to a friendship lasting half a century, and also to Michelet's discovery of the German author whom Quinet admired. A month after their first meeting, Michelet began to learn German. Quinet's translation appeared in 1827. In 1905, a well-known historian of French literature, Gustave Lanson, perceived that it was in Herder that Michelet, like Quinet a short time before him, sought the means of constructing a philosophy of history. It seems that it is only after he had become acquainted with Herder that Michelet truly assimilated Vico. If one understands a philosophy of history to mean an attempt to make history rational through the use of reason, it is revealing that Michelet turned to Herder and not to Voltaire or Rousseau, and that he did not take more from François Guizot, although he admired him for being the first to discern "the history of ideas beneath the history of facts."⁹

It was Michelet's neglect of Montesquieu, however, that was most revealing of all. After all, does one not find in book 19 of *The Spirit of Laws* all that Michelet might have needed? Herder was not the only one to have "a feeling for the national"; he was not the only one to recognize the national aspect of literature, language, legislation, and, as we saw in the preceding chapters, he did not in the eighteenth century have a monopoly on reflection concerning the specific and the particular. Did not Montesquieu speak of the "general spirit of a nation" and of the "characters of nations,"¹⁰ and did he not, from 1720, with his *Persian Letters*, show an awareness of the relativity of our civilization? Did he not in *The Spirit of Laws* and in his *Considerations on the Causes of the Greatness of the Romans and Their Decline* demonstrate a sense of historical relativity? Why, then, did Michelet turn toward Herder and Germany?

The explanation is no doubt that Michelet felt a deep affinity with the German national awakening. In the final analysis, he did not like the rationalism of the Enlightenment, and he thought, like Herder, that an excessive use of

reason blunted one's vital forces. In Herder's philosophy of history, he found the idea of the national mission in the service of humanity, which enabled him to reconcile his humanism with his sense of national superiority. Lanson correctly pointed out that, in general, Michelet received his training outside the French historical school, and independently of it. It is interesting to note that before him de Maistre had introduced into the nineteenth-century French discourse the idea that "nations, like individuals, have their character and even their *mission*; and, just as, among individuals, each man receives from nature the features of his moral physiognomy . . . so, among nations, each of them reveals to the observer an unalterable character, the result of all the individual characters." It was in order to counteract the influence of Voltaire that de Maistre, like Herder, asserted that "each language has its genius, and this genius is ONE, so that it rules out any idea of composition, of arbitrary formation or previous convention." It was once again in opposition to Voltaire that de Maistre said that "the excessive introduction of foreign words . . . is one of the surest signs of a people's degradation."¹¹ The war against the Enlightenment always had a national, provincial aspect and a very pronounced parochial spirit.

Michelet's recourse to Herder in preference to Montesquieu turned out to be a very weighty factor in the evolution of nationalist thought in France. Michelet transmitted the heritage of Herder and Vico first to Renan, then to Barrès. Indeed, *The People* reads like a classic Herderian profession of faith. It is by following the trail leading from Herder via Michelet and Renan to the ideologists of contemporary nationalism that one can understand not only the explosion at the turn of the twentieth century but also a phenomenon that at first sight seems strange: around 1900, German nationalism and French nationalism converged to the point of displaying very similar characteristics. It is strange because although to the east of the Rhine, from Germany as far as the Ukraine, Russia, and the Balkans, this linguistic and cultural but nonpolitical conception of the collectivity, along with the idea of young peoples to whom the future belonged, was a true revelation and hence a tremendous mobilizing force, these ideas did not correspond to any real need in France. If it was natural in these regions that Herder became a prophet, and that national, historical, cultural, and later biological particularisms became the spur to political action, this was not the case in the land of choice of a centralized monarchy and the Jacobin Republic. In the multinational empires where the collectivity was defined by the language and culture and not by the state or the dynasty, the concepts "national genius" and "national character" were an extraordinarily powerful stimulus to revolt, if not liberation. Cultural criteria could also have a certain antidynastic character dear to Herder, and already

apparent in Voltaire: in *An Essay on the Manners*, the purely political history of dynasties was opposed to the cultural history of nations. In the case of Voltaire, of course, it concerned the role of the third estate in relation to the monarchy, whereas in Herder it meant that the people overlapped the frontiers of the state, with which it by no means coincided.

But in France, that nation-state par excellence, that country where the nation was the product of a long political process and where the cultural and linguistic frontiers were practically identical to the political frontiers, Herder's philosophy of history did not correspond to any real need besides that of raising one's fatherland above other countries by heaping fulsome praise on it and at the same time identifying it with humankind. And yet the two nationalisms, the French and the German, began, from the first half of the nineteenth century, to develop similar, often identical characteristics, and the rebellion against the Enlightenment, the cultural introversion which Germany had initiated and with which the long-drawn-out process of national unification had begun, increasingly affected France. This process came to a head at the turn of the century.

The People represents the aspect of French historiography and French nationalism that reflects the victory of particularistic values over universal values. To be sure, its other aspect, which in the *Introduction à l'histoire universelle* continued the tradition of the Enlightenment, had not by any means disappeared. "France is not a race like Germany; it is a nation. Its origin is a mixture, action is its life. . . . The individual achieves honor through voluntary participation in the whole." It is "this close fusion of races [that] constitutes the identity of our nation, its personality." That is why only France "seeks liberty in equality, which, precisely, is social genius. The liberty of France is just and holy. It deserves to initiate that of the world, and to bring all peoples for the first time together in a true unity of intelligence and will." And further on, Michelet said: "Much will be forgiven this people on account of its noble social instinct. It is interested in the liberty of the world; it is concerned about the most distant calamities. The whole of humanity vibrates within it. All its glory and beauty resides in this living sympathy."¹²

Michelet was convinced that, in Herder, the kind of mission that a nation was given was exclusively one of peace and civilization. The dream of the greatness of one's country, based on a deep sense of cultural superiority, the belief in a people chosen by Providence to lead the human race, were expressed in the form of an essential identity between the national interest and the good of humanity. This explains Michelet's enthusiasm for Herder. Like Germany in Herder, Michelet's country, because it had a sense of sacrifice, was also poor, bruised, "seated on the ground like Job. . . . If one wanted to pile up the blood

and gold each people had given and the exertions of every kind it had made for disinterested causes that would only benefit the world, the pyramid of France would rise up to the sky. . . . And yours, O nations, as you now are, yours — the accumulation of your sacrifices — would rise only as high as a child's knee!" Thanks to France, the guide and messiah of humanity, a great universal society would arise, from which no one would be excluded. This idea of a civilizing mission for France was based, like that of Herder for Germany, on a deep sense of national superiority. Even in the *Introduction à l'histoire universelle* one learns that "a social or intellectual solution cannot be fruitful in Europe until France has interpreted it, translated it, popularized it." France "enthusiastically imports and exports new ideas and absorbs them into itself with great effectiveness. It is the legislative people of modern times as Rome was in Antiquity . . . France acts and reasons, decrees and fights: it shakes up the world. It makes history and relates it." In *The People* one sees France "as a faith and a religion"; its history "alone is complete," whereas "all other histories are mutilated." It is this special nature of France, the "great tradition" stretching "from Caesar to Charlemagne and Saint Louis, from Louis XIV to Napoleon, [that] makes the history of France that of humanity."¹³

Like Herder before him and Barrès after him, Michelet, in order to preserve the national identity, warned of "the danger of cosmopolitanism, of imitation." What, he asked, would become of this unique people, "the one that, more than any other, has merged its own interests and destiny with that of humanity," if it began to imitate other peoples; if, for instance, it took to "copying what might be called the anti-France: England?" "The path of imitation," which meant "placing a foreign body in your flesh" — that path that Herder so severely reproached the Germany of his time for following with regard to France — "is quite simply the path of suicide and death." Thus, Michelet's answer to the question, "What would happen to the world if France perished?" — a question that had already been asked in Germany — was hardly different from the answer given by Fichte: "The earth," said Michelet, "would enter into the ice age that other planets close to us have already entered."¹⁴

On discovering Herder, Michelet, in the words of Lanson, turned away "from universality and humanity and looked at differences and different periods." A lecturer at the École normale from the beginning of 1827, he was tremendously interested in the ethnic foundations of history, and considered the question of the permanency of races, that product par excellence of local influences. Lanson, writing in the first years of the twentieth century, one of the great periods of French radical nationalism, described how Michelet liked, when observing his students, "to discern in their deportment and their spirit the characteristics of the different French provinces, the inescapable influences

of the soil and the race, sensing in languages, literatures, beliefs, the soul of the anonymous masses of the vanished past.” The nation was viewed as a living organism: Michelet said he saw the nations “revealing their moral character each day, and from the collections of men that they were, becoming individual people.” Each people possessed a soul: “National characteristics are not the result of our whims, but are so deeply rooted in the influence of climate, food and the natural products of a country that they can change a little but never disappear.”¹⁵ At the turn of the twentieth century, the idea that a nation was a person rather than a collection of citizens prevailed in the world of politics and culture.

Thus, with the passage of time, the process of radicalization became increasingly pronounced. Taine and Renan — one a convinced social Darwinist and the other close to Gobineau — represented in relation to Michelet a crucial stage in the shift toward the nationalism of Blood and Soil. But as the rejection of the Enlightenment had not yet descended from the sphere of high culture into the street, the political significance of this phenomenon in France was limited. As soon as conditions were suitable, however, the cultural revolt led to a political revolt. The same happened in Germany. When in the winter of 1807–1808 Fichte delivered his famous *Addresses*, a continuation of fourteen lectures entitled “Characteristics of the Present Age” given three years earlier, Herder had been dead for only four years, and his appeal to the German nation, in a Berlin occupied by the French army, was imbued with a true Herderian spirit. The wars of liberation, waged not only against the French armies but also against the French Enlightenment, were a popular phenomenon on the relatively limited scale of the period, but the Napoleonic Wars enabled the intellectual corpus linked to the essential principles of historicism to become a political force.

France was affected only much later, when industrialization and the rapid democratization of the European societies had created what is commonly called the mass society. The defeat of 1870 also played a role in the reaction against the principles of the French Revolution, but it was by no means the cause of it. Renan and Taine saw the French decadence as the work of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, and the 1870 defeat was only its final outcome. They both insisted on what they considered the main point: it was not the military defeat that caused the disaster. The tragedy of 1870 only brought about a “stripping away” of “all the veils.”¹⁶ The true gravediggers of French greatness were the men of the eighteenth century.

Thus, in the last years of the nineteenth century, it became apparent in France that the reflections on the egalitarian decadence, the explanation of history first in cultural and then in racial terms, the meditations on the base

utilitarianism of modern times, and the reflections on the moral sickness of the age cast doubt on a whole political culture based on the rationalism of the Enlightenment, and hence on the very foundations of the republic. That is when Barrès, Gustave Le Bon, and Paul Bourget appeared, to name only the best-selling authors of their time, along with the dividing line between the aristocratic, conservative rejection of the Enlightenment reflected in Taine's and Renan's fear of the "populace," and the translation of these ideas into the truly revolutionary terms of the nationalism of the Land and the Dead was very clearly marked. The conception of society as a body, the idea of the nation as a living organism, the cultural determinism all gave rise to an extremely closed view of the world.

Who could fail to see that the campaign against Kant and Rousseau was the ultimate inspiration of *Les Déracinés*, Barrès's best novel? Was there, in the European literature of that period, a political novel more Herderian in character than the three volumes of *Le Roman de l'énergie nationale*? Is there a text closer to the spirit of the Sturm und Drang movement than the hundred and fifty pages of the "Voyage along the River Moselle" that is the heart of the second volume of his trilogy, *L'Appel au soldat*? Who could fail to recognize in Herder's criticism of "so-called modern education" that "must . . . be mechanics, really," in his rejection of the mechanical character of the "modern spirit," the model for later charges against modernity? When Taine's idea that man is the victim of too much culture¹⁷ becomes commonplace, will that not inevitably lead to a cult that champions violence as creating morality and beauty? When the idea that progress is connected to something depraved gains acceptance, will it not give rise to a synthesis that glorifies modern technology while condemning ideological modernity?

In the years before the First World War, one sees the full cumulative effect of a century of historicism. This was the basis on which Action française was founded, and Maurras bore the tradition of integral nationalism from Barrès to Vichy. Less than fifty years after the struggles of the turn of the twentieth century, when the nationalism of the Land and the Dead became the intellectual driving force of the Vichy National Revolution, national and racial particularism gave proof of the power it had long accumulated. The idea that only men of the same blood can share the same cultural heritage now manifested all its destructive force.

Maurras never wrote a systematic political essay, and he was not a great writer, but he was an incomparable intellectual leader and head of a school. In 1937, he brought together some old articles he had written under the title *Mes Idées politiques*, to which he added an introduction, "Natural Politics," specially written for the occasion. This collection of articles did not, in fact,

go further than his *Enquête sur la monarchie*, his best-known contribution to right-wing politics produced in the first years of the twentieth century. It would seem that, where Maurras was concerned, everything had already been said at the time of the Dreyfus Affair. In this, he was a good illustration of the problematic intellectual situation in France during the period between the two world wars. The 1920s and 1930s could not lay claim to a quality of intellectual production comparable with that of the very beginning of the century. However, it was in those years, which ended with the defeat of 1940, that these ideas achieved their fullest expression in France.

The very first sentences of the introductory essay to *Mes Idées politiques*, taking a view opposite to Rousseau's *Social Contract*, convey the tone of the whole work. Man is not born free but instead is powerless and owes everything to society. In this situation, there is nothing like a contract: there is no reciprocity or equality. That is why Maurras believed that the source of all the trouble was the Reformation: the progenitor of all evils was also "the wretched Rousseau." Maurras had an unparalleled stock of insults, but where Rousseau was concerned, he seems to have surpassed himself: Rousseau was "by turns a lackey, a minion, a music teacher, a parasite, and a kept man," and one finds in "this unhappily born vagabond, the criminal or savage and the simple madman in equal doses." He entered Paris like "one of those false prophets who, vomited up by the desert, decked out in an old sack, girded with a camel's hide and with his head dirtied with ashes, took their melancholy wailings through the streets of Zion." Very soon, "this savage, this semihuman being," conquered Paris, and the elites of the capital of a still powerful monarchy, "the reflective and gracious leader of the intellectual world, . . . were employed in disseminating the ravings of a lunatic." All the evils of the age came together and were concentrated in Rousseau rather than in Voltaire and Montesquieu, despite the fact that the first encounter "of the classical French spirit with the Hebrew and Germanic spirit that had just stirred up England" had taken place on the journeys of these two to London. As they were totally lacking in knowledge of general philosophy, "this oriental grafting did not make them wither away." They undoubtedly took back "a few seeds of the foreign fever and anarchy" to Bordeaux and Paris, but being classical in spirit — the one a "great judge" and the other "a well-to-do bourgeois" — they were not "really affected."¹⁸

The French Revolution came from quite another source: not, as Taine believed (Maurras thought this was his great mistake), from the classical spirit but from its exact opposite, Romanticism. Catholic philosophy was modeled primarily on Aristotle, Catholic politics on the practices of ancient Roman politics. This was the classical tradition. Maurras believed that the classical spirit was the basis of the teachings of cultured humanity. In politics, it was a

spirit of authority and tradition. Consequently, to describe the spirit of the French Revolution as “classical” was to distort the meaning of the word. It was in *The Social Contract* rather than in Nicolas Boileau that the ideas of Robespierre were to be found. “Romanticism is revolution”: the Romantic age began with Rousseau, a man from Geneva. Now, Geneva is the Reformation, and the Reformation was, as Auguste Comte said, “a systematic sedition of the species by the individual.” Maurras held that both the Greco-Roman traditions and the medieval Catholic genius were resistant to the revolutionary spirit. The progenitors of the French Revolution, or rather of all revolutions, were in Geneva, in Wittenberg, in Jerusalem: “They are derived from the Jewish spirit and from those independent forms of Christianity that sprang up in the Eastern deserts and the Germanic forests, the various focal points of barbarism.”¹⁹

Maurras, like Burke and de Maistre, like Renan, Taine, and Barrès, and like Herder before them, saw the root of the trouble to be “individualistic philosophy.” “The revolutionary spirit . . . ,” liberal, egalitarian, and democratic, “only conceives of individuals.” Unconnected, separated from his family, his nation, his profession, the individual had not only “become a mere cipher” but, intoxicated with the idea of justice, he demonstrated the intrinsic insanity of this conception, for “the person who claims every right for himself begins by imposing every duty on the world.” After Rousseau, Chateaubriand was one of the first to become enamored of this isolated figure, and “the throng of disorganized ‘individuals’ grasped at the promises of liberty.” But liberty is an enabling, so that anyone who speaks of liberty necessarily means authority and power. Liberty is a means and not an end.²⁰

Here Maurras introduced a dual distinction. He took up the traditional Burkian distinction between “liberty as a metaphysical principle” and “liberties” and made a distinction between the will of the people, “the sum of individual wills,” and “the general will, the expression of the general interest of a nation.” This was connected with the necessity of restraining “the fury of the human beast,” which is to be feared to the degree that the beast gains power. This “human beast,” however, is endowed with reason, and it is this instrument, above all, that distinguishes him, without separating him, from the rest of nature. To despair of the power of reason is as futile as to expect everything from it. It was not because the revolution claimed a monopoly over reason and because foreign influences, principally English (here Maurras was attacking Burke without naming him), tended to represent the principles of the French Revolution as an expression of rationality that the adversaries of the Enlightenment should have abandoned the world of ideas. He refused to “disregard ideas just because they are ideas”: “Reality and ideas are neither op-

posites nor incompatible,” and it followed that “the revolutionary ideas are not to be condemned because they are abstract or because they are general” but because they are “at the opposite extreme from the truth.”²¹

Thus, Maurras denied the autonomy of the individual and the rights of man not because they were rational principles but because he considered them bad principles. Here he repeated, on his own account, the sally of “the foremost of our political philosophers,” de Maistre, who said he had known Frenchmen, Englishmen, Germans, and many others, but “had not met Abstract Man anywhere.” Up to the present day, this way of thinking has delighted all neo-conservatives, and it will no doubt still be popular in the future. Maurras traced de Maistre back to Hobbes and Aristotle. Aristotle, for whom man was a “political animal,” and Hobbes, whom Maurras saw as a theoretician of absolute monarchy, and who began with the principle that “man is a wolf to man,” refused, like all “true philosophers,” to consider man except in a society. Moreover, Maurras put the word “individual” in inverted commas, preferring the word “person,” which would also come into its own in the 1930s with the antiliberal personalism of left-wing Catholic theoretician Emmanuel Mounier. Whatever terminology he used, the principle was clear: man does not make society, “he is made and unmade by it.”²²

Consequently, like Herder and Burke, Maurras thought that “society is not a voluntary association: it is a natural aggregate. It is not intended; it is not elected by its members. We choose neither our blood nor our country, nor our language, nor our tradition. Our society of birth is imposed upon us. Human society is part of the requirements of our nature. We have only the capacity of accepting it, of revolting against it, and perhaps of running away from it, but we essentially cannot do without it.” And earlier he said, “The postulate of positive science is that societies are the products of nature and necessity.” Here Maurras based himself upon the authority of Montesquieu and his concept of law as “*a relationship deriving from the nature of things*.” There was nothing in these texts that had not been said by Burke, who, like Maurras, invoked the authority of Montesquieu when it suited him, though always very selectively, and by de Maistre, and by Herder as well. Unlike de Maistre, his mentor, and unlike Antoine de Rivarol, the famous right-wing journalist at the time of the French Revolution, Maurras had little respect for Burke, a Briton, whom he did not like very much for that very reason, and whom he saw as a mere “practitioner” of politics, but their mutual rebellion against the Enlightenment caused them both to use the same arguments. To these, however, Maurras added the discoveries of biology, which, enabling him to apply the concepts of heredity, selection, and continuity to politics, acted as a reinforcement to political science. He said that despite the differences that exist between political

heredity and biological heredity, they had something essential in common: the principle that man is “a living being, subject to the laws of life.” It was thus absurd to speak of a contract being the origin of society, and the good of the individual was not the purpose of political and social activity. The happiness of the individual was not an objective that society could aim at: the only task of politics was to “make communities prosper.”²³ And that is why the principles of the French Revolution, especially equality, were as absurd as they were criminal.

A society may aim at equality, but biology teaches us that “there is equality only in the cemetery.” Everyone must have as many rights as possible, “but nobody can make these rights equal when they correspond to naturally unequal situations.” Like all the social Darwinists, Maurras conceived of the social body in biological terms. He classed biology with history and saw society as a product of nature. One can have equality at the beginning, right at the bottom of the ladder, but the more a being lives and develops, “the more a division of labor creates an inequality of functions, creating a differentiation of organs and an inequality among them. . . . Progress is aristocratic.”²⁴

Burke said the same thing, but in a different way: he too believed that civilized society was in the nature of things an inegalitarian society. A hundred years later, Maurras could develop this idea on the basis not only of experience but also of science, as represented by Comte. Maurras said that, according to Comte, “politics, the daughter of biology, had . . . precise laws, previous and superior to the human will. Legislation was to be judged in relation to these natural laws.” After this came a text of primary importance that could have flowed straight from the pen of Burke, Herder, or Taine. The fact that it appeared in a context in which Maurras invoked Comte — whom Taine claimed not to have read, for which the founder of Action française reproached him bitterly — is even more significant: “A just political law,” said Maurras, “*is not a law voted into existence in a regular manner*, but a law that agrees with its object and suits the circumstances. It is not created; it is to be found and discovered in the secret of the nature of places, times and States.”²⁵ This old formula, used by Burke and Herder and readopted by Taine, recurred innumerable times among all the enemies of the Enlightenment and served them as a kind of manifesto.

In this context, we should consider the place of reason in Maurras’s thought. And here one should above all not let oneself be deceived: if he refused to abandon the use of reason, Maurras was not a rationalist. He could have adopted for himself Carl Schmitt’s dictum that “only in duration does time approach the irrational that brings forth the cosmic event out of itself.”²⁶ First of all, he maintained that “the instinctive and the unconscious are basic to

human nature,” and that reason and sentiment are complementary, but his chief assertion was the total dependence of the individual on his cultural and national community. As in Herder and Burke, this dependence concerned not only the living but also the dead. “Our country was not born from a contract between its children, it was not the result of an agreement between their desires”; France existed not just through its forty million living men but through “a billion dead men.”²⁷ “A *nation* is composed of people who were *born* here and not there. It implies birth, a heredity, history, a past.” A country is thus “a *natural society*, or, what comes to exactly the same thing, a *historical* one; it is not a *gathering of individuals that vote* but a *body of families who live*.” Maurras claimed that the nation is “the most vast communitarian circle that exists,” the “strongest” of all realities, and if he did not go so far as to make the nation into a god, “a metaphysical absolute,” he did make it into a goddess: the “goddess France.” France, he said, “deserves better than we French”: it rests on “generations of masters, of heroes and artists, demigods and saints,” not on universal suffrage. Nationalism relates to the ancestors, “their blood and deeds”; it protects the nation against the foreign, and the foreign can also, or even especially, be “the foreigner within.”²⁸

Like Herder and Spengler, Maurras knew that the threat of death lies in wait for all nations and all civilizations. The only defense one can make against it is to oppose it with tradition, which brings together “the forces of the soil and the blood.” Maurras did not know German and loathed Germany, but the expression “Blut und Boden” came to him quite naturally. With him, as with Barrès and all the other critics of the Enlightenment, French nationalism at the beginning of the twentieth century was at the same point as German nationalism. Tradition—this was already a banality, propagated since Burke—was opposed to reason: “It is like the antithesis of reality and idea, and art and nature, and can be compared to the opposition of vinegar and oil.”²⁹ Tradition was the plinth on which civilization stood.

However, Maurras made a clear distinction between “civilizations” and “Civilization.” Civilizations existed everywhere in the world, from China to Peru, from the depths of Africa to Oceania. But there was only one Civilization with a capital C: the one that was born in Greece and was spread throughout the universe by Rome: first of all by the Roman legions and then by Christian Rome: “Greek art invented beauty. . . . Greek philosophy introduced . . . virtue.” France, which was able to resist the regression of Civilization represented by the Reformation, became the legitimate heir to the Greek and Roman world. Despite the French Revolution, which was simply a consequence of the Reformation, and despite Romanticism, which was simply a literary, philosophical, and moral sequel to the French Revolution, there were

some fine remnants of Civilization in France. The tradition had merely been interrupted; "our capital," said Maurras, "remains. It depends on us to make it flourish and bear fruit once more."³⁰

The aim of nationalism, according to Maurras, was to maintain and prolong that "miracle" of order, measure, and equilibrium of which France was the heir. Maurras, like Barrès, Vico, Herder, and Spengler, had the feeling that every society reached a point of perfection, followed by a decline. It could hardly be otherwise: from Vico onward, the idea of decadence was part and parcel of Anti-Enlightenment thought. Henri Massis, perhaps the most influential of Maurras' followers, said that his work was nothing other than a long meditation on death. And indeed, his nationalism taught that one had to catch the moment when a nation, having reached the peak of its glory or the height of its genius, began to decline. Like Burke, who was also fascinated by the idea of order, like Herder, who had the same reaction, and like Barrès, Maurras sought to construct this protective shell that would ward off the threats that constantly menaced the nation and Christian civilization. Like his predecessors, he did not like the idea of progress in the service of the individual, which negated the idea of decadence. Maurras thought that "nothing authorizes this act of faith in the indefinite progress of the human race," although nothing disproves it. Faith in progress is mystical and not scientific. Similarly, Maurras could not see how, since the completion of the Parthenon, it could be proved that Western man had made any real progress.³¹

The defense of the nation required one to draw on the experience of history, and this experience was "full of the charnel houses of liberty and the cemeteries of equality." Maurras saw history as a kind of natural science: if each phenomenon was unique of its kind, the linkage between historical phenomena was not. There were constant factors in history, and their recurrence "allowed one to see ahead accurately." Thus, experience, which "resembles a Muse" and "is the daughter of Memory," was said by Maurras to be "our mistress in politics."³² Burke thought in much the same way, but in the twentieth century, as envisaged by the founder of Action française, history became scientific truth.

This truth revealed that "*Democracy is evil itself, democracy is death. . . .* The meaning, the spirit of this regime against nature ended by bringing into being . . . states of quite a new kind, full of fanatical passion, characterized by a strong taste for carnage for the sake of carnage, often accompanied by a wish for annihilation that is by no means incompatible with tendencies to suicide and sterility." Democracy, said Maurras, was a phenomenon against nature (one seems to be hearing Burke, or Carlyle, or Renan). Because it is based on the equality of individuals, it simply contradicts the normal state of affairs.

Society being an organism, the organs, fashioned from the same basic elements, have different qualities and capacities. The division of labor accentuates these inequalities. That is why one should not seek to know the opinion of nine-tenths of the French on the conditions for public safety, but determine what the real conditions for this safety are and see that they prevail “by all available means.” This is the case not only because there is no such thing as the sovereignty of the people but also because “the crowd resembles a mass. Just as inert,” it acquiesces, it follows the line of least effort. Universal suffrage “is conservative”; even riots are merely demonstrations of inertia. Finally, universal suffrage delivers up the country to “the four affiliated estates (the Jews, the Protestants, the Masons, the foreigners),” and it creates the social question. Consequently, France is “suited to be a democracy” less than any other country is. This “political sickness,” this phenomenon against nature, delivering up the country to the foreigner from the inside, kills the nation and destroys the state.³³

Thus, the rights of man, the autonomy of the individual, the liberty that gives rise to the sovereignty of the people are pure illusions (*nuées*) destructive of the elements in the social body that assure its survival. The social body needs a state; the principles of the French Revolution distort and denature authority and the idea of the state. Maurras understood very early that “the Republic is above all a philosophy, much more than it is a form of government. The republican State is based on this philosophy, or rather this religion. If it abandoned this historical foundation, it would be based on nothing, and soon there would no longer be any reason for France to remain a Republic.”³⁴ Maurras’ royalism was nothing other than the cult of a leader and dictator, the cult of command that Spengler also saw as the expression of tradition.

After Barrès and Maurras, the other aspect of this French campaign against the Enlightenment was represented, in this first prewar period, by Georges Sorel. In Sorel, the three main branches of antirationalism—the successive contributions of Vico, Nietzsche, and Henri Bergson—were united.³⁵ Sorel’s campaign against the eighteenth century, together with the one waged during the same period by Croce, was the ideological transition to the next stage, fascism.

Sorel searched a great deal, and despite a progression that at first sight seems to be full of insurmountable obstacles, he never altered his fundamental conceptions. Antirationalism and pessimism, the cult of myths, heroic ages, and values, were basic to his way of thinking from his very first book, *Le Procès de Socrate* (The Trial of Socrates). In this work, in which he launched his campaign against the Enlightenment, Sorel distinguished between a warrior ethic and an intellectual ethic. The warrior represented the heroic values of ancient

society, the Homeric values (here we see the influence of Vico); the intellectual represented the decadence of a civilization of enlightenment. The Homeric values were destroyed by the reasoning sophists and dialecticians, corrupters of morality and morals, of the family and society: their prototype was Socrates. Sorel's horror of the open society of the age of Socrates and Pericles was exceeded only by his disgust for the age of Voltaire and Rousseau. The ancient society was destroyed by the philosophers, and Athens in its decadence descended to the level of the Italian republics. The intellectuals had overcome the representatives of the closed societies who "thought that one could only form heroic generations by the old method, by nurturing youth on heroic poems." Here Sorel put forward an idea he would never abandon, which was that a civilization based on myths is always superior to a rationalist and materialist civilization. Socrates and the sophists, those intellectuals devoted to the ideas of the Athenian democracy that Plato was to oppose, attempting to dissociate them from Socrates, who, as we know, played the role of his spokesman in the *Republic*, were also teachers of higher learning. All were guilty before the tribunal of history. Sorel concluded by naming the main sin of the intellectuals: their optimism.³⁶

Throughout his first book, Sorel's aim was to demonstrate the parallel between the Athenian democracy, responsible for the decadence of society, and the French Enlightenment, of which the Third Republic, democratic, liberal, and no less decadent than the regime of Pericles, was the product. As in Spengler, the Enlightenment is seen as a type of civilization, and does not belong solely to the eighteenth century. The sophists, Socrates, Descartes, Voltaire, Rousseau, the Jacobins and their successors, the politicians of the end of the nineteenth century — all belong to one and the same line. Socrates and the sophists destroyed Homeric morality, Greek pessimism, steeped in heroism; but pessimistic and apocalyptic religion was reborn with early Christianity, which introduced a myth, the most formidable enemy of rationalism, the spearhead in the fight against decadence. Modern morality, however, was ruined by the eighteenth century, that unfortunate century to which we owe rationalism and positivism, with their political and social implications: democracy, parliamentarianism, and, as in Athens, a slackening of morals, the emancipation of women, and the destruction of the ancient pessimistic and heroic religion.³⁷ A renaissance was still possible, but it would only come about through a new victory of myth over rationalism: this idea was the main theme of Sorel's *Reflections on Violence*.

The work that accompanied the *Reflections on Violence*, *The Illusions of Progress*, was devoted to a criticism of rationalism. Before each appeared in a volume, both these works were published in *Le mouvement socialiste*, Hubert

Lagardelle's journal, between August and December 1906. In fact, Sorel could just as well have chosen "The Illusions of Rationalism" as his title. The work begins with the Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns: Sorel sided firmly with the ancients against Perrault, that "indefatigable defender of the bad writers whom Boileau killed off," and against Fontenelle. He saw the victory of the moderns as a sign of decadence. Whereas all the great seventeenth-century writers supported Boileau, society people, the literary gazettes, and women took the side of Perrault. Sorel maintained that the famous quarrel had consequences that went far beyond the world of art: French society gained the conviction that it was self-sufficient, that it no longer had to look for models in other countries. On the contrary: France itself had to serve as the model. At the same time, at the end of the seventeenth century, the religious questions that a short time before had roused the country to passion now left everyone indifferent. Fear of sin, respect for chastity, and pessimism disappeared: Christianity faded away. *Joie de vivre* entered everywhere: this society that wanted to enjoy itself needed to justify its behavior, or, in other words, it needed an ideological cover. Fontenelle, a mediocre mind, a clever vulgarizer, and a fanatical Cartesian, revealed the possibility of such a philosophy. That was the origin of the theory of progress.³⁸

That was how Descartes came to be enthroned by the late seventeenth century. Sorel reproached Descartes for never having been "concerned with the meaning of life," and that was why there was no Cartesian morality, and why that "garrulous" and superficial rationalism that shocked Pascal, attacked religion, and why it was "resolutely optimistic." No one personified Cartesianism better than Fontenelle, whom Sorel never tired of putting down as much as possible. With Descartes, the theory of "indefinite progress" was born, and the foundations of modern democracy, that regime imbued with a science that had the pretension of inventing nature, were laid. In *Reflections on Violence*, Sorel called this a "little science"; in *The Illusions*, he used the term "bourgeois science" to describe this "encyclopedic science of the eighteenth century."³⁹ That was all that rationalism could produce: an inordinate confidence in the capacity of man to solve, through the use of reason, all the problems of society, just as all the problems of cosmology had been solved.

Writing at the beginning of the twentieth century, Sorel did not confine himself, as is often said, to a critique of positivist vulgarization: he attacked the core of rationalism, Cartesianism, which "will always be the prototype of French philosophy."⁴⁰ His criticism of Cartesian rationalism was steeped in Vico's thought, which he discovered right at the beginning of his career.⁴¹ In 1896 he wrote "Étude sur Vico." The fact that this critical exposition of Vico's thought was produced in Sorel's Marxist phase did not make any real differ-

ence to his basic hostility to rationalism. Sorel's reading was influenced by Hegel, Marx, and Engels, who were quoted throughout the essay, but Sorel achieved a real tour de force: he succeeded in emptying Marxism of its rationalism. That is why, while still claiming the authority of Marx and Engels, ten years later, in *Reflections*, he could without any difficulty return to Vico.

From the beginning of the first part of his essay, Sorel put his finger on the point in Vico that was relevant to Marxist thought: the history of man is distinguished from that of nature by the fact that we have made the former but not the latter. It follows that men can only know the world of society, since they produced it. Moreover, "Vico teaches us to look for the origin of our metaphysical constructions in the more or less empirical constructions of social life." From Vico, Sorel learned the importance of psychological factors in history, interwoven as they are in social life. Sorel thought that Vico's analysis of history was "of primary importance for an interpretation of events according to the doctrine of historical materialism." As a Marxist, he maintained that "socialism must take a purely scientific path, however arduous the path of science sometimes is," but he also learned from Vico that moral judgments are "the basis of all historical movements," and that "no philosophical system owed its success to the logic of its arguments alone; the writer always had to find a way of arousing emotions that would sway the balance in his direction in our minds."⁴² In many respects, Sorelian Marxism avoided the Marxist vulgarization that was still prevalent in France at the time, but Sorel's variety was a Marxism without rationalism. And once Sorel had dispensed with Marxism completely, his basis in Vico still remained, and the new teachings of Nietzsche and Bergson were grafted on to it, coming to the forefront in the *Reflections* and *Illusions*.

One sees, then, that Vico played a far greater role in Sorel's thinking than Croce believed. According to Croce, Sorel merely demonstrated the usefulness of some of Vico's ideas, applying the theory of reflux to the history of early Christianity and the theory of the modern proletarian movement. But in fact, Vico's work played a crucial role in setting up the infrastructure of Sorel's thought. From Vico, first of all, and then from Taine, Sorel derived the constant features of his thought: the rejection of rationalism, of intellectualism, of Cartesian doubt, of universal norms; an attachment to Christian pessimism, and thus a rejection of the idea of progress. It was undoubtedly from Vico that Sorel derived his theory of myths, based on the idea of the supreme importance of the "laws of psychology." Similarly, Sorel invoked the Vico-Renan tradition in support of his conviction of the historical importance of fables, poetry ("The eternal characteristic of poetry is to represent 'the impossible that is nevertheless believable'"), the will, and the sublime that, in contrast to intellectualism, "requires the soul to feel emotions."⁴³

In *Le Procès de Socrate* Sorel criticized Plato, whom he held responsible for the monistic conception that had always been an obstacle for science (this idea was taken up again by Berlin): "The Platonic method is anti-scientific. Ancient philosophy, with its mania for bringing everything down to unity and deduction, did tremendous harm to the progress of human knowledge." In the same work, Sorel was highly critical of Descartes, the principle of doubt, which, he said, must be firmly rejected, and the Cartesian system and method. His objection to the Cartesian method was that if the rule of evidence was justified in mathematics, elsewhere it had grave disadvantages. Here he once again appealed to the authority of Vico (who "often returned to the subject of Cartesian sophism, which he thought had greatly harmed knowledge, both in physics and in matters of scholarship"), in order to shoot some poisoned arrows at "rationalists" and further criticize the Cartesian system, which he said was the model of all that ought to be avoided. Sorel thought that a fundamental reason for the failure of Cartesianism was that it made the individual the supreme judge of truth. Just as he did not believe in the "Cartesian revolution," he was convinced of the failure of Kant, for which he invoked the authority of Bergson. Sorel drew a significant parallel between Bergson and Pascal. At the turn of the twentieth century, the French philosopher confronted the "modern spirit"; Pascal had the same role in the seventeenth century. Sorel was fascinated by Pascal, just as he was mesmerized by Bergsonian spiritualism. He saw Pascal as the antithesis of Descartes, who prepared the way for the encyclopédistes.⁴⁴

After the trial of Socrates and Descartes came that of the eighteenth century. Sorel began with Condorcet, who completed the work of Turgot and took Locke as his point of departure. Condorcet saw Locke as the thinker whose "method soon became that of all the philosophers." For the enemies of the Enlightenment, from Burke on, this was a major sin. Sorel contemptuously quoted Condorcet speaking of the "war cry" of Anthony Collins and Bolingbroke in England, Bayle, Fontenelle, Voltaire, and Montesquieu in France, and their respective schools: "reason, tolerance, humanity." All of these "fought for truth . . . seeking out in religion, in administration [that is, political organization], in customs, in laws, everything that smacked of oppression, of harshness, of barbarity." That is how that century of triviality gave itself up to "a great debauch of abstractions."⁴⁵

With a great sweep of the broom that he hoped was final, Sorel brushed aside most of the intellectual heritage of the Enlightenment: Descartes, Locke, and Rousseau, rationalism, optimism, the theory of progress, the theory of natural law, the atomistic concept of the individual that had prevailed since Hobbes and Locke, and the idea of society as a collection of individuals. He felt that the Enlightenment bore direct responsibility for the decadence of modernity, for democratic baseness, and for the denatured quality of demo-

cratic socialism. It is fascinating to see the eagerness with which Sorel adopted the harshest, most unjust, and most inaccurate criticisms of the Enlightenment as his own. As with Burke and Herder, and as with Carlyle, nothing good could be said where the eighteenth century was concerned. Sorel followed Taine in attacking the French written and spoken at that time: it was impoverished, they said, and above all, it lacked clarity. Condorcet wanted to reform the French language in order to create a universal scientific tongue, and a language was more likely to be accepted as universal if it was remote from daily existence.⁴⁶

If for some people Sorel is a difficult figure to place, and for others one of the intellectual founders of fascism, this cannot be said of Benedetto Croce, who is generally known for his unfailing liberalism and his intellectual resistance to the Mussolini regime. On the other hand, his contribution to Mussolini's rise to power is often obscured in view of the tremendous effort made after 1945 to minimize the significance of fascism in Italian history. Croce was a figure symbolic of twentieth-century Europe, and if one wishes to understand the reasons for the fall of democracy not only in Italy but in Europe in general, or if one wants to understand the great ambiguities of Anti-Enlightenment liberalism, it is to him that one rightly turns as one of the greatest thinkers of the twentieth century and the most important Italian intellectual since Vico. In many ways, Croce played in Italy the role played by Renan and Taine in France in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and by Meinecke in Weimar Germany. Closely connected to Sorel, in 1909 he wrote the preface to the Italian translation of *Reflections on Violence*.⁴⁷ Croce shared with Sorel an admiration for Vico that never ceased, a journey through Marxism, and a profound dislike of the Enlightenment and its twentieth-century outcome, democracy.

We have seen that Vico's importance only really became apparent in the time of Michelet. Alain Pons showed that, unlike Pierre-Simon Ballanche, who discovered the Neapolitan philosopher in 1824–1825 and gave him a Maistrean interpretation, Michelet wished to reconcile Vico with the eighteenth century and the French Revolution. He described a Vico not hostile to Descartes, but the discoverer of the great “Promethean” principle that “humanity is its own work.” Michelet set the tone that Croce took up again at the beginning of the twentieth century, when he also made some unreasonable accusations. He claimed that in 1729, on a journey to Naples, Montesquieu bought a copy of *La Scienza nuova*. According to Croce, a copy of the 1725 edition existed in La Brède's château. However, he said, one should not see *The Spirit of Laws* as an imitation of *The New Science*: Montesquieu's spirit was too different from and inferior to that of Vico. In other words, even had Montes-

quieu so desired, he was incapable of rising to the level of the masterly work that he possessed without really understanding it. In fact, said Croce, Vico had “the merit generally attributed to Montesquieu of having introduced the historical element into positive laws and thus considering legislation in a truly philosophical manner (as Hegel said later), that is, as a moment depending on a totality relative to all the other determinations which go to form the character of a people or a period.”⁴⁸

A few pages further on, Croce complained of the injustice of the treatment Vico received from historians of philosophy: he was ignored, because he was seen simply as a writer who followed Bossuet and preceded Herder in the dubious science called the “philosophy of history.” The historians forgot, or were unaware of, the extraordinary richness of Vico’s contribution to the theory of knowledge, to ethics, to aesthetics, to law and religion that was obscured by this too general a term. Another reason for this injustice, according to Croce, was that Vico lacked social importance, and belonged to a country and a culture that had lost their influence in Europe. While one would not dare to ignore William Paley, d’Holbach, or Mendelssohn, one can allow oneself not to mention Vico who, in their company, is like “a giant among pygmies.”⁴⁹

Croce’s exaggerations and apologetics do not stand up to examination; nor, as Pons showed, do the claims made in Italy that most of the eighteenth-century French philosophers, from Montesquieu to Condorcet, including d’Alembert, Helvétius, Rousseau, Condillac, Turgot, and Boulanger, pillaged, plagiarized, or at least were heavily indebted to *The New Science*, without acknowledging their debt.⁵⁰ However, even if one agrees with Pons when he says that the first explicit references to Vico appeared only in the very last years of the eighteenth century, it does not necessarily follow that ideas from far away did not circulate and did not influence those who were preoccupied with the same questions. Vico was undoubtedly the first to consider, in their full scope, the questions that engrossed all those who thought, read, and wrote in the time of the Enlightenment, but a consideration of the origin of societies, of law, of government, and of the place of religion in society was central to the thinking of Hobbes and Locke, not to speak of the enormous quantity of writings and pamphlets published in the second half of the seventeenth century, not only in Holland, which was free from the censorship that prevailed in the rest of Europe, but also in England. It is thus not impossible that thinkers preoccupied by the same questions came to very similar conclusions. Neither Herder nor Burke was acquainted with Vico, and their campaign against the French Enlightenment owed nothing to *The New Science*. But as one advanced into the nineteenth century, and as Michelet’s translation, placed at the dis-

position of the European public in the major language of culture in that period, began to be widely known, the rejection of the Enlightenment that it signified, the antirationalism to which it gave the stamp of genius, started to bear fruit.

Where Croce was concerned, it was Vico's work that formed the basis of his criticism of the eighteenth century and its products: democracy, equality, secularity. Croce's interpretation of Vico was a Hegelian one, a fact that had a lasting influence on his view of democracy and religion. Croce made Vico's critique of the Enlightenment his own in its deepest and most durable aspects. A Catholic like Sorel, he had an intense, almost visceral feeling of discomfort with regard to the Enlightenment, a discomfort that was to develop into a violent campaign, lasting more than a quarter of a century, against democracy.⁵¹

A reading of Croce's *Philosophy of Giambattista Vico* tells us more about Croce than about Vico, as the work is so uncritical. Indeed, Croce internalized Vico to such an extent that a reader who already knows the original texts has the impression of reading a "Vico by Himself." But the reason was not any weakness on the part of Croce. On the contrary: Croce identified himself with his great predecessor to such a degree that he took up his arguments as if they were his own. Meinecke, Gadamer, and Berlin had a similar attitude to Herder. In many respects, this applied to practically all the enemies of the Enlightenment: as soon as one rejected the premises of rationalism, there were not many ways of attacking the Franco-Kantian eighteenth century. It was for this reason — and it is not exactly a surprise — that Croce began with anti-Cartesianism. He said that Vico, of course, did not think that all Descartes' ideas were wrong, but his cogito "is a mere sign or indication of my existence and nothing more." Similarly, as we saw earlier, man according to Vico could only prove the existence of God if he became God's creator.⁵²

Moreover, Croce saw Vico, as Vico saw himself, as the founder of the "moral sciences": that is, the human and social sciences. In addition to a social science, *The New Science* embraced a philosophy of the spirit and a history or a group of histories. Just as "Cartesianism, with its attention confined to the universalising and abstractive forms, ignored the individualising" and "shrank in horror from the tangled forest of history," Vico was passionately attracted to history. He "was led to investigate in all their profound divergencies and contradictions the modes of feeling and thought proper to various times." Vico did not write detailed histories; he sought "generic characters," and he thought of his new science as a "generalizing science." Finally, though Croce did not say so explicitly, this is what he was trying to demonstrate: the concept of "character," much used in the eighteenth century, was an invention of Vico's, which meant that Herder merely adapted the thought of the Neapoli-

tan philosopher to his own needs. Croce began this train of argument with a criticism of Machiavelli: Machiavelli, he said, thought that the source of Roman greatness was the Roman institutions, whereas its true source, and hence the reason for these institutions, was the character of Roman society. That is what permitted one to see Montesquieu's work as an imitation of Vico's. Already in chapter 3 Croce quoted Vico: the "nature of things is nothing else than their production at certain times and in certain manners: and whenever these latter are of such a kind, then the things produced are of such a kind and no other."⁵³

The invention of history, said Croce, began with Vico's criticism of Grotius, Pufendorf, and other theoreticians of the school of natural law. They all thought about human nature, but in tracing the progress of history, they began in the middle, with man already civilized by religion and law. They concentrated on the intellect and ignored imagination and the passions, poetry and fables, those major forms of expression of primitive man. "Averse to intellectualism and in sympathy with imagination," Vico discovered a new world: before him, myths and fables were regarded as allegories, fictions, and deceptions, and not as a science of primitive man. Vico was also the inventor of aesthetics. His theory of poetry was a revolutionary innovation: he overturned everything, from Plato and Aristotle onward. He not only said that "poetry is the primary form of the mind, prior to intellect and free from reflection and reasoning," and that it is made up of feelings and emotions. He went on to say that the aim of poetry, unlike that of history, was the impossible, and that its favorite subject was the miracles performed by magicians. In this way, that world which employed an artificial language, which attempted to reduce metaphysics and ethics to mathematical forms, and in which detachment, coldness, hostility, and mockery of all that was original and authentic prevailed, was saved by the genius of Vico, "who saw into the true nature of language." Language was not a convention; it was "born naturally," in a spontaneous and fantastic way. And just as language is natural, society is also natural. Society originated not in a decision of rational men but in the basic instincts of "brutes" who only gradually became human. Men began to express themselves through signs and symbols, and "language is the best evidence for the ancient life of a people."⁵⁴

However, it was in three fascinating pages of chapter 6, entitled "Moral Consciousness," and in some pages on Roman history that Croce, expressing his personal ideas, described the lessons he had learned from Vico's thought. The rationalists of the school of natural law lacked depth. As philosophy their works never rose above a flat and vulgar empiricism; they were lacking in concepts and coherence. All these pamphleteers of natural law, including,

among others, Hobbes, Locke, Pufendorf, Bayle, and Grotius, as well as Spinoza, shared the characteristics of their period. Croce named the most prominent of these abominable characteristics: the doctrine of natural law was materialistic, bourgeois, anticlerical. All the thinkers of this school were guilty of having sunk into an overt or concealed utilitarianism. Even when they showed traits of genius, these men who denied the presence of divinity in the world were incapable, unlike Vico, of getting to the bottom of things. Utilitarianism and intellectualism led to another major error: "the lack of a historical sense," and an "anti-historical attitude . . . which set up the abstract ideal of a human nature apart from human history, and not based on it and living within it." This antihistoricism was combined with "an aversion to transcendence and a tendency to an immanent conception of man and society."⁵⁵ All these accusations were repeated almost word for word by Meinecke.

All the items in the case against rationalism, intellectualism, utilitarianism, and the first manifestations of secularity were laid out in these pages. The term "natural," wrote Croce, meant "what is common to the individuals of different classes and nations," and it served as a splendid flag beneath which all the European bourgeoisies, who shared the same objectives and aspirations, could go forth to war. Croce did not ascribe any ethical value to this appeal to the universality of rights. It was above all a matter of material interests and political propaganda: "Treatises of natural rights were for the bourgeoisie in the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries what the Communist Manifesto and the cry 'Proletariats [Workers] of the world unite' attempted to be for the working class in the nineteenth century."⁵⁶

Going back two thousand years and before speaking of later developments, Croce's chapter 17, "The History of Rome and the Formation of the Democracies," completed the trial of the democratic system. With the triumph of the plebeians, the character of society, private life, and public life changed. Unlike the situation under the aristocracy where the laws were few, rigid, and religiously observed, in the Roman democracy there were many laws, and they underwent changes and modifications. The Roman plebeian regime legislated endlessly, but despite a relaxation of manners, "the power of wise rule, political virtue diminished," and utilitarianism became the driving force of political life. This led to the inevitable outcome, monarchy, "that new form of popular government." These reflections were immediately followed, in the next chapter, by a hymn of praise to the Middle Ages, that period of "return to barbarism" or "divine age of the 'Cyclops'" of which Dante was the Homer, parallel to the early centuries of Greece and Rome. Feudalism returned, the "republics became aristocratic once more in government if not in constitution," and the aristocratic governments were once more "shrouded in a religious atmo-

sphere.” This feudalism was not a relic of the Roman law of the last centuries of the Empire but a heroic return to the early days of Latin barbarism. Thus, with the Middle Ages one saw a reappearance of “the fundamental division between heroes and slaves.” Croce ended his account by stating that “Vico was the first to understand the soul of the Middle Ages, that is to say, the mental, social and cultural constitution of the period.”⁵⁷

If, according to Vico’s theory of “reflux,” a new period of barbarism was possible, why would a third such period not be possible, and why should it necessarily be regarded as a bad thing? Might not fascism represent this third return? Were these not the practical conclusions from a reading of Vico and a reflection on his work that Croce, the thinker and politician, displayed in his thought and behavior in the years that followed the publication of his book in 1910? After all, his critique of the school of natural law, of its intellectual foundations, of its formulations and their practical significance, and his cult of heroic ages were identical to the ideas of Herder and Burke, Carlyle and Sorel. All this ended in a long campaign against democracy and an embrace of the greatest Anti-Enlightenment campaign of its time, which the apologetic historiography of the post-1945 period regarded as no more than an accidental wrong turning.

In reality, the long path of opposition to democracy that Croce followed from the turn of the century was not the result of opportunism but reflected his motto: “Against the eighteenth century.” That is what specifically defined the aims of his intellectual critique. Thus, one sees that his ideas and his behavior in the early 1920s were not the result of a misunderstanding of fascism but the contrary. No one understood fascism better than Croce; no one had a more exact idea of its intellectual content and its political function.

Indeed, in the critical moments of 1922, on the eve of the king’s invitation to Mussolini to form the new government, Croce declared that, when all is said, fascism is compatible with liberalism. In 1924, after having contributed, together with many other major figures of Italian liberalism, to the rise of fascism, Senator Croce did not hesitate to raise his hand in favor of the Mussolini government after the assassination of the socialist deputy Giacomo Matteotti, a heroic figure of the antifascist opposition, when the opportunity existed to depose the fascist leader and when the king might have favored doing so. Despite his experience of fascism in power, Croce gave a vote of confidence in its leader. Despite the fact that Mussolini had publicly taken responsibility for Matteotti’s assassination, the greatest living Italian intellectual still thought that fascism, in saving Italy from democracy and socialism, still had an important role to play. It was only later that Croce became a dissident, and at the beginning of the 1930s he began to see history as the history of liberty. In

1924, in connection with the assassination of Matteotti, Croce wrote a text, published by the journal *La Critica* and extensively reproduced in the Turin daily newspaper *La Stampa*, that explained the attraction of fascism better than the long and tortuous accounts he gave in the years after the fall of Mussolini: "My denials, like those of any reasonable man, are always *secundum quid*, and do not rule out the principle that things that are reprehensible in certain respects may be admirable in others, and that things that are invalid with regard to certain consequences are valid with regard to others. I have denied that futurism, a voluntarist, vociferous and vulgar movement, could ever give rise to poetry, which comes to birth among solitary and contemplative souls in shadows and silence; but I have never denied, and I even acknowledge, the practical character of the futurist movement. To write poetry is one thing, but it would appear that to use one's fists is another, and there is no reason why someone who does not succeed in the first activity should not succeed in the other, or why an avalanche of punches should not in certain cases be usefully and suitably administered."⁵⁸

These reflections are a remarkable example of the way in which a philosophy of history can be expressed in terms comprehensible to the reader of a daily newspaper, and of the way in which historical relativism can be applied to day-to-day politics. Croce, who can be regarded as an Italian Meinecke, had the same historicist outlook. His political thought was dominated by a rejection of the Enlightenment, which led to the idea that humanitarian "preconceptions" were the greatest obstacles to the power of the state and the security of the homeland, and hence to the progress of history. Like Mussolini and his syndicalist friends, Croce drew the following classical conclusion from the Great War: "The makers of world history are peoples and States, and not classes."⁵⁹ Croce was close to the German historical school, of which Vico, his master, no less than Herder, may be considered one of the ancestors, both in his preference for the particular and in his antiuniversalism. From the last decade of the nineteenth century, Croce insisted, in a similar manner to the Germans, on the absolute individuality of historical facts. It is undeniable that German historical relativism had by that time a great influence on Croce's thought, which had been well prepared by the relativism of Vico. At the same time, Croce turned toward Marx, but like Sorel, he took little from him apart from the campaign against bourgeois democracy and natural law. What counted in Marx for Croce, as for Sorel, was the idea of his work as a sociology of violence. In 1917, Croce, despite the fact that he had long abandoned Marxism, still expressed his gratitude to Marx for having helped to "make him indifferent to Justice and Humanity."⁶⁰

True to this principle, Croce, who during this period was also a convinced

social Darwinist, never ceased, in the twenty years that preceded the rise of fascism, to wage a bitter polemic against democracy, natural law, and humanist ideologies. All the clichés that from the end of the eighteenth century had expressed hatred of the Enlightenment were readily welcomed by him. “No, definitely, democracy is emptiness! It is the flock leading the shepherd; it is the world upside down; it is disorder, inanity and organized imbecility.”⁶¹ Croce liked this quotation from *Le Mercure de France* of September 1915 so much that he made it his own and reproduced it just as it was, in French, in an article he wrote in October. Its content was characteristic of Croce’s thought: it deserves the reader’s attention all the more because it was reproduced word for word in *Pagine sulla guerra* in 1928, in the midst of the period of the “fascization” of the Italian state. The experience of all the years of the fascist dictatorship was needed in order to convince him that one could not make war on intellectualism, rationalism, historical materialism, and the heritage of the French Revolution with impunity. Croce finally came to understand that the war on democracy had a price and practical consequences. That is why his vote of confidence in 1924 has a symbolic meaning: nothing could more clearly demonstrate the ambiguity of the positions adopted, throughout the period between the two world wars, by so many European intellectuals toward fascism.

It should not be forgotten that it was the enemies of democracy from cultured circles, from the elites, often liberally inclined (though in a very limited sense), who delivered Italy up to fascism. That was Croce’s historical role: in Germany, Spengler, Carl Schmitt, and other revolutionary conservatives like Arthur Moeller van den Bruck and Ernst Jünger had a similar function. It was these enemies of the Enlightenment, of rationalism and of universal values, of equality and the Kantian autonomy of the individual that led the German upper classes to the threshold of the Third Reich. At the same time, Spengler came to be much liked by that tireless reader, Mussolini. Renzo de Felice has already shown that the Italian fascist leader began to become acquainted with *The Decline of the West* in the second half of the 1920s. In 1928, Spengler and Mussolini jointly wrote a preface to the Italian translation of an essay by a German writer whose ideas were in agreement with Spengler’s philosophy. It concerned a subject that both men cared about deeply: the decadence of the Western, white man. Mussolini agreed with Spengler about the importance of values in the struggle against decadence. He readily accepted Spengler’s conception of the primacy of culture, except where the Germanic origins of Western culture were concerned. Moreover, hoping to arrest the decadence resulting from democracy, Spengler leaned toward dictatorship, and he was well disposed to Mussolini, who was its incarnation and who fascinated him, just

as he fascinated Moeller van den Bruck. In 1933, Mussolini ordered the translation of *Jahre der Entscheidung* (The Decisive Years), a work which Spengler wrote in the last years of his life and in which he expressed his repugnance at the vulgarity and crude racism of the Nazis. Il Duce wrote an article praising the work. Like Spengler, he viewed the problem of the preservation of the cultural identity of Western man as one that concerned the entire white race, and, like him, he wished to distance himself from the racial conceptions of the Nazis.⁶²

It was only when the harm had been done that these robust enemies of the Enlightenment adopted a position of relative dissidence: and again, one must understand what is meant here by "dissidence." The sacrifice that Spengler agreed to amounted, in fact, to that of being unable to publish his reservations and criticisms, and Jünger never for a moment thought of refusing to serve under the Nazi flag in the French campaign of 1940, or in the forces of occupation in Paris. Dissidence was also not very arduous for Croce, comfortably set up in his own home, whereas Gramsci was only liberated so that he would not die in prison. Needless to say, Gramsci's detention in very harsh conditions did not elicit any reaction from Croce. Throughout the years of fascist rule, he continued to publish his journal *La Critica*, and by dissociating culture from politics in this way, rendered Mussolini a priceless service, just as Meinecke in Germany rendered the regime a priceless service. Whereas Gramsci paid with his liberty, and in fact with his life, for his conviction that such a dissociation was a betrayal of culture, Croce's hatred for communism was sufficiently deep to make fascism bearable. His manifesto for antifascist intellectuals was motivated far more by his disagreements with Giovanni Gentile than by any desire to resist fascism. Another enemy of democracy, one of the celebrated figures of the "conservative revolution," Moeller van den Bruck, who committed suicide under the Weimar regime because he could not bear to see the degradation of a Germany that had fallen into the hands of liberals and democrats, was justifiably used as an example by the Nazis.

However, the greatest enemy that Enlightenment thought ever had was undoubtedly Nietzsche. His formidable figure dominated the turn of the twentieth century, but owing to his violent antinationalism, his intense hostility to anti-Semitism, his unrelenting cosmopolitanism, his aristocratic individualism, his attraction to France, his admiration for Voltaire and Rousseau, he had a place apart. He helped to foment the revolt against the rights of man, liberalism, and democracy, he gave the stamp of genius to antirationalism and anti-universalism, and nobody did more than he did to hold the claim of equality up to ridicule. Contrary to what is often said, he was a thinker very conscious of the political significance of his work. This aristocrat of thought did not go

down into the street, however. The political campaign on the ground was waged by men who took upon themselves the task of translating Nietzsche's work and that of the preceding generation into terms of politics of the masses. They knowingly acted as publicists, simplifiers, and vulgarizers.

Like all his generation, Spengler acknowledged Nietzsche's influence, and chronologically he came immediately after Sorel, who was also steeped in Nietzsche. Although Spengler had pondered his great work before the war, the German defeat caused the first volume of *Decline of the West*, appearing in April 1918, to be an enormous success both with the public and with the intellectual community, inasmuch as it began a debate in which the greatest names in Germany at the time, including Troeltsch and Meinecke, took part. Without explicitly acknowledging it, these two high priests of historicism were subject to a deep Spenglerian influence. The great majority of the reviews of the work were negative: its weaknesses, the errors of which it is full, were apparent as soon as it appeared, but they did not harm its status as a best seller. At the same time, criticism was often mitigated both by the grandiose vision of universal history the book provided and by the belief that it contained a prophecy of the decline or death of the West. Here one should mention something that Spengler himself called a misunderstanding: the work was written with the expectation of a German victory. The reproach that he was pessimistic hurt Spengler deeply: he reacted in 1921 with an article entitled "Pessimism" that stressed the action his work was meant to provoke. Already in 1919 he had published a political essay called *Preussentum und Sozialismus*, which was to inspire all the varieties of national socialism, and which showed that he was less concerned with the idea of the decline of the West than with the future of Germany. In this pamphlet, he proposed for his country a Prussian, anti-Marxist socialism, an "ethical socialism" that would be a negation both of liberalism and of the Soviet Revolution.⁶³

Although Nietzsche and Goethe, especially the latter, were the only influences on his work that Spengler acknowledged, he was nevertheless a faithful disciple of Vico, Herder, and Burke, whose influence he failed to acknowledge. In fact, he mentioned the last two only once, and Vico not at all. Vico had already seen that history was not a single unit, that it was made up of different peoples that passed through a complete cycle of evolution independently of one another. Vico was also the originator of the idea of organic phases of ascension and decline, and of the idea that history is not a continuous progress. According to Vico, when a people has passed through the cycle of ascension and decline, another people enters the cultural cycle and develops its own characteristics. However, Vico, like Herder, was still a Christian. The abandonment of the Christian dimension of the rejection of the Enlightenment

took place in the second half of the nineteenth century. The fact that neither Vico nor Herder was part of the cultural heritage of Spengler, who went as far as China to seek out thinkers and statesmen whom European readers (apart from a small circle of scholars) had never heard of, was neither natural nor logical, and can only be explained by a desire to diminish the Christian element as much as possible, without replacing it with the universalism of the Enlightenment.

Herder is mentioned in the introduction to Spengler's book, where he is criticized, together with Kant and Hegel, for accepting the traditional division of history into antiquity, the Middle Ages, and modern times, which meant taking "the spirit of the West . . . for the meaning of the world." Thus the three most important German philosophers before Nietzsche were dismissed lightly. Herder, who called history an education of the human race, Kant, who saw it as a development of the idea of liberty, and Hegel, who saw it as the self-realization of the universal spirit, were all thinkers who had seriously reflected on the basic form of history. For Spengler, none of this really counted. As for Burke, he was only mentioned at the very end of the book to illustrate the superiority of realistic policies to abstract ideas.⁶⁴ In reality, however, the total conception of *The Decline of the West* and its general context owed a great deal to Herder, and to a certain extent also to Burke. The concern for cultural sovereignty and above all the idea that the decline of Western civilization goes back to the French Enlightenment are part of the heritage of the pastor of Weimar. This heritage was radicalized by Spengler, but not invented by him.

Herder, as we have seen, believed that European civilization was founded by the Germanic tribes of the great invasions. He was the first to oppose Germanic creativity to the decadence of the French. At the end of the eighteenth century, when France, undermined by the rationalist Enlightenment, and post-Shakespearean England had, according to him, entered the path of decadence, the monopoly of intellectual creativity passed to Germany, a young nation to whom the future belonged. Herder's and Burke's revolt against rationalism, which had already appeared on the scene at the turn of the nineteenth century, reached its climax in Spengler, together with nationalist tendencies. Spengler was no more a blind nationalist than were Herder and Burke, and he did not identify the West exclusively with Germany, but he considered the sources of Western "high culture" to be Nordic.

Like Herder, Spengler is a highly ambiguous figure. He waged a relentless campaign against the Weimar Republic, but in July 1933 he brought out the best seller *Decisive Years*. His political development somewhat resembles that of Croce. An enemy of the Enlightenment and democracy, Croce supported the Mussolini regime in the first years of its existence, and then wanted to be

the leader of the intellectual opposition to fascism. But while Spengler, condemned to silence, died in 1936 without having offered up his critical reflections on the new regime to the scrutiny of his fellow countrymen, Croce enjoyed relative freedom, and after the fall of Mussolini invented the theory of fascism as a “parenthesis” or an unfortunate accident that did not really belong to the national history of Italy. This theory, maintained throughout the postwar period, also had the great advantage of portraying the “fascist-leaning” years of Croce himself as a digression.

An ambivalent thinker, Spengler was also ambivalent in his way of writing. *The Decline* is captivating in its literary quality and in its extraordinary mixture of philosophical considerations and journalistic remarks, and in its unusual capacity to take a bird’s-eye view of history and combine it with journalistic trivialities. In this way, Spengler strikes the imagination: he gives readers the feeling of taking part with him in fantastic discoveries, and while making them sense the importance of these things, he echoes the preoccupations of the man in the street. His book can be read as a curiosity, but the important point is that at the time of its publication it corresponded to a need: its enormous success is proof of that. Moreover, Spengler put his finger on important truths, as when he said that “a political problem could not be comprehended by means of politics themselves.”⁶⁵ But where Spengler really strikes the imagination is when he lays out his comprehensive vision of history. The success of *The Decline* can also be explained both by the time of its appearance in a Germany humiliated as it never had been since Napoleon and by the fact that, generally speaking, it took up a number of key ideas with which the educated European and especially German reader was already familiar. That Spengler’s scientific method may seem to be dubious, that it raises a smile from the experts, that Spengler dared to write as if Vico and Herder had never existed, that he looked down on Kant and Hegel from above and acknowledged a debt, and even then a small one, only to Nietzsche, makes no difference. He could not have known of the existence of Nikolai Danilevsky,⁶⁶ but it is impossible that he could have known nothing about Herder and the considerable Herderian bibliography that already existed in his time. The idea that the westernization of Russia and the French influence on Germany were a violation of the national soul was a Herderian idea. It was in adopting the main ideas of the Herderian critique of the Enlightenment that Spengler suddenly gained a stature that made his work the symbol of his era.

In the first paragraph of his introduction to *The Decline*, Spengler defined his objectives as follows: “In this book is attempted for the first time the venture of predetermining history, of following the still unraveled stages in the destiny of a Culture, and specifically of the only Culture of our time and on our

planet which is actually in the phase of fulfillment — the West-European American.” The last paragraph of the introduction describes the two dominant aspects of his thinking or the two great themes of the work. The first is “the development of a philosophy and of the operative method peculiar to it, which is now to be tried, viz., the method of comparative morphology in world-history.” At the same time, “the narrower theme is an analysis of the Decline of that Western European Culture which is now spread over the entire globe,” an analysis that “seeks to obtain a quintessence of historical experience that we can use in order to work upon the creation of our own future.” Spengler wished to discover “the form in which the destiny of the Western Culture will be accomplished,” and in order to do so, he said he would undertake an examination of “what culture *is*.” This, he said, was the main problem to be faced “if we are really to comprehend the great crisis of the present,” a problem that must be viewed “in a high, time-free perspective, embracing whole millenniums of historical world-forms.”⁶⁷

Throughout his introduction, Spengler developed an extreme relativism which went beyond anything imagined by Herder, but which nevertheless was based on the foundations and raw materials provided by the young Stürmer: “How, *from the morphological point of view*, should our eighteenth century be more important than any other of the sixty centuries that preceded it?” But the problem was larger than that: “Is it not ridiculous to oppose a ‘modern’ history of a few centuries, and that history to all intents localized in west Europe, to an ‘ancient’ history which covers as many millennia — incidentally dumping into that ‘ancient history’ the whole mass of pre-Hellenic cultures . . . as mere appendix-matter?” Like Herder, Spengler was convinced that “it is in our own West-European conceit alone that this phantom ‘world-history,’ which a breath of scepticism would dissipate, is acted out.” It is quite natural that for Western culture, the existence of Athens, Florence, and Paris is more important “than that of Lo-Yang or Pataliputra,” but no one has the right to found “a scheme of world-history on estimates of such a sort.” If they did, then Chinese historians would be allowed to write world histories from which the Crusades, the Renaissance, Julius Caesar, and Frederick the Great would be excluded. One should therefore abandon the privileged position of the West in relation to India, China, Egypt, or Arab or Mexican culture; one should get rid of this Western scheme of history, which Spengler calls a “*Ptolemaic system*” in which “the great Cultures are made to follow orbits round us as the presumed center of all world-happenings.” He called this idea a “*Copernican discovery*.” In fact, it was not so much a revolution as an application of Herderian historicism, radicalized by the biological sciences, to the realities of the twentieth century. The pluralism of cultures was an eighteenth-century discov-

ery, but neither Voltaire, nor Montesquieu, nor even Pastor Herder, antirationalist as he was, questioned the unity of the human spirit. One had to wait for the end of the nineteenth century, with the rise of social Darwinism, for a decisive stage to be crossed: the Spenglerian system, said Gilbert Merlio, enclosed human history in a tight-fitting biological straitjacket.⁶⁸

Thus, instead of a universal history with a linear form, Spengler said, in a text in which he gave the gist of his philosophy of history, that he saw “the drama of a *number* of mighty Cultures . . . each stamping its material, its mankind in *its own* image; each having *its own* idea, *its own* passions, *its own* life, will and feeling, *its own* death. Here indeed are colors, lights, movements, that no intellectual eye has yet discovered. Here the Cultures, peoples, languages, truths, gods, landscapes bloom and age as the oaks and the stone-pines, the blossoms, twigs and leaves — but there is no ageing ‘Mankind.’ Each Culture has its own new possibilities of self-expression which arise, ripen, decay, and never return. . . . These cultures, sublimated life-essences, grow with the same superb aimlessness as the flowers of the field . . . I see world-history as a picture of endless formations and transformations, of the marvellous waxing and waning of organic forms.”⁶⁹ This was the Spenglerian organicism: pluralism and organicism became two different aspects of the same evolution.

Spengler did not see universal history as a story of mankind moving toward a time of fulfillment. In his version, it was made up of a series of “high cultures” that appeared at different times and places. These cultures succeeded one another without prolonging one another: there was no interdependence or borrowing. Each gave birth to a particular type of humanity which was peculiar to itself, and which disappeared when the culture died. No rebirth was possible. Each culture was the emanation of a certain “soul”; it had a symbolic language, and expressed an archetype, an *Ursymbol* that gave it its originality. Each culture was an organism whose development passed through the common stages of youth (spring), maturity (summer), old age (autumn), and death (winter). The winter of cultures, their period of decadence, Spengler called civilization. These cultural cycles were exactly like the cycle of the seasons, and took place with the same rhythm. Spengler’s historical morphology consisted of revealing the essential nature of the soul of such-and-such a culture, and then comparing the manifestations of this “cultural soul” at a given period with the manifestations of another soul that had reached a similar stage of cyclic evolution. Finally, Spengler, as Merlio showed in his wholly remarkable work, did not believe history was a science: he thought that the soul of the different cultures was only accessible to intuition.⁷⁰

Essentially, all this had already been said in the time of Herder. We saw

earlier that Herder rebelled against what he thought to be a Eurocentric, linear conception of history as a continual march of progress, for which Voltaire was held to be particularly responsible. We have also seen that this simplistic interpretation of Enlightenment thought was entirely incorrect, a totally fabricated construction that Herder invented to fight rationalism. Spengler continued this line of thought, making it more extreme, just as he developed the idea of a history that was universal and not national. But, in fact, was not the idea of a universal history Voltaire's? Was it not Voltaire who first wrote of history in terms of cultures? But if the people of the Enlightenment had an awareness of the pluralism of cultures, they retained a sense of the unity of the human race. People should be seen in their historical context, but humanity was one, people were rational individuals, and their weaknesses were a product of their environment and not of their nature. It was not in the second half of the twentieth century that the idea was invented that there is no hierarchy between societies. The French eighteenth century was aware of the individuality of different cultures, but Voltaire and Montesquieu thought that a hierarchy did exist, and this hierarchy was a hierarchy of values: a society in which absolutism prevailed was inferior to a society in which individual liberty was assured. Rousseau and Helvétius saw an excessive inequality of wealth as an evil to be remedied, not as one social condition among others.

But in Spengler's view this infinite pluralism was precisely what the Western thinker, or in other words, the rationalist, failed to understand. Europe was no longer the sun around which the other stars revolved. The classic example of this phenomenon was Kant. Spengler claimed that when Plato spoke of mankind, he meant the Greeks as opposed to the Barbarians, but when Kant spoke of ethical ideals, he committed a deadly sin: "he maintained the validity of his theses for men of all times and places." The same applied to his aesthetic criteria: "What he poses as necessary forms of thought are in reality only necessary forms of Western thought." For the modern Chinese or the Arab, Kant's philosophy is no more than a curiosity. To Russian thought, Western categories are as alien as they are to Chinese or Greek thought. Moreover, to Westerners the words of ancient languages are as incomprehensible as Russian or Indian words.⁷¹

This, according to Spengler, is the weakness of the West: its total lack of understanding of the "*historically relative* character" of its criteria. The Westerner refuses to accept that these criteria are "expressions of *one specific existence and one only*"; he has no knowledge of "the necessary limits of their validity"; he has no idea that "his 'unshakable' truths and 'eternal' views are simply true for him and eternal for his world-view," and that it is his duty to look "beyond them to find out what the men of other Cultures have with equal

certainty evolved out of themselves.” It follows that there is obviously “nothing constant, nothing universal.” One must no longer “speak of the forms of ‘Thought,’ the principles of ‘Tragedy,’ the mission of ‘The State.’ Universal validity involves always the fallacy of arguing from particular to particular.”⁷²

After this critique of Western thought via Kant, there was a critique of Nietzsche. Nietzsche, said Spengler, “gripped all the decisive problems,” but “being a romantic,” he did not dare “to look strict reality in the face.” “It is one of the greatest achievements of Nietzsche that he confronted science with the problem of the *value* of truth and knowledge,” wrote Spengler at the beginning of volume 2, and he continued a few hundred pages further on, “It will always remain the great merit of Nietzsche” that he was the first to recognize “the dual nature of all morality. . . . *Good and bad are aristocratic, and good and evil, priestly distinctions.* The good are the powerful, the rich, the fortunate. Good means strong, brave. . . . Bad, cheap, wretched, common, in the original sense, are the powerless, propertyless, unfortunate, cowardly, negligible — ‘the sons of nobody’ as ancient Egypt said.”⁷³

Nietzsche, said Spengler, went much further than Descartes, for if Descartes wished to doubt everything, he did not doubt the importance of the problem, but stating a problem is not the same as solving it. In this way, Spengler wished to show that the harm was not restricted to the rationalism and universalism of the Enlightenment, but the fault was structural, and was to be found in equal measure in Nietzsche, that anti-Kantian par excellence. What, in fact, asked Spengler, was “Nietzsche’s historical horizon”? What was the basis of “his concepts” (with which Spengler totally identified, incidentally) “of decadence, nihilism, the transvaluation of all values, the will-to-power,” if not the Greeks and Romans, the Renaissance and contemporary Europe? Was not Nietzsche also a prisoner of the Western European periodization of antiquity, the Middle Ages, and modern times? And did Schopenhauer, Comte, Fichte have a broader historical horizon? Was Henrik Ibsen’s celebrated Nora anything other than a Nordic upper-middle-class woman with a Protestant education?⁷⁴

Spengler accused Nietzsche of being “in every respect a disciple of the materialistic decades.” The same applied to Schopenhauer, whose “system was an *anticipated Darwinism.*” In fact, Spengler considered the whole nineteenth century to have been overshadowed by Darwin and Darwinism as he understood it: that is, evolution governed by natural selection and the survival of the fittest. According to him, “Nietzsche was an unconscious pupil of Darwin,” but he failed to mention that the writer of *Against Wagner* was also the writer of “Anti-Darwin” in “Skirmishes of an Untimely Man” included in *Twilight of the Idols*. He probably knew this, as he took the trouble of referring to Nietzsche’s unconscious. But Nietzsche, he said, was also a disciple of Marx: “That

is the genealogy of 'Herrenmoral.' The will-to-power is today represented by the two poles of public life: the worker-class and the big money-and-brain men." "Nietzsche was a socialist "without knowing it," declared Spengler, clearly following in the footsteps of Sorel, who was also a disciple of Nietzsche: "Nietzsche's 'slave-morale' is a phantom, *his master-morale is a reality.*" This reality, he said, was represented today both by the entrepreneurs who create the future — Sorel's captains of industry — and by socialism.⁷⁵

It is most important to recognize the degree to which Spengler was a successor to Sorel, who had preceded him by at least two decades. As with Sorel's, Spengler's revolt against the Enlightenment ended in a cult of symbols, and it was motivated not only by the same antirationalist and antiuniversalist reactions but also by the same interpretation of Marx. According to Spengler, the idea of class warfare concealed a simple will to power and domination. Marx posed the question of social relations in terms of power: he sought to demonstrate that the proletariat in its turn could and should become the strongest element. No less than Darwin, he contributed to the genealogy of master morality. In reality, Spengler took up the main lines of Sorel's argument. One finds in Sorel the same contempt for the Enlightenment, for the idea of progress, for liberal values dismissed as "bourgeois morality," for "materialism," for humanitarianism, for parliamentarianism, for vote-catching and political parties: in short, for anything that bore any kind of resemblance to democracy or democratic socialism. Sorel's thinking centered on the ideas of myth and of violence as creative of morality. Proletarian violence would destroy rotten bourgeois democracy and corrupt socialism, its ally in the implementation of the values of the Enlightenment.

Spengler considered himself a revolutionary, the first person who could claim the title of the inventor of universal history. One and a half centuries after Herder, Spengler undoubtedly enjoyed a freedom of maneuver that Herder did not possess. Moreover, not being in any way a Christian, he was in a better position than Herder to say that "what the West has said and thought, hitherto, on the problems of space, time, motion, number, will, marriage, property, tragedy, science, has remained narrow and dubious, because men were always looking for *the* solution of *the* question. It was never seen that many questions imply many answers." Here Spengler reached an important conclusion, which Herder had already reached, and which Maurras and Barrès took up in turn, using it in the Dreyfus Affair without feeling that they were making a revolution: namely, that "for other [different] men there are different truths. The *thinker* must admit the validity of all, or of none." Some three hundred pages further on, Spengler hammered in the nail in such a way that no misunderstanding was any longer possible, and the solutions to "old perplexities" were

now available to all: “*There are as many moralities as there are Cultures, no more and no fewer.* [No one is free to choose.] . . . The individual may act morally or immorally, may do ‘good’ or ‘evil’ with respect to the primary feeling of his Culture, but the theory of his actions is not a result but a datum. Each culture possesses its own standards, the validity of which begins and ends with it. *There is no general morality of mankind.*” And further on, he said: “A morality, like a sculpture, a music, an art of painting, is a self-contained form-world expressing a life feeling; it is a datum, fundamentally unalterable, an inward necessity. It is ever true within its historical circle, ever untrue outside it.”⁷⁶

That, said Spengler, is why “the innocent relativism of Nietzsche” can by no means provide us with a grasp of universal history. “We may talk today of transvaluing all our values,” but we are far from having what the West really needs. “A strict morphology of all moralities is a task for the future. Here, too, Nietzsche has taken the first and essential step towards the new standpoint. But he has failed to observe his own condition that the thinker shall place himself ‘beyond good and evil.’ He tried to be at once skeptic and prophet, moral critic and moral gossamer. It cannot be done. One cannot be a first-class psychologist as long as one is still a Romantic. And so here, as in all his crucial penetrations, he got as far as the door — and stood outside it.” But, having said this, Spengler nevertheless paid him a tribute: “So far, no one has done any better.”⁷⁷

Spengler gave himself the task of improving on Nietzsche. He said that in order to understand the process of the West’s decline, we have to consider “*the problem of Civilization.*” For Spengler, a Civilization was “the organic-logical sequel, fulfillment and finale of a Culture.” This meant that “every Culture had its own Civilization.” These two words, which had previously represented some vague distinction of an ethical kind, were used by Spengler for the first time to express “a strict and necessary *organic succession.* The Civilization is the inevitable *destiny* of the Culture. . . . Civilizations are the most *external and artificial* states of which a species of developed humanity is capable.” Thus, Rome represented the stage of civilization in relation to Greece, terminating a long development. Like Herder, who thought much the same, Spengler gave us a portrait of the Romans: “Unspiritual, unphilosophical, devoid of art, clanish to the point of brutality,” their “imagination directed purely to practical objects,” they “stand between the Hellenic Culture and nothingness. . . . In a word,” he said, “Greek *soul* — Roman *intellect*, and this antithesis is the *differantia* [difference] between Culture and Civilization.” He added that this did not apply only to antiquity.⁷⁸ From Herder to the thinkers of the conservative revolution, this opposition between Rome and Greece was a tradition widely accepted in Germany. The nationalist intellectuals asked the Germans to dis-

sociate themselves from Rome, associated with Latinity, French cultural dominance, the Renaissance, and the Mediterranean, which, by and large, represented Western cultural imperialism.

The transition from Culture (*Kultur*) to Civilization (*Zivilisation*) took place in the fourth century B.C. in antiquity, and then in the nineteenth century, with the growth of large cities, “world-cities” as Spengler called them. The world-city meant “cosmopolitanism in place of ‘home,’ cold matter-of-fact in place for reverence for tradition and age, scientific irreligion as a fossil representative of the older religion of the heart, ‘society’ in place of the state, natural instead of hard-earned rights.” Romans already had the advantage over the Greeks of knowing money, and money ruled in the twentieth century. The world-city did not have a people but a mass, had no understanding of tradition, had a naturalism of an entirely new kind and saw a reappearance of “panem et circenses.” Culture had gymnastics and tournaments, and Civilization had sport. In the world of the nineteenth century, economics prevailed, just as the Romans had shown the world the attraction of money.⁷⁹

Spengler’s image of decadence was the same as Herder’s. He also thought that imperialism was “a typical symbol of that which is passing away. Imperialism is Civilization unadulterated. In this phenomenal form the destiny of the West is now irrevocably set.” It is the “indwelling tendency of *every* civilization that has fully ripened,” including the Roman, Arab, and Chinese. “It is not a matter of choice — it is not the conscious will of individuals, or even that of whole classes or peoples that decides.” Thus, after relativism comes determinism: now that the secret of history is revealed, one can no longer permit oneself to hope that the future will be as one wants. Henceforth, it will be every man’s business to inform himself “of what, with the unalterable necessity of destiny . . . *will* happen,” so that freedom simply means that we are free to do “the necessary or nothing. Feeling that this is ‘just as it should be’ is the hallmark of the man of fact. . . . To birth belongs death, to youth age.”⁸⁰

Here Spengler immediately defended himself against the charge of pessimism that he saw coming. Acknowledging realities is not the same as being pessimistic. Western culture had exhausted itself, and European contemporaries lived in an age that had its parallel not in the Athens of Pericles but in the Rome of the Caesars. They could no longer expect to see great music, great painting, great architecture, or great theater. They lived “in a time of decline”: “We cannot help it if we are born as men of the early winter of full Civilization, instead of in the golden summit of a ripe Culture, in the time of a Phidias or Mozart.” In recognizing a reality, in showing that there are limits, one is not guilty of pessimism. On the contrary: “The lesson, I think, would be of benefit to the coming generations, as showing them what is possible, and therefore

necessary.” In recognizing what is possible, the European contemporary would be saved from squandering his energies in false directions: “I can only hope that men of the new generation may be moved by this book to devote themselves to technics instead of lyrics, the sea instead of the paint-brush, and politics instead of epistemology.”⁸¹

Like Herder, Spengler believed that “every thought lives in a historical world and is therefore involved in the common destiny of mortality.” The idea of the absolute historicity of thought was a reiteration of Herder, although Spengler never took the trouble to mention Herder’s philosophy of history. “Every philosophy,” he said, “is the expression of its own and *only* its own time. . . . The immortality of thoughts-become is an illusion.”⁸² This was true in all times and places.

Spengler, like Herder, attacked intellectualism, or what, like Herder, he called bookish culture, “academic triflings”; he thought that “only its necessity to life decides the eminence of a doctrine.” “For me . . . the test of value to be applied to a thinker is his eye for the great facts of his own time.” The great philosophers of the past, the pre-Socratic Greeks and the Chinese, Plato and Confucius, Hobbes and Leibniz, Pythagoras and Goethe, participated intensely in public life. Grasping political realities, dealing with the great problems of life, is an integral part of philosophical thought as properly understood. This, however, was no longer the case in the early twentieth century: “Our contemporary philosophers,” said Spengler, “are blind. . . . We have descended from the perspective of the bird to that of the frog.” “Systematic philosophy closes with [at] the end of the eighteenth century” with Kant.⁸³

As ethical philosophy was now exhausted, all that remained was “comparative historical morphology.” This corresponded, in contemporary Western thought, “to *Classical Skepticism*.” Once again, we should make no mistake: we are dealing with skepticism and not pessimism. But classical skepticism was ahistorical: it doubted simply by denying, while twentieth-century skepticism “got its solutions by treating everything as relative, as a historical phenomenon and its procedure is psychological. . . . We are led to renounce absolute standpoints [dogmas].” This was the essential point: “Skepticism is the expression of pure Civilization; and it dissipates the world-picture of the Culture that has gone before. . . . The thinkers of the past conceived external actuality as produced by cognition and motivating ethical judgements, but to the thought of the future they are above all *expressions and symbols*. . . . *The Morphology of world-history becomes inevitably a universal symbolism*.” The conclusion followed immediately: “With that, the claim of higher thought to possess general and eternal truths falls to the ground. Truths are truths only in relation to a particular human group.” As there is no longer any absolute

truth or God that could serve as a reference, the only criterion is vitality, usefulness for life.⁸⁴

The first generation of the Anti-Enlightenment was saved from nihilism by the Christian faith. When faith disappeared, the generation of the turn of the twentieth century drew upon a primitive, vulgarized Nietzscheanism, but in politics and as a historical force, it was the interpretation of Nietzsche that mattered and not the subtleties of his philosophy. Thus, according to Spengler, truth — that is, morality — has no value, as it is powerless in the face of facts. In the opening pages of the second volume of *The Decline*, he posed the problem of truth in the context of his discussion of reason, and, as we have seen, he appealed to the authority of Nietzsche when questioning the intrinsic value of truth. This context, however, also had another dimension: “But, for an animal, truths do not exist, but only facts. . . . Facts and truth differ like time and space, destiny and causality. . . . Actual life, history, knows *only* facts; life-experience and knowledge of men deal only in facts. The active man who does and wills and fights . . . looks down upon mere truths as unimportant. The real statesman knows only political facts, not political truths.”⁸⁵

Here we reach the essential point, which is the Spenglerian critique of rationalism. Before Adorno and Horkheimer, Spengler discovered a dialectic of reason, but he conceived of it differently. One must insist on this fact: the people of the Frankfurt school showed that in his domination of nature through reason, man, who was the dominating party, ended by including himself in the totality to be dominated, and so lost his individuality and freedom. For Adorno and Horkheimer, the trouble was that the duality of the subject and object was eliminated in this way. They sought to reveal and then to challenge this reversal, which made an instrument of liberation into an instrument of repression. For Spengler, on the other hand, the trouble was the liberation itself and the division between the subject and object.⁸⁶

For Spengler, there was a dual problem. First of all, he held, like Barrès, that reason tore men away from their attachment to the forces of blood and soil, and the liberation of man through reason was an uprooting. Then, he claimed there was a moment in the cultural process when reason gave way to understanding, when the spirit became intellect. That moment was the distinguishing sign of all civilizations and marked the beginning of decadence. In the chapter entitled “Problems of Arab Culture,” Spengler spoke of Mohammed and Cromwell in a way that leaves little doubt that he was acquainted with Carlyle. His treatment of Mohammed and Cromwell, and the great figures surrounding them like Abu Bekr and Omar, and the Puritan leaders John Hampden and John Pym, has an unmistakable similarity to Carlyle’s sentiment and tone. Spengler, like Carlyle, believed that they were all conscious of

having a great mission, a predestination that gave all of them, like the Arabian puritans of Mohammed's time, the feeling of being God's elect. Spengler admired "the grand Old Testament exaltation" of the Puritans, but he saw that "in Puritanism there is already hidden the seed of Rationalism. . . . This is the step from Cromwell to Hume."⁸⁷

Here Spengler described the eighteenth century as the age of "Enlightenment" (in quotation marks), and associated it with the critical consciousness, finally giving his definition of rationalism: "Rationalism signifies the belief in the data of critical understanding (that is, of 'reason') *alone*." Like the modern city, the eighteenth century belongs to civilization: like Herder, Burke, de Maistre, Maurras, and Sorel, Spengler revolted against triumphant reason that sought to explain everything, including religion: "Every 'Age of Enlightenment' proceeds from an unlimited optimism of the reason — always associated with the type of the megalopolitan — to an equally unqualified skepticism." This expresses the meaning of the word *Weltanschauung* in *Decline*: it "is the characteristic expression for an enlightened waking-consciousness that, under the guidance of the critical understanding, looks about it in a godless world of clarity and, when sense-perceptions are found not to square with sound human reason, treats sense as a 'lying jade.'"⁸⁸

Spengler believed that the philosophy of the Enlightenment was a phenomenon that recurs in all civilizations, in all periods of decadence. The collection and classification of the Chinese canonical writings by the Confucians amounted to a destruction of all the ancient religious works of China, and a subjection of the rest to rationalist falsification: "Confucius belongs to the Chinese 'eighteenth century' through and through." The same applied to Buddha, who recognized neither the idea of God nor myth or cult. He was a classic representative of "true rationalism. Nirvana . . . is a purely intellectual release and corresponds exactly to the . . . 'Eudaimonia' of the Stoics." For educated people of the age of Enlightenment, the great ideal was wisdom. The sage was the man of the golden mean, and "the wisdom of the Enlightenment never interfered with comfort." Morality backed by myth is a sacrifice, but "Virtue with Wisdom at its back is a sort of secret enjoyment, a superfine intellectual egoism," and the moralist thus becomes a Philistine. Socrates and Rousseau were the Western equivalent of those destroyers of myths, Buddha and Confucius. Despite all their wisdom, they, together with Rousseau and Socrates, were arch-Philistines.⁸⁹ Here again one seems to be hearing Sorel.

In the West, rationalism "is of English origin and Puritan parentage. The rationalism of the Continent comes wholly from Locke." Thus, two centuries after Puritanism, "the mechanistic conception of the world stands at its zenith. It is the effective religion of the time." Every great Culture began "with a

mighty theme that rises out of the pre-urban countryside . . . and closed with a finale of materialism in the world-cities." The death of faith was accompanied by a mechanization of destiny described as "evolution, development, progress." People still toyed with myths in which they no longer believed, any more than in the cults with which they hoped to fill their inner void. "Materialism," said Spengler, "is shallow and honest, mock-religion shallow and dishonest." Such were the characteristics of decadent periods. However, Spengler's critique of the atheism of the Enlightenment and of rationalism, "the religion of educated men," was made not in the name of faith but of culture, "ever synonymous with religious creativeness."⁹⁰

This critique of rationalism was made in the name of blood and instinct, as Barrès's critique was made in the name of the Land and the Dead. Blood is the living current that bears history along, but reason harms the life force, and rationalism is condemned for seeking to change the world. That was the concrete significance of this new phase of the revolt against the Enlightenment.

Spengler saw rationalism as both the cause and the result of decadence. Because he was primarily interested in the concrete problems of history, he associated rationalism not with Descartes but with English philosophy. In "The Idea of Destiny and the Principle of Causality," a fascinating section of the chapter entitled "The Problem of World-History," Spengler claimed that the theory of "European civilization" (the quotation marks are Spengler's) had its birth in the England of Locke, Shaftesbury, and above all Bentham, and was taken to Paris by Bayle, Voltaire, and Rousseau. "It was in the name of *this* England of Parliamentarism, business morality and journalism that [the battles of] Valmy, Marengo, Jena, Smolensk and Leipzig were fought." "Transmitted via the English-schooled intellects of Rousseau and Mirabeau," the English philosophical ideas were the driving force of the revolutionary armies. Only Goethe understood the true significance of Valmy. That, said Spengler, was why the French Revolution was the beginning of an *epoch* in the ancient sense of the word, which is not to be confused with a period. An epoch is "necessary and predeterminate." "When we say an event is epoch-making we mean that it marks in the course of a Culture a necessary and fateful turning-point." The "idea" of the French Revolution, its historical significance, was "the transition from Culture to Civilization, the victory of the inorganic metropolis over the organic countryside." In other words, the French Revolution was the beginning of the utilitarian, hedonistic, and materialistic decadence produced by the Enlightenment, practical considerations overrode everything else, and metaphysics disappeared. In the gently sloping route of decline of this "Twilight of the Gods," declared Spengler in the concluding pages of the first volume of *The Decline*, he discerned "the last stage of Western science."⁹¹

It was undoubtedly these pages that readers would have remembered, and, when the second volume was published, the sections that made the greatest impression on them would have been the two last chapters, on politics and the state and on money and machines, which played a crucial role in the war against democracy and the Weimar Republic. “*Politics in the highest sense is life, and life is politics*,” wrote Spengler. And much further on, he wrote: “*All living is politics*, in every trait of instinct, in the inmost marrow.” Like Maurras, and like Schmitt after him, Spengler sought to define the principle of politics. He discovered this principle to be the struggle for power and life. Democracy and liberalism harmed the very essence of politics: Maurras said exactly the same. But what did this word “liberal” mean? Spengler said that to be liberal meant “freedom from the restrictions of the soil-bound life . . . freedom of the intellect for every kind of criticism, freedom of money for every kind of business.” As rationalism was born in England and David Hume was the teacher of Adam Smith, “‘Liberty’ self-evidently meant intellectual *and* trade freedom.” In England, everything could be bought, including parliamentary elections, and Englishmen discovered that “the ideal of a Free Press” could coexist with the fact that “the press serves him who owns it.”⁹² Spengler’s analysis, as we have seen, was quite accurate: in the time of Robert Walpole and his successors, service to the country and service to the Whig aristocracy were one and the same thing.

When the bourgeois or liberal ideas moved from England to France, however, they took on an abstract meaning that they did not have in the British Isles. The bourgeoisie seeks, by means of democracy, to subject government to judicial and moral norms, but nothing is more contrary to the very nature of government. Under the influence of abstract systems that since the triumph of rationalism have been dominant, the bourgeoisie has endangered the nation. Richelieu or Cromwell would never have thought of taking decisions under the influence of abstract ideas. But one is dealing not only with ideas or the critical spirit, for “along with abstract concepts, abstract Money—money divorced from the prime values of the land—and along with the study, the counting-house, appear as political forces. The two are inwardly cognate and inseparable.” Thus, “if by ‘democracy’ we mean the form which the Third Estate as such wishes to impart to public life as a whole, it must be concluded that democracy and plutocracy are the same thing.”⁹³

Like Maurras, Barrès, and Sorel, Spengler condemned liberalism and Marxist socialism equally. In the two volumes of *The Decline*, Spengler opposed to the socialism of Marxist origin that had just taken the path of democracy the Prussian, national form of socialism that he also called ethical socialism. This was also the type of socialism that Hendrik de Man was to advocate in *The*

Psychology of Socialism, but it is Sorel who had the privilege of pioneering the critique of socialism as enslaved to the bourgeoisie by money, parliamentarism, and the principles of the Enlightenment. In a footnote, Spengler reiterated a classic Sorelian idea almost word for word, although Sorel himself was not mentioned anywhere in the work: "The great movement which makes use of the catchword of Marx has not delivered the entrepreneur into the power of the worker, but both into that of the Stock Exchange." "The concepts of Liberalism and Socialism," he said, "are set in effective motion only by money. . . . There is no proletarian, not even a Communist, movement that has not operated in the interest of money, in the directions indicated by money, and for the time permitted by money." Finally, "Intellect rejects, money directs — so it is in every last act of a Culture-drama, when the megapolis has become master over the rest."⁹⁴ Does one need to be reminded once again that this idea is commonplace all the way from Drumont's *La Fin d'un monde* to the writings of Maurras and those of his German counterparts, Julius Langbehn and Paul de Lagarde?

Thus the city, or modernity, produces civilization. The difference between the politics of a period belonging to a culture and those of one belonging to a civilization is the difference between an "organic" world founded on blood and race and a world in which the bourgeoisie has taken over. Like that of Herder and Maurras, Carlyle and Sorel, Spengler's ideal was the Homeric and Gothic ages, where the social organization had a patriarchal form and was governed by "the connections with the mother soil." In a world of this kind, "blood and race speak in actions undertaken instinctively or half-consciously," and everyone who takes part in politics, even the priest, behaves "as the [or: a] man of race."⁹⁵

Great cities were a turning point, the beginning of the reign of the "non-Estate" or bourgeoisie. The politics of struggles between "factions," from Telemachus and the suitors in Ithaca to the Guelphs and Ghibellines and the houses of Lancaster and York, were now "reduced to comprehensible ideas. The powers of intellect and money set themselves up against blood and tradition. In place of the organic we have the organized; *in place of the Estate, the Party*." Parties, which were a negation of all that could not be rationally understood, were a purely urban phenomenon. They did not recognize the division of society into Estates, the two "prime Estates" being the nobility and the clergy. That is why the concept of the party is connected with the concepts of equality and liberty, two totally negative concepts, the first of which is "disruptive, socially leveling" and belongs to "the incipient cosmopolitan" and democratic civilization.⁹⁶ Sorel's critique of democracy, and that of the Sorelians in France and Italy, was almost identical.

The question that now arises is, "How is politics *done*?" The basic assump-

tion is simple: “*Political talent in a people is nothing but confidence in its leading.*” This formula is to be found not only in Carlyle but also, to the same degree, in Renan and Taine, not to speak of Maurras. Politics is nothing other than the science of leading. The “sovereignty of the people” merely means that the ruling power has passed from one individual to another, from a king to a popular leader. Gaetano Mosca and Vilfredo Pareto, like Robert Michels, thought that the authoritarian and oligarchic structures remain essentially the same: one elite may be replaced by another, but the nature of politics and government cannot change. Spengler made a synthesis of all currents of Anti-Enlightenment thought: Carlyle, Taine, and Pareto, as well as Mosca and Michels, who became fascist militants, were grafted onto his social Darwinism. “The life-unit,” he said, “— even in the case of the animals — is subdivided into subjects and objects of government.” “War is the primary politics of everything that lives, and so much so that in the deeps [depths] battle and life are one.” Thus, “the born statesman stands beyond true and false.” No statesman has convictions; he does not believe in systems, and as Goethe saw, he does not have, which means he must not have, a conscience, because “it is *life*, not the individual, that is conscienceless.”⁹⁷

Spengler, like Carlyle, believed that “there is only *personal* history, and consequently *personal* politics.” It followed that “the struggle, not of principles but men, not of ideals but race-qualities, for executive power, is the alpha and omega of politics.” The qualities required for leadership are heroic qualities possessed by exceptional men, individuals who “have a historical vocation.” A man of this kind, Carlyle’s hero, a political leader worthy of the name, wishes “to be the center of action and effective focus of a multitude, to make the inward form of one’s own personality into that of whole peoples and periods, to be history’s commanding officer.” When a real hero appears, the formal structures of democracy can no longer conceal the reality: for “true master-natures,” “the people is nothing but an object and the ideal nothing but a means.” Universal suffrage is pure hypocrisy, a decoy, and “the rights of the people and the influence of the people are two different things.”⁹⁸ It very soon becomes apparent that “one can make use of constitutional rights *only when one has money.*” The means by which the masses can be led are money and the press; whether one likes it or not, the means of attaining power in a parliamentary democracy are elections and the press, backed by money. Thus, “the fundamental right of the mass to choose its own representatives . . . remains pure theory.” “Freedom is always purely *negative.*” It is essentially a denial of tradition, but the power passes to other authorities, heads of parties or dictators, or prophets and their adherents, for whom “*the multitude continues to be unconditionally a passive object.*” Democracy — here Spengler repeats an ob-

servation of Michels without mentioning the existence of the writer of *Political Parties*—is really a dictatorship of party apparatuses. That is why “an irresistible tendency drives every democracy further and further on the road to suicide.” Spengler can thus announce the forthcoming death of parliamentarism “in full decay” and the transition to Caesarism.⁹⁹ The ideological path was now wide open to the fall of the Weimar Republic.

What follows is in a similar vein. Spengler continued his campaign against the domination of money, on which political power, the press, freedom of opinion, and, in the final analysis, democracy depend. In the chapter on the state, one sees, first, how money triumphed “in the form of democracy,” and then how “through money, democracy becomes its own destroyer, after money has destroyed intellect.” But the triumph of money creates a reaction of “the form-filled powers of the blood, which the rationalism of the Megapolis has suppressed. . . . Caesarism *grows* on the soil of democracy, but its roots thread deeply into the underground of blood tradition.” “The powers of the blood, unbroken bodily forces, resume their ancient lordship. ‘Race’ springs forth, pure and irresistible—the strongest win and the residue is their spoil.” The appearance of the dictator represents the victory of politics in its struggle against economics.¹⁰⁰

But as one might have expected, this violent critique of capitalism was not a criticism of private property. Spengler took the path opened up by the first national socialists such as Barrès, and by the Italian revolutionary syndicalists and their master Sorel, who dissociated the capitalism of liberalism from the capitalism of private property. They accepted private property but not the intellectual values of liberalism. Moreover, they all saw liberalism as an ideological cover for the domination of money. Maurras and the Maurrasians, like Thierry Maulnier, the translator of Moeller van den Bruck’s *Third Reich*, developed an anti-Marxist anti-capitalism that found its major theoretician in Hendrik de Man. The vice president and later president of the Belgian Workers’ Party, and an eminent socialist thinker, de Man gave anticapitalism a theoretical framework that nourished the French neosocialism of Marcel Déat. It would be difficult to exaggerate the importance for the middle classes of this campaign against large-scale, mobile, anonymous capital—“hypercapitalism.” Spengler, and later de Man, attacked the capital of the stock exchange but not the capital that created industrial wealth and power. The captains of industry were always welcome.

Thus, everything fitted together. The ideology of blood and soil, the Land and the Dead produced both a hatred of Kantism, rationalism, and the autonomy of the individual and of bourgeois society and large cities. The group of students described by Barrès in *Les Déracinés* exactly resembled Spengler’s “intellectual nomad” for whom “home is any one of these giant cities, but even

the nearest village is alien territory. He would sooner die upon the pavement than go 'back' to the land." Barrès's uprooted intellectual, that product of republican doctrines, democracy, and the big city, that product of overintellectuality, was the twin brother of the Spenglerian intellectual, cosmopolitan, cut off from his origins, an integral part of "the new nomadism of the Cosmopolis," of "the mass" that "is the end, the radical nullity."¹⁰¹ As with Barrès, the theme of uprooting is fundamental to Spengler, and is linked to the rationalism of the Enlightenment. Opposition to Kant and Rousseau, to rationalism and humanism, was a rejection of uprooting, or, in other words, of the loss of cultural identity, the capacity to resist the outside world. Individualism was a primary expression of decadence.

A quarter of a century before Spengler, Barrès showed in *Les Déracinés* how rationalism, universalism, individualism, and humanism cut off the seven young men from Lorraine from their provincial and national roots. In *Scènes et doctrines du nationalisme* he exhibited the mortal danger to the nation represented by uprooted cosmopolitan intellectuals who instinctively and hence inevitably betray their race and their country. It should be recalled that the Jews were also considered part of this category of intellectual nomads. Barrès was violently anti-Semitic and close to Spengler, who did not fall into the racial anti-Semitism of the Nazis but (as Merlio has demonstrated), like the Nazis, denied the Jews any possibility of assimilating into Western civilization because of the psychic racism underlying his conception of culture.¹⁰²

It is very striking that both Barrès and Spengler knowingly distorted the meaning of the Kantian categorical imperative. Barrès thought it disintegrated the community and was a form of hypocrisy, and according to Spengler, Faustian morality interpreted Kant as prescribing obedience, which he saw as a manifestation of the will to power. The Faustian world was an expression of the "will-to-power" and the "will-to-domination": "All that is Faustian desires to reign alone." The will to power is intolerant by nature: in the West, tolerance is "a sign of fading-out." In this way, said Merlio, Spengler asserted the superiority of the Nordic Faustian type to other human types.¹⁰³

In granting superiority to the Germanic heritage created by the Great Invasions, in insisting on the Nordic roots of Western civilization Spengler could show that all deviations came from the South. Renan was also convinced of this. The inferiority of the Renaissance, which Herder already regarded as foreign to this heritage, was forcefully asserted. According to Spengler, the Renaissance made no contribution to Western culture, as it was totally lacking in originality. Whereas "the Gothic gripped life in its entirety, penetrated its most hidden corners," the Renaissance did not alter "the ways of thought and the life-feeling of Western Europe one whit."¹⁰⁴

Spengler, like Maurras and Barrès, thought that every culture was a national

culture, unique of its kind, which cannot be borrowed or imitated. Like Herder, he defined as “nations” peoples that are “in the style of their culture,” and he believed that “underlying the nation there is an Idea.” But he went much further: according to him, this idea was opposed to all other ideas. Thus, any attempt at understanding between nations or any possibility of such an understanding was a sign of decline. For men who come to a different culture, its customs and morals are “a deep secret and a source of continual and pregnant error.” When people begin to understand each other everywhere, as was the case in imperial Rome, one enters a period of civilization and thus of decline, for when humanity “ceased to live in nations, . . . [it] *ipso facto* ceased to be historic.”¹⁰⁵

Culture, for Spengler, was the emanation of the collective soul: “A Culture is born when a great soul awakens. . . . It blooms on the soil of an exactly-definable landscape, to which plant-wise it remains bound. It dies when this soul has actualised the full sum of its possibilities in the shape of peoples, languages, dogmas, arts, states, sciences.” These “cultural souls” are irrational entities “eternally inaccessible to learned investigation. . . . Critical (i.e., literally, separating) methods apply only to the world-as-Nature. . . . Nature-knowledge and man-knowledge have neither aims nor ways in common. . . . *Every psychology is a counter-physics.*”¹⁰⁶ Thus, “a Culture is soul that has arrived at self-expression in sensible forms, but these forms are living and evolving. . . . This Culture is not only a grand thing, but wholly unlike any other thing in the organic world.” And consequently, there is “in every culture a sharp sense of whether this or that man belongs thereto [to it] or not.”¹⁰⁷ Every culture is the story of a soul, of which its history is the expression, and “when the aim [is] once attained . . . the Culture suddenly hardens, it mortifies, its blood congeals, its force breaks down, and it becomes a *Civilization*.” “Culture and civilization — the living body of a soul and [its] mummy”: that is the difference between “Western existence . . . in one great uninterrupted evolution from Gothic childhood to Goethe and Napoleon,” on the one hand, and “the autumnal, artificial, rootless life of our great cities, in forms fashioned by the intellect,” on the other.¹⁰⁸

Spengler declared that “*Cultures are organisms*, and world-history is their collective biography. . . . I distinguish the *idea* of a Culture, which is the sum total of its inner possibilities, from its sensible *phenomenon* or appearance upon the canvas of history as a fulfilled actuality.” Whatever this realization may be, “in the destinies of the several Cultures that follow upon one another, grow up with one another, touch, overshadow, and suppress one another, is compressed the whole content of human history.”¹⁰⁹ In the second volume of *The Decline*, Spengler described the basis on which the legitimacy of all com-

parative studies of civilizations rests: "Our licence to proceed thus comes from general *experience* of organic being," for the histories of human societies are subject to the same laws as "the histories of birds of prey or coniferous trees." Like multitudes of social Darwinists before him, Spengler quite naturally linked human societies to living organisms. It is impossible to forecast the future, but as soon as a being is conceived or a seed is planted in the soil, we know "*the inner form of this new life-course*."¹¹⁰ Biological determinism governs cultures as it governs the world of nature: "We may speak of the *habitus*" of culture or history "as the term *habitus* is used of a plant." Similarly, "Every Culture passes through the age-phases of the individual man. Each has its childhood, youth, manhood and old age." The whole of the chapter entitled "The Problem of World-History" is a demonstration of the individual's dependency with regard to space. Full of attacks on Kant, it shows man subject to the laws of biology as a "destiny." "Kant and every other builder of rational world-systems . . . could not touch *life*," and ignored the following fundamental fact: "Causality is — so to say — destiny become," but destiny "stands beyond and outside all comprehended nature."¹¹¹ The idea of human liberty is thus simply nonsensical.

Style was the second concept used by Spengler to define culture. His inspiration for this came not only from Nietzsche; already in Herder and Möser one sees that style was regarded as a distinctive attribute of a people. Goethe was also familiar with this idea. A "great culture" said Spengler, is characterized by a "great style"; "high culture" is a style. "Style is not," as materialists suppose, "the product of material, technique, and purpose. It is the very opposite of this, something inaccessible to art-reason, a revelation of the metaphysical order, a mysterious 'must,' a Destiny." The concept of style allowed Spengler once again to stress the originality of each culture. "An art is an organism, not a system. There is no art-genius that runs through all the centuries and all the cultures. . . . Every individual art . . . is *once existent*, and departs with its soul and its symbolism, never to return." This is the rule of the universe: each science, philosophy, politics, and art has a style which is that of a particular culture. This relativism is carried to the point of denying the existence of universal exact sciences: there is not a single mathematics, as mathematics is "an art . . . subject like every art to unnoticed changes from epoch to epoch."¹¹² From this, one may deduce that no one is able to reach the truth.

According to Spengler, this is a universal principle and a universal reality. What one actually finds in *The Decline* is the great Herder-based principle developed by the rebels of the end of the nineteenth century that the sole universal norm that exists is that no universal norm can be found.

The ensuing attack on cosmopolitanism represented something widespread

in Europe, no less than the attack on democracy. The cult of cultural specificity was a basic element in the campaign against the Enlightenment. Before 1914 and immediately after the war, Thomas Mann, like Croce, waged a ferocious campaign against democracy and against all forms of cosmopolitanism. Confronted with the reality of Nazism, he, unlike Meinecke, nevertheless left Germany, which, however, does not alter the fact that he played a part in the long psychological preparation without which the appearance of Nazism would not have been possible. Mann, one of the rare non-Jewish émigrés, was one of those who thought around 1920 that democratic ideas, being universal, could only lead to a loss of national identity and cultural uniqueness, or, in other words, to the death of culture. Taine had already shown how the French Revolution, the greatest cultural disaster of modern times, resulted from an abdication of the elites in the face of a popular revolt. Mosca explained the unfolding of history by making the behavior of the elites into a kind of universal law. All the critics of the Enlightenment were agreed that rationalism, individualism, and democracy represented an existential danger for the nation. Democratization was a revolt of the masses set in motion by the bourgeoisie. “*Panem et circenses*’ is only another formula for pacifism,” said Spengler. “In the history of all Cultures there is an anti-national element whether we have evidences of it or not.” Like cosmopolitanism, pacifism is a “fellaheen” ideal.¹¹³ Long before August 1914, Barrès, Mann, Croce, Sorel, and Maurras represented the onslaught on the Enlightenment without which the fall of democracy in Western Europe is incomprehensible. The fact that Croce and Mann changed their ways only shows how widespread the phenomenon was.

The institutional and political consequences predicted by Spengler were hardly surprising. Finally, there would be dictatorship, and great men, great leaders, would appear, as in Carlyle. It seems that the charismatic leaders in question did not necessarily have to be politicians, but the best kind of state was undoubtedly one managed by a single individual. The strengthening of the state was a condition for the survival of the nation: Maurras spent his life attempting to convince his fellow countrymen that, precisely for that reason, a monarchical dictatorship was necessary for the salvation of France. Spengler regretted that the Prussian monarchy allowed a democratization, even a partial one.

Spengler, like Maurras, believed that if liberal democracy was the type of state in which politics were most unpolitical, absolute monarchy was the system that corresponded most perfectly to the nature of politics: “The State-idea in its sturdy youth is always—and self-evidently, with a naturalness rooted deep in animality itself—bound up with the conception of an individual ruler.” Monarchy is thus natural: it corresponds to the natural order; it

extends nature into the area of politics. The human masses, like the animals, require a leader: "They are 'in form' for the onrush of events only when they are in the hands of the leader," and the same applies "in the formation of the great life-units that we call peoples and States." Spengler continued: "With this cosmic fact is bound up . . . the *inherited will*, which presents itself with the force of a natural phenomenon in every strong race," and the idea of dynasty comes into being. Thus, "With the sinking of feudalism, Faustian history becomes dynastic history." In this way, one sees how "the genealogical principle already ruling in the feudal nobility and the yeoman families . . . becomes so powerful . . . that the appearance of nations . . . is dependent upon the destinies of ruling houses." It was the idea of empire that "welded the disjunct primitives of Charlemagne's time into the German nation," and as for the French people, Spengler asserted, in a text that seems to have been copied word for word from one of the writings of de Maistre, Maurras, or Jacques Bainville, that it was "forged out of Franks and Visigoths by its kings" and "learnt to feel itself as a whole for the first time at Bouvines." Similarly, Prussia, "the latest nation of the West," was "a creation of the Hohenzollerns."¹¹⁴ The idea of a country was thus the product of a political process.

Once established, all authority tends to perpetuate itself, and the desire to be hereditary is inherent in government. The dynastic will is thus one of the necessary features of government as exercised in the great periods of "high cultures," but only the Faustian culture, with its very special sense of time, gave it full expression.¹¹⁵ Thus, the dynastic idea played a crucial role in the history of the West as seen by Spengler. His view of the way nations and races were formed explains his rejection of Nazi biological racism. His racism, and hence his anti-Semitism, were cultural phenomena, quite close to the anti-Semitism of Maurras and Barrès.

What, then, is race? "'Races' of the West"—races in quotation marks—according to Spengler, "are not the creators of the great nations, *but their result*. Not one of them had come into existence in Carolingian times." But in the process of becoming a nation in a dynastic framework, the "nations of today" came "to feel themselves to be races and experienced themselves as such." It is in this way that "the *historical* concepts of equivalence by birth and blood-purity" came into being.¹¹⁶ Initially historical and not biological, the idea of Blood and Soil, linked to the ideas of the Fatherland and cultural specificity, nevertheless produces a violent anti-Semitism, with the practical conclusions that follow: the exclusion of the Jews from the cultural community, that historically created blood community to which they cannot belong.

Here Spengler undoubtedly met with the same difficulties as those encountered by Carlyle and Maurras. The appearance of a great statesman "whom

the Classical world would doubtless have called a divinity,” and who becomes “the *spirit*-ancestor of a young race,” is a matter of chance, but—and this is the primary task of a great man—he must perpetuate his work by creating a tradition, for “the creation of tradition means the elimination of the incident[al].” In this, Spengler, Barrès, and Maurras can be considered traditionalists, but, if so, they were revolutionary traditionalists. A traditionalist is not synonymous with a conservative in the strict meaning of the word. A traditionalist may wish to preserve a tradition that already exists, or, conversely, create a tradition he wishes to perpetuate, just as he might oppose a tradition he wishes to suppress. Tradition is really the prolongation in time of “the *ability to command*” that distinguishes every truly great man. A great statesman, as Carlyle had already said, is an educator who does not necessarily represent a doctrine or a morality: he commands, provides an example by his actions, and forms proud elites. He is a living model who inspires sentiments of honor, discipline, and duty, but he can only create a tradition if his contemporaries feel he is indispensable to their time and nation.¹¹⁷

Relativism, the rejection of all forms of universalism and of the unity of the human race, the idea of the self-sufficiency of cultures and of the impossibility of any real communication between them, soon produce a feeling of alienation that has been expressed since Herder as a cultural withdrawal. Those linguistic and historical units called peoples are the products of a culture, and “between the souls of two cultures the screen is impenetrable,” so that “no Westerner may ever hope completely to understand the Indian or the Chinese.” But what is more important still is the fact that Spengler thought that “this is equally so, or even more so, between well-developed nations”: “Nations understand one another as little as individuals do so. Each understands merely the self-created picture of the other.” The European nations are consequently in such a state of alienation and incomprehension that it amounts to xenophobia, and “for the average man, and, therefore, for the public opinion of his community, the real inwardness of every foreign nation remains a deep secret and a source of continual and pregnant error.”¹¹⁸ As a result of emphasizing all that separates human collectivities, one ends by setting them against each other. The Herderian ideal of absolute cultural independence had its concretization in the nationalism of the turn of the nineteenth century. Starting well before the First World War, the radicalization of these same principles produced an infinitely harder nationalism.

This is because the difference between historical and ethnic relativity is by no means always clear and has a concrete historical significance. The same applies to the difference between cultural and ethnic determinism. With Herder, one had the beginning of the campaign against “French ideas”; with

Spengler, it ended in the campaign against “English ideas.” In both cases, one was dealing with universal values. Spengler stopped on the threshold of Nazism; does that mean he did not play a crucial role in the ascent of Nazism? Would the rise to power of Nazism have been possible without the long struggle against the rational principles of the rights of man and hence the unity of the human race, based on the much-abhorred Enlightenment?

Similarly, one must differentiate the idea, present in Hegel, that a people “creates a period” once, and once only, from Herder’s and Spengler’s way of thinking. Hegel thought that once a people had realized its essence and fulfilled its historical mission, it passed the torch to another people. At first sight, it would seem that a similar idea is to be found in Herder, but we have seen that it is a mistake to imagine that the pastor believed in an equality of all peoples, who succeeded one another. In Herder’s opinion, the Germans, the founders of Western culture, did not end their role with the passing of the Middle Ages. The Middle Ages remain a yardstick by which to judge the modern world. In placing the emphasis on the uniqueness of each culture, Herder prepared the way for Spengler, and the fact that he saw it as part of a divine plan was not enough to make it something different: the divine plan did not prevent the introduction of a hierarchy among peoples and cultures. Relativism finally gives rise to particularism and partitioning. Cultural partitioning was Herder’s invention and not Spengler’s, and it was foreign to Hegel. It was this partitioning that produced alienation and finally hostility between peoples and cultures. Cultural differences very soon turned into ethnic differences, which was inconceivable in Voltaire or Hegel.

Spengler’s critique was undoubtedly radical, clear, and unambiguous, more extreme than that of Maurras or Sorel, who had no doubt of the superiority of the West. But the German humiliation in 1918, like that in Fichte’s time in the face of Napoleon, does not explain everything — far from it. The same applies to France when defeated in 1870 and 1940. In Germany, even after the victory of 1870, the nationalists believed that the major objectives of the national rebirth had not been achieved. In the last section of his introduction, Spengler made a “personal observation” on the crisis of 1911, when a world war seemed to him imminent. This introduction appears to have been written during the war, but nothing would be more mistaken than to make the world conflagration responsible for the pessimism, the relativism, the antihumanism and the revolt against reason, the autonomy of the individual, and the idea of progress to be found in Spengler’s work. The whole of this ideological corpus was put together not merely a quarter of a century before 1914 but already from the second half of the eighteenth century onward. These very ideas were the content of the second kind of modernity described throughout this book.

With regard to the immediate context of *The Decline*, one sees that Sorel's *Illusions of Progress*, Drumont's *La Fin d'un monde* (The End of a World), Bourget's *Essais de psychologie contemporaine* (Essays on Contemporary Psychology), and the vast literature of decadence that inundated Europe in the half-century before the First World War represented a tendency that continued with Spengler, but did not end with him.¹¹⁹ According to this school, the decadence was the product of the rationalism, materialism, and utilitarianism that gave rise to the French Revolution, and at the same time to democracy with its tradesman's morality. It is hard to imagine that in opposing a morality of heroes to a morality of tradesmen Spengler had no knowledge of the great debates of his time. It is not possible that he was unaware of Sorel, Maurras, or Marinetti, or that in Germany itself he did not know Langbehn and Lagarde. It is difficult to believe that he was unaware of the fact that his critique of the content and style of democracy and his hymn to modern technology strangely resembled the Futurist Manifesto.¹²⁰

Thus, from Herder to Spengler and Meinecke, a new modernity came into being, which for the past century and a half has never stopped attacking rationalist modernity and proclaiming the collapse of its values. These values could be those of the rationalism of the Enlightenment, of ancient humanism and its principles grounded in natural law, or of Christian morality. "There are no eternal truths" said Spengler: universal values did not collapse unaided, any more than did the principles of 1789, the Weimar Republic, or the Third Republic.¹²¹ The acknowledgment of pluralism, the development of the natural sciences, the discovery that there could be several types of geometry or different mentalities or psychologies did not necessarily have to lead to the conclusion that, in the same way, there were various moralities, various truths, and various human species. The idea of difference has as many dangers as the idea of uniformity. By stressing all that separates people, by rejecting the idea that there can be a single human nature, Spengler carried the principles of historicism to their ultimate conclusion. However, it should be emphasized here that the idea of difference does not necessarily undermine that of the unity of humankind: by no means. It was with the Enlightenment that the interest of the Europeans in other worlds and other civilizations began. If Montesquieu and Voltaire took so much trouble to study cultures distant in time and space, such as ancient Egypt, Persia, China, and South America, it was in order to understand humankind in all its different manifestations, beyond anything that Christianity was able to provide. Thus, in France and England the great thinkers of the Enlightenment aspired to an authentic universality that Christian thought could not give. They put the peoples unconnected with the Bible on a footing of equality with Christian Europe. They reflected on decadence,

on the cyclic evolution of peoples and cultures, without denying the development of a humanity that was truly one and the same.

Of course, Spengler finally rejected Nazi biological determinism. But at the same time, he held that the soul that, in the final analysis, was embodied in “high culture” had to be protected against any racial admixture and any metamorphosis. One begins to wonder if there is any possibility of upholding a cultural relativism, a declared, if not absolute, dependence of the individual on the community, without sliding toward some kind of cultural and then ethnic determinism. The matter can also be stated in another way: How can one determine the demarcation line between cultural determinism and ethnic and racial determinism? The Herderian ideal of partitioning was the source of this fragmentation, and the Herderian xenophobia seen in his view of French culture and in his view of other peoples, including blacks and Jews, was a first step in the construction of Spengler’s philosophy of history.

Spengler’s thought was the last stage in the psychological preparation that permitted the disaster of the twentieth century to happen. It was then that the long process of accumulation that began with the Herderian rebellion against the culture of the Enlightenment, immediately followed by Fichte and the generation of the Napoleonic Wars, reached its conclusion. This process could be compared to that described by Taine when he demonstrated how, in the time of the Enlightenment, there was an accumulation of gunpowder that finally exploded in the French Revolution. The partitioning of historical worlds began with Herder, and it increased more and more until different cultures became completely impervious to each other with Spengler. Biological determinism was only the logical next step.

The Anti-Enlightenment of the Cold War

In the period of the cold war, the battle against the Enlightenment continued to be fought in accordance with the great principles formulated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Thus, the polemic between Herder and Kant, Herder's criticism of Voltaire and Montesquieu, Burke's rebellion against Locke's ascendancy throughout the century following the Glorious Revolution, and Herder and Burke's critique of Rousseau formed the basis of Anti-Enlightenment thought in the century that has just ended. Although the intellectual structures of this campaign, modernized and adapted to the political and social realities of the beginning of the twentieth century, underwent an evolution up to the middle of the century, and in many ways up to the present time, they demonstrated a surprising continuity. The root of the evil was always the same: the French Enlightenment, Voltaire, and Rousseau were held to be responsible for all the misfortunes of the modern world, and Burke and Herder were the source of all wisdom. From the beginning of the twentieth century, throughout the interwar period, and during the first stirrings of the cold war, when the October Revolution was seen as the natural sequel to the French Revolution, this campaign on behalf of liberty took the form of a war against the destructive rationalism of the eighteenth century that claimed to be capable of finding the way to truth and fulfillment. The central figure of this trend, and its most famous but also most ambiguous and hence most interesting representative, was Isaiah Berlin.

Berlin took upon himself the role with regard to communism that Herder and Burke had taken upon themselves with regard to the French Enlightenment. When he wrote about Herder, it was from the point of view he had first expressed in his attack on Rousseau in 1952, and later in 1958, in his famous lecture "Two Concepts of Liberty." Speaking at the time of the cold war, he held that communism, which claimed to possess the universal truth, and was the enemy of negative liberty, the enemy of pluralism, and the heir to Jacobinism, continued the destructive work of Rousseau, Helvétius, and Voltaire. It was thus in the name of a certain liberalism, the "blocked" liberalism, that the war cry against the universalism of the Franco-Kantian Enlightenment was sounded.

Berlin was not monolithic in his thinking, and he can easily be read in several different ways. He left essays, lectures, and interviews spread over half a century, but he did not produce a single systematic work. Contrary to the accepted view, the reason for this was not his way of working: one imagines that he understood the difficulty of reconciling the contradictions to be found in his writings, and he felt that it would be a very risky undertaking to draw conclusions from them. He resembled Herder, with whom he identified to such a degree that he exemplified the three different aspects of his intellectual mentor. Thus, we discover both a nationalist, communitarian, antirationalist, and relativist Berlin and one who was humanistic, postmodernist, and deconstructionist before his time.

When the Oxford professor began his career as a historian of ideas, he was preceded by the Israeli historian Jacob Talmon. In 1952, almost simultaneously with the publication of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* by Hannah Arendt, Talmon published his best-known work, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*. The expression "totalitarian democracy" was launched with this work, although it had been invented earlier (when, it is hard to say) and is to be found in 1943 in a work by A. D. Lindsay, the master of Balliol, one of the oldest of the Oxford colleges, and a well-known personality of the period. Ernest Barker, also an eminent figure of that period, accused Rousseau of advocating an omnipotent government, and in 1947 used the term "totalitarian" to describe his influence.¹ The idea was in the air in the war and postwar years that Talmon passed in England, but it was the Jerusalem historian who had the idea of making it, analogously to Burke and via the French Enlightenment, the spearhead of the campaign against communism.

However, it is Burke as seen by Taine that emerges from Talmon's writing, and it is the spirit of *Les Origines de la France contemporaine* and not, as has often been said, of *Democracy in America* that is to be found in *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*.² Talmon was aware of the fact that the use he made of terms like "eighteenth-century philosophy" and "eighteenth-century philosophers" was not really appropriate, but he explained it by saying that he

was only interested in the philosophers of the second half of the eighteenth century, especially “those who shaped the revolutionary mood and spirit and who, when all reservations are made, do deserve . . . to be considered as speaking for the eighteenth century.”³ The writers in question were first of all Rousseau, and even then only as the author of *The Social Contract*, Étienne Gabriel Morelly, to whom we owe a few unimportant pamphlets, including *Le Code de la nature*, and Gabriel Bonnot de Mably, who in his time was considered a particularly muddle-headed thinker. Mably was rarely taken seriously either in his time or by historians, but it was these writers who, according to Talmon, are supposed to have spoken for the eighteenth century. As Mably and Morelly were marginal figures, the whole weight of the demonstration fell on Rousseau.⁴

Talmon’s work immediately had a great success, perhaps less than that of Arendt, but enough to thrust him into the forefront of the intellectual debate of the period. The educated public gave a favorable reception to a book that it considered a new and valuable contribution to the war effort against the new Jacobins of communism. A few years later, in July 1957, Talmon was invited to address the members of the British Conservative Party at a summer conference in Oxford. Published under the title “Utopianism and Politics,” this lecture was a kind of manifesto of enlightened conservatism, and it began — significantly, at that period, for an Israeli — with a reference to the oldest conservatives in the world: the Jews, who for innumerable generations had remained true to their traditions and identity. This was followed by a résumé of the difference between an Aristotelian or pragmatic view of politics and a utopian one, as seen by the conservatives of the 1950s. What matters here is not the validity of arguments of this kind today but what their purpose was in their time. More exactly, where we are concerned, we may say that in these twenty or so pages we may find a brilliant, though rapid, account of the themes that, after first being embraced by Talmon, were to bring fame to Isaiah Berlin. There was first of all the danger of “utopianism”: that is to say, the idea that history has a purpose and a goal, and that, in order to attain these objectives, life and society must be remodeled from top to bottom. Talmon claimed that, in this way, history is replaced by sociology. According to him, this idea, which had become very powerful on the eve of the French Revolution, was a common denominator of communism, socialism, and other ideologies of the kind. After the decline in religious faith and the doctrine of original sin, and with the coming of the age of reason, the idea that man was naturally good or at least perfectible gained ground, and, together with that, the idea that, since man’s natural impulses are good, these impulses, if freed from the shackles in which they are bound, would harmonize automatically, and diver-

gent interests would likewise be reconciled. The cohesive structure of the universe was a guarantee of the possibility of achieving absolute justice. At the same time, people were taught that they had the right to happiness, and the secular doctrine of the rights of man that replaced the religious doctrine of original sin, by encouraging appetites that could never be satisfied, far from producing happiness, actually caused greater misery. The doctrine of the rights of man thus resulted in a vulgar utilitarianism. In consequence, the way was opened up to demagoguery and to dictators who were supposed to satisfy these new appetites.⁵

According to Talmon, the tragedy of utopianism has been that "in place of a reconciliation between human freedom and social cohesion, it brought totalitarian coercion." Thus, totalitarianism resulted from a rejection of tradition, habits, and prejudices and was the product of a faith in reason as the sole criterion of human behavior. Reason, like mathematics, was seen as the only truth. But reason, in fact, proved the most unreliable and fallible of guides, for nothing prevented a number of different "reasons," each claiming to be the only truth, from engaging in a conflict that could only be resolved through the use of force. In the modern world, revolutionary utopianism was represented by international communism directed from Moscow.⁶

The list of the evil consequences of rationalism, of the search for happiness, of the rights of man, and of utilitarianism was endless. Here Talmon invoked the authority of the great Swiss historian Jacob Burckhardt, who had also complained of the wretchedness of the modern world and mass society. Mass production had killed the craftsman's pride in his work, the universities, overloaded, produced a Lumpenproletariat; illiteracy had disappeared, it is true, but never before had readers been so swamped with printed vulgarity. One could travel safely at night, but the nightmare of war threatened the whole of humanity. Which leads us to the conclusion that not only is totalitarianism a disaster, but democracy itself, daughter of the rationalist modernity, can scarcely be considered progress. Finally, Talmon concluded with a return to Burke, to the "prescriptive" British constitution and to the instinct of conservation that in the final analysis Talmon considered the best protection. He praised Britain, the land of conservatism, whether Tory or Labour, for its peaceful evolution, which he contrasted favorably with the revolutionary convulsions that France continually experienced in the nineteenth century.⁷

Without acknowledging it, Berlin followed in Talmon's footsteps and drew from the same sources. He followed Talmon in his fight against rationalism, Rousseau, and the eighteenth century, and against utopianism and the French Revolution, seen as the prototype of all subsequent revolutions and the forerunner of the Soviet Revolution. The idea of a conflict of values, aims, and

objectives and the problem of “monism,” which have been associated with Berlin, were already very clearly articulated in Talmon. And yet, or perhaps precisely for that reason, in a long and important interview with the well-known British sociologist Steven Lukes at the beginning of the 1990s, Berlin strongly insisted on the originality of his thought: “As for Talmon’s thesis—I had thought of that independently, and I had already delivered my lecture on liberty by then. But it is an interesting book.”⁸ In fact, Talmon’s first work appeared in 1952, and its author enjoyed a celebrity at that time which Berlin achieved only at the very end of that decade, after he was elected Chichele Professor of Social and Political Theory at All Souls. It was on October 31, 1958, six years after the appearance of Talmon’s first work and more than twelve months after the lecture to the Conservative Party Conference, that Berlin gave his inaugural lecture, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” which established his fame.

His other major contemporaries, including some who were his closest ideological allies, and whose contribution to twentieth-century thought he did not hesitate to obscure, were not treated any better than Talmon. Raymond Aron, he said, was a brilliant publicist, but no more than that; his book *Peace and War* and his book on Clausewitz were interesting, but not his other writings. Leo Strauss, he said, was an erudite, a conscientious thinker, but his main thesis “seems to me to border on the absurd.” Berlin declared that he disagreed with his doctrines in principle, and that “he could not get me to believe in eternal, immutable values, true for all men everywhere at all times”: “there is an unbridgeable chasm between us.” He had little respect for Strauss’s pupils either, and on the other side of the political spectrum, the great Marxist historian E. H. Carr was unworthy of attention, as he was incapable of coping with concepts.⁹

It was Arendt, however, who was treated worst of all. In a conversation with Ramin Jahanbegloo in 1990, Berlin launched a particularly venomous attack on her. One is inclined to think that the growing reputation of “the egregious Hannah Arendt” in Europe was beginning to become seriously offensive to him: it is the only reasonable explanation for such malice. “I do not greatly respect the lady’s ideas, I admit,” he said. He admitted he had only “looked at” her *Origins of Totalitarianism*, which in his opinion had little value, as what she said about the Nazis was correct but not new, whereas she was totally wrong about the Russians. As for *The Condition of Modern Man*, that work was based on two ideas, “both historically false.” Finally, Berlin invoked the authority of Gershom Scholem, the expert in Cabbala, an Israeli of German origin, who had argued with Arendt concerning the Eichmann trial, and who told him that no serious thinker admired her, and “that people

who admired her were only the 'littérateurs' . . . because they were unused to ideas." Which meant that, except for Americans, "anybody who was truly cultivated and a serious thinker could not abide her."¹⁰ The only writers Berlin treated decently were Quentin Skinner, whose writings were so far removed from Berlin's that they did not constitute any danger to him; Karl Popper, whose notoriety was confined to a restricted university milieu and who was not a public figure; and Norberto Bobbio, to whom he was grateful for having supported his thesis of the two kinds of liberty. In fact, as we shall see later, Bobbio demonstrated very skillfully that this thesis was already to be found in Kant and was by no means a discovery.

Berlin's insistent desire to distance himself from his contemporaries hardly changed throughout his career. He agreed that an unknown young scholar, Robert Hausheer, would write for him an introduction to the collection of his texts and lectures published under the evocative title, *Against the Current*. This text sums up the views of the writer with a fidelity to which Berlin paid a warm tribute at the beginning of the book, and can be considered as though written by him. Hausheer informs us that these essays "sail manfully against the current" and "are devoted to intellectual figures of great originality who have . . . been largely ignored."¹¹ This statement is striking in its naïve provincialism, as it is difficult to see why the writers examined by Berlin, from Machiavelli, Vico, and Herder to de Maistre and Sorel, had been rescued by him from a state of obscurity, or why extraordinary courage was needed to speak about them. Nor did one know that their names had been covered with a veil of forgetfulness until the middle of the twentieth century. With regard to Herder, for instance, not only could a whole library be filled with works dealing with him before Berlin spoke about him, but between 1945 and 1955 two major works, those by Robert Clark and Alexander Gillies already mentioned, appeared in English, followed in 1965 by F. M. Barnard's *Herder's Social and Political Thought*. The same applies to Vico. A *Bibliografia Vichiana* in two volumes, more than a thousand pages long, was published in 1947–1948 courtesy of Croce, and ten years earlier, in 1937, a Columbia University dissertation on Vico's influence on de Maistre had been published.¹² Two English translations appeared during the same period: that of the *Autobiography* in 1944, and that of the third, 1744 edition of *Scienza nuova* in 1948.¹³ Joseph Mali has given an excellent description of some of the broad outlines of Berlin's interpretation of Vico, without, however, indicating how much that interpretation owed to that of Croce. Berlin related to Croce in the same way he read Herder in the light of Meinecke. Indeed, half a century after Croce, one finds the dominant ideas of the writer of *La filosofia di Giambattista Vico* in *Vico and Herder*. Vico once again became the unknown genius who invented everything, but who was pillaged shamelessly

because he remained in obscurity in his distant province of Naples and wrote in a relatively little-known tongue. After Croce, Berlin became the standard-bearer of the Vico myth in the English-speaking world.

No less curious was Berlin's attitude to Nietzsche and Max Weber. In his interview with Lukes, Berlin claimed to have no knowledge of Weber, but to admire him a great deal, and the same applied to Émile Durkheim. Lukes raised the question of the conflict of values that was basic to Berlin's thinking and the main reason for his attack on the French Enlightenment. He reminded Berlin that Weber and Carl Schmitt had already confronted this problem and had come to the conclusion that there was no such thing as a rational choice. According to Schmitt, the only choice that exists is that between friends and enemies: Weber's position was more complex, but in both cases the problem was clearly stated. Berlin's reaction was disconcerting: "Let me tell you that I first have to admit to you something very shaming. When I first formulated this idea, which is a long time ago, I'd never read a page of Weber. I had no idea that he said these things. People often ask me, but surely Weber was the first person to say this. I answer that I am sure he is, but I had no idea of it." Lukes responded: "No, but it came from Nietzsche, as far as Weber was concerned." Berlin replied: "I know, but I said these things entirely on my own, without Nietzsche and without Weber."¹⁴

At a later stage came Meinecke. Berlin adopted the German historian's positions in a way that seems strange after the Second World War. Like Meinecke, Berlin agreed with Herder in admiring the spiritual forces, the reservoirs of creative energy, that in the face of the so-called aridity of the Enlightenment were released by the Sturm und Drang movement. Like Meinecke, Berlin endeavored to separate culture from politics, or, in more concrete terms, to dissociate the intellectual flowering of this movement of rebellion against the Enlightenment from nationalism and relativism. There is no doubt that his own *Vico and Herder* owes a great deal to Meinecke. Like him, Berlin was fascinated by the great enemies of natural law, universal norms, and individualism as understood by the thinkers of the school of natural law from Locke to Rousseau. Like Meinecke, he was enthralled by Machiavelli because the writer of *The Prince* set the rights of the community against the individual, by Herder, whose Christian universalism was not too heavy in relation to his ethnic and cultural particularism, and by Vico and Hamann, each of whom in turn and in his own way assaulted rationalism.

Berlin saw Meinecke as the last link in a chain of great historians deeply involved in the political life of their country, and at the same time aware of the differences between their world and the universalism and scientific rationalism of the civilizations west of the Rhine. Although Macaulay, Michelet, and

Guizot can by no means be described as politically neutral writers, the historical school extending from Theodor Mommsen and Johann Gustav Droysen to Treitschke, Werner Sombart, and Weber represented a historical philosophy that was almost national and official. Meinecke was the last great representative of this tradition. All these writers viewed society as a quasi-biological whole that could not be split up into component parts like a piece of machinery. Society was perceived as a characteristic organism made up of complex social entities.¹⁵ Berlin had only praise for Meinecke, whose approach, like that of his predecessors, did more in his opinion to widen the horizon and perspective of historians than the positivist doctrines to which this approach was a reaction. For him, Meinecke belonged to a school, and he provided an extraordinary in-depth survey of this movement that began with Herder and the Sturm und Drang and extended to Spengler and Jünger. That Meinecke was unaware of the meaning this continuity was to have is hardly surprising, but that Berlin did not ask himself about the implications of this hatred of the eighteenth century for giving rise to natural law and universal values and flaunting the rights of man is very much stranger.

Thus, Berlin looked favorably on Meinecke's "classic" contribution, which was to expose the tensions that existed between universal values, the rights of the individual or of groups, and the requirements of the state. But the main idea that obsessed him as it obsessed his predecessors was the nature of these societies, each of which had its own completely individual laws of growth, each of which was an organism unique of its kind: social units that developed like plants, each one in accordance with its specific nature. Owing to this fact—here Berlin did not merely give an account of Meinecke's thought; he adopted it—it is impossible to understand or explain these bodies through general laws or principles. He agreed with Meinecke that general criteria necessarily ignored their specific character, as the values of one society could not be the same as those of other societies or other periods. The justification for what these societies are or what they do could only be found in themselves. Meinecke, Berlin pointed out, was deeply troubled by the moral relativism inherent in this view of human realities, and by the idea it led to: namely, that only success and sometimes only force are the criteria that enable us to decide the values that count and give a meaning to life. Meinecke was aware that such a relativism was incompatible with the human aspiration to something more than a subjectivism of this kind, with the human need for a common goal.¹⁶

Berlin was sufficiently perspicacious to realize that the revolt against the "generalizing vision," as Meinecke called it—that is, rationalism, the sphere of natural law—against the different varieties of positivism and utilitarianism, and above all against the idea that the universe is a great system that men can

penetrate and make intelligible by means of the power of reason that they all possess, everywhere and at all times, has been at the root of several great ideological currents of the past two centuries. He listed these currents: on the one hand, traditionalism, pluralism, Romanticism, and the Promethean conception of man, anarchism, nationalism, and individualistic self-realization, and on the other, imperialism, racism, and all sorts of irrational tendencies. It should be noted that liberalism and democracy, like socialism, are not included in this prize list, and for good reason. At the same time, Berlin claimed that Meinecke was frightened of making the same mistakes as the much-hated tradition of natural law, the mechanistic, standardizing, encyclopédiste tradition of the eighteenth century. Meinecke's three heroes were Herder, Goethe, and Möser, and Meinecke wished to grasp what Möser called the "total impression," the impression that can never be gained by the mere analysis of the components of a whole. The whole was all that mattered.¹⁷

The thing that gave Meinecke's exposition its extraordinary vitality, said Berlin, was that he was no less affected by the problems he discussed than were the pioneers of the historicist school of thought. He was conscious of the difficulties, and the history he wrote was one in which he was an actor as well as an observer. Berlin showed great sympathy for someone he presented as an old man who had not bowed down to Hitler and Hitlerism, but he forgot to tell us that this great academic not only did not raise the slightest protest against the regime when he saw it gaining power and getting down to work without delay, but enthused over the victories of Hitler's armies. Meinecke, said Berlin, was an honest man who found himself in a difficult situation. It is worth quoting in its entirety this key passage of the foreword written by Berlin in 1972 to a work written in 1936:

The time at which he wrote this book was one of crisis, which consciously or unconsciously offered a parallel to that earlier critical turning point in German history, when the German Geist was hemmed in on one side by the levelling spirit of French revolutionary and Napoleonic centralization and rational organization, contemptuous of tradition and of the individuality of different societies — together with the complementary influence of British industrialism and its destruction of ancient ties, and on the other, threatened by the menacing barbarous great power in the East. If the German "spirit" won this war on two fronts, and established the great unified German state, it had done so at what might be thought by *some* to have been a fearful cost in moral values. After 1918, with Bolshevism in the East, and once again what he regarded as a shallow liberal universalism in the West, Meinecke put all his hopes in a mysterious synthesis of the claims of individual liberty and morality with the needs and values of public life in the majestic historical march of the great organic whole — the national state.

The national state, as represented by Meinecke, according to Berlin, was the supreme instrument of education that made possible the existence of all for which men live: moral values, art, personal relations, the overcoming of bestiality.¹⁸

This text is of great interest not only for what it teaches us about Meinecke but also for what it teaches us about Berlin and the struggle against the French Enlightenment as it was waged both in the shadow of Nazism and in that of Stalinism. Is not the use of the term “some” interesting? Who were those “some” who, in 1936, found exorbitant the price to be paid for this German revolt against the values of revolutionary France, and after the Soviet Revolution, for this defensive reaction against the barbarians in the East, or, in other words, for the “majestic march” of the German “spirit” and the German state? And, on the other hand, who were those who thought that that price — that is, the fall of Weimar and the arrival of the Nazis — was worth paying? Was not Meinecke, who wrote in 1936 as if 1933 had never happened — one of them? And what can be said about 1972, when Berlin seemed to align himself with Meinecke’s positions without much difficulty? Between Voltaire and Rousseau on the one hand and Herder and Meinecke on the other, Berlin chose the two Germans. One was the prophet of German cultural nationalism, and the other added a vindication of the German national state.

This vision of the German national state that gave a quasi-religious fervor to his whole conception of history undoubtedly came to Meinecke from Herder and Leopold von Ranke. Meinecke professed a veritable cult of Bismarck and, like many other German academics, saw him as the man who created the only possible conditions in which the German character could flourish and the German destiny come to pass. Indeed, Bismarck was not a cosmopolitan intellectual like Frederick the Great, who wrote works of political philosophy in French and received Voltaire; he was the German *par excellence*. The chancellor was able to be all that the king of Prussia in Herder’s time was not. Herder detested the Prussian monarchy not because it was authoritarian but because it was not sufficiently German.

At the end of his foreword, Berlin finally looked at the somewhat less brilliant aspect of the writer whom he nevertheless admired and whose influence on his thought had been decisive. He knew that the book he was introducing dealt with a period that was “the springtime” of a “great development,” when the “romantic German dream” was “still distant from the terrible nightmare into which it would later turn” and had not yet sunk into the “darkness” of an “unimaginable disaster.”¹⁹ But what about the relationship of cause and effect between the inversion of values at the end of the eighteenth century and its final product in the twentieth? Was there no kind of correlation between the cult of national uniqueness and the view of history that prevailed in Germany after Herder and the events of the 1930s and 1940s?

But what is even stranger is the fact that the work that closed Meinecke's career, *The German Catastrophe*, published in 1946, was not even mentioned by Berlin. The fact is that in this famous book, much discussed at the time, Meinecke did no more than modify his Bismarckian positions and continued to express many ambiguous ideas. It was the same in his lecture of May 1947 given to the Academy of Sciences in Berlin: Meinecke recognized the dark side of Bismarck's power politics but did not shift to the opposite approach represented by Burckhardt. In that famous lecture he wondered whether Burckhardt had not understood the modern world better than Ranke had. He did not decide between the two positions to which, as Lionel Gossman put it, for rhetorical purposes he assigned the names "Ranke" and "Burckhardt." He called instead for a "synthesis" in which "the spirits of Burckhardt and Ranke would live on," a "more profound orientation to the relationship of power and culture."²⁰ The most disastrous moment in German history could thus be considered, said Gossman, not the consequence of an unprecedented intensification of the desire for power but, in a very Hegelian sense, a necessary stage in the advance of the "spirit" to a new and more complete understanding, as in a tragedy by Friedrich Hebbel. While Troeltsch had tried, as Georg Iggers put it, to find a way back from German idealism to a common Western heritage, Meinecke continued to affirm, as essentially beneficial, the separate way the German spirit had gone since the Enlightenment. In the 1930s, Meinecke could simultaneously hail the triumph of the German spirit in the nonpolitical sphere, be disturbed by the Nazi domestic policies, and see in Hitler's foreign policy an expression of the healthy demands of German *raison d'état*.²¹

Indeed, in *The German Catastrophe* Meinecke remained true to himself and did not indulge in any kind of examination of conscience. Like Heidegger, Jünger, Schmitt, and Gadamer, he felt no need to revise his ideas. When Europe lay in ruins and the barbarism of the Nazis was no longer a secret for even the most "apolitical" of Germans, Meinecke could see the massacre of the Jews as the product "of a fanaticism partly nourished by a perversion of German idealistic notions," and yet, said Iggers, "place the guilt for the catastrophe almost exclusively on Western rationalism and democracy. In creating modern conditions of life, these forces had disturbed the harmony between spirit and power." In addition, this book was addressed to the Germans and was exclusively concerned with the fate of the Germans. *The German Catastrophe* was not the catastrophe provoked by Germany but the catastrophe experienced by the Germans. Neither the Holocaust of the Jews nor the fate reserved for the Slavs and other *Untermenschen* existed for Meinecke. It is hard to avoid the impression, said Gossman in a low-key formulation, that, as far as Meinecke was concerned, there would have been no *Katastrophe* had

Germany been victorious. That such an outcome might have been an even greater Katastrophe is a thought that does not seem to have occurred to him.²²

The way Meinecke treats the Jews is characteristic of his approach in general. According to him, the Jews were largely responsible not only for their own misfortunes but also for the fall of liberalism. Written in the months following the Second World War, *The German Catastrophe* reiterates two of the classic themes of anti-Semitism: the legitimacy of the resentment caused by the economic activities of the Jews and the resentment aroused by their "character": "The Jews, who were inclined to enjoy indiscreetly the favorable economic situation now smiling upon them, had since their full emancipation aroused resentment of various sorts. They contributed much to that gradual depreciation and discrediting of the liberal world of ideas that set in after the end of the nineteenth century. The fact that besides their negative and disintegrating influence they also achieved a great deal that was positive in the cultural and economic life of Germany was forgotten by the mass of those who now attacked the damage done by the Jewish character."²³

Reading Meinecke, one may ask oneself whether the Third Reich did not simply fall from the sky. It is true that he was not totally oblivious to the fact that "general causes" had played a part in Hitler's "so-called *Weltanschauung*" and "the monstrous success of Hitler's rise to power," but it was principally a matter of accident and the "demon chance." In the final analysis, the responsibility for the disaster of Nazism lay with Hitler and the band of criminals around him who imposed Nazism on the Germans: although the "despiritualization and materialization" of the upper classes of society in the post-Bismarckian era, the intensification of Prusso-German militarism, and the devastating psychological effects of the transformation "of *homo sapiens* into *homo faber*" also played a part, the main role was played by Hitler's personality.²⁴ One cannot help comparing this interpretation with that of Croce: Italy the land of liberty was taken hostage by a band of evildoers. Both Croce and Meinecke wished at all costs to explain the rise of fascism by a play of chance rather than by deep cultural factors.

We shall now turn to the central core of Berlin's writings, his attack on the French Enlightenment. Berlin's attitude to the French eighteenth century seems at first to be full of contradictions, but a comprehensive view of his work leaves no doubt of where his ideological predilections lay. Although in 1990, when he had long stopped writing, he declared himself "a liberal rationalist," for most of his career he fought against rationalism. In the interview with Ramin Jahanbegloo I referred to, Berlin declared he was not interested in Spinoza, because, he said, "he is too rationalistic for me." Those to whom he was attracted were Vico and Herder, Hamann and Sorel, Burke and de Maistre. All these thinkers

were avowed antirationalists. Where Berlin becomes really incoherent is when, at the very end of his career, he speaks of Voltaire, H  lvetius, d'Holbach, and Rousseau. "The values of the Enlightenment, what people like Voltaire, H  l  tius, Holbach, Condorcet, preached are deeply sympathetic to me . . . these people were great liberators. They liberated people from horrors, obscurantism, fanaticism, monstrous views. They were against cruelty, they were against oppression, they fought the good fight against superstition and ignorance and against a great many things which ruined people's lives. So I am on their side."²⁵ This would have been quite in order and perfectly normal coming from a liberal, but all his works unfortunately showed the contrary and were a thirty-year-long tortuous battle against the French Enlightenment, against the very writers he had just named.

What was Voltaire for Berlin, and what did he represent? We must see, first of all, what he was not. According to Berlin, Voltaire was not an original thinker; he was not, contrary to what is generally believed, the inventor of the history of civilization. That title, it goes without saying, went to Herder. To Voltaire, as to Fontenelle and Montesquieu, we owe at most the beginnings of economic history, of historical sociology and demography, of the history of science and other quantitative studies. Voltaire extended the scope of history beyond mere political history, and he also had the merit of denouncing the Eurocentrism of his contemporaries. That is what he did, and nothing more, for Voltaire was above all "wholly a journalist." He was undoubtedly an incomparable genius, but it was the genius of a publicist; he was "part tourist and *feuilletoniste*." His historical works were marvelously readable, but they were "largely anecdotal in character — there is no real attempt at synthesis," and "he looks on history, in a loose fashion, as an accumulation of facts."²⁶

When Berlin finally provided a direct quotation in support of his thesis, it consisted of two well-known sentences, which he misinterpreted: "If you have no more to tell us," Voltaire declared, "than that one barbarian succeeded another on the banks of the Oxus or the Iaxartes, what use are you to the public?" Who wants to know that "Quancum succeeded Kincum, and Kincum succeeded Quancum"? Berlin saw this text as the expression of an antihistorical, moralistic, Eurocentric point of view, whereas Voltaire was really saying something quite different: he thought that an accumulation of facts had little importance in itself, and that pure erudition can be detrimental to knowledge. In this way, he made the first great declaration in favor of a comprehensive history of societies, manners, and cultures. His *Essay on the Manners* and his *Age of Louis XIV* were an application of this method, which Herder merely followed, but, in basing it on irrationality, he distorted it. Voltaire feared the irrational; he questioned everything and thought that everything needed to be

questioned. Reason, he believed, was the only possible barrier against barbarism, fanaticism, and stupidity. The iconic figure of the French Enlightenment, the prototype of the committed intellectual, the prophet of tolerance, Voltaire was hated by the clerical right throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, little liked by the Left, which reproached him for his bourgeois and “capitalist” side, and he was opposed by all antirationalists. It was his rationalism that also aroused Berlin’s hostility, despite the fact that Voltaire’s eulogy of liberty in his *Dictionnaire philosophique* preceded his own by more than two centuries.²⁷

Nor was this all: according to Berlin, Voltaire bore the direct responsibility for totalitarianism: “Modern totalitarian systems do, in their acts if not in their style of rhetoric, combine the outlooks of Voltaire and Maistre.” However different their ideas may have been, their “quality of mind is often exceedingly similar”: one does not find in them “any degree of softness, vagueness or self-indulgence of either intellect or feeling. . . . They stand for the dry light against the flickering flame.” Their thinking has an “icy, smooth, clear surface.” Voltaire, “it is true, defended neither despotism nor deception,” but he “can be made to strip away all liberal illusions.”²⁸ Here again, one cannot help wondering where, exactly, Berlin got to in his reading of Voltaire. Was Voltaire really trying to strip away all “liberal illusions” from the modern world? Or was he, conversely, making an extraordinary defense of the rights of man? Similarly, with regard to liberalism, is it not strange to see Voltaire, who in 1763, after the Calas affair, wrote the famous *Traité sur la tolérance* (Treatise on Tolerance), and who never stopped fighting for tolerance, freedom of expression, and equality before the law, as the psychological father of totalitarianism, whereas Machiavelli is made out to be one of the major founders of pluralism? Is the thinking of the writer of *The Prince* any less “icy and smooth” than that of Voltaire? Did Voltaire, who drew inspiration from Locke’s *Letter on Tolerance* propose a political *modus operandi* comparable to Machiavelli’s?

The champion of the victims of the French penal system of the period, Voltaire, as is well known, waged a long and difficult campaign for the rehabilitation of the Toulouse Huguenot Jean Calas, accused of murder, tried, and executed in 1762. Voltaire devoted nearly two years of his life to getting the case reviewed by the King’s Council and obtaining compensation for the victim’s family. It was in the course of this campaign for the rights of man that he also began to defend the cause of the poor and underprivileged in general.²⁹ Can one recognize in Berlin’s caricature of Voltaire—the hermit of Ferney, forbidden to reside in Paris by Louis XV—the writer of the *Philosophical Letters*, one of the finest manifestos ever written for the liberation of mankind from irrationality, obscurantism, superstitions, and prejudices? Can one see in

it the thinker who professed a boundless admiration for enlightened England, for its real or supposed liberties, for the balance of powers achieved there, and for the British political system in general? Can one discern in this portrait of the founder of the “despotism of rational scientific organization” the political thinker who advocated a return to Locke, whereas Burke acted as if the theoretician of the Glorious Revolution had never existed? Was it not this presumed founder of totalitarianism who wrote in his *Philosophical Dictionary* that tolerance “is the prerogative of humanity”? One is almost ashamed to recall these facts, or the articles “Liberty” and “Freedom of Thought”: “Was the Roman Empire any less powerful because Cicero wrote in liberty?” Would Christianity have come into existence if “the first Christians did not have freedom of thought”? It is perhaps not uninteresting to recall Nietzsche’s tribute to Voltaire as a writer of splendid tragedies, the last representative of the classical tradition and a true aristocrat of the spirit. Earlier, Nietzsche said he would like to place himself beneath “the banner of the Enlightenment,” which would bear “the three names, Petrarch, Erasmus, Voltaire.”³⁰

According to Berlin, the sins of Voltaire were the same as those of Helvétius — directly coresponsible with him for modern dictatorship — plus materialism. A volume entitled *Freedom and Its Betrayal*, published in 2002 by Berlin’s disciples, gathered together texts from the early 1950s first delivered by Berlin as talks on the BBC. In this volume, one finds the first formulation of the idea of negative liberty: “I am . . . free if no institution or person interferes with me except for its or his own self-protection.” According to this definition, which was hardly new, all six writers were hostile to liberty in its negative sense, which meant that, in Berlin’s opinion, their teachings were in several respects contradictory to the very idea of liberty, and in the nineteenth century and especially in the twentieth they had a decisively antilibertarian influence.³¹

What was it that earned Helvétius the dishonor of appearing, with Rousseau, among the six greatest enemies of liberty the modern world has ever known? It was his utilitarianism, his belief in the benefits of education and good laws. Here I must add in parentheses that another major guilty party was Locke, whose idea that “virtues” and “vices” are “for the most part the same everywhere,” inasmuch as they are “absolutely necessary to hold society together,” made him guilty of enunciating a very extreme utilitarian doctrine. Thus, Locke bore the same kind of responsibility as Helvétius, but Berlin understood that even if Locke’s view of liberty was not that of a negative liberty, making him simply into an enemy of liberty would mean taking up Burke’s position and placing oneself clearly in the antidemocratic camp. In order to fight utilitarianism without openly breaking with English liberalism, it was sufficient to attack Helvétius, for whom, like all the philosophes, as

Berlin saw them, man was part of nature and was “infinitely malleable,” nothing more than “a piece of clay in the hands of the potter.” It would therefore be criminal — this is the interpretation that Berlin gave to Helvétius’s ideas — to allow people to be governed by evil men. Berlin reproached Helvétius with seeing self-interest as the driving force of human behavior. His whole philosophy, he said, was based on his conviction first of all that what activates men is “the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain,” and then that, in order to achieve this, they need to understand the world and to understand themselves: that is to say, to know what is really for their benefit. For that, they need guidance, and can one imagine a better guide than science and individuals better equipped to lead men than scientists? In this way, said Berlin, “We have become like animals trained to seek only that which is useful to us.” And he continued: “One thing is clear: in the kind of universe which Helvétius depicts there is little or no room for individual liberty. In his world man may become happy, but the notion of liberty eventually disappears. It disappears because liberty to do evil disappears, since everyone has now been conditioned to do only what is good.” Helvétius’s utilitarian system led “directly to what is ultimately a kind of technocratic tyranny.” The tyranny of ignorance, superstition, and arbitrary royal power is replaced with another form of tyranny, the tyranny of reason. Thus, an Orwellian “brave new world” comes into being, the product of the idea that a reasonable solution can be found for every problem.³²

The same applied to d’Holbach and Condorcet. The former told us that “education is simply the agriculture of the mind.” Berlin concluded again that, according to this philosophe, “to govern men is like breeding animals.” Since “ends are given and man is mouldable, the problem becomes a purely technological one: how to adjust men in such a way that they will live in peace, prosperity and harmony.” But since not all men’s interests coincide, “the philosopher — the enlightened philosopher — will link them. Hence the need for the despotism of an elite of scientists.” As for Condorcet, in saying that nature “binds by an unbreakable chain truth, happiness and virtue,” he too made his contribution to the construction of the totalitarian edifice. From this statement by Condorcet one must conclude, said Berlin, “that whoever knows the truth completely is also virtuous and happy. Scientists know the truth, therefore scientists are virtuous, therefore scientists can make us happy, therefore let us put scientists in charge of everything.” Finally, according to these “enlightened” thinkers, “what we need is a universe governed by scientists.” In this universe, men have no individual liberty, for the objective one seeks to attain is not liberty but happiness. Thus, Berlin believed that utilitarianism gave rise to the tyranny of reason, and rationalism ended by producing both

fascism and communism.³³ That is what Berlin extracted from Voltaire, Condorcet, Helvétius, and d'Holbach: all of them were guilty of laying the foundations of modern totalitarianism.

Montesquieu and Hume received better treatment, but it was above all as a thinker who contributed to the rise of German antirationalism that Hume benefited from a certain indulgence. As for Montesquieu, in his 1955 article Berlin recognized that he had great qualities. He enunciated the principles that were to be those of the new social sciences; he thought that each human group, each state, had its own individual, unique path of development; his *Persian Letters* marked the appearance of "Montesquieu's notorious relativism, the belief that there is no single set of values suitable for all men everywhere, no single solution to social or political problems in all countries." He was an empiricist — "His particular achievement was to demonstrate the impossibility of universal solutions" — and a pluralist, not a monist, who differed from all the other thinkers of the Enlightenment in not sharing their enthusiasm for progress, and who believed in liberty: a liberty that consisted in being "able to do what one ought to will, and not . . . compelled to do what one ought not to will." He showed an understanding of human societies "unparalleled since Aristotle."³⁴ Montesquieu, according to Berlin, believed that each society is animated by an inner force, that different societies have different needs, and that these needs vary from one moment to the next. That is why the problems that men grapple with cannot have universal and definitive solutions. There is no rational norm that allows one to decide between the contradictory aims that men pursue.

After Berlin's "discovery" of Vico, however, his tone changed, and he perceived a distance between Vico and Montesquieu. The relativistic Montesquieu disappeared and was replaced by an Enlightenment thinker like the others. It was in vain that Montesquieu understood that cultures differed from each other: the comparison with Vico worked to his disadvantage: "He is much more rigid and much more universalistic. Montesquieu believes in absolute justice that doesn't differ from culture to culture." Elsewhere, Berlin expressed the same idea in a slightly different way: "Montesquieu did not doubt the universality of ultimate human values . . . eternal reason or nature. . . . In morals and politics and even aesthetic judgements, Montesquieu is no less objectivist about men's central ends than Helvétius." This major fault was precisely what Meinecke also reproached Montesquieu for. For Meinecke, and for Berlin half a century later, the source of evil was always the same: despite his acknowledgment of the inevitable diversity of customs and concepts, Montesquieu nevertheless assumed that the fundamental aims of humanity were always and everywhere the same.³⁵ Thus, the great sin of the

Bordeaux jurist was exposed: he lacked what one finds in Vico—a far more pronounced, more developed sense of relativity. Which meant that even this unquestioned pillar of liberalism, the thinker who was looked to by the founders of the United States and was Tocqueville's intellectual authority, did not find favor with Berlin. He was far too much a man of the Enlightenment, who envisaged a simple pluralism and not the kind of relativism one finds in Vico, Herder, and Meinecke.

The trouble was therefore not simply "Rousseau's fault" but that of the Enlightenment as a whole and, more generally, that of "the deepest single assumption of western thought": the universal and invariable character of human nature. Apart from marginal figures like Sade, said Berlin, all the great intellectuals of the Enlightenment were agreed on this principle. Whether it was Locke, Voltaire, Dr. Johnson, Rousseau, or Diderot, they were all concerned with the unchangeable natural man. With Burke, this line came to an end, and, to Berlin's satisfaction, "this position, perhaps the deepest single assumption of western thought, was attacked by two of the fathers of modern historicism, Vico and Herder." Berlin pointed out that he used the term "historicism" in the sense employed by Meinecke, Troeltsch, and Croce.³⁶

Here we must make a further observation. According to Berlin, Helvétius, the philosopher of utilitarianism par excellence, paved the way for Jeremy Bentham. In fact, the whole of Helvétius is to be found in Bentham. Bentham's utilitarianism is rightly regarded as a fundamental element of English liberalism: Can one imagine the thinking of John Stuart Mill without its utilitarian component? But Berlin's liberalism was totally different. According to him, liberty could not be defined as the possibility of satisfying the needs of the individual through his capacity to create for himself and through his own efforts a world that could satisfy those needs and secure his happiness.³⁷ In order to make his argument stand up to scrutiny, Berlin had to add another name—the most important of all—to his list of founders of totalitarianism: that of Rousseau.

Berlin, following Talmon, launched out against Rousseau, whom Talmon in *Totalitarian Democracy* held to be not only the figure chiefly responsible for the Jacobin dictatorship but also the true founder of Leninism and Stalinism. Berlin began his exposition in *Freedom and Its Betrayal* with a rejection of rationalism, which he had already expressed in his essay on Helvétius. In Rousseau, subjective feelings separated men, reason brought them together. Reason always provided a single answer: truth is one, error is multiple. According to Berlin, however, these ideas were commonplace. All the philosophes said the same; they all considered the question of how to reconcile liberty and authority. Rousseau's originality lay in giving the words "liberty" and

“authority” a completely different meaning. For Rousseau, liberty was an absolute value. But at the same time, this secularized Calvinist (here one has an echo of Carl Becker’s thesis) thought that just as liberty is an absolute value, respect for rules is also an absolute value, and there is no possible compromise between them. The solution is to be found in *The Social Contract*: “In giving oneself to all, one does not give oneself to anyone.” There cannot be a conflict between liberty and authority: they are one and the same thing. In this way, one achieves the “general will,” a harmony which reflects the natural order of things, and which all rational beings have the possibility of attaining.³⁸

Finally, for Berlin, Rousseau was the prototype of the bourgeois rebel, a sort of “guttersnipe of genius,” of whom certain figures, such as Carlyle, Nietzsche, D. H. Lawrence, and Gabriele D’Annunzio, as well as Hitler and Mussolini, were the successors. Like them, Rousseau hated intellectuals, urban civilization; he associated nature with simplicity. Finally, forcing a man to be free is to force him to be rational: from absolute liberty one arrives at absolute despotism. The Jacobins, Robespierre, Hitler, Mussolini, and the communists all said the same thing. Because he was convinced that “everything could be discovered by mere untrammelled human reason, by mere unobstructed observation of nature,” Rousseau was “one of the most sinister and most formidable enemies of liberty in the whole history of modern thought.”³⁹

Thus, the first sketch of the 1958 lecture is to be found six years earlier in this attack on Rousseau. The declaration of war against the eighteenth century and the principle of negative liberty appeared at the same time, which is very logical, for in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, particularly in Tocqueville, it was thought that a citizen’s duties were a condition of his liberty. One could not enjoy one’s rights without fulfilling one’s obligations as a citizen. From Machiavelli onward, virtue and duty were regarded as the precondition for the existence of rights. Men have a common aim, which is to remain free. They all share this common purpose, and that is what enables them to pursue specific objectives. Rousseau thought that men should wish to be autonomous because they should wish to be men and not slaves or animals. They should want their actions to be determined by their will; they should therefore wish to avoid being dominated by the will of others. They should desire to be what they are destined to be by their nature: moral beings. In this connection, referring to the famous passage for which Rousseau is generally most attacked, Jean-Fabien Spitz gives an excellent summing-up of Rousseau’s argument. The idea that the law forces me to be free means that it sanctions any offense committed by me or committed against me by others. An unpunished offense amounts to a privilege for the person who commits it, and that privilege is destructive of liberty in that it deprives those who do not have it of any

moral obligation to obey the laws and respect the rights of their fellow citizens. This obligation is the lifeblood of liberty, for that is what brings it about that the citizens of a free state live in relationships of law that replace the violence of nature. Their mutual relationships are motivated by the idea that they are devoted to each other and not by fear of punishment.⁴⁰

It was this way of thinking that all the critics of the Enlightenment, from Herder and Burke to Berlin, took exception to. What was really offensive was that Rousseau refused to accept the existing order, an order in which the law was an instrument of oppression. Instead of creating justice and equality, it ratified the principle underlying the societies of his time: the right of the stronger party. "The stronger party is never strong enough always to be the master unless it makes its force into a right and obedience into a duty." One clearly sees that, from Berlin's point of view, Rousseau was guilty of promoting positive liberty. Rousseau defined liberty in terms of the individual giving laws to himself. These laws must be universal and rational, which makes its liberty "moral." Moreover, he broached a difficult question, one that perhaps has no solution but that is truly worthy of a philosopher: How can men govern themselves without making them dependent on each other, or, in other words, how can one put "the law beneath man"? Rousseau knew he was dealing with an insoluble problem, which in politics is comparable to that of "squaring the circle in geometry."⁴¹ He tried to solve it by postulating the law of the majority: "There is only one law that by its nature requires unanimous consent, and that is the social pact, for civil association is the most voluntary act in the world. No man born free and master of himself can under any pretext whatsoever relinquish this without his own consent. To decide that the son of a slave is born a slave is to decide that he is not born a man." That is why, "outside this original contract, the opinion of the majority always obligates all the others." That is what the general will amounts to: if one accepts this definition, provided by Rousseau himself, it is at least as legitimate as the "totalitarian" interpretation. This is all the more so because, even if the concept of the general will lends itself to different and opposing interpretations, one thing is certain: Rousseau could never have conceived that, as Berlin supposed, an individual, an assembly, or a class could exercise dictatorial powers in the name of the general will. His thought had an ethical character that Kant, as Cassirer demonstrated so many years ago, understood perfectly, just as he perceived the inner coherence of Rousseau's thinking.⁴²

It must be pointed out that Berlin's reading of Rousseau was not a slip on his part. Forty years later, he mentioned, in a letter to Conor Cruise O'Brien published as an appendix to his *Great Melody*, that his talk on the BBC was a recapitulation of the lectures he had given in America at Bryn Mawr College in

1952. These, then, were texts of which he was still very proud in 1991. Finally, Berlin and O'Brien were delighted with the following passage from Émile Faguet, which is well known to all those who have some familiarity with French intellectual writings of the end of the nineteenth century, but which the Irish neoconservative took as a great discovery by Berlin. Faguet wrote that when Rousseau said "‘Man is born free, but everywhere he is in chains,’ he was talking nonsense. . . . One might just as well say ‘lambs are born carnivorous, but everywhere they eat grass.’" Both of them considered this observation by the French writer "the neatest deflation of Rousseau ever achieved." O'Brien described himself as "a confirmed Rousseau-basher," and he saw this community of ideas with Berlin as the basis of their essential agreement. Whoever is pro-Rousseau, wrote O'Brien, "I class . . . as basically an enemy."⁴³ The reverse was also true.

Thus, in the last years of the twentieth century, after two world wars, fascism, Nazism, and Stalinism, followed by the cold war, the campaign against Rousseau and the French Enlightenment was pursued in the same spirit and similar terms as two centuries earlier, and remained a point of reference and a sure criterion for the cataloguing of intellectual affinities. The common denominator of Berlin and O'Brien, which is only of importance because it represents a whole school of thought that gives them, like Burke and de Maistre, their pronounced communitarian flavor, is their horror of the idea that the basis of society, or, if one prefers, its basic cell, is the individual and not the historical, ethnic, or linguistic group, that the origin of society is voluntary in nature, and that the whole purpose of society's existence is the good of the individual.

Benjamin Constant, who can hardly be suspected of being oversympathetic to Rousseau, had this to say of "confirmed bashers" of this kind: "I am far from joining the disparagers of Rousseau, who are numerous at the present time. A mob of inferior people [esprits subalternes] who seek to achieve a fleeting success by denying all courageous truths are busy tarnishing his glory, which is yet another reason to be circumspect in finding fault with him. He was the first to popularize a feeling for our rights; generous hearts and independent souls were awakened by his voice, but he was unable to give precise definition to what he felt strongly."⁴⁴

Chateaubriand, who could not be described as a Jacobin either, declared that "the Lockes, Montesquieus, J.-J. Rousseaus, rising up in Europe, summoned the modern peoples to liberty." A little further on, he spoke of "the tender and sublime geniuses of Heraclitus and Jean-Jacques," and then of a "group" of "three geniuses," Plato, Fénelon, and Rousseau, "which comprises all that is agreeable in virtue, great in aptitude, and feeling in men's character."

As later in Nietzsche, Rousseau was placed on the same level as Plato. Friedrich Hölderlin wrote an ode on Rousseau, and in his "Rheinymne" described Rousseau as "a son of the Earth," a demigod who spoke with a divine madness, like Dionysius.⁴⁵

Nietzsche, who was not exactly an admirer of the Enlightenment as a whole, or of the principles of 1789, or of socialism, that "visionary younger brother of an almost decrepit despotism whose heir it wants to be," who detested English liberalism and made harsh criticisms of Kant, saw Rousseau as one of the eight giants—four couples—in the pantheon of the Western world. These were Epicurus and Montaigne, Goethe and Spinoza, Plato and Rousseau, Pascal and Schopenhauer. It is with these four pairs of colossi, he said, "that I have to explain myself." Rousseau was undoubtedly an adversary, but what an adversary! "There are three images of the human being that our modern age has set up, one after the other, and whose contemplation will probably spur mortals on to a transformation of their own lives for some time: these are Rousseau's human being, Goethe's human being and Schopenhauer's human being."⁴⁶

Nietzsche's complicated and ambivalent relationship with Rousseau is a fascinating subject in itself, but it is hardly possible here to do anything more than to mention it and to refer the reader to the excellent work on the subject by Keith Ansell-Pearson. On the one hand, we see that Nietzsche was close to Rousseau in his vision of a general will and of a lawgiving founded on the idea that the individual submits only to the law he has given himself, but, on the other hand, for Nietzsche a choice must be made in the end between the needs and claims of a noble culture whose goal is art and those of a democratic culture whose goal is justice and compassion. The two cannot be reconciled and unified: we must have one at the expense of the other. In other words, the relation between ethics and politics in Nietzsche is an antinomic one.⁴⁷ But however great the divergences between Nietzsche and Rousseau were, and often precisely because of Nietzsche's position contra Rousseau, a reading of Nietzsche as a political thinker would have enabled Berlin to avoid many traps, with regard not only to Rousseau but to the whole question of liberty. If Berlin had studied Rousseau seriously, he might have followed in the footsteps of Kant, Hegel, Constant, Tocqueville, Marx, and Nietzsche instead of going astray with a cold war pamphlet.

Before coming to the inaugural lecture of the Chichele professorship, we should once again look briefly at the sources of this lecture. Berlin acknowledged that Constant had a "pretty strong influence" on his thought. Indeed, in "Two Concepts of Liberty," he wrote: "No one saw the conflict between the two types of liberty better, or expressed it more clearly, than Benjamin Constant." Anyone who has taken the trouble to study French liberalism knows

that the idea of a negative liberty opposed to a positive liberty is simply a revival of the famous distinction between the liberty of the ancients and the liberty of the moderns. The political writings of Constant cover all the main aspects of the idea of liberty. The great liberal thinker considered the liberty of the ancient republics, which he saw as “an active participation in the collective authority” rather than “a peaceful enjoyment of individual independence,” and he tried to discern the relationship between individual liberty and liberty of the press and of conscience. Berlin’s distinction between “freedom to” and “freedom from” was made by Constant in a particularly instructive passage: “The advantage that liberty, as the ancients conceived it, gave the people, was actually to be among those that ruled. It was a real advantage, a pleasure both flattering and solid.” That was the idea of positive liberty. A few lines further on, one finds the concept of negative liberty, an essentially individual concept that allows each person to maintain a zone of protection against interference and external constraints: “People only need, in order to be happy, to be left in complete independence with regard to everything touching their occupations, their enterprises, their sphere of activity, their fantasies.”⁴⁸

In an essay entitled “Two Concepts of Liberty in the Political Thought of Kant,” published in 1962, Bobbio, author in 1957 of an important book on Kant, thought that these concepts existed in Kant but were not explicitly formulated in his works. However, such a formulation, said Bobbio, is necessary for a better understanding of the sense and significance of Kant’s thought. In its most common usage, the word “liberty” means either the ability to accomplish, or not to accomplish, certain actions when one is prevented by others — society or the state — or the ability only to obey laws that one gives oneself. One finds the first sense in classical liberal teaching and the second in democratic teaching. The two concepts come from Montesquieu and Rousseau, respectively, and are found again in Kant, who uses the two concepts of liberty without clearly differentiating between them.⁴⁹

Montesquieu gave his definition of liberty in book II of *The Spirit of Laws*: “Political liberty does not consist of doing what one wants. . . . Liberty is the right to do everything permitted by the laws.” This, then, is the first definition of liberty. The second comes from *The Social Contract*: the sovereignty of the general will is a philosophical justification for the sovereignty of the law, and the law is the expression of reason and the human conscience. In the two key chapters of his most controversial work, Rousseau defined the general will and liberty. He distinguished natural liberty from civil and moral liberty, and said that “only moral liberty makes man truly master of himself, for the force of appetite alone is slavery, and obedience to the law one has given oneself is liberty.” That is the meaning of the general will with regard to the law: the citizens have to have laws that they themselves have made.⁵⁰

That, as we saw in the first chapter, is how Kant understood liberty. He returned to this definition in his "Toward Perpetual Peace": "Juridical (and hence external) *freedom* cannot, as one conventionally does, be defined as the authority to do anything that one wants, as long as one does no one any wrong." According to Kant, if one pursues this line of thought, one is finally confronted with "an empty tautology. — My external (juridical) *freedom* must rather be described in this way: it is the authority to obey no external laws than those to which I have been able to give consent."⁵¹ Liberty coincided with autonomy, and Kant returned in his "Idea for a Universal History" to a fundamental theme of *What Is Enlightenment?* "If one prevents the private citizen from pursuing his own welfare in any way he sees fit, as long as this pursuit is consistent with the freedom of others, one hinders the vitality of the whole enterprise and thereby diminishes the powers of the whole. For this reason limitations on personal activities are increasingly lifted and the general freedom of religion extended. In this way, although folly and caprice will appear occasionally, *enlightenment* arises as a great good."⁵² Progress consisted of this movement of emancipation, this emergence of man from a state of minority. Liberty increased, and this liberty was the individual liberty so highly valued by Constant. As the result of a closely argued, clever analysis, Bobbio saw this as facilitating a liberal conception of liberty. He concluded that despite the fact that Kant gave a definition of political liberty inspired by Rousseau, in the final analysis his idea of liberty was derived from the liberal conception of liberty and not from the democratic conception of it.⁵³

One must also bear in mind two other points. The first is that in Kant, as in Constant and Tocqueville, the two aspects of liberty, clearly described, are not only compatible but necessary to each other. And second, the concept of autonomy is so central to Kant that it signifies both noninterference and the capacity to be one's own master. This enabled Berlin's critics to demonstrate with conviction that there was only one concept of liberty, not two: noninterference was in principle also possible in an authoritarian system that would assure the individual a great deal of economic and religious liberty and a very large area of cultural autonomy, but would not permit him to obey only laws given by himself. Kant was not a democrat, but he had an excellent understanding of the principles formulated by Rousseau. His explicit view of liberty was that of an autonomous person who had emerged from his minority and taken his fate in hand. The liberal interpretation, in the true sense, the enlightened definition of liberty, was implicit in his view, inasmuch as Kant understood that no private sphere could be guaranteed and no individual liberty be protected if men did not themselves formulate the laws by which they were bound.

It is interesting to see once again how common, or even banal, the distinc-

tion between the two forms of liberty was in Europe in the first half of the twentieth century. If Maurras, who was not a philosopher but a thinker familiar with the ideas of his time, could use the concepts of “positive liberty” and “negative liberty” quite naturally as he did in *Romantisme et Révolution*, it shows that these concepts were regarded as self-evident at that time.⁵⁴

Which brings us to Berlin’s lecture in 1958. This text, which bears the strong imprint of the long confrontation with Marxism and communism, came between the first campaign against the Enlightenment and the one that reached its climax with the two essays on Vico and Herder published in 1976. In his conversation with Lukes, Berlin clearly and explicitly acknowledged the powerful political motivations that lay behind this pamphlet, regarded as his chief contribution to political thought and the kind of political message he wished to deliver. “Certainly. It really has to do with the fact that I was maddened by all the Marxist cheating which went on, all the things that were said about ‘true liberty,’ Stalinist and communist patter about ‘true freedom.’ Popper is right—this talk cost innocent lives.” As if there was still any need, Lukes sought to avoid all misunderstanding: “It’s not a piece of neutral conceptual analysis,” he said, speaking of the 1958 text. “Oh no,” replied Berlin, “nor meant to be, certainly not. I still stand by it.”⁵⁵

Thus, forty years later, Berlin still held to his positions, despite the many fluctuations, retreats, and zigzags he had made in the 1960s in response to criticisms. His definition of liberty created a hierarchy of values in which noninterference in the affairs of the individual—negative liberty—was in the final analysis the only acceptable definition. He considered the supporters of so-called positive liberty, which exemplifies the desire for justice and equality and for which democracy is the means of achieving a decent human order, to have been responsible for the greatest disasters in the modern world. This text appeared at a time when the Labour experiment of Clement Attlee’s first government was already a pronounced success, as were similar policies in other Western countries, and when the beneficial effects of positive liberty could no longer be ignored.

It must be admitted that readers of Kant, Rousseau, Constant, Tocqueville, and of course John Stuart Mill, as well as of far less well-known writers like Antoine-Élisée Cherbulez, have been intrigued by the celebrity of this text.⁵⁶ After all, as Bobbio observed once again, the existence of two kinds of liberty was an idea that was self-evident and known to all.⁵⁷ When it made its public appearance, however, this text was acclaimed as the great manifesto of the free world. It depicted liberty, an absolute value, set against sovereignty, and implicitly against the search for equality and justice, principles that, while central to the preoccupations of all the left-wing parties in Europe, were nevertheless

the ideological armor of the cold war waged by the Soviet Union against the West, led by the United States. For in reducing the idea of liberty to that of negative liberty, one can easily fend off criticism of the existing order in the Western democracies. As negative liberty is the ultimate good, the weaknesses, inequalities, and injustices of democracy pale in comparison and are only secondary considerations.

To all these factors may be added the multipurpose, many-sided character of this most elegant, clear, and brilliant lecture, in which all can find something to their liking. The encomium to liberty, identified with a pluralism of values, aims, and truths, later codified in *Vico and Herder*, was also seen as a kind of manifesto of multiculturalism and pluralism, without any connection being made between this praise of pluralism and the nationalism of the twentieth century.⁵⁸ Moreover, one can find in this lecture the first strains of postmodernism. This was the brilliant side of Berlin, the capacity to present the most complex problems in an accessible way that gave him his immense popularity.⁵⁹ Here we should bear in mind that Berlin tried to avoid having to deal with difficult questions like that of civil liberty which the liberal conservative Michael Oakeshott considered—how to preserve the principle of noninterference in view of a certain identity between liberty and the law—or like those that Tocqueville attempted to resolve. Indeed, for a liberal like Tocqueville, the alternative of negative versus positive liberty was virtually incomprehensible. He knew that the mere existence of a guarantee of individual rights in a constitutional regime was not enough to create free men. He believed that liberty depended not only on the preservation of a zone of noninterference around the individual but also on his capacity to join his fellow citizens in deciding his fate. It was the capacity of the Americans to come together to govern themselves and not depend on the protection of a sovereign that impressed Tocqueville. A fascinating chapter in the second volume of his great work is entitled “How the Americans Combat Individualism Through the Doctrine of a Proper Understanding of Interest.” In the first volume, he looked at political associations and considered their usefulness to “democratic peoples.” It was not in leaving the individual to his own devices that one saved him from “despotism,” it was in teaching him to join his fellows in governing himself. It was through democracy itself that one could overcome the dangers that equality presented for liberty. For Tocqueville, the participation of the citizen in the affairs of society, the exercise of his sovereignty, and his capacity to be his own master were a *sine qua non* of liberty. Participation in politics affirmed and developed the practice of liberty. On the other hand, the citizen who chose to isolate himself in the private sphere, who chose to conceive of liberty only in terms of nonintervention rather than as a means of asserting

himself in the public sphere, actually ended up provoking the intervention of the state and of society. Only men who have not “renounced the habit of guiding themselves” are capable of “wisely choosing those who should lead them,” said Tocqueville at the end of *Democracy in America*; the three concluding chapters of his book are among the finest ever written on liberty.⁶⁰

This should be enough to make classical French liberalism, rooted in Constant and Tocqueville, lose its quite widespread inferiority complex with regard to Britain and the United States. In our day, the hierarchical model of the two liberties satisfies the new French neoliberalism and a certain American neoconservatism, but is not by any means the only possible definition of liberalism. Even in the English-speaking world the critics of the two concepts of liberty do not mince their words. For Gerald MacCallum, the writer of a classic article on this question, there can be only one concept of liberty: the presence of liberty always implies the absence of any constraint that would prevent a man from realizing his objectives. Ronald Dworkin, who is probably the most important philosopher of law in the English-speaking world today, has no doubt that for Berlin there exists an incompatibility of values, and that those values contradict one another, but in a brilliant text he argues against Berlin and makes a strong case for the compatibility of liberty and equality.⁶¹

Between these two types of liberty, the “positive” and the “negative,” which is really the anti-Tocquevillian defensive variety, Berlin was thus the champion of the second. He held that only this conception of liberty—the absence of constraint, the preservation of as wide a space as possible around the individual, in which each of us can do what he wants without restriction—is compatible with a pluralism of values. Berlin knew that liberty in the negative sense was “not incompatible with some kinds of autocracy. . . . Just as a democracy may, in fact, deprive the individual citizen of a great many liberties which he may have in some other form of society, so it is perfectly conceivable that a liberal-minded despot would allow his subjects a large measure of personal freedom.” And further on, he said: “There is no necessary connection between individual liberty and democratic rule.” The concept of negative liberty allows one to recognize the fact that men can have different, contradictory aims that are often equally praiseworthy. These aims vary, contradict one another, and oppose one another not, as Hobbes believed, because of the competition between different individuals who pursue the same objectives, but for a quite different reason: there is no single solution that enables one to decide between these objectives. In other words, there are no criteria by which to determine the correct path for each individual or to provide a single answer to ethical questions. Negative liberty, and hence the protection of the individual against interference, is sacred, and as such is an inviolable principle.⁶²

Berlin knew that such a restrictive definition of liberty raised as many difficulties as it solved. In a long note in the original essay, he reflected on this: one can decide, he said, to sacrifice part of one's liberty to permit more justice and equality, but one should make no mistake: liberty is liberty, and simply that. It is neither happiness, nor justice, nor a clear conscience. A sacrifice of individual liberty is a loss that can be compensated by greater justice, but it is nevertheless a loss. That is to say, one should not confuse individual liberty with what some people call "social" or "economic" liberty: there is only one kind of liberty, and that is individual liberty. Harold Laski, one of the theoreticians of the British Labour movement and a professor at the London School of Economics, whom Berlin cordially disliked because of the Marxist element in his thinking, had expressed, many years before Berlin, the classical position of social democracy. In response to Acton, the nineteenth-century conservative theoretician who held that "the passion for equality makes vain the hope for freedom," Laski, the writer of a fine introduction to *Democracy in America*, said that in the absence of certain elements of equality, liberty cannot become a reality.⁶³ It is hardly surprising that Laski could identify with Tocqueville's conception of liberty: after all, right from its beginnings, democratic socialism had regarded itself as the successor of enlightened liberalism and not its gravedigger.

Berlin now grappled with the concept of positive liberty. Associated as it is with the idea of autonomy, accomplishment, self-fulfillment, and the individual's capacity to be his own master, this was almost the opposite of all that Berlin aspired to. He thought that positive liberty meant placing our behavior under the control of our "ideal," "true," "real," or "higher" self. It was no longer a matter of eliminating the obstacles that prevented the individual from exercising his liberty and pursuing the many objectives, however incompatible, that crossed his path, but of bringing it about that, after he had recognized the truth, he undertook to use his liberty to achieve the good. This conception of liberty made it possible to compel men "to be free," and thus finally led to the submission of the individual either to Rousseau's general will or to Marxist historical necessity.⁶⁴

In reality, positive liberty, which is basic to democracy, has very little in common with Berlin's description of it. Positive liberty means first of all the need for autonomy that Kant called for, the desire to leave the state of tutelage and to realize certain objectives. The primary significance of positive liberty is clearly participation in sovereignty. That is undoubtedly the reason for Berlin's hatred for Rousseau: for Rousseau, liberty only existed for the man who could make choices, and who would only be subjected to laws in whose making he himself had participated. That is the meaning of the idea of the "general will," and that is how Kant understood it. We must remember that Rousseau was

Kant's mentor, the one who taught him respect for man. For what exactly can the principle of the sovereignty of the people be based on, if not on the right of each person to participate in the formulation of laws and the taking of political decisions? One must therefore find out "who is ruling," and this question is no less important than that of the limits of state intervention. Obsessed by his fear of Marxism, Berlin put forward a one-dimensional argument, an argument, as Tocqueville already knew very well, not at all compatible with democracy. He thought that positive liberty destroyed a pluralism of values, that it implied the existence of a hierarchy of values, and that from there went astray — that is to say, it led to the general will, and the general will led in turn to the death of negative liberty, which amounted to a repudiation of liberty as such.⁶⁵ In the same way as Talmon, Berlin thought that, as soon as one believes in a single answer to the question of what constitutes the good life, or the values that must govern men in society, there is no reason why an individual, a group of men, or a political party, convinced of possessing this solution, should not impose it on society as a whole. His whole argument turned on this point.

Ten years later, under the pressure of criticism, and aware that, outside the context of the cold war, his position had become reactionary in the literal meaning of the word, Berlin moderated his opinions, although he was not able to renounce them completely. In a note in the introduction to *Four Essays on Liberty*, a collection of essays that included "Two Concepts of Liberty," he claimed that it had not been his intention to make a total defense of negative liberty against positive liberty, and in order that the last paragraph but one of his 1958 essay, which had been strongly criticized, should reflect what he now claimed he had really wanted to say, he revised its text. He said that if he had offered "a blank endorsement of the 'negative' concept as opposed to its 'positive' twin brother," he would have been guilty of an "intolerant monism." Many years later, in his interview with Steven Lukes, Berlin attempted once more to explain that he had not intended to denigrate the idea of positive liberty, and said that positive liberty was "as noble and basic an ideal as negative." In the same breath, however, he said that he stood by his text of 1958. In order to avoid inexplicable contradictions, Berlin now spoke of the need to achieve a compromise in which no value could be completely satisfied. He understood the significance of his rejection of positive liberty, based on his criticism of Rousseau, but he was unable to retract the main gist of his argument without openly repudiating himself. In 1975, in opposing Romanticism to the French Enlightenment, he stated that, contrary to the belief of the men of the eighteenth century, there was no reason to suppose that "rational organization can bring about the perfect union of such values and counter-values as individual liberty and social equality."⁶⁶ He was able to insert a new text at

the beginning of *Four Essays on Liberty*, but he could not, any more than where the question of relativism is concerned, change the meaning of his already published works and all his other essays.

That is why Berlin was unable to consider the problem of harmonizing the rights of the individual with the duties of the citizen as part of society, or to consider the place that obedience to the law and the legislative process have in the life of society. As for Tocqueville's teachings on engagement in politics as a fundamental element in the building of a free society and the education of a free citizen, Berlin ignored them and behaved as if *Democracy in America* had never existed. Tocqueville repelled him by his fondness for the French eighteenth century, for the idea that there were fixed laws that could be discovered, and for the idea that 1789 was liberty's date of birth.⁶⁷

The way out of the situation was to identify pluralism with negative liberty. On the last page but one of the original 1958 edition of *Two Concepts of Liberty*, Berlin delivered a final eulogy of "negative" liberty as "a truer and more humane ideal" than the idea of "positive" liberty on which authoritarian systems of every kind are based. In *Four Essays on Liberty*, this text received a different formulation: "Pluralism, with the measure of 'negative' liberty that it entails, seems to me a truer and more humane ideal." Thus, pluralism and the incompatibility of values, based on the negative conception of liberty, were now held to be sacred.⁶⁸ Logically, it would follow that an indifference of some to the objectives of others is a characteristic of liberty.

The existence of a pluralism of values without the possibility of making a rational choice between them was precisely what was attractive to Berlin in the great enemies of the Enlightenment. Like them, he rejected "*a priori* lists of human rights," but he knew that in order that there should be "a minimally decent society," "general principles of behaviour" had to exist. But, asked to define his position, Berlin was evasive: "Don't ask me what I mean by decent. By decent I mean decent—we all know what that is."⁶⁹ Unfortunately, this is not the case, and no kind of agreement exists on the definition of a "decent" society. For a society to deserve this title, for some it is enough that equality before the law and individual liberty are assured, and that, in order to achieve this, the capacity of the state to intervene in the economy and in society are reduced to the minimum; but for others, liberty and the right to vote lose much of their meaning without a certain amount of equality and social justice. And between these two visions of a good society, there are many intermediate positions. This means that Berlin's refusal to adopt a position on a crucial question of our time in the name of a pluralism of values constitutes a form of conservative neutrality that necessarily confirms the existing order. That, precisely, is the stumbling block: the men of the French Enlightenment believed

that it was indeed possible to define a decent society. In that, they were all revolutionaries: they all fought forms of discrimination, and they did it in the name of natural rights. No one did more than Rousseau to bring this about, and that is why he is the pet aversion of Berlin and of the neoconservatives of today, just as he was Burke's two centuries earlier.

The neoconservative O'Brien, writing in 1992, was not far wrong when he claimed that Burke was no more reactionary than Berlin. In his exchange of letters with O'Brien, Berlin did not protest against this comparison. In 1980, Berlin used the word "reactionary" in relation to Burke. Twelve years later, despite some reservations, he admitted he had made a mistake, and under the impact of the respectful criticism of O'Brien, he described Burke as a "liberal pluralist." In fact, O'Brien had no reason to complain, for, with the exception of the passage referred to in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, Berlin had on many occasions demonstrated his fondness for Burke, in the text that made his name, among other places.⁷⁰

It was Herder, however, more than any other thinker, who was the object of Berlin's veneration. In this, he was behaving like Renan and like Meinecke. He took Herder's part not only against Rousseau and Voltaire but also against Montesquieu. He, like Renan, considered Herder the greatest of modern thinkers because he rejected the idea that there could be a single solution to all questions concerning the finality of human existence. Berlin knew that Herder held an excessive use of reason to be a sign of weakness in a civilization and a clear sign of old age, if not of senility. He knew that Herder championed the instincts and vital forces against the individual, communitarian relationships independent of his will, a faith-filled society against freethinking, the particular against the universal, the countryside against large cities, and, finally, power and force against the philosophical spirit of an age of decline. Man is motivated not by reason but by feelings and instincts, all the nationalist thinkers of the turn of the twentieth century repeated after Herder. Reason blunts the instincts and kills the vital forces.

Against this, the thinkers of the Enlightenment did not believe that all objectives were equally praiseworthy, and they saw reason as the only instrument that could guide man, as a moral agent, in his choices. This was the cause not only of Berlin's opposition, throughout his life, to the French Enlightenment, but also of his other obsession, his rejection of "scientific history," the product of rationalism, based on the idea that the work of the historian, contrary to the idea he had of it, was to search for the truth. When a historian wants to reconstruct a period, even if he knows that it will always be an interpretation and that he will never be able to claim, like Ranke, to reconstruct events as they really happened, he cannot accept the idea of an infinite number of truths. Differing interpretations are not to be regarded as different truths.

This, however, was the framework of Berlin's great enterprise. It was described in a page of an article of 1972 and taken up again in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*. His intention was to demolish the great edifice of the Enlightenment, identified with the Western intellectual tradition. According to Berlin, the central core of this tradition rested on "three unquestioned dogmas: a) that to all genuine questions there is one true answer and one only, all others being deviations from the truth and therefore false . . . ; b) that the true answers to such questions are in principle knowable; c) that these true answers cannot clash with one another, for one true proposition cannot be incompatible with another; that together these answers must form a harmonious whole." Two years later, in his essay on Hume, Berlin again summarized his view of the Enlightenment. The idea that antirationalism could have the kind of harmful consequences described by Richard Wolin had no effect on him whatsoever. We should therefore pay attention to this text, as Berlin gave it great importance. He believed that the common denominator between the French philosophes and their disciples in other countries was their acceptance of "a secular version of the old natural law doctrine according to which the nature of things possessed a permanent, unalterable structure, differences and changes in the world being subject to universal and immutable laws. These laws were discoverable in principle by the use of reason and controlled observation, of which the methods of the natural sciences constituted the most successful application. . . . According to this doctrine, all genuine questions were in principle answerable: truth was one, error multiple; the true answers must of necessity be universal and immutable, that is, true everywhere, at all times, for all men, and discoverable by the appropriate use of reason."⁷¹ It was these "dogmas," as he called them, of "monism" and utopianism that Berlin attacked.

Here we must return to the introduction to *Against the Current* written for Berlin by Roger Hausheer as a résumé and analysis of the writer's thought. Hausheer sought to explain the nature of Berlin's major and original contribution to the history of ideas. Berlin thought that from Plato onward the vast majority of thinkers, despite their profound divergences, all subscribed to one central postulate which they did not even discuss: namely, that reality was basically a rational whole in which all things attain a coherence. They supposed that there existed a body of truths accessible to human understanding embracing all conceivable questions, both theoretical and practical. They believed that, in order to gain access to these truths, there was only one correct method, or a single set of methods, and that these truths, as well as the methods used in their discovery, were of universal validity. It was against this background that Berlin settled his accounts with logical positivism, exhibiting his very acute awareness of the infinite diversity of varieties of experience. He knew that this diversity was irreducible. Here Hausheer added an important

observation. He said that Berlin's rejection of Hume, Russell, Carnap, the early Wittgenstein, the Vienna Circle, and the main tendencies of neopositivism, together with their methods, was comparable to Vico's rejection of Descartes or Hamann's and Herder's rejection of the doctrines of the French Enlightenment. It was the affinity Berlin felt with them that enabled him to study them with such a deep and sympathetic understanding.⁷²

Hausheer continued, speaking on behalf of Berlin: "Under one aspect, Berlin's entire philosophical oeuvre may be seen as a long battle, now overt, now covert, but always subtle, resourceful and determined, against the facile application of inadequate models and concepts in the field of human studies. . . . Berlin warns against two fatal dangers: that of subscribing to all-embracing systems . . . and that of transferring methods and procedures from one discipline . . . to another." In other words, Berlin was waging war on rationalism. "What all these rationalist thinkers shared," said Hausheer, "was the belief that somewhere, by some means, a single, coherent, unified structure of knowledge concerning questions of both fact and value was in principle available. They sought all-embracing schemas, universal unifying frameworks, within which everything that exists could be shown to be systematically — i.e. logically or causally — interconnected, vast structures in which there would be no gaps left open for spontaneous, unattended developments, where everything that occurs should be, at least in principle, wholly explicable in terms of immutable general laws."⁷³

With great fidelity, the disciple continued his account: "Berlin's entire *oeuvre* is a long and sustained rejection of a view of philosophy and truth, and of the methods of inquiry into man's true capacities and condition, which, in the western tradition at least, has been central for more than two thousand years." The conclusion followed immediately: we learn that "it is this proud and shining column, which Berlin identifies as the central mainstay of the rational and scientific edifices of western thought, which some of the thinkers in this volume undermined and caused to totter." This undoubtedly explains why Berlin felt such an affinity with Herder, Vico, and Hamann, de Maistre and Sorel. All of them launched an attack on the Western tradition, which was rationalistic and based on natural law. Hausheer was right to represent the rebellion against the Western tradition celebrated by Berlin as one of the greatest upheavals, most weighty with consequences, that have taken place in the history of ideas since the Reformation, an upheaval that continues to have a powerful effect on the society of our time. Hausheer, summarizing Berlin, described how this revolt, which was first articulated in Italy in the first third of the eighteenth century and then, with increasing force, in the German-speaking world, was led by thinkers who, according to Berlin, were hostile to all rules, against the rationalist and scientific theories that are central to the Western

tradition. This current of ideas, he said, has literally transformed the world: nationalism, romanticism, relativism, and pluralism have come out of it.⁷⁴

Like Sorel and Spengler, Berlin thought that the Enlightenment did not belong exclusively to the eighteenth century: one is dealing with intellectual structures and not a period of history. The Enlightenment, which represents a rationalistic culture based on universal values, is to be found in all periods. Plato, the founder of “monism,” belonged to the initial Enlightenment. Sorel thought the same. Spengler spoke of a Chinese Enlightenment with intellectual structures almost identical to those of the European Enlightenment.

A counterculture was constructed on the ruins of the edifice of the Enlightenment. Its foundations were laid by Vico, the first modern antirationalist. Berlin saw him as the father of both the modern conception of culture, cultural pluralism, and historical anthropology. He was the forgotten precursor of the German historical school. Indeed, one finds the whole embryo of historicism in him: he made a frontal attack on the idea of the social contract and natural law. According to Berlin, his principal contribution was not his theory of the cyclical development of civilizations: “His revolutionary move is to have denied the doctrine of a timeless natural law, the truths of which could have been known in principle to any man, at any time, anywhere.” In *Vico and Herder* there is a sentence that implies that in Vico’s thought there was a clear relativism (he would try to repudiate it later in the face of scholarly Italian criticism): “He does, at times, remind himself that Christian values are timeless and absolute; but for the most part he forgets this, and speaks as if necessarily *autres temps, autres mœurs*.” History, said Vico, does not progress through a series of acts and it is contradictory, but our past is essential for our understanding of ourselves. That is where the answer lies. Vico claimed that there were three unfailing sources of historical knowledge: language, myth, and ancient ways and customs. Berlin declared that Vico developed this theme with erudition, imagination, and audacity.⁷⁵

Vico’s targets were first of all Descartes and the Cartesians, who were totally mistaken with regard to mathematics, which could point to regularities, occurrences of phenomena in the external world, but were unable to provide an understanding of the reason for these occurrences or their purpose. Nature is unknowable, as we have not made it. The true object of Vico’s attack, however, was the theory of natural law, based on the idea that “human nature was fundamentally the same in all times and places, . . . that there were universal human goals.” He “wished to shake the pillars on which the Enlightenment . . . rested.” “Vico,” said Berlin, “regarded each stage of the historical cycle of cultures (through which each gentile nation was bound to pass) as embodying its own autonomous values, its own vision of the world, in particular its own

conception of the relations of men to one another and to the forces of nature. . . . For Vico, each of these cultures . . . is not just a link in a causal chain or contingent sequence, but a phase in a providential plan governed by divine purpose. Each phase is incommensurable with the others, since each lives by its own light and can be understood only in its own terms. . . . If a civilization is interpreted or, worse still, evaluated by the application of criteria that hold only for other civilizations, its character will be misunderstood . . . and the account presented will . . . be a systematically misleading . . . scarcely coherent story, a haphazard succession of events, somewhat like Voltaire's entertaining parodies of the Dark Ages." Such was the nature of Vico's contribution to Anti-Enlightenment culture, so highly praised by Berlin. Such statements recur innumerable times in virtually all Berlin's major texts. They were reiterated and summarized in seven points, in a very accessible form, in the introduction to *Vico and Herder*, the central work of his career.⁷⁶

Vico was followed by Hamann, who Berlin claimed was "the pioneer of anti-rationalism in every sphere," and who "repays study: he is one of the few original critics of modern times. . . . He is the forgotten source of a movement that in the end engulfed the whole of European culture." No one else deserved this glorious title, neither Rousseau, whose "explicitly political ideas are classical in their rationalism," nor even Burke, who, while denouncing "theories founded on abstractions," was simply appealing to "the calm good sense of reflective men." This, however, was not the case with Hamann: "Wherever the hydra of reason, theory, generalization rears one of its many hideous heads, he strikes." This page of the introduction sets the tone for the whole work, and it reads as if it had been written a century or two earlier. On the one hand, Berlin regarded Hamann with affection, and showed that the empathy that he had learned from Herder was a necessary condition for historical understanding; and on the other hand, he kept his distance from him. He was not a Hamannian in the way he was a Herderian: the religious nature of the Magus's thinking did not allow it, and he knew that Hamann "was a fanatic" who had "a passionate hatred of men's wish to understand the universe or themselves," and that this rabid antirationalism finally led to a "reveling in darkness." But at the same time, this antirationalism intrigued him, and he said that Hamann, in setting up a challenge to the sciences, "recognizes only the individual and his temperament" and "thinks that all attempts to generalize lead to the creation of faceless abstractions." Berlin continued: "Like Burke some years later, he thinks that the application of scientific canons to living human beings leads to an erroneous and ultimately a deeply degrading view of what they are." He spoke for "ultimate human values no less than did his enlightened opponents, Voltaire and Kant."⁷⁷

Hamann's importance, wrote Berlin, lay in his cry of "an outraged sensibility," his rebellion "as a German humiliated by an arrogant and, it seemed to him, spiritually blind West." Here, in the second half of the twentieth century, we find a legitimization of the classic alibi of all rigid nationalisms, all catastrophic ethnocentrisms, from Fichte during the Napoleonic Wars and Barrès after the defeat of 1870 to the Germans and Italians after the First World War. The founders of fascism and Nazism also gave humiliation not only as the explanation but also as the justification for their revolt against the Enlightenment, against the democratic West, always held to be as arrogant as in the time of Hamann. Moreover, Berlin said, "Hamann condemns monism," an attitude Berlin considered the height of political virtue: "As a defender of the concrete, the particular, the intuitive, the personal, the unsystematic . . . he has no equal." Berlin once again fell into line with Troeltsch and Meinecke: that, he claimed, was precisely what "distinguishes, indeed divides, the Germans from the rational, generalizing, scientific West." He was overcome with admiration for "the poignant and uncompromising audacity, with which he [Hamann] plunges the knife into those wounds which were duly uncovered for all to see." This is what gave "him his unique importance in the history of thought."⁷⁸ Quite apart from the fact that this is such a gross exaggeration that it throws doubt on Berlin's credibility, what matters here for an understanding of the twentieth-century Anti-Enlightenment is that in heaping praise on Hamann, Berlin set up an unambiguous scale of values: the wounds he was referring to were rationalism and universal values.

Pluralism and the capacity to question the validity of all monistic systems was also, in Berlin's opinion, the great virtue of Machiavelli. Here again, Berlin followed in the footsteps of Meinecke, who asked, "Must we conceive the world as dualistic or as monistic?" The article Berlin wrote on the Florentine in 1972 is a résumé of his entire oeuvre. He claimed that the writer of *The Prince* taught that there are several moralities, and that "Christian morality cannot be a guide for normal social existence. It remained for someone to state this. Machiavelli did so." Machiavelli attacked "one of the deepest assumptions of western political thought," which is "that there exists some single principle which . . . prescribes their proper behaviour to all animate creatures." Since Plato, "this doctrine . . . has dominated European thought"; it is at the root of "the idea of the world and of human society as a single intelligible structure," and hence "of natural law." Thus, one saw the appearance of the "unifying monistic pattern . . . at the very heart of traditional rationalism . . . that has been characteristic of western civilization." It was this "belief in the ultimate compatibility of all genuine values," "one of the foundations of the central western philosophical tradition," that was challenged by Machia-

velli. Berlin delighted in the thinking of Machiavelli, the destroyer of the Western rationalistic tradition: he was the one that “split open” this rock and “lit the fatal fuse,” and who, as Meinecke also thought, inflicted with his dagger a “wound that has never healed.” No one before him had thought of “the possibility of more than one system of values, with no criterion common to the systems whereby a rational choice can be made between them”; no one had considered “that entire systems of value may come into collision without possibility of rational arbitration.” Machiavelli revealed “that there was something incoherent in the very notion” of the “perfect society.” In so doing, he cleared the way for “empiricism, pluralism, toleration, compromise” and “diversity.” Machiavelli was also deemed praiseworthy for his contribution to the triumph of the social and political values of antiquity over the individualistic values of Christian morality.⁷⁹ One might equally well conclude, however, that contrary to Berlin’s idea, it was not the reign of tolerance that comes about in this way but that of relativism, and when arbitration is nevertheless unavoidable, there is no option other than the use of force.

Obviously, this analysis follows that of Meinecke, and Berlin does not conceal the fact. Meinecke likewise took the part of Machiavelli when he returned to an older tradition, that of the Greek polis or the Roman Republic, to the anti-Socratic communitarian morality that Sorel also greatly admired.

It was once again the rejection of the fundamental principles of the Enlightenment that Berlin singled out in his essay on de Maistre, an essay that ascribed great importance to the diplomat from Savoy, describing him as “our contemporary.” He was our contemporary, said Berlin, in his historicism, “in denouncing the impotence of abstract ideas and deductive methods. . . . No one has done more than he to discredit the attempt to explain how things happen, and to lay down what we are to do, by deduction from such general notions as the nature of man, the nature of rights, the nature of virtue, the nature of the physical world.” Berlin returned to this idea on innumerable occasions. De Maistre, he said, was the sworn enemy of the ideas that all branches of the Enlightenment held in common, whatever their differences, which were sometimes considerable, in other areas may have been: for instance, the idea that “men were, by nature, rational and sociable,” and that “all good and desirable things were necessarily compatible.” De Maistre regarded as equally absurd the concept of natural law and the idea that men, at least after they had been suitably reeducated, would be capable of governing themselves and living a life that would be “free, secure, happy, virtuous and wise.” Against this naïve optimism, de Maistre fought with all his might, just as he attacked the other aspect of this complacent optimism, the use of the scientific method in the human sciences.⁸⁰

This is what Berlin felt to be important in de Maistre. He fully recognized the violent, brutal, bloody, and dictatorial side of de Maistre's thinking. He knew that he relied on the pope and the hangman to conduct human affairs, but he was full of admiration not only for his deep understanding of human nature but also for his out-and-out struggle against rationalism and scientism. De Maistre, he insisted, "with remarkable brilliance and effectiveness . . . denounced all forms of clarity and rational organization." Although he did, in fact, see him as a precursor of fascism, anti-Dreyfusism, and Vichy, he thought him admirable on account of his historicism, his interest in the variable and the particular, in prejudices, in national particularities, his contempt "for *man*." He thought that de Maistre had something very important to teach us: founder of fascism though he was, he was on the right lines when, like Burke, he opposed the idea that "man" can exist outside a given cultural and social context. Burke, de Maistre, and Maurras, and, following them, Gentile, Rocco, and Mussolini, Carl Schmitt and Alfred Rosenberg considered the idea of the rights of man as the great absurdity in modern thought. Berlin adopted as his own, in the name of pluralism, de Maistre's attack on the rights of man and his view of a humanity split up into an indefinite number of cultures and ethnic groups.⁸¹ Another interesting feature of Berlin's essay on de Maistre is that one sees in it the emergence of a fascism devoid of nationalism. This would surely be a misconstruction if Berlin was not pursuing a clearly defined objective, the rescue of nationalism.

At the end of his article on de Maistre, written in 1960 and then set aside for further reflection, Berlin already mentioned Sorel. He was to write about the author of *Reflections on Violence* only ten years later, but from the beginning of the 1960s a transition to Sorelian antirationalism took place quite naturally. Sorel, the great enemy of rationalist constructions and "models," the admirer of Vico, the disparager of Socrates and the morality of Pericles' polis, the writer whose works were based on the promotion of myth against the rationalist utopia, fascinated Berlin. Sorel defended the morality of the fighters of Marathon against that of the Athenian Enlightenment, and via fifth-century Greece sought to uproot the foundations of the French eighteenth century. In Sorel, Berlin valued the formulation of a modern social mythology utilizing all the tools provided by Bergsonism, tools "which he could equally well have found in the francophobe German romantics a century earlier." It essentially concerned the idea "that reason was a feeble instrument compared with the power of the irrational and the unconscious in the life of individuals and societies." Berlin was favorably disposed to Sorel's antirationalism, despite the latter's anti-democratic obsession and his contempt for liberal values and social democracy. Sorel, he said, taught us that "not theoretical knowledge but action, and only

action, gives understanding of reality. . . . Reality must be grasped intuitively, by means of images, as artists conceive it, not with concepts or arguments or Cartesian reasoning.”⁸² From Vico and Hamann to Sorel and Berlin, one always had the same line of thought. The Anti-Enlightenment, as Spengler also believed, belongs to all periods and cultures.

If de Maistre was seen as a founder of fascism despite his quasi-imperviousness to nationalism and his vision of a Christian Europe governed from Rome by the head of the Catholic Church, Sorel was spared this unflattering description. Despite his cult of violence and active minorities, his hatred for democracy and liberalism, his nationalism, his xenophobia, and his anti-Semitism, despite the fact that the founders of Italian fascism and the first French fascists saw him as their prophet, Berlin was entranced by Sorel’s criticism of the eighteenth century, his contempt for Cartesianism, for the theory of progress, Fontenelle, Rousseau, and the *Encyclopédie*. This led him to conclude at the time he wrote the essay, the beginning of the 1970s, that “the dangers of which he spoke were, and are, real.” The dangers that Berlin referred to were not those of the rebellion against the rights of man, rationalism, and optimism. On the contrary; this was a revolt that Berlin approved of. Sorel’s ideas, he said, had not aged with the passage of time but still today “come at us from every quarter. They mark a revolt against the rationalist ideal of frictionless contentment in a harmonious social system in which all ultimate questions are reduced to technical problems, soluble by appropriate techniques. It is the vision of this closed world that morally repels the young today. The first to formulate this in clear language was Sorel. His words still have power to upset.”⁸³

Once again, one sees that the caricature of the Enlightenment drawn by de Maistre and Sorel was accepted by Berlin. When he read the writers of the Enlightenment, he saw them through the eyes of Herder, Burke, and Taine, and his interpretation was no less selective and caricatural than theirs. Burke and Herder were fighting to save a whole civilization, and Berlin felt much the same way. In this fight, everything was allowed: just as Herder and Burke distorted the meaning of the Enlightenment, even in its most moderate aspects, Berlin helped to present an image of the Enlightenment, the French Enlightenment in particular, as the realm of intolerance and absolutism, the inevitable product of rationalism and a limited scientism that, when applied to human society, gave rise to determinism. It was likewise the realm of a cultural imperialism with a marked disdain, under the pretext of universal values, for cultures other than Parisian culture.

Like his predecessors, Berlin saw the men of the Enlightenment as zealots, when in fact they were moderate reformers. All the detractors of the Enlightenment made them out to be the founders of modern fanaticism, when they

fought against fanaticism and on behalf of tolerance; they made them out to be “monists” and rabid Eurocentrists when they showed a respect unknown in the Christian world for non-European cultures and for cultural pluralism. D’Holbach was an atheist, but he never claimed that, because God was dead, all was permitted. Helvétius’s utilitarianism laid the foundations of a reasonable and moderate social policy. One can see how this distortion of the ideas of the Enlightenment comes about. When these men conceive of a better world and demand the right to happiness, they are immediately accused of asking for the moon; when they want more justice, they are accused of seeking perfection; when they criticize the established order and view the state as simply a tool in the hands of the citizen, they are depicted as the destroyers of an order without which no society can exist; and when they appeal to reason against the wrongs and perversions wrought by history and grant themselves the right of defining the aims of existence, they are accused of desiring a world “conceived as a mechanical system to be manipulated for utilitarian ends by teams of rational experts.”⁸⁴

Need it be pointed out here that the thinkers of the Enlightenment never reduced the complexities of human life to a single formula that could be found whenever needed? Mark Lilla has demonstrated this admirably in a concise and brilliant text. John Robertson, who, like practically all the historians of the eighteenth century, feels very uncomfortable about Berlin’s writings, showed that, for Berlin, the Enlightenment consisted of a very few simple ideas: the uniformity of human nature, the universality of natural law as the criterion of all moral behavior, the conviction that there is a single perfect goal for mankind, which men can discover and attain.⁸⁵ Despite everything, it is this image of the Enlightenment that the educated, but not erudite or specialized, English-speaking reader, bewitched by an exposition that is elegant and easy to follow, finds in Berlin.

But the true apostle of the great intellectual revolution that was to change the modern world, the one whom Renan regarded as the greatest philosopher since Plato, and who in the hierarchy of heroes set up by Meinecke came immediately after Goethe, was clearly Herder. Berlin saw Herder as the originator of three important ideas that are still relevant today. First of all, the world, he said, is indebted to him for the idea that men can only develop if they belong to an identifiable group with its own particular style, its own view of the world, its own traditions, its own historical memories and language. In other words, it must have a specific culture and history, distinct from all others. Then there is the idea that any spiritual activity, whether in art, literature, philosophy, religion, or law, is above all a means of communication between men. Creative activity is seen as a voice expressing individual concep-

tions of life which cannot be understood through rational analysis—that is to say, through a dissection of its constitutive elements—or through an intellectual classification, but through the power of empathy (*Einfühlen*) of the artist, who also possesses imagination and a historical sense. According to Berlin, the new interpretation given to history depended on this faculty of empathy discovered by Herder. Finally, there is pluralism, which is a recognition of the infinite diversity of cultures and systems of values. Each culture possesses its own scale of values, its own forms of conduct, all of which are absolute in themselves and cannot be judged by a single criterion. For Herder, said Berlin, men were men in all periods, but what counted were the differences between them. It was the differences that determined their culture, which made them what they were in the deepest sense. It is in the differences that the individual genius of men and cultures is expressed.⁸⁶

That is why cultures or periods are always an end in themselves and not a transition to another period or a preparation for a different culture. Not only does no hierarchy of cultures exist, but if men are not interchangeable and can never become what other men are or have been, if each civilization is unique, “how could there exist, even in principle, one universal ideal, valid for all men, at all times, everywhere?”⁸⁷

Some fifty pages earlier, Berlin described the three great themes of Herder’s writings, which he interiorized to such a degree that practically all his essays were a long series of elaborations of these three themes: populism, expressionism (in the generic sense), and pluralism. These three concepts were incompatible with the moral, historical, and aesthetic teachings of the Enlightenment. Here one also finds the refutation of an idea often expressed by his disciples and sometimes by Berlin himself: despite his particularist, “blocked” liberalism, Berlin not only could not claim to be a representative of the Enlightenment, even of the kind sometimes described as “sceptical,” he was one of its harshest critics. His criticism was fully Herderian in character, for if “the tension of . . . the One and the Many” was Herder’s “obsessive *idée maîtresse*,” this idea—the war against what he called the “monism” of the Enlightenment—was, as Lilla perspicaciously observed, Berlin’s own major purpose.⁸⁸ A war on the Enlightenment was waged by all the writers whose pluralism received Berlin’s endorsement—de Maistre and Sorel, and before them, by anticipation, Machiavelli—whatever his reservations about other aspects of their thought may have been. Basically, all the enemies of “monism,” rationalism, and absolute values were his friends. It is almost inconceivable that the obvious incompatibility of liberalism with the criticism of the Enlightenment by its greatest adversaries could have escaped him.

What was the meaning of the term “populism”? Berlin used the term for as

long as possible in order to avoid the pejorative associations of the word “nationalism.” “Populism” denotes the sense of belonging to a group; Herder believed that this need was as fundamental, as elementary as the need for food. The individual always belongs to a group, and belonging to a group means thinking and acting in a certain way, in accordance with a certain outlook on the world, and in accordance with certain values and particular objectives. It follows that whatever the individual does must consciously or unconsciously reflect the aspirations of his group. The term “group” was preferable to “society,” for, as a society was a collection of individuals, it had precisely the voluntary character that Herder abhorred. The group was a product of history and could be known by its distinctive cultural features: in other words, it was an ethnic group. Membership of a group implied a rejection of alien values: with Herder, Germany began its war of liberation with the rejection of French cultural influence. But this was the beginning not only of the long process of German unification but also of a closed, inward-looking ethnicity.⁸⁹

Berlin knew that populism, in the form of nationalism, could become aggressive. In the second half of the twentieth century, this process no longer needed much demonstration, and that is why he immediately observed, “Nationalism is an inflamed condition of national consciousness which can be, and has on occasion been, tolerant and peaceful.” Unfortunately, Berlin did not take the trouble to provide an example of an “inflamed condition” that at the same time was “tolerant and peaceful,” or to show when, and in what circumstances, in the course of the past two centuries, an awakening of national consciousness in the sense that he understood it did not lead to an intolerant nationalism. That is why it is difficult to understand how, after the Second World War, one could still commend this organic conception of society and see it as great progress, or even as a form of liberation, in relation to the French Enlightenment. Berlin praised Herder to the skies for affirming the total unity of all spheres of life: one cannot separate the flesh from the spirit, the sciences from the arts, the enumeration of facts from their evaluation, any more than one can separate the individual from society.⁹⁰ That was Herderian organicism, very innovative according to Berlin, who saw it as tremendous progress.

Berlin displayed much sympathy for nationalism. That is why the image he gave of Herder was very naïve and misleading: his nationalism, he claimed, was entirely cultural and peaceful, or democratic, innocent, totally Christian, and hence universal, immutable, based on a common culture. Variety could not imply conflict in this great enemy of uniformity. Nationalism was a natural need to “belong,” and Berlin’s concept of national identity was nothing else than a carbon copy of Herder’s. Indeed, Berlin’s entire oeuvre was a reflection

of Herder: "Men congregate in groups because they are conscious of what unites them — bonds of common descent, language, soil, collective experience; these bonds are unique, impalpable and ultimate. Cultural frontiers are natural to men, spring from the interplay of their inner essence and environment and historical experience."⁹¹

If Berlin is to be believed, Herder rejected all doctrines based on anthropology. He was more liberal than Kant, and already heralded the individualistic and cosmopolitan spirit of Weimar. Less than twenty pages further on, however, we learn that "if he denounces individualism, he equally detests the state."⁹² This was not the least of the inconsistencies to be found in Berlin's writings when he attempts to vindicate Herder. As for the state, we saw in earlier chapters that Herder did not revile the state as such, he reviled a state that was not national. Berlin refused to see that cultural and ethnic organicism is incompatible with the liberty and autonomy of the individual, and that the individualism of Weimar was at the opposite extreme from Herder's vision of the "group" and his concept of cultural uniqueness. The nationalism that Herder invented was henceforth to bear the imprint of its origins: war on universalistic and "materialist" values, which in plain language means rationalism and utilitarianism, and hence liberalism.

Although Berlin was not truly aware of it, we nevertheless sometimes catch sight of the authentic Herder in his own work. Indeed, for Herder, said Berlin, men, "since they are different, . . . seek different ends; therein is both their specific value and their character. Values, qualities of character, are not commensurable. . . . Men are not self-created: they are born into a stream of tradition, above all of language, which shapes their thoughts and feelings, which they cannot shed or change, which forms their inner life." But, "no one of these peoples or cultures is . . . superior to any of the others." In fact, as we saw earlier, in Herder the differences immediately gave rise to a hierarchy of cultures and periods. But, according to Berlin, there is no "order of merit" in Herder, and to speak of universal criteria is "evidence of blindness to what makes human beings human," for "there are many things which men do have in common, but that is not what matters most. What individualises them, makes them what they are, makes communication possible, is what they do not have in common with all the others. Differences, peculiarities, nuances, individual character are all in all." Then comes the conclusion, which is scarcely surprising and presents a Fichtean, Barrèsian view of the human condition: as the values of one civilization will always be different from those of another, and perhaps are incompatible with them, as men are confronted with many varieties of ways of life, ways of thinking and feeling, each with its own "center of gravity," "men can develop their full powers only by continuing to live where they and their

ancestors were born, to speak their language, live their lives within the framework of the customs of their society and culture.” In this way, Herder, without any objection on the part of Berlin, undermined a central idea in Western thought, perhaps the most important of all: that of the unity of the human race. Simultaneously, he invented “pluralism,” or, if one wishes, the idea that variety is a good thing in itself, and that all knowledge and in fact all human life depends on the unique past of a community.⁹³ Later, Berlin once again returned to this theme: in 1980, he said that since pluralism means recognizing “the incommensurability and, at times, incompatibility of objective ends,” “if each culture expresses its own vision and is entitled to do so, and if the goals and values of different societies are not commensurable, then it follows that there is no single set of principles, no universal truth for all men and times and places.”⁹⁴ Do we not have here a classical definition of relativism?

Here one sees with great clarity, but under the pretext of a totally theoretical respect for all cultures, the emergence of a tribal, closed society, and the cultural uniqueness that is manifest here already borders on determinism. In what way exactly are these ideas different from the principles set forth by Barrès in his manifesto “*La Terre et les morts*,” or Maurras’ thinking in *L’Enquête sur la monarchie*, or the ideology of the German conservative revolution? Cultural nationalism has never been anything but a first stage toward a radical political nationalism. The whole first half of the twentieth century bears witness to this: destructive nationalism was never anything but a natural result of the emphasis placed on ethnic, historical, and cultural specificity in the face of the universal values and concepts of the humanism of the Enlightenment. The factual proof already existed when Berlin was writing, and the cost of fragmentation, of insistence on differences, on national characteristics, on the individual’s dependence on his cultural and psychological context was no longer in any way a secret. It is even embarrassing to have to mention it: it was the supposedly innocent cultural identities that caused dozens of linguistic, cultural, and religious communities, armed with the great Herderian principles, to cast themselves at each other’s throats in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Moreover, were not fascism and Nazism above all nationalisms in rebellion against natural law? Berlin did not hesitate to depict the eighteenth century as the cradle of the gulag, but where Herderian nationalism and its consequences were concerned, he behaved as if the European catastrophe of the twentieth century had fallen from the skies without any connection to the rebellion against the Enlightenment that had preceded it. The rationalism of the eighteenth century envisaged a nation of citizens: that is why liberal nationalism never survived the earliest years of the French Revolution, and never existed anywhere except in France during that very short period, and its intel-

lectual framework was precisely this body of ideas and principles that Berlin reviled. Against this, the followers of the principles expounded in *Another Philosophy* envisaged a living organism, a great family united in a common history and culture, and, as Barrès and the Herderians of the twentieth century would have it, grouped around its cemeteries and churches.

The significance of the German cultural revolution, which very soon had its equivalent in France, was not lost on Berlin. It was with full awareness that, like Meinecke, he saw the break with the Western tradition as a lifebuoy thrown to a world floundering in the French rationalist decadence. The following passage, which came just after *Vico and Herder* and dates from 1975, gives a very exact and concise description of the meaning of this break that was central to Berlin's thought. He said that this revolution from Germany had "permanently shaken the faith in universal, objective truth in matters of conduct, in the possibility of a perfect and harmonious society, wholly free from conflict or injustice or oppression — a goal for which no sacrifice can be too great if men are ever to create Condorcet's reign of truth, happiness and virtue, bound 'by an indissoluble chain' — an ideal for which more human beings have, in our time, sacrificed themselves and others than, perhaps, for any other cause in human history."⁹⁵ This passage can be read in different ways, but it can hardly be taken for an analysis of the Enlightenment.

Berlin never tired of insisting on the importance of the most inexorable defamers of the Enlightenment in the history of political thought, on their essential role as redressers of the wrongs inflicted on the modern world by the French Enlightenment. He saw these rebels as admirable wreckers, when in fact they gave rise to a new hard conformism that often resulted in endless calamities. He was grateful to them for having predicted that it was rationalism and not tribal nationalism that was leading to an inevitable disaster. However, he also had doubts. In order to clear the great enemies of the Enlightenment of their historical responsibility, he interceded on their behalf: "Men are not responsible for the careers of their ideas: still less to the aberrations to which they lead." He returned to this further on: "It is a historical and moral error to identify the ideology of one period with its consequences at some other, or with its transformation in another context and in combination with other factors."⁹⁶ But if the Oxford professor was trying to give us a lesson in the methodology of the historical sciences, why did he not apply it to Rousseau or Voltaire or Helvétius — all three declared to be intellectual fathers of totalitarianism — or to Condorcet? Why should Rousseau bear the responsibility for 1793, why should his voice be said to have spoken through Robespierre, and why should he anticipate not only Lenin but Hitler and Mussolini, whereas Herder was merely an innocent lover of cultural diversity? Why

should the search for happiness and virtue bear the responsibility for the greatest disasters of human history, whereas the destruction of universal values was said to be beneficial?

We finally come to the crucial problem of relativism. Berlin knew that a writer who thinks that each culture has its own values, and consequently that no culture is in a position to criticize another culture, practices a pure and simple relativism: "Vico's relativity went further than Montesquieu's. If his view was correct, it was subversive of the very notion of absolute truths." The same applied to Herder. In spite of this, Berlin lavished praise upon him for rebelling against the French Enlightenment and setting against it "his relativism, his admiration of every authentic culture for being what it is, his insistence that outlooks and civilizations must be understood from within." He made him both the hero of the historical world and its inventor because of the "classical statement of historical relativism" contained in *Another Philosophy*. Herder, he said, celebrates "the uniqueness, the individuality, and, above all, the incommensurability with each other of each of the civilizations which he so lovingly describes and defends." A few years later, immediately after *Vico and Herder* was first published, when subject to criticism from the Italian historian of antiquity Arnaldo Momigliano, the writer of well-known works on Vico, who asked if he had fully considered the implications of Vico's and Herder's historical relativism, Berlin backed down.⁹⁷ Undoubtedly, he did not wish, and was not able, to renege on his main thesis, but he absolutely had to clear these two great enemies of the French Enlightenment of this accusation that, in the light of the twentieth century, was disastrous for their reputation.

Berlin then wrote his important 1980 article, "Alleged Relativism in Eighteenth-Century European Thought," where he made his mea culpa. He said he had put forward wrong ideas, he had been inattentive; he had sinned through ignorance. Now he knew that Vico and Herder were no more relativistic than Montesquieu or Hume.⁹⁸ In order to save Vico and Herder, and in fact to save himself from the intellectual disaster of recognizing relativism as the basis of pluralism, Berlin linked these two greatest adversaries of the Enlightenment to two pillars of the Enlightenment so that one would speak of them in the same breath. In this way, one could claim that the accusation of relativism, unjustly made against the eighteenth century as a whole, should be unhesitatingly rejected in the cases of Vico and Herder, as in the cases of Montesquieu and Hume.

Berlin's relativism did not escape the notice of Leo Strauss. Strauss was the only one of the great figures of the period not to have hesitated, at the time of its appearance, to reveal the reality behind the inaugural lecture, "Two Concepts of Liberty." In a text published in 1961, the Chicago philosopher made a

devastating criticism of the distinction between positive liberty and negative liberty, and the relativism of values it implies. He immediately understood the significance and political purpose of the 1958 lecture, and was not swept off his feet by what Berlin had done. One should not hide the fact, he said in 1961, that this formula “is very helpful for a political purpose — for the purpose of an anti-Communist manifesto designed to rally all anti-Communists.” In other words, Strauss saw this text as simply a pamphlet of the cold war. But since Berlin was at the same time grappling with a theoretical problem, Strauss took the bull by the horns. The argument does not stand up to scrutiny, he said: Berlin simply contradicts himself. “Liberalism, as Berlin understands it, cannot live without an absolute basis and cannot live with an absolute basis.” And he went on to say that, according to Berlin, “interference with the pursuit of ends is legitimate only to the extent to which one man’s pursuit of an end collides with another man’s pursuit. Yet it appears that such collisions cannot possibly be prevented.” Here he quoted Berlin, who wrote that “there must be some frontiers of freedom which nobody should ever be permitted to cross.” To which Strauss replied: “Yet the primary question concerns, not the location of the frontiers, but their status.” If “those frontiers must be ‘sacred,’” he said, it follows that “the demand for the sacredness of a private sphere needs a basis, an ‘absolute’ basis, but it has no basis.” That is why “We are still waiting to hear why Berlin’s principles are regarded by him as sacred. If these principles are intrinsically valid, eternally valid, one could indeed say that it is a secondary question whether they will or will not be recognized as valid in the future and that if future generations despise the eternal verities of civilization, they will merely condemn themselves to barbarism. But can there be eternal principles on the basis of ‘*empiricism*,’ of the experience of men up to now? Does not the experience of the future have the same right to respect as the experience of the past and the present?” Finally, said Strauss, “Berlin’s statement seems to me to be a characteristic document of the crisis of liberalism — of a crisis due to the fact that liberalism has abandoned its absolutist basis and is trying to become entirely relativistic.”⁹⁹

We must now examine another aspect of Berlin’s thought, or, if one wishes, heritage. “A Savile Row post-modernist” — that is, a postmodernist in a fashionable suit: this portrait of Berlin, delineated by Ernst Gellner on the occasion of the appearance of a biography by one of the most enthusiastic disciples of the Oxford professor, John Gray, represents a by no means negligible aspect of Berlin’s contribution to the culture of the second half of the twentieth century.¹⁰⁰ It was precisely because Berlin was always able to position himself at the heart of the liberal establishment that there are few men who did more harm to the tradition of the Enlightenment than he did. Relativism is inherent

to anti-Enlightenment thought, and despite his attempts to show otherwise, Isaiah Berlin, like Herder, was a relativist who refused to declare himself. The dangers of relativism, under the label of pluralism or some other description, are no longer in need of proof, any more than the harm done to the humanities and the social sciences by the refusal to accept the idea that there was a single scientific method. The campaign against the Enlightenment's application to the humanities of the seventeenth-century scientific revolution that had changed the face of the world finally resulted in the 1960s in a general state of doubt, or as Gellner once again put it, a situation of "*anything goes*."¹⁰¹ In other words, one is confronted with a generalized relativism: all approaches are legitimate, there are no rules of scientific research applicable to the humanities; pluralism reigns supreme under the pretext of the great variety of values that exist, all of which are equally just and respectable, and between which it is not always possible to make clear and definite choices. Who did more than Berlin to make pluralism the dominant ideology of our time?

It was Kant who gained acceptance in the West for the idea that criticism is the source of all progress in knowledge, but the ideology of "*anything goes*," as Raymond Boudon judiciously said, denies any value or virtue to criticism in the Kantian sense. Kant was not a real source of inspiration for Berlin: his harsh criticism of Herder and his rationalism precluded any possibility of Berlin being a Kantian. The same applies to Tocqueville, for whom the social sciences — the moral and political sciences, in the language of the time — could aim to be as solid as the others.¹⁰² We have seen in this chapter that one of the principal reasons for Berlin's campaign against the eighteenth century was his total opposition to the idea that the humanities could use the same tools as the other scientific disciplines. Until the second half of the twentieth century, however, this idea was accepted by all those who made the social sciences their profession. One can say the same about historians: the principle of *anything goes* allows one to ignore facts, which have become so many "*texts*," and, above all, pluralism, or in other words relativism, allows one to forget that the aim of all research is to reach the truth, even if one knows that reconstruction of the past can never be dissociated from the context in which it takes place.

In the very last years of his life, when the twentieth century was also coming to an end, Berlin returned to his starting point. He recognized that one was dealing with relativism, but this relativism, he said, was moderated by the fact that all values proceeded from an evolution within a common human culture. He said that Vico propounded a kind of relativism that at the same time assured the existence of a pluralism of values. But this common element was obviously not enough to support humanism and universalism: Berlin did not even try to claim that it did.¹⁰³ His way of thinking is probably best revealed by

the fact he refused to make comprehensive judgments. As a Zionist Jew,¹⁰⁴ he never asked himself if the rebellion against rationalism did not bear the responsibility for the destruction of European Jewry. The reason for this was simple: the rejection of rationalism and natural law gave rise to pluralism and the relativity of values, which made antirationalism a source of life. If the great enemy of the human race is not antirationalism, which gives rise to the rejection of natural law, but monism, "faith in universal, objective truth," "one is not committed to applauding or even condoning the extravagances of romantic irrationalism if one concedes that, by revealing that the ends of men are many, often unpredictable, and some among them incompatible with one another, the romantics have dealt a fatal blow to the proposition that, all appearances to the contrary, a definite solution of the jigsaw puzzle is, at least in principle, possible."¹⁰⁵

In reading the writings of this great Riga-born intellectual, who for half a century exercised an unparalleled authority in the English-speaking world, one sees constantly hovering over him the shadow of another provincial who also came from the shores of the Baltic. And behind Herder one sees all the Germans "victimized" by French "imperialism," all the children humiliated by French cultural expansionism, all the Slav and Jewish nationalists eager to belong to a community of their own on the basis of their common history. Leveling rationalism, linguistic imperialism, French intellectualism, a vision of humankind based on that loathsome abstraction "man," the idea of universal truth, were as repugnant to him as they were to Herder. All these ideas were no less offensive to French nationalists like Barrès, Maurras, and the leaders of the Vichy National Revolution. At this point in our discussion, the reader, on reading these lines, should have no trouble in recognizing in Herder, the German whose national pride had been hurt, another "humiliated child," Barrès, who in 1870 at the age of eight saw the German troops enter his small town in Lorraine. But just as it is puerile to place on French cultural "imperialism" the responsibility for the war on rationalism and natural law initiated by Herder, so it is simplistic to see France's defeat by Prussia as the reason for Barrès's theory of the Land and the Dead, his ferocious anti-Semitism, or his relativism, a carbon copy of Herder's. It was not French, the language of culture in eighteenth-century Europe, that Herder was rebelling against but rationalism and the autonomy of the individual, held responsible for all the evils of civilization in his time, and it was against this same leveling rationalism, destructive of national cultural uniqueness, against this same detested "Kantism," that Barrès and the other French nationalists went to war for the salvation of France. Like Maurras and Le Bon, and like all nationalists throughout Europe, Berlin too felt the need to grant satisfaction to people's emotional needs. The

German reaction to the French Enlightenment in general and its strictly political and judicial definition of the nation in particular, its “aridity,” was in his view not only legitimate but also a salutary antidote to Western culture. In this way, one returned to the starting point, to Rousseau, Voltaire, and Helvétius, the founders of totalitarianism, to Plato guilty of “monism,” to Condorcet, to the frightfulness of positive liberty, responsible for the degeneration of the spirit of liberty that ended in Stalinism. It was the “faith in universal truth” that provoked the worst massacres in human history, Berlin assured the generation of the Second World War, and not the cult of ethnocentrism, of cultural and ethnic particularism, the view of society as a living organism and not a community of citizens. For him, it was the Franco-Kantian Enlightenment and not the war on universal values, reaching its climax in fascism, that bore sole responsibility for the disasters of our time.

Epilogue

On the last page of *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville condemned “the false and despicable doctrines” that claim that “peoples here on earth are never their own masters and necessarily submit to heaven knows what insurmountable and unintelligent forces resulting from former events, race, soil or climate.” Such doctrines, he said, “can never produce anything except weak men and irresolute nations.” Twenty years after his memorable voyage to America, in a letter to Gobineau written twelve months before the publication, in 1853, of the first two volumes of the *The Inequality of the Human Races*, Tocqueville took up the same theme from a different angle. He told his protégé about a book he had read on Georges-Louis Leclerc de Buffon by Pierre-Jean-Marie Flourens: “Buffon and Flourens believe in a diversity of races but in the unity of the human species. . . . The human varieties are produced by three secondary and external causes: *climate, food, and way of life*.”¹ According to Tocqueville, who at that time was engaged in his work on the French Revolution, this was the view of the men of the eighteenth century. It was also his own.

A century later, Hannah Arendt also understood the immense harm that could result from a systematic war on the rights of man and the French Revolution. She found in Burke both an expression of English nationalism and the source of English racial ideas. She knew that in opposing the “rights of Englishmen” based on their “entailed inheritance” to the rights of man, Burke had

taken a decisive step: "The concept of inheritance, applied to the very nature of liberty, has been the ideological basis from which English nationalism received its curious touch of race-feeling ever since the French Revolution. Formulated by a middle-class writer, it signified the direct acceptance of the feudal concept of liberty as the sum total of privileges inherited with title and land." She observed that, without touching the privileges of a particular social class, Burke was able to extend this principle of privilege to the people as a whole, so that the English became a kind of world aristocracy. In the 1920s, Carl Schmitt also claimed that one could find in Burke all the arguments of the German school of law of the beginning of the nineteenth century, and one does in fact find there the legal-political framework of German nationalism. Burke was particularly eager to defend a national reality that was above the individual and independent of the will of any single person. Schmitt pointed out that he was not the first to ascribe a special character to each people. Montesquieu, Vico, and Bossuet had already done so, and the idea was not foreign to Nicolas Malebranche, Descartes, or Jean Bodin either. But the great innovation of the turn of the nineteenth century was this: "Now the people becomes the objective reality; historical development, however, which produces the *Volksgeist*, becomes the superhuman creator."² Indeed, Burke's contribution to the growth of national sentiment among the masses has been greatly underestimated, and he deserves to be ranked next to Herder among the intellectual founders of organic nationalism.

It is to Arendt herself, however, that we owe one of the errors of perspective that still today tend to confuse our vision. The success of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* was due not only to the intrinsic qualities of the work but also to the fact that the author, like Talmon and Berlin, was addressing a large educated public immersed in the cold war. During those years of reflection on the Nazi barbarism, and at a time when the hideous face of Stalinism was being revealed, there was a great temptation to seek the source of the evil in the intellectual origins of the modern world. Suddenly, it was modernity itself that was questioned, and thus the blame was laid on the French Revolution and the rights of man. Arendt was in effect returning to the concept of "the rights of Englishmen," but this time she said that "the pragmatic soundness of Burke's concept seems to be beyond doubt in the light of our manifold experiences. Not only did loss of national rights in all instances entail the loss of human rights; the restoration of human rights, as the recent example of the State of Israel proves, has been achieved so far only through the restoration or the establishment of national rights."³

If Arendt had meant by this that in our world force is the sole guarantee of rights and the individual has to be protected by the power of an organized national community, she would simply have been stating a universally recog-

nized truth. But that was not what she was saying, and what she did say was far from the realities of the twentieth century. “The survivors of the extermination camps . . .,” she wrote, “could see without Burke’s arguments that the abstract nakedness of being nothing but human was their greatest danger. Because of it they were regarded as savages and, afraid that they might end by being considered beasts, they insisted on their nationality, the last sign of their former citizenship, as their only remaining and recognized tie with humanity.”⁴ Here, Arendt was obviously thinking primarily of the Jews, for the non-Jews, Polish, Russian, or French, were killed without having lost their nationality. But it was not as human beings that the Jews were taken to the death camps but on the contrary as members of a well-defined group, and they were exterminated not as human beings stripped of their nationality but on the contrary because they belonged to what their murderers considered the strongest type of community — racial community. They were the victims not of their abstract humanity but of their very concrete identity as members of an accursed species.

Here, Arendt went one step further. According to her, Burke was already afraid that the principle of natural and inalienable rights — that is, abstract rights — in confirming “the right of the naked savage” (or, in other words, in basing itself on the prepolitical rights so detested by all the enemies of the Enlightenment), would reduce all the civilized peoples to the state of savages. She said that since only savages have nothing but their quality of being human, men cling to their nationality. Burke’s argument, she thought, has an even more weighty significance when one considers the human condition of those who were excluded from their political communities. Having lost all the elements of existence that belong to one’s membership of society, these people had lost all genuine rights and could be treated as nonhumans.⁵

This argument is surprising, since Hobbes and Locke, Rousseau, Montesquieu and Voltaire, and the French revolutionaries who drafted the Declaration of the Rights of Man did not believe that human beings were defined by their membership in a national community. Moreover, they thought that a savage had the same rights as a European. The Jews were not exterminated because, deprived of their citizenship, all that was left to them was their quality of being human, they were exterminated precisely because this quality was denied, because the idea of a human nature common to all people, the idea of natural rights valid for all and in all periods had disappeared in the course of the long fight against the Enlightenment. For, in the final analysis, who bears the intellectual responsibility for the European catastrophe of the twentieth century? Is it those who, throughout the eighteenth century, from 1689 to 1789, spoke of natural law, of the unity of the human species, of universal rights, of “the abstract nakedness of being human” so much decried by Arendt, or is it those who denied the existence of universal values?

The Jews were persecuted not as human beings bereft of political identity but precisely because they were victims of a fragmentation of the human race into ethnic, historical, and cultural groups to a degree previously unknown. They were massacred as members of a well-defined group, seen as ethnic by some and racial by others, in accordance with the hereditary criteria celebrated by Burke and extolled by Herder as the sole source of dignity, the sole source of security, being the only form of definition that possessed an existential character. For the children, the grandchildren, or the great-grandchildren of a Jew, there was no escape from their heredity. The same applied to other massacres: if the world saw nothing sacred in “the abstract nakedness of being human,” neither did it see anything sacred in the concrete identity of the Armenian, the Polish intellectual, or, closer to our time, the Bosnian or the Albanian.

Before closing the circle with Burke’s neoconservative posterity, we must return to the little book by Carl Becker I have already mentioned, which also, like Lovejoy’s book, resulted from a series of lectures given in 1931, but this time at Yale, where Ernst Cassirer settled a few years later, and where his influence was felt for a long time. Elected that year to the presidency of the American Historical Association, Becker gave an address entitled “Every Man His Own Historian,” which was to become a milestone in American intellectual history. On the twenty-fifth anniversary of the appearance of Becker’s *Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*, a symposium comprising a group of distinguished scholars testified to the importance ascribed to the book.⁶ Extremely provocative, soon to become familiar to anyone interested in the eighteenth century and foster mother of the twentieth-century totalitarian school, this work could not fail to strike the imagination. Becker rejected the idea, generally accepted in his time, that the eighteenth century, essentially modern, was the true source of the twentieth-century “climate of opinion.”⁷ According to him, the eighteenth century was infinitely closer to the believing thirteenth century than to the liberal twentieth century, for the philosophes were far less emancipated from the Christian thought of the Middle Ages than they thought or than posterity imagines. According to Becker, they only destroyed Saint Augustine’s Heavenly City in order to reconstruct it with more up-to-date materials. The posterity of Becker’s book was worthy of its ancestry, and twenty years before the “totalitarian school” of the cold war, one found in it the idea that “in the Communist Manifesto, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels sounded the battle-cry of a new social religion. Like the eighteenth-century religion of humanity, the communist faith was founded on the laws of nature as revealed by science.”⁸

At the very moment when Becker was launching his missile, Cassirer published his *Philosophy of the Enlightenment*. A follower of Kant and a Jew in

Germany on the point of being overtaken by the Nazi dictatorship, Cassirer had confronted Heidegger a few years earlier in a face-to-face meeting that became and has remained famous.⁹ The ostensible subject of the celebrated encounter in Davos in 1929, in the presence of two hundred academicians and students from the whole of Europe, was Kant, but in reality it was the fate of Europe that was under discussion. The European intellectual crisis that had developed from the end of the nineteenth century and had become increasingly dramatic, had reached its point of culmination. In confrontation with Heidegger, Cassirer took on the defense of rationalism and universal values. A few years later, in May 1935, in a lecture given to the *Kulturbund* in Vienna, Edmund Husserl, who, since Hitler's rise to power, had kept silent in order not to harm the Jewish community, issued a final warning: "Europe's existential crisis . . . attested by innumerable symptoms of mortal danger, is not a mysterious fate, an incomprehensible occurrence." The crisis was not caused by "the essence of rationalism itself, but only by its alienation, the fact that it has become immersed in naturalism and objectivism." In the face of the irrationalism of the circles around Heidegger, Husserl stated without hesitation: "I too am certain that the European crisis has its roots in the deviations of rationalism, but that does not justify saying that rationality is bad in itself, or that it is of secondary importance in human existence as a whole."¹⁰

In Europe as a whole, and especially in Germany, it was not a time for intellectual acrobatics. The war for or against the Enlightenment suddenly assumed a significance it had not had since the time of Burke, Thomas Paine, and the abbé Sieyès. The difference between *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers* and *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* corresponded to the gulf that existed between the campus in New England and the camp of Dachau, opened precisely at the moment when Becker's book began to be widely discussed in the American universities. The "inauguration" of the first Nazi concentration camp also coincided with the William James Lectures given at Harvard by Arthur O. Lovejoy. For Cassirer, who took refuge at Oxford before coming to Yale in 1941, and for Husserl, who before his death in 1938 had already seen his pupil Heidegger turn his back on him and side with Nazism, the world had collapsed. For them, it was not a matter of finding out if the eighteenth century was nearer the thirteenth or the twentieth, but a matter of if, in abandoning the heritage of the Enlightenment, the twentieth century was not sinking into barbarism. Like so many others, Cassirer did not wish to give way to despair: "The age which venerated reason and science as man's highest faculty cannot and must not be lost even for us," he wrote in his preface to *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*.¹¹ To Cassirer, the eighteenth century was the age that had magnificently asserted men's confidence in themselves. To

support the power of reason, practical, scientific reason, to urge his contemporaries to draw their moral energy from the “age of reason,” seemed to him, on the eve of the Nazi seizure of power, to be the last remaining hope.

At Yale, in 1944–1945, Cassirer embarked on his last work, as it turned out, *The Myth of the State*. In 1944, he had published his *Essay on Man*, in which he gave an idea of his political anthropology, based on the three great volumes of his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. The theme of the work was the search for self-knowledge through the study of history in order to achieve a better understanding of modern man. But in those war years, something more was needed: *The Myth of the State* was conceived in the last year of the war and published after the writer’s death. In many ways, this circumstantial work reads like an appendix to *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, but as often happens in the case of circumstantial works, it has still not lost any of its interest.¹²

For Cassirer, as for all the intellectual heirs of the Franco-Kantian eighteenth century, the Enlightenment represented the beginning of modernity. *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* was really a response to the long campaign against the principles of the Enlightenment which had reached its height in Europe and which was nothing new for any observer of intellectual developments. In writing it, Cassirer was also, without knowing it, replying in advance to Becker, with whom he could not have been acquainted at the time, and whom he continued to proudly ignore ten years later when he had read him. The German philosopher stressed the novelty and originality of the Enlightenment, the rupture created by a world that had turned away from the great seventeenth-century metaphysical systems, the enormous difference that existed between the medieval law of nature and the modern, individualistic concept of natural law. In a fascinating chapter entitled “The Conquest of the Historical World,” Cassirer showed how the philosophy of history of the Enlightenment grew out of a revolt against the traditional conception of history. He supported his argument with Lessing, who was the greatest adversary and most penetrating critic Voltaire had in the eighteenth century, but who was nevertheless magnificently appreciative of Voltaire’s historical work. The noblest study of mankind is man, said Lessing at the beginning of his review of *Essay on the Manners*, but “there are two approaches to this study”: “Either one considers man in particular or in general. Of the first approach one can hardly say it is the noblest pursuit of man. What is it to know man in particular? It is to know fools and scoundrels. . . . The case is quite different with the study of man in general. Here he exhibits greatness and his divine origin. Consider what enterprises man accomplishes, how he daily extends the limits of his understanding, what wisdom prevails in his laws, what ambition in-

spires his monuments. . . . No writer has yet selected this subject as his special theme, so that the present author can rightly boast 'I was the first to take free steps through empty space' (*libera per vacuum posui vestigia princeps*)."¹³

The great enemies of the Enlightenment were not mistaken: it is enough to compare the view of man of Rousseau, Voltaire, Fontenelle, and Lessing with that of Burke, Herder, Taine, de Maistre, and Spengler to see the gulf that existed between the Enlightenment and its enemies. Man had to have this noble image of himself in order to dare to accomplish what he did in 1789. For the first theoreticians of the Anti-Enlightenment, it was ideas that had shattered a way of life and a social order created by a thousand-year-old history, things that were held to be in the nature of things; and it was ideas that, in jettisoning the principles of good and evil, were on the point of destroying Christian Europe. Consequently nothing, not even the war against the Jacobins, was more urgent than to set up an ideological corpus that could serve to rescue Europe from the liberal and democratic decadence represented by Locke's *Second Treatise*, Rousseau's *Second Discourse*, Voltaire, Kant, Fontenelle, and Condorcet. Burke's *Reflections* and de Maistre's *Considerations* were conceived by their authors not as commentaries on the events taking place in Paris or on the battlefields of northern France but as weapons of war against the ideas of the philosophes. The same was true throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: we must at all costs put the eighteenth century, Voltaire, Rousseau, and the French Revolution behind us!

Saving the world from liberal decadence is still the goal that neoconservatism has set itself in the early twenty-first century. In the nineteenth century, before the arrival of Maurras, it is probably in Renan that one can best discern the intellectual infrastructure of this defense of civilization that the American intellectual Right has now adopted. Indeed, Renan's idea of liberty had very little in common with Tocqueville's, and his idea of the state, which was the representative of the elites rather than the minimalist state in the manner of Guizot, was as far from the state-on-a-low-burner as it was from the democratic state. When Renan called for less government and more liberty, it was in order to counteract democracy and the sovereignty of the people and to forestall the disastrous effects of universal suffrage. He did not like America, but freedom to choose one's occupation, free competition, the free use of property, the possibility of enriching oneself in accordance with one's capacities, seemed to him the best means of blocking the progress of European democracy.¹⁴ Supported by a strong state, this form of liberty might save whatever had not yet been submerged by democracy. He said that in the final analysis, "the mistake of the French liberal party is not understanding that every political construction must have a conservative basis."¹⁵ In our time, this idea has been taken up with the same conviction by the neoconservatives.

However, there is nevertheless a difference: neoconservatism can no longer claim that “the sovereignty of the people cannot be a foundation for constitutional government.” Renan, like Burke, could still see an extremely limited political participation as an essential precondition for elitist liberalism as he understood it. He had high praise for Britain, “which did not pride itself on any philosophy,” which was able to ensure continuity, which had broken with its tradition only “in a passing moment of aberration followed by a swift repentance,” and which ended up “a thousand times freer than France.” France, which had set up “the philosophical flag of the rights of man,” saw a political structure emerge from the revolution that could only give rise to the National Convention—synonymous with democratic despotism—or one-man dictatorship. The first years of Napoleon’s rule—the consulate—and then the empire were the natural consequence.¹⁶ The desire for equality had similar results: in seeking to create “a just state, one does not see that one destroys liberty, that one is making a social revolution and not a political revolution, that one is laying the basis for a despotism similar to that of the Caesars of ancient Rome.”¹⁷ These ideas, with the exception of that of the rejection of universal suffrage, reappeared almost word for word among the generation of the cold war, as well as fifty years later in the first years of the present century.

Indeed, even now, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, it is still Burke’s *Reflections* that, after constituting the birth certificate of neoconservatism, make it the only ideology in the Western world today that can claim to have a comprehensive view of society and the nation. Thus, in a work published in 2004, the high priestess of American neoconservatism, Gertrude Himmelfarb, opposed the beneficial American and British Enlightenments to the French Enlightenment, which she held to be destructive of morality and society. Like Conor Cruise O’Brien, she saw Burke as a child of the British Enlightenment, in the same way as Thomas Paine. This cult of the “great ancestor” is of very great importance to the neoconservatives, who, to this day, have produced nothing that even bears comparison with Burke’s *Reflections*. Other thinkers, conservatives like Michael Oakeshott, are too liberal, too secular, too open, to provide their movement with an intellectual infrastructure. The same applies to the great names of the nineteenth century: Tocqueville, an enlightened liberal and admirer of the rationalist French eighteenth century, or John Stuart Mill, who at the end of his life drew near to socialism, could not have provided fuel for the neoconservative movement. Himmelfarb said that she deeply regretted that Burke never made a comparison between the American Revolution, which was solely political, and the French Revolution, which, as nobody understood better than he did, was a moral revolution, a total revolution touching all aspects of human life.¹⁸ Thus, neoconservatism

pursues the line of thought initiated by Burke, who knew how to dissociate the Glorious Revolution from the French Revolution, but it regrets that Burke himself, for some mysterious reason that Himmelfarb could not explain, stopped halfway and did not provide an analysis of the American Revolution. She did not see that if Burke had embarked on such an undertaking, he would have been forced to recognize the strong affinities between the American Revolution and the French one and would by that very fact have legitimated the whole revolutionary process of his time. And that is why, from the time the colonies gained independence, from the time of their Declaration of Independence, Burke, fearing to shatter the entire structure, acted as if America had disappeared from the face of the earth. For, as we have seen at length in this book, the concept of natural rights, the sovereignty of the people, male franchise from which blacks were excluded, but which, even as it was, nevertheless represented tremendous progress for the period, all this, and the whole power structure in America, was profoundly repugnant to Burke. For that reason, for that whole tradition, from the most intelligent of his first disciples to the neoconservatives of today, Burke's silence on the question has been an obstacle that had to be overcome as soon as possible. John Quincy Adams and Friedrich Gentz set to work from the first years of the nineteenth century to emphasize the special diabolic character of the French Revolution and to set an unbridgeable distance between the American Declaration of Independence and the French Declarations of the Rights of Man.

Himmelfarb's role in the development of neoconservative thought can scarcely be overestimated. From *Victorian Minds*, a collection of essays on the moral sense of the nineteenth-century British elites, published in 1968 and republished in 1995 but beginning with an essay on Burke written in 1949, to *Poverty and Compassion: The Moral Imagination of the Late Victorians*, another work on much the same theme published in 1991, and to her offensive of 2004, Himmelfarb has made every effort to provide neoconservatism with a solid conceptual framework. The core of her exposition, which now spreads over half a century, is the idea that the chief problems that men have to face are always of a moral and cultural kind.

Here it should be made quite clear that neoconservatism is not a purely American phenomenon; the battle for cultural hegemony in France can sometimes be no less ferocious. In the last quarter of the twentieth century, this confrontation centered particularly around the place of the French Revolution in modern history. To put an end to the French Revolution — that is to say, to abandon its heritage — after dissociating it from the American Revolution and from the Glorious Revolution, was in the final years of the twentieth century the major objective of the type of French liberal conservatism closest to Ameri-

can neoconservatism. "The French Revolution is over," is the title of the first part of François Furet's *Interpreting the French Revolution*, originally published in 1978. In his long struggle against Marxist historiography and against his own communist past, Furet supported his argument with Tocqueville, or rather one aspect of Tocqueville, in putting forward his two major criticisms of the French Revolution: first, that it could not have been the mainspring of liberty, because, as a continuation of the Old Regime in its affirmation of the power of the state, it merely continued its work of destroying the basis of liberty. Second, in seeing itself as "an absolute chronological break in the history of France," the revolution gave birth to "the ideology of a radical break with the past, a tremendous cultural drive for equality." Consequently, the Terror of 1792–1793 was not, according to Furet, the product of circumstances but "an integral part of revolutionary ideology."¹⁹ In fact, it is the spirit of Taine and Renan rather than that of Tocqueville that readers of this book will recognize in Furet. Taine, as we saw in chapter 4, compared America favorably not only to the French Revolution as a whole but also to the very first steps of revolutionary France.²⁰ For Renan, France was the only country that had a revolution that set it "on a path full of peculiarities," following which, after shedding rivers of blood, it was still far from reaching the intended goal: a just, human, honest society. This goal had almost been reached by Britain, which did not progress by means of revolutions.²¹ A century after Renan, Furet thus arrives at a conclusion that will no longer be surprising: "Modern France was special not because it had gone from an absolute monarchy to a representative regime or from a world of noble privilege to a bourgeois society. After all, the rest of Europe went through the same process without a revolution and without Jacobins, even though events in France may have hastened that evolution here and there and spawned some imitators. What sets the French Revolution apart is that it was not a transition but a beginning and a haunting vision of that beginning. Its historical importance lies in the one trait that was unique to it, especially since this 'unique' trait was to become universal: it was the first experiment with democracy."²²

This is for Furet the main point, and what this amounts to is that this first experiment was both unfortunate, because dependent on the Terror and Jacobinism, and, seen in comparison with the rest of Europe, unnecessary. The violent ideological break with the past, with religion, the idea of the beginning of a new dispensation, was held to be the source of all the trouble: from Burke, de Maistre, Taine and his bloodthirsty Jacobin, Renan and the idea of "terrorist democracy" to "totalitarian democracy" and the liberalism of the cold war, the critics of the French Revolution never said anything else. Thus, one arrives at the idea of the French exception. According to Furet, "the history of the

Revolution between 1789 and 1794, in its period of development, can therefore be seen as the rapid drift from a compromise with the principle of representation toward the unconditional triumph of rule by opinion.”²³ Furet is thus in agreement with the conservative interpretation of the revolution from Burke, Gentz, and Rehberg to Himmelfarb, which denies the existence of the common denominator of the three revolutions—the Glorious, the American, and the French—which is their radical novelty. Finally, what has come to be generally accepted, Éric Vigne recently wrote, is the “exceptionality” of the French Revolution, which did not take the path of the American one. In a brilliant work devoted to the French publishing trade and the relationship between the written word and the media, or in other words the problem of selling the products of intellectual work, Vigne showed how Furet’s presence in the media has allowed the idea of the “French exception” to be “sold” to the public at large. According to this, the American Revolution was the great historical point of reference for most of the democratic countries.²⁴ That this idea, although simple and easy to assimilate, is quite simply wrong, as we have seen in this book, makes no difference. From his works on the French Revolution to his latest work, *The Passing of an Illusion*, Furet created a variant of neoconservatism that the France of the end of the twentieth century was well prepared to accept: the battle for cultural hegemony resulted in a defeat for any idea in any way related to Marxism.

In this continuous battle for cultural hegemony, neoconservatism takes three main lessons from Burke.²⁵ First, there is the idea that a civilized society can only survive on the basis of cultural capital accumulated by all the generations preceding one’s own, which means that liberty and all liberal values can only survive if tempered by the antiliberal values that have come down to us and are an integral and indestructible part of our heritage. From this follows the second lesson, according to which any attempt at significantly improving life means no less than a revolutionary or utopian change of the social order, and must end in disaster. Third, there is the idea that since moral values are essential to the life of a well-ordered society, they have precedence over material, utilitarian values, which depend on the will of the individual. This is an idea which Himmelfarb gained from her work on the Victorian era, and which the neoconservatives never tire of putting forward. In *Poverty and Compassion*, she claims that when one helps the poor and the unfortunate one is really acting through egoism and in order to give oneself a good conscience. Generally, in order to do good one has to be capable of doing evil: one must be able to overcome one’s instinctive inclination to compassion, for that is the true interest of those one wishes to serve. It is with this profession of faith that one of the most popular manifestos of neoconservatism, *The Neocon Reader*,

begins. It is here, also, that one learns that the concept of “compassionate conservatism” that George W. Bush made the theoretical foundation of his social policies comes from the title of Himmelfarb’s work.²⁶

Throughout this collection one finds, with variations of style and temperament, the few leading principles of this ideology. First of all, there is the classical Burkian critique of utopianism, the defense of the so-called Anglo-American tradition against the French tradition, the critique of egalitarianism, and an assertion of the importance of religion in the life of society and of the centrality of traditional moral values. And together with all this, there is a rejection of what is called the liberal “counterculture,” which is held to be opposed to traditional “American values.” Nationalism, which admires American power, also takes the form of an out-and-out war against international organizations (especially the United Nations, which endangers national sovereignty), against the dismantling of the nation-state within the framework of the European Union, and against the progressive disappearance of national characteristics.²⁷ Here one can easily recognize practically all the major themes of Anti-Enlightenment thought from Burke to the mid-twentieth century.

It was once again the authority of Burke that was invoked by Irving Kristol in a 1973 essay in which he made a new attack against the aggressive rationalism of the intellectual elite in revolt against the instinctive feelings of the mass of the people. This is the basis on which the neoconservative rise to power began more than thirty years ago. One heard the same complaint from Herder, speaking in the name of the true Germany in the face of the Frenchified court of Frederick the Great, and from Barrès, who in the Dreyfus Affair claimed to express the authentic voice of the people, uncorrupted by rationalism, the Kantian republican education, or the Sorbonne professors in revolt against the deep instincts of their national community in the name of the categorical imperative. Kristol thought that in the twentieth century this exasperated instinctive rebellion against the tyranny of a “radical utopian rationalism” gave rise to fascism.²⁸ This is not very far from a certain legitimization of fascism, and it recalls Ernst Nolte’s position: Was not Nazism simply a sharp reaction to an existential danger created by Bolshevism?

Thirty years later, in the flush of the American neoconservative victories of the turn of our century, Kristol drew up a balance sheet and at the same time looked toward the future. On August 25, 2003, in the *Weekly Standard*, Irving Kristol published an article/manifesto entitled “The Neo-conservative Persuasion.” This manifesto took up the arguments of a series of articles brought together in 1995 but published throughout the second half of the twentieth century. The thing that, without being a surprise, is most fascinating about this document is the fact that, apart from the question of universal suffrage, this

text could equally well have been written by Burke, Renan, Taine, Maurras, or the Croce of the first quarter of the twentieth century. It could have been written by any of the critics of the Enlightenment of the turn of the twentieth century who, like Barrès, had not only finally resigned themselves to democracy but also learned to use it. When one takes into account that twentieth-century Europe, like the United States of the years after the year 2000, provides the proof that universal suffrage ensures neither equality nor justice, and that democracy alone is very far from being able, as was thought in the past, automatically to guarantee a respect for human rights or the survival of basic liberal values, the war against the Enlightenment being waged today differs less than might seem at first sight from the great campaigns of the turn of the twentieth century.

That is why, despite Kristol's opinion, the phenomenon known today as neoconservatism is not uniquely American, even if, according to him, secular, permissive, "materialistic" Europe has not yet reached the higher level of neoconservatism. In a text written in 1995, Kristol explained the difference between neoconservatism and conservatism. He did this specifically by setting his own ideas against a fine text by Michael Oakeshott dating from 1956, which Kristol, as coeditor of the monthly *Encounter*, had refused to publish because it was opposed to the ideas which had begun to take root in him and which later developed into a theory.²⁹ Oakeshott claimed that conservatism was neither a faith nor a body of doctrine but a certain way of seeing things, an inclination, a mood, a temperament, or a state of mind. The term used by Oakeshott was "disposition." The conservative prefers to leave things as they are rather than to take chances, but he accepts change, as it is inevitable. Where authority and the form of government are concerned, conservatism does not wish to change the world or make men better or happier; it does not regard government as a means to impose on men beliefs other than those they profess, to educate them and make them perceive truths, or galvanize and mobilize them for great actions and great schemes. A government's sole *raison d'être* is to govern: "This is a specific and limited activity, easily corrupted when it is combined with any other. . . . The image of the ruler is the umpire whose business is to administer the rules of the game, or the chairman who governs the debate according to known rules but does not himself participate in it."³⁰

This profession of faith is that of an enlightened and moderate conservative who summarized his thought when the great leap forward of the postwar social reforms was already an accomplished fact. It is in effect very much a conservatism in the style of Tocqueville that is expressed here, and one that depends neither on the divine order, nor on religion, nor on bourgeois moral-

ity. This conservatism does not attempt to undo the reforms that have been made, unlike the dismantling Maurrasians in 1940, for whom the rescue of the country and of civilization required the immediate destruction of the hundred and fifty years of history between 1789 and the defeat of France, and like the American “neos” of our time where all prevailing liberal legislation is concerned. It will attempt to curb reforms but does not attack those that have been made, and it knows there will be others. This conservatism undoubtedly also appears to be a luxury of contented societies, but it is not a belligerent movement aimed against the liberal counterculture, it is not another revolution, and it is capable of facing the question that arises automatically: If the principle of leaving things as they are had been applied throughout the past two centuries, not to speak of earlier periods, what exactly would the world look like today?

But conservatism in the true sense of the word is repugnant to Kristol. The vision of a society without God, without metaphysics, made up of autonomous individuals who behave as adults, as Kant envisaged, and who make their own choices; free people with a great diversity of opinions, who ask the state to govern as little as possible: this, precisely, is a way of thinking that horrifies neoconservatives. First of all, there is the matter of religion. A society without religion is a “thin gruel,” without connection to the past, with no links to the future, and ill suited to the present. Without its religious dimension, conservatism lacks consistency and body. Thus religion is an incomparable source of social health, a barrier against permissive liberal culture. That is what Kristol said, as did Carlyle, Renan, Taine, Croce, Sorel, and Maurras. It is not enough to say, like Oakeshott, that the world as it exists is the best one possible, or that the evils it contains are necessary evils: one must know what course of action to take against these evils. The conclusion is self-evident: philosophy is not enough to enlighten us; only religion can keep us on a straight path.³¹

The second reason why American neoconservatism opposes conservatism as such is the ardent patriotism of the former, a patriotism that is expressed in daily life in the United States as in no other Western democracy. Kristol recognizes that an enlightened European, seeing these demonstrations of patriotism that would seem infantile to others—the recital of the “Pledge of Allegiance” by all schoolchildren every morning, for instance, or the singing of the national anthem at the beginning of all sporting events, whether amateur or professional—would see America as a premodern country. “Perhaps so,” he comments. “Or perhaps we are a postmodern country.” This quasi-religious patriotic fervor means that there is no tension in the United States between religion and the “civic religion,” and if the ordinary American hated commu-

nism, it was first of all because Soviet Russia had the image of a world that was “atheistic and godless,” and hence doomed to disappear. If the fall of communism surprised the experts, it was eminently foreseeable to the American citizens. That is why conservatism in America is a popular movement and not a current within a political party: in effect, it is a real “populist conservatism.”³²

However, the most characteristic trait of neoconservatism, according to Kristol, is the fact that its declared enemy is not statism or socialism (the neoconservatives have never adopted Friedrich A. Von Hayek and his famous *Road to Serfdom* as their own, and they regard the thought of Herbert Spencer as off-center) but contemporary liberalism. As Kristol sees it, the glory of neoconservatism is to have created a vast current of popular feeling, not only against the welfare state or against egalitarianism but against the very principles of liberalism. Neoconservatism has succeeded in convincing the great majority of Americans that the main questions that concern a society are not economic, and that social questions are really moral questions. Modern secularism is associated with moral nihilism to such a degree that those who wish simply to assert their adherence to moral values have no choice: they have to anchor their beliefs in religion. That, says Kristol, is something that liberals fail to understand: they are sensitive to economic frustrations, but not to moral frustrations. That is why neoconservatives collaborate so easily with religious conservatives, and why together they have been able to create a populist conservatism: men have a need for the sacred, and they need to have something to obey.

Most of this has been said by Daniel Bell in his well-known *Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*. Religion “is the fulcrum of the book,” says Bell in his 1978 foreword. Like Durkheim, he sees religion as “the consciousness of society” — for him to say “that ‘God is dead’ is, in effect to say . . . that society is dead,” and he claims that “modernism” — what I call enlightened modernity — is “a cultural movement [that] trespassed religion and moved the centre of authority from the sacred to the profane.” This is the explanation of all the evils of our time: “The central point is . . . [that] the legitimation of social behaviour passed from religion to modernist culture,” and culture cannot provide “a comprehensive or transcendental set of ultimate meanings, or even satisfactions in daily life.” Finally, the erosion of the Protestant ethic — the heart of which is “saving or abstinence” — has produced an erosion of traditional American values and the emergence of the “new capitalism” and a hedonistic counterculture. The abandonment of the Protestant ethic has left capitalism with no moral or transcendental ethic.³³

Neoconservatism is thus distinguished from simple conservatism above all by its assertion that, for most people, the main questions in life are not eco-

nomic but moral. This idea, as I have demonstrated in my previous works, which has been central to all varieties of Anti-Enlightenment thought of the past hundred years, was the brilliant invention of the revolutionary Right of the beginning of the twentieth century. This new Right was able to play down economic problems and, by turning them into psychological questions, launch an unprecedented cultural, moral, and political revolution.

Here we must touch on the dual objective of the neoconservative interpretation of Burke: first, to limit the French Enlightenment to Voltaire and Rousseau, each of them anti-Christian in his own way; and second, to marginalize the French Enlightenment and expunge its character as an unparalleled movement for the liberation of man. As the neoconservatives see it, the Enlightenment becomes a kind of hold-all in which everything that in the eighteenth century was not in favor of absolutism is to be found. For Himmelfarb, who based herself on O'Brien on this point, the conflict between Burke and the French Enlightenment was not at all a confrontation between the Enlightenment and the Anti-Enlightenment but between one particular kind of Enlightenment and another.³⁴ As we saw earlier, when O'Brien's work on Burke appeared, he tried to persuade Berlin to recognize Burke as a liberal. Indeed, when Berlin's collection of essays *The Crooked Timber of Humanity* was published, O'Brien had only one reservation: he did not want there to be any ambiguity about Burke. Placed with his back to the wall by a conservative who asked him to draw the logical conclusions from the positions he had held all his life, Berlin equivocated. He could not easily accept that Burke, who detested Locke's idea of natural rights and the law of the majority he advocated, and who was afraid of Montesquieu's rationalism, could be a child of the Enlightenment whose criticism, according to O'Brien, was aimed solely at Voltaire and the encyclopédistes.³⁵

In the 1990s, when the cold war and the danger of communism were already things of the past, Berlin no longer had a view of the French Revolution that was as monolithic as his previous view of it. He could not help feeling a certain attraction for it: Was it not the French Revolution that liberated the Jews and other oppressed groups? It had some beneficial consequences in the long run, with the result that he could not help feeling a certain antipathy for the writer of the *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, and even wondered if Burke, with his rejection of the rights of man, would not have been a Pétainiste if he had lived in France in 1940. But, in the final analysis, he still remained "the admirable Burke," and Berlin was still convinced that the utopianism of the eighteenth century, which culminated in the French Revolution, was like many nineteenth-century rationalist doctrines, the cause of endless disasters. The noble ideas of the eighteenth century ended in blood, and "the

line” he said “that leads to Lenin, Stalin, Pol Pot, and Mao is still not finished.” From the beginning of the 1950s, Berlin had considered Lenin and Stalin to be the heirs of Rousseau. In the last decade of the twentieth century, Mao and Pol Pot were added to the list, which, one must remember, also included Mussolini and Hitler. That is why Berlin agreed to have his letters published at the end of the epilogue to O’Brien’s work, where O’Brien described the intellectual and methodological consequences of the French Revolution. The Marxists, he said, had different concepts, but in their character and style these new revolutionaries were faithful clones of their ancestors: the Terror was the foreseeable result of the revolution, a result commensurate with the greatness of the plans of reform. The communists were clearly the direct heirs of the Jacobins.³⁶

Here O’Brien’s position links up with that of Ernst Nolte. It is difficult to determine whether the author of *The Great Melody* knew the writings of the German historian, or the main lines of the debate among historians that stirred up not only Germany but the whole of continental Europe in the 1980s. If he did not, it hardly makes any difference: both O’Brien and right-wing German academic circles not only viewed the Soviet Revolution as the successor of the French Revolution but saw Nazism as merely an imitation of two aspects of the French and Russian revolutions. The first aspect was the audacity of the enterprise, and the second was the ferocity of the repression that was brought to bear on any resistance to its innovations. Similarly, the Third Reich was the most far-reaching attempt to reconstruct human society on the basis of a theory. Hitler was a legitimate descendant of the French Revolution, not in his ideas, but in his example, his ferocity, and his audacity.³⁷ Another writer claimed in 1995 that “Hitler . . . appears as a startlingly intelligent thinker” who “represented the continuation of an essentially Enlightenment style of thought.” A third writer, two years later, said that the Enlightenment laid the basis not only for Auschwitz and the gulags but also for the disasters of Rwanda and East Timor.³⁸

One could dismiss this kind of literature as being of little consequence if it were not for the dimensions this phenomenon of the rejection of the Enlightenment has taken on, and if it were not that it has been fueled by respectable conservatism. O’Brien and his friendly exchange with Berlin is a good example of this, and the cordial correspondence between Nolte and Furet is another. There can be no question here of making a comprehensive analysis of Nolte’s ideas. My critique of Nolte goes back thirty years. In 1976, in an essay on fascist ideology, I put the question: Does Nolte understand Nazism? Does he realize what Nazism was?³⁹ Since those far-off days, I have many times had occasion to answer this question in the negative. Today, I shall add a truly essential point that I did not perceive at the time, when I naïvely thought that

Nolte's idea was a simple mistake: an enormous mistake, but the legitimate mistake of a historian carried away by his phenomenological method. Now, however, I am convinced that Nolte's work forms part of a continuous attempt at a "historicization of Nazism," an elegant expression used to cover up a real intellectual fraud aiming to give Nazism a human character by making it a reflection of Stalinism or an act of legitimate defense against the communist threat. This attempt was especially well illustrated by the historians' controversy, the *Historikerstreit*, of the 1980s, and it is in the classical tradition of German historicism.⁴⁰

Indeed, Nolte's great objective has been that of the whole German "philosophy of history" from Herder to Meinecke: to restore to the Germans, particularly in difficult times, their confidence in themselves and their faith in their history. After Nazism, this meant explaining the European disaster not by the long war against the Franco-Kantian Enlightenment but by 1914 and 1917. According to Nolte, it was not the two centuries of the cult of Blood and Soil and the cult of German specificity in opposition to the decadent West, it was not the rejection of rationalism, natural law, and universal values that were responsible for the twentieth-century catastrophe, it was the First World War and the Soviet Revolution. It is not to the myth of the German, victim of Western arrogance, or to that of a young people to whom the future and the right to lead Europe belong, it is not to the launching of this cultural revolt by all generations of nationalists since Fichte made his call for rebellion in the capital of a defeated Prussia that we owe the years 1933–1945. No, where this professional historian is concerned, it is not cultural withdrawal and the idea of the self-sufficiency of cultures, that intellectual motive force of the process of German unity in the nineteenth century, it is not organic nationalism and ethnic particularism that explain the all-out war against democracy. It was not these manifestations of rebellion against the heritage of the Enlightenment, democracy, and the rights of man that caused the fall of the Weimar Republic, but the example of Lenin.

By making Nazism a reflection of communism and a legitimate response to the Bolshevik danger, by cutting it off from its ideological and cultural roots, by laying undue stress on the role of the Führer, Nazism could be virtually excised from the national history. One should also add the original idea we owe to Nolte that there was "'a rational core'" in "Nazi anti-Judaism."⁴¹ Thus, if communism, fascism, and Nazism were, one and all, merely products of the Great War, if communism preceded both fascism and Nazism chronologically, and if Mussolini and Hitler were simply vague imitators of Lenin, then the national history could be saved. Yet, if one surveys the history of Europe over the period of the past two centuries, can one say that fascism and

Nazism can reasonably be reduced to an imitation of Leninism? But on this important point, Furet is in agreement with Nolte, the literal and spiritual disciple of Heidegger and the direct heir of the Meinecke of the 1930s, the last link in the chain of German intellectuals whose whole career was a long struggle against the Franco-Kantian Enlightenment.

Undoubtedly, Germany was not predestined to produce Nazism any more than Italy had to produce fascism, but these two countries were the two weak links in the liberalism of the period. The Anti-Enlightenment, as this book has demonstrated, was a pan-European phenomenon, and the Enlightenment tradition was under attack in France just as it was in Germany and Italy. But there were two great differences with France. France had since the eighteenth century produced two antagonistic political traditions, and the Anti-Enlightenment tradition was held in check there by the tradition of the rights of man, whereas in Germany, from Herder to Spengler and Meinecke, and in Italy from Vico to Croce, the Enlightenment tradition did not succeed in holding its own and was largely a secondary tradition. In order to break forth, the Anti-Enlightenment potential only needed favorable conditions.⁴² France, victorious in 1918, escaped the disaster, but after its defeat in 1940 the Anti-Enlightenment tradition gained the upper hand. The oldest democracy of the European continent collapsed and gave way to a dictatorship that was not significantly different from the one in Italy.

The special characteristic of Nolte's vision of Nazism is that, in relation to the totalitarian school of the 1950s, it is not an interpretation but a veritable perversion of the history of the twentieth century. Here we go one step further: neither Aron, nor Talmon, nor Arendt had the idea of giving Stalinism the moral and historical responsibility for Nazism, or making the gulags responsible for Auschwitz. In this connection, it is worth going back just over forty years to Raymond Aron's *Democracy and Totalitarianism*. In this book, he put his finger on the essential point: "In order to measure the relative importance of the kinship and of the opposition we must not be content simply with comparative sociological analysis: the two other ways of understanding, history and ideology must be taken into account." Aron continues: "This is why passing from history to ideology, it can be taken as a starting point that between these two phenomena [communism and Nazism], the difference is essential, no matter what similarities there may be. The difference is essential because of the idea which inspires the two undertakings; in one case the final outcome is the labour camp and in the other it is the gas-chamber."⁴³

Furet's claim that "Mussolini, who like Lenin comes from an ultra-revolutionary socialism, can more easily imitate it in order to fight it" does not correspond to the ideological and political reality and does not stand up to

examination.⁴⁴ In the years before the war, Mussolini's thought developed within the framework of Sorelian revolutionary syndicalism, whose peculiarity was that it accepted capitalism and the idea of profit as the sole motive force of economic activity; but, true to the teachings of their master, its followers rejected the intellectual content of the Enlightenment and hence democracy. The Sorelian syndicalists, of whom Mussolini became the official leader in August 1914, supported by the mass of nationalists and futurists who in any case abhorred Marxism, offered no alternative to capitalism, nor did they seek any. This was fundamental to their thinking. Unlike the Bolsheviks, they did not believe that capitalism was the cause of the evils represented by the bourgeoisie or by social democracy, heir to liberal values and rooted in the Enlightenment. This in itself is sufficient to show that Mussolini could not have been a disciple of Lenin, and explains why, contrary to Furet's assertion, he broke with Marxism in 1912 and then devoted himself to preparing minds and weapons for a national, cultural, and moral but not social revolution. Not only did Mussolini not imitate Lenin, his revolution at the top that touched neither the economy nor the social structure was at the opposite pole from that of the Bolsheviks, as was the way he came to power supported by all the social elites, the progressive establishment of the dictatorship over a number of years, the function of the party, and the nature of the Italian regime.⁴⁵

Thus, at the beginning of the twentieth century, a comprehensive attack upon the essence of the Western rationalist and universalist tradition was coming to maturity. Fascism was an extreme expression of the Anti-Enlightenment tradition; Nazism was a total assault upon the human race. Here one sees the significance that the rejection of universal values and humanism, that cornerstone of Enlightenment thought, can have for a whole civilization. For the first time, Europe endowed itself with regimes and political movements whose aim was nothing less than the destruction of the culture of the Enlightenment, its principles and its intellectual and political structures.

Finally, we come to the question that underlies all forms, from the most moderate to the most extreme, of the rejection of the Enlightenment. Is the world in which we live the only possible one because it is the one that exists? If Furet takes it upon himself to defend Nolte with such determination, it is because he sees that Nolte's work has the enormous advantage of confirming the idea that the origin of the sickness that is eating away at modernity is to be found not in the particularism of blood and soil but in the universality of Marxist "utopianism." The fall of communism means the end not only of the history of communism but also of the idea of communism: that is, of "utopianism," or in other words the idea formed by the Enlightenment that a world other than ours is conceivable and desirable. The lesson drawn by Furet from

the history of the twentieth century is that “the idea of a *different* society has become almost impossible to conceive of, and no one in the world today is offering any advice on the subject or even trying to formulate a new concept.”⁴⁶ The term “illusion” that figures in the title of his work is fundamental to Furet: belief in the possibility of the existence of a system different to our own is itself an illusion. It is hard to see on what methodological premise, in a world that in the past hundred years has changed more profoundly than in any other period of modern history, this abdication of reason is based.

It is clear, however, that this is another way of celebrating the final and definitive victory of capitalism, assimilated to the “end of history.” Furet is really returning to a classical theme of both conservatism and neoconservatism, based on two ideas. One idea has been, from the 1970s onward, the central axis of the intellectual endeavor by Kristol and his friends to provide the Republican Party with an ideological platform. In 1973, Kristol urged his readers to look upon the world as it exists as their property, and to transcend the feeling of alienation that people can have toward their daily existence. He considered this world entirely capable of providing us with a life that permits us to realize our potential as human beings. It is up to us to create a world in which dreams complement reality instead of opposing it. In this way, we could launch “a reformation of modern utopianism” that would bring us to “a confident acceptance of reality.”⁴⁷

The other idea is the concept of the “end of history,” which the neoconservative Right owes to one of its outstanding figures, Francis Fukuyama, author of *The End of History and the Last Man*.⁴⁸ Nearly twenty years after Kristol, with the confidence he was given both by the fall of communism and by the political success of neoconservatism, Fukuyama had a far greater ambition. His book of 1992 took up the main ideas of his article “The End of History?” published in 1989 in *The National Interest*. Both the article and the book, each in its way, had a tremendous success. In the two years following the publication of the article, the American intellectual debate centered on Fukuyama’s thesis: basing himself on Hegel and Alexandre Kojève, Fukuyama created a conceptual framework that allowed him to assert the final victory of liberal democracy. The victory over hereditary monarchy, fascism, and communism, he said, could constitute “the end-point of mankind’s ideological evolution” and “the final form of human government,” and, if this is the case, this victory could mean “the end of history.”⁴⁹ One should remember that to the neoconservative mind liberal democracy is capitalistic, and an “end of history” of this kind implies the perpetuity of capitalism. The idea that capitalism can sustain both free regimes and the vilest tyrannies did not occur to the neoconservatives.

Here we must ask another question. If accepting the world as it exists is a universal principle that could prevent a return to barbarism, does that apply to all people at all times and in all places, or only to that small part of humankind that around the year 2000 lived in Western Europe, or that in the United States was not at the bottom of the social scale? Moreover, is there any methodological reason for thinking that the Stalinist barbarism is the only possible way of changing the structures of our society?

Thus we come back to the fundamental problem posed by the Quarrel of the Ancients and the Moderns with which this book began, to Locke's social contract, to Kant's autonomous individual, and, to use a Nietzsche-style idiom, to "man according to Rousseau." The principles set forth by these founders of the Enlightenment tradition were universal ones that gave men the right to build themselves a world other than their own in accordance with their needs and their idea of the political ideal. Whatever the differences between the great thinkers of the Enlightenment may have been, the common denominator of their respective outlooks was their rejection of what exists. The culture of the Enlightenment was a critical culture, and it did not regard any established order as legitimate simply because it existed. No established order is legitimate if it is unjust. Justice and happiness are legitimate values and valid objectives of political action, and should not be regarded as a subversion of freedom, for social justice and freedom are not conceptually opposed. Mankind is capable of moving forward as long as it relies on reason. It was not "belief in a universal truth" that caused the massacres of the twentieth century; it was not a desire to break away from the existing order or the idea of the right to happiness that motivated them but, on the contrary, an eruption of irrationality, the destruction of the idea of the unity of the human race and an absolute faith in the capacity of the political power to mold society. These were precisely the evils the Enlightenment fought against, and the Enlightenment, as Spengler and Sorel so rightly said, though in a spirit of disparagement, exists in every period. Progress may not be continuous, history may advance in zigzags, but that does not mean that humankind must trust to chance, submit to the regime of the hour, and accept social evils as if they were natural phenomena and not the result of an abdication of reason.

To prevent the people of the twenty-first century from sinking into a new ice age of resignation, the Enlightenment vision of the individual as creative of his or her present and hence of his or her future is irreplaceable.

Notes

Introduction

1. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Les Confessions* (Paris: Garnier, 1964), p. 480. Rousseau was at that time thinking of writing his *Institutions politiques*, a work, he said (p. 479), “that in my opinion should crown my reputation.” This book, of course, never appeared; David Hume, *Political Essays*, edited by Knud Haakonsen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), Essay 23, p. 186.

2. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All too Human, I: A Book for Free Spirits*, vol. 3 of *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. by Ernst Behler, trans. with an afterword by Gary Handwerk (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997): a statement by the author at the beginning of the original edition of *Human, All too Human* said it had been written in memory of Voltaire to mark the hundredth anniversary of his death on May 30, 1778. See also *Human, All too Human*, trans. by R. J. Hollingdale, intro. by Richard Schacht (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. xxi. However, this dedication was omitted in the second edition in 1886. In his postscript to his own edition of Nietzsche’s works (with Jacques Le Rider), dealing with “Nietzsche and French Civilization,” Jean Lacoste showed that if Nietzsche paid homage to Voltaire, it was only after he had done justice to Schopenhauer and after speaking of metaphysics and religious nihilism, for Nietzsche felt that Voltaire’s critique of religion was not sufficiently radical: see Nietzsche, *Oeuvres* (Paris: Lafont, 1993), p. 1339.

3. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “Discours sur l’origine de l’inégalité parmi les hommes,” in *Contrat social ou principes du droit politique* (Paris: Garnier, 1954), p. 48.

4. See Robert Wokler, “Isaiah Berlin’s Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment,”

in Joseph Mali and Robert Wokler (eds.), *Isaiah Berlin's Counter-Enlightenment* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 2003), pp. vii, 26. Wokler gives as the source the *Nachgelassene Fragmente* of the spring and summer of 1877 in *Nietzsche Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1967), vol. 4, part 2, p. 478, 22 [17]. Nietzsche wrote: “Es giebt kürzere und längere Bogen in der Culturentwicklung. Der Höhe der Aufklärung entspricht die Höhe der Gegen-Aufklärung in Schopenhauer und Wagner.”

5. Cf. William Barrett, *Irrational Man: A Study in Existential Philosophy* (New York: Doubleday, 1962), p. 274: “Existentialism is the Counter-Enlightenment come at last to philosophical expression.” Isaiah Berlin thought he might have invented the term in 1973: Wokler (see previous note) referred to Ramin Jahanbegloo, *Conversations with Isaiah Berlin* (London: Orion Books, 1993), pp. 69–70. This is what Berlin said: “I don’t know who invented the concept of ‘Counter-Enlightenment.’ Someone must have said it. Could it be myself? I should be somewhat surprised. Perhaps I did. I really have no idea”; Friedrich Nietzsche, *Oeuvres philosophiques*, vol. 3, *Humain, trop humain: Un livre pour esprits libres*, part 1, *Fragments posthumes* (1876–1878), trans. by Robert Rovini (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), pp. 437–438. The term “anti-philosophe” is found in 1751 in Abbé Allemand’s *Pensées antiphilosophiques* and in 1767 in Louis Mayeul Chaudon’s *Dictionnaire anti-philosophique*. The term is also to be found in 1747 in Diderot’s *Pensées philosophiques* and in Voltaire’s *Dictionnaire philosophique* in 1764. See Darrin M. McMahon, “The Real Counter-Enlightenment: The Case of France,” in Mali and Wokler (eds.), *Isaiah Berlin's Counter-Enlightenment*, p. 93.

6. One can gain a very good general idea of the writing on Enlightenment thought from the recent *Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Political Thought*, ed. by Mark Goldie and Robert Wokler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). This work has a bibliography of more than a hundred pages that contains all important primary and secondary sources. A fine collective work on a far smaller scale is that of Norman Geras and Robert Wokler (eds.), *The Enlightenment and Modernity* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000). Dorinda Outram, *The Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995, republished in 2005), examines the so-called evil consequences and “disruptive impact” of the Enlightenment. The work, written to be a textbook, contains chapters like “Enlightenment Thinking and Gender” and “The Enlightenment and the Exotic.” In general, this interesting work is indirectly inspired by the critique of Adorno and Horkheimer in their well-known *Dialectic of the Enlightenment* (New York: Continuum, 1987), as well as by Michel Foucault’s work. Published in 1944, the work of the two philosophers of the Frankfurt school was written under the immediate impact of the disaster that had overtaken Europe. The only explanation they could find at that time was that the whole of European culture bore the responsibility, and since Europe was the Enlightenment, the origin of the evil was necessarily to be found in the Aufklärung. The idea that it was precisely the Anti-Enlightenment tradition that was the cause never occurred to them. Outram’s Enlightenment is not mine, and Graeme Garrard’s Counter-Enlightenments in his *Counter-Enlightenments: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (London: Routledge, 2006) are not mine either. Garrard’s thought-provoking work, which appeared at the same time as my first French edition of this book, has a clearly defined objective: the deconstruction of the Enlightenment and the Anti-Enlightenment

into an infinite number of Enlightenments and Anti-Enlightenments. In its spirit as in its methodology, this work is at the opposite extreme from mine. Its approach is guided by the same logic as the deconstruction of liberalism, socialism, fascism, nationalism, and all the other “isms” into a limitless number of varieties and subcategories. Although previously adopted by Lovejoy, whom Garrard mentions, and who preferred to speak of “Romanticisms” rather than “Romanticism,” this is too easy a solution. In this way, one avoids the difficulties of a conceptualization that, although it can never cover all aspects, all forms of a phenomenon, is nevertheless indispensable as a tool of historical explanation. This convenient practice allows one to speak of “enlightened totalitarianism” without any critical assessment of the concept of “totalitarianism” or that of “Enlightenment,” and without questioning the authority of the liberals of the cold war. The discussion of religious faith in a chapter that ends with Chateaubriand fails to mention that, after the minor opponents of the eighteenth century, most of whom were men of the church, it was religion as a social discipline that interested the Anti-Enlightenment thinkers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and not metaphysics. Moreover, the nineteenth century, with the exception of Nietzsche, does not appear in Garrard, and from Nietzsche one moves on to totalitarianism, and then straight on to postmodernism. Finally, Garrard agrees with the disastrous assessment of the Enlightenment by John Gray, who like himself is also a liberal of the school of Isaiah Berlin: see the two works by Gray that are of interest to us here: *Enlightenment’s Wake: Politics and Culture at the Close of the Modern Age* (London: Routledge, 1995) and *Isaiah Berlin* (London: HarperCollins, 1995). In the final analysis, it is the idea of the Enlightenment conceived by Berlin at the time of the cold war, scarcely modernized or updated, that one finds in the works of Gray and Garrard. In this connection, one wonders why the term “totalitarianism” is used in the singular and not in the plural like “Enlightenments” and “Counter-Enlightenments.”

7. Mark Hulliung: *The Autocritique of Enlightenment: Rousseau and the Philosophes* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 242. See also Hulliung, “Rousseau, Voltaire and the Revenge of Pascal,” in Patrick Riley (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Rousseau* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 58 and 75. There is also a view that unhesitatingly makes Rousseau the unrivaled first figure of the Anti-Enlightenment: see Graeme Garrard, *Rousseau’s Counter-Enlightenment: A Republican Critique of the Philosophes* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003). This work is in many ways a response to Mark Hulliung. See also Garrard’s *Counter-Enlightenments*. Though interesting, these books cannot do the impossible and make Rousseau the supreme enemy of the Enlightenment. The approach of Wolfgang Pross, editor of the most recent edition of Herder’s *Werke*, is the opposite of Garrard’s. According to Pross, Rousseau was a great figure of the Enlightenment, but he shared this status with Herder and Vico, an assertion that has the effect of posing the question of the very meaning of the Enlightenment. See his chapter “Naturalism, Anthropology and Culture” in *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Political Thought*, pp. 218–222.

8. Judith N. Shklar, *Men and Citizens: A Study of Rousseau’s Social Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 217, and *Political Thought and Political Thinkers*, ed. by Stanley Hoffmann, foreword by George Kateb (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 290; Jean Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: La Transparence et l’obstacle suivi de sept essais sur Rousseau* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), p. 345. However,

it has been asked whether the idea of Rousseau as the philosopher of liberty is not an illusion. Was not the philosopher of the “general will” that of totalitarianism? We shall discuss this further later on, but to see the problematic nature of this idea, which derives especially from Hippolyte Taine and has had so great a success, and was not invented, as is often claimed, at the time of the cold war, one can consult the excellent collection of articles in *The Cambridge Companion to Rousseau*, and Timothy O’Hagan’s *Rousseau* (London: Routledge, 1999), which deals with the idea of the individual and the “general will” and hence totalitarianism in Rousseau. See also Julia Simon’s *Mass Enlightenment: Critical Studies in Rousseau and Diderot* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995). Influenced by Adorno and Horkheimer’s *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Julia Simon states that Rousseau’s “vision of utopia leads to social conformism, which I read as a form of totalitarian control” (p. 19). Later, Simon says in connection with Rousseau’s essays on Corsica and Poland that although “no direct parallels may be drawn either to Mussolini’s Italy, Hitler’s Germany, or Stalin’s Russia, Rousseau’s texts nonetheless exhibit an idealist concern with social disintegration and anarchy that prefigures a totalitarian concern” (p. 45). On p. 188, note 4, Simon tells us that Rousseau “attempts to engineer social cohesion in ways similar to those employed by twentieth-century fascist leaders, for similarly idealistic reasons.” This book, like many others exposing the same arguments, must be read in the light of the classic works on the subject in the second half of the twentieth century: especially Shklar, *Men and Citizens*; Robert Derathé, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau et la science politique de son temps* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1950), and Roger Masters, *The Political Philosophy of Rousseau* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968). On the problem of Rousseau as the founder of left-wing totalitarianism see Jacob L. Talmon, *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1952), where he is at least cleared of responsibility for fascism, and John W. Chapman’s reply, *Rousseau: Totalitarian or Liberal?* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956). On Talmon and the eighteenth century see two harsh criticisms: Alfred Cobban, *In Search of Humanity: The Role of the Enlightenment in Modern History* (New York: George Braziller, 1960), pp. 182–184, and Peter Gay, *The Party of Humanity: Essays in the French Enlightenment* (New York: Norton, 1971), first edition in 1964, pp. 279–286. An excellent article that is representative of the approach of an important school in the history of ideas regarding the “influence of the Enlightenment on the Revolution” and the idea that “the fault was Rousseau’s,” is Keith Michael Baker’s “On the Problem of the Ideological Origins of the French Revolution,” in Dominick LaCapra and Steven L. Kaplan (eds.), *Modern European Intellectual History: Reappraisals and New Perspectives* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), p. 205. Another good work dealing with this question is *Le Totalitarisme: Le XXe siècle en débat*, texts selected and edited by Enzo Traverso (Paris: Le Seuil, 2001). See also Abbot Gleason, *Totalitarianism: The Inner History of the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995). On the controversial question of totalitarianism, see Shlomo Avineri and Zeev Sternhell (eds.), *Europe’s Century of Discontent: The Legacies of Fascism, Nazism and Communism* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2003). This collection of articles is a reflection on the problem of why the deconstructionist process stops at totalitarianism and fails to take into account the enormous differences between Stalinism, Nazism, and fascism.

9. Hume, *Political Essays*, introduction, pp. xx–xxi.

10. Gentz had founded a journal in Berlin, *Historisches Journal*, in which in May 1800 he published his essay “The Origins and Principles of the American Revolution Compared With the Origins and Principles of the French Revolution”: Friedrich Gentz, *The French and American Revolutions Compared*, trans. by John Quincy Adams, intro. by Russell Kirk (Chicago: Gateway Editions, 1955). See especially pp. 55ff.

11. Russell Kirk, *The Conservative Mind, from Burke to Santayana* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1953), sixth reprinting in 1963, the most recent in 2001, and his *Edmund Burke: A Genius Reconsidered* (Wilmington, Del.: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 1997), first edition in 1967; Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The Roads to Modernity: The British, French and American Enlightenments* (New York: Knopf, 2004); Carl L. Becker, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), first edition in 1932. See Kirk’s introduction to Gentz, *The French and American Revolutions Compared*, pp. iii–xi. See also the negative criticisms made by Yehoshua Arieli, author of the admirable *Individualism and Nationalism in American Ideology* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964), p. 369, of another work by Becker, *The Declaration of Independence: A Study in the History of Political Ideas* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1922).

12. The idea of a revolution that was not French but Western was put forward in the 1950s by Jacques Godechot in *La Grande Nation*, 2 vols. (Paris: Aubier, 1956), and Robert Palmer in *The Age of the Democratic Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959). In another work, *La Contre-Révolution*, 2d ed. (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1984), Godechot considered in that light the disturbances, revolts, and revolutions of the end of the eighteenth century, from the revolution in Geneva in 1768 in which counterrevolutionaries had the *Contrat social* burned by the hangman in the city square to the rebellion of 1783–1787 in Holland and the one crushed in the Liège region in 1790. In all these cases, order was reestablished through foreign intervention. There were also disturbances in England in 1782–1784, and again in Geneva, where in 1782 the oligarchs called to their assistance troops from Berne, Zurich, the king of Sardinia, and the king of France; Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987), pp. 6–7: quoted from Hegel’s *Philosophy of History*. Cf. also pp. 1–50.

13. Zeev Sternhell, *La Droite révolutionnaire: Les origines françaises du fascisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), first edition in 1978.

14. Leo Strauss, “Relativism,” in Helmut Schoeck and James W. Wiggins (eds.), *Relativism and the Study of Man* (New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1961), pp. 136–139. On Strauss’s critique of Berlin’s relativism, see my chapter 8.

15. Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. by Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1985), p. 470.

16. Joseph L. Pappin III, “Edmund Burke’s Progeny: Recent Scholarship on Burke’s Political Philosophy,” *Political Science Reviewer*, vol. 35 (2000), p. 15. The book in question is Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire: A Study in Nineteenth-Century British Liberal Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999). See, for example, Gertrude Himmelfarb’s *Roads to Modernity* and her chapter on Burke in *The Moral Imagination: From Edmund Burke to Lionel Trilling* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2006); John Bolton, “The Prudent Irishman: Edmund Burke’s Realism,” *National Interest*, no. 50

(Winter 1997–1978), pp. 67–74. Himmelfarb's interest in Burke was evident from the end of the 1940s. It was with her and with Russell Kirk that there began the cult of Burke, who was transformed into the depository of all political wisdom. Her chapter on Burke in *Victorian Minds: A Study of Intellectuals in Crisis and Ideologies in Transition* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1995), pp. 3–31, is made up of two essays, the first of which was written in 1949 and the second twenty years later. It was the second that began the tendency to see Burke as a liberal or even a democrat; C. B. Macpherson, *Burke* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 74; Stephen White, *Edmund Burke: Modernity, Politics, and Aesthetics* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1994), quoted by Pappin, "Edmund Burke's Progeny," p. 40.

17. Seamus Deane, *Foreign Affections: Essays on Edmund Burke* (Cork: Cork University Press, 2005), and Luke Gibbons, *Edmund Burke and Ireland: Aesthetics, Politics and the Colonial Sublime* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

18. The term *historismus* appeared for the first time in Friedrich Schlegel in 1797, and from the beginning it took on a meaning close to that it would have later on. In 1857, a work on Vico saw the essence of the historicist outlook to be the idea examined above that men know no reality other than history. Throughout the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth there was a continued reflection on historicism, culminating in Meinecke. For the various meanings the concept has had and for its history, see Georg G. Iggers, "Historicism: The History and Meaning of the Term," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 56, no. 1 (1995), pp. 129–152. This article also provides an excellent bibliography.

19. Johann Gottfried Herder, "Do We Still Have a Fatherland?" in *Another Philosophy of History and Selected Political Writings*, trans. with intro. and notes by Iannis D. Evrigenis and Daniel Pellerin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2004), p. 107.

20. Georg G. Iggers, *The German Conception of History: The National Tradition of Historical Thought from Herder to the Present* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1983), pp. 30–31, 7, 35. An excellent example of the widespread acceptance of this idea has been provided by Wolf Lepenies, *The Seduction of Culture in German History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 19. This will be discussed further on; Friedrich Meinecke, *The Age of German Liberation*, ed. and intro. by Peter Paret (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), pp. 44 and 51 (this book was written in 1905).

21. Max Rouché, *La Philosophie de l'histoire de Herder* (Paris: Société d'édition Les Belles Lettres, 1940), p. 163; Wolfgang Pross, "Naturalism, Anthropology and Culture," in *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Political Thought*, pp. 246–247; Friedrich Meinecke, *The German Catastrophe: Reflections and Recollections*, trans. by Sidney B. Fay (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), p. 112.

22. Voltaire, *Dictionnaire Philosophique*, ed. by Alain Pons (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), pp. 492 and 494; Herder, *Another Philosophy of History*, pp. 94–95 (S 583).

23. Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," in Amy Gutmann (ed.), *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 30–31. See also an earlier version of the same argument in Taylor's *Ethics of Authenticity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991), pp. 28–29.

24. Just as the manuscript of this book was about to be sent to the publisher, I found in a Parisian bookshop a collection that had just come in, *Kant cosmopolite*, edited by

Charles Zarka and Caroline Guibet Lafaye (Paris: Éditions de l'éclat, 2008). In one of the essays in this collection, "Cultural Pluralism and Cosmopolitanism in Kant," Monique Castillo (pp. 39–40) speaks of the very high price to be paid for cultural differentialism. What is required, she says, "by the idea of the cultural equality of all cultures, is the reduction of humanist universalism to a mere prejudice and unilateral cultural violence. In a word, the ultimate foundation of differentialism is the negation of humanism as the supreme legitimation of the equal dignity of all men. Above the equal dignity of men, differentialist pluralism places the cultural equality of all national particularisms." According to Taylor and his friends, particularism constitutes a new kind of liberalism: this kind, to use Michael Walzer's terminology in his commentary on Taylor, is "Liberalism, no. 2," as opposed to "Liberalism, no. 1," which is a liberalism that "is committed in the strongest possible way to individual rights and, almost as a deduction from this, to a rigorously neutral state, that is a state without cultural or religious projects or, indeed, any sort of collective goals beyond the personal freedom, and the physical security, welfare, and safety of its citizens. (2) The second kind of liberalism ('Liberalism, no. 2') allows for a state committed to the survival and flourishing of a particular nation, culture or religion, or of a (limited) set of nations, cultures, and religions — so long as the basic rights of citizens who have different commitments or no such commitments at all are protected" (Michael Walzer, "Comment," in Gutmann [ed.], *Multiculturalism*, p. 99). The preference of both Taylor and Walzer is clearly for "Liberalism, no. 2." One should add here that already in the 1960s and 1970s, when the contemporary cult of Herder and his multiculturalism or pluralism began with Berlin, Claude Lévi-Strauss showed — as Castillo very rightly points out on p. 41 — that it is impossible both to promote a humanistic ideal of communication between cultures and to maintain the incommunicable and inimitable originality of each culture. Lévi-Strauss was conscious of the antihumanist and antiuniversalist role played by cultural differentialism. In a truly Herderian text, he wrote: "We cannot close our eyes to the fact that, despite its urgent practical necessity and the high moral goals it has set itself, the struggle against all forms of discrimination is part of the same movement that is carrying humanity toward a global civilization — a civilization that is the destroyer of those old particularisms, which had the honor of creating the aesthetic and spiritual values that make life worthwhile." If it wishes to avoid cultural and spiritual decadence, humanity "must learn once again that all true creation implies a certain deafness to the appeal of other values, even going so far as to reject them if not denying them altogether. For one cannot fully enjoy the other, identify with him, and at the same time remain different. When integral communication with the other is achieved completely, it sooner or later spells doom for both his and my creativity": Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The View from Afar*, trans. by Joachim Neugroschel and Phoebe Hoss (New York: Basic Books, 1985), pp. 23–24. See also his "Race and History" in a collection edited by UNESCO in 1956: *The Race Question in Modern Science*, pp. 125–132. In their struggle against the Enlightenment, Herder, de Maistre, and Spengler used very similar arguments. Obviously, these arguments can be invoked for very different purposes, but basically they have the same principle.

25. Friedrich Meinecke, *Historism: The Rise of a New Historical Outlook*, trans. by J. E. Anderson, with a preface by Isaiah Berlin (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), p. lv (translator's italics). See Meinecke's *Die Entstehung des Historismus* (Mu-

nich: R. Oldenbourg, 1959), p. 2: “Der Kern des Historismus besteht in der Ersetzung einer generalisierenden Betrachtung geschichtlich — menschlicher Kräfte durch eine individualisierende Betrachtung” (“*individualising*” and “*generalising*” are in italics in the English translation but not in the German original). Throughout this book, I use the term “historism” and not “historicism,” a neutral term with a connotation quite different from Meinecke’s ideologically loaded “Historismus.” The term “historism” corresponds exactly to the problematics discussed in the present work.

26. Meinecke, *Historism*, pp. lvi–lvii.

27. Rouché, *La Philosophie de l’histoire de Herder*, p. 583.

28. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, ed. Maudemarie Clark and Brian Leiter, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), # 197, pp. 197–198.

29. See Jahanbegloo, *Conversations with Isaiah Berlin*, and my chapter 8.

30. See the preface by Alain Renaut and the introduction by Lucas A. W. Sosoe in A. W. Rehberg, *Recherches sur la Révolution française* (Paris: Vrin, 1998), pp. 9–15. At the same time, it must be said that in political terms Rehberg’s work, coming three years after Burke, has no real originality in relation to the *Reflections*. See pp. 99–104 and 114–117, for example, on the rejection of universal rights, rationalism, equality among men, the idea of the contract, the autonomy of the individual, as of each generation in relation to the preceding ones, and the possibility of changing a constitution through a majority decision. To say that “the French Declaration is a collection of very imprecise philosophical maxims” and “only contains the rights of the citizens and none of their duties” and to claim that “the spirit of metaphysics has taken over all the members of the national assembly” (pp. 135–136) was not in 1793, and even less in the following years, a revelation for the critics of the French Revolution.

31. The full title is *Considerations on the French Revolution and on the Causes Which Prolong Its Duration*, with an intro. by Paul H. Beik (New York: Howard Fertig, 1974). From a different point of view, it is understandable that certain people, hypnotized by their period and their subject, might think that “the eighteenth century would not be what it is without Elie-Catherine Fréron,” and that “Elie Fréron’s incessant struggle against the philosophes for thirty years” made him the equal of Voltaire for the men of his time and ensured his “immortality”: see Jean Balcou (ed.), *Le Dossier Fréron: Correspondance et documents* (Geneva: Droz, 1975), p. 7. See also, by the same author, *Fréron contre les philosophes* (Geneva: Droz, 1975), p. 5. This highly talented journalist, who founded *L’Année littéraire* in 1754, and who is equally known for a collection of libels against Voltaire, undoubtedly delighted religious circles, but in comparison with Voltaire, Rousseau, or Diderot, he does not count for much and did not do so even at the time. The same applies to other minor figures of the Catholic establishment, interesting in themselves but no more than that. The long-term historical significance and intellectual importance of Jean-Nicolas Beauregard and Jacques-Marie Boyer Brun, of the abbés Gérard, Bertrand Capmartin de Chaupy, Jean-Baptiste Gaultier, or even Augustin Barruel, despite the success of his *Mémoires pour servir à l’histoire du jacobinisme*, was somewhat limited. The anti-Voltaire polemics of the Jesuit Nonotte, the abbé Chaudon, author of a *Dictionnaire anti-philosophique*, or the abbé Paulien, author of a *Dictionnaire philosopho-théologique portatif*, the indignant refutations of the “materialist” d’Holbach, the speech

to the Académie française of Jean-Jacques Lefranc de Pompignan in 1760, like the struggles for influence, the rivalries between clans and coteries, the conflicts of ideologies and personalities of which Didier Masseau has drawn a captivating picture, may have been fascinating at the time. In terms of intellectual history, however, the influence of all these *Ennemies des Philosophes* (this is the title of an excellent work by Didier Masseau), churchmen, publicists, and pamphleteers of all kinds, despite an impressive production of printed paper, was not decisive either in their own time or in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and their contribution to the tradition of the Anti-Enlightenment, as it became a pan-European phenomenon in the two centuries that followed the Parisian output, was not very extensive. On all these minor figures see Masseau's book, of which the subtitle is *L'Antiphilosophie au temps des Lumières* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2000). One can also find much information about these figures in Darrin M. McMahon, *Enemies of the Enlightenment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). Masseau's work preceded McMahon's and is far superior.

32. For this reason, it is not the classical enemies of the French Revolution and democracy, figures all of a piece, famous antiliberals, who are the main object of this book, despite the fact that a total view of the problematics we are dealing with makes their presence inevitable. Among many other important studies, three are particularly relevant: Albert O. Hirschman, *The Rhetoric of Reaction: Perversity, Futility, Jeopardy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991), Stephen Holmes, *The Anatomy of Antiliberalism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), and Richard Wolin, *The Seduction of Unreason: The Intellectual Romance with Fascism: From Nietzsche to Postmodernism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004).

33. Ernest Renan, *La Réforme intellectuelle et morale de la France*, in *La Réforme intellectuelle et morale*, 12th ed. (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, n.d. [1929]), preface, pp. ii and iii.

34. Cf. Daniel Roche, *France in the Enlightenment*, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), and Keith Michael Baker, "On the Problem of the Ideological Origins of the French Revolution," in Dominick LaCapra and Steven L. Kaplan (eds.), *Modern European Intellectual History: Reappraisals and New Perspectives* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), p. 207, quoting Daniel Roche, *Le Siècle des lumières en province: Académies et académiciens provinciaux, 1680–1789* (Paris: Mouton, 1978), vol. 1, p. 206.

35. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Oeuvres complètes* (definitive edition ed. by J.-P. Mayer), vol. 2, part 1: *L'Ancien Régime et la Révolution* (Paris: Gallimard, 1952), and vol. 9: *Correspondance d'Alexis de Tocqueville et d'Arthur de Gobineau* (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), p. 199. See also the second volume of *L'Ancien Régime et la Révolution*, p. 173: "My spirit is immersed in details and I cannot extract the idées mères," and further on, at the bottom of the same page, "I will not do anything good a priori, but perhaps, on seeing the details, the idées mères will come to birth"; Hippolyte Taine, *Les Origines de la France contemporaine* (Paris: Laffont, 1986), vol. 1, p. 155; Max Weber, "Objectivity in Social Science and Social Policy," in *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, trans. and ed. by Edward A. Shils and Henry A. Finch (New York: Free Press, 1949), p. 90. See also pp. 91–94. It goes without saying that the complexities of Weber's concept of ideal types cannot be discussed here. There are important differences between his 1904 essay on "objectivity" and his *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (New

York: Bedminster Press, 1968), vol. 1, part 1, “Conceptual Exposition,” pp. 3–310, published between 1918 and 1920: see especially pp. 21–22. Cf. Thomas Burger, *Max Weber’s Theory of Concept Formation: History, Laws, and Ideal Types* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1976), pp. 118ff.; Raymond Aron, *Main Currents in Sociological Thought* (London: Pelican Books, 1968), pp. 206–210. Among the many works devoted to Weber, see Walter Runciman, *A Critique of Max Weber’s Philosophy of Social Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972); Nasser Behnegar, *Leo Strauss, Max Weber and the Scientific Study of Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Karl Löwith, *Max Weber and Karl Marx*, trans. and ed. with an intro. by Tom Bottomore and William Outhwaite (London: Routledge, 1993); *Max Weber: Critical Responses*, ed. by Bryan S. Turner, 3 vols. (London: Routledge, 1999), see especially vol. 2; *Max Weber: Critical Assessment*, ed. by Peter Hamilton, 8 vols. (London: Routledge, 1991).

36. Here I will take the liberty of referring the reader to my previous works, especially *The Birth of Fascist Ideology*, with Mario Sznajder and Maia Asheri (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); *Neither Right nor Left: Fascist Ideology in France*, trans. by David Maisel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), and the introduction written for the most recent French edition of *Ni Droite ni Gauche: L’Idéologie fasciste en France* (Paris: Fayard, 2000). For an abridged English version see my “Morphology of Fascism in France,” in Brian Jenkins (ed.), *France in the Era of Fascism: Essays on the French Authoritarian Right* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005), pp. 22–64.

37. Roger Hausheer in Isaiah Berlin, *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas*, ed. by Henry Hardy, intro. by Robert Hausheer (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. xvi–xviii.

38. Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study in the History of an Idea* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965). See his introduction and especially pp. 14–23. The first edition of this book appeared in 1936. In January 1940, Lovejoy founded the *Journal of the History of Ideas*. On Lovejoy’s personality, see Gladys Gordon-Bournique, “A. O. Lovejoy and the ‘History of Ideas,’” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 48, no. 2 (April–June 1987), p. 209. Gordon-Bournique wrote a thesis on the subject at the Sorbonne.

39. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being*, p. 15.

40. See the April–June 1987 issue of the *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 48, no. 2, especially Daniel J. Wilson’s article, “Lovejoy’s *The Great Chain of Being* after Fifty Years,” pp. 187–206. See also Thomas Bredorff, “Lovejoy’s Idea of ‘Idea,’” *New Literary History*, vol. 8, no. 2, 1977, pp. 195–212. Two interesting articles were recently devoted to Lovejoy in the *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 67, no. 1 (2006): Anthony Grafton, “The History of Ideas: Precept and Practice 1500–2000 and Beyond,” pp. 1–32, and John Patrick Diggins, “Arthur O. Lovejoy and the Challenge of Intellectual History,” pp. 181–208; Leo Spitzer, “*Geistgeschichte* vs. History of Ideas as Applied to Hitlerism,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 5, no. 2 (1944), pp. 194–203; Lovejoy, “Reply to Professor Spitzer,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 5, no. 2 (1944), pp. 204–205.

41. Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs et l’esprit des nations et sur les principaux faits de l’histoire depuis Charlemagne jusqu’à Louis XIII*, intro. by René Pomeau (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1963), vol. 1, chapter 82, p. 774. English trans.: *An Essay On the Manners and Spirit of Nations and on the principal occurrences in history from Charlemagne to Louis XIII*, vol. 4 of *The Works of the late M. de Voltaire*, translated from the French, with

notes critical and explanatory, by the Rev. David Williams (London: Fielding and Walker, 1780).

42. Alain Renaut, “Les humanismes modernes,” in Alain Renaut (ed.), *Histoire de la philosophie politique*, vol. 3, *Lumières et Romantisme* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1999), p. 45.

43. Mark Bevir makes an excellent critique of linguistic contextualism in “The Errors of Linguistic Contextualism,” *History and Theory*, vol. 31, no. 8 (1992), pp. 276–298. See also, by the same author, *The Logic of the History of Ideas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

44. Quentin Skinner, “Some Problems in the Analysis of Political Thought and Action,” in James Tully (ed.), *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and His Critics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), p. 106; Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas,” *History and Theory*, vol. 8 (1969), pp. 49–53. See also: Dominick LaCapra and John P. Diggins, “The Oyster and the Pearl: The Problem of Contextualism in Intellectual History,” *History and Theory*, vol. 23, no. 2 (1984), pp. 151–169; “Rethinking Intellectual History and Reading Texts,” *History and Theory*, vol. 19, no. 3 (1980), pp. 245–276; Eric Miller, “Intellectual Discourse after the Earthquakes: A Study in Discourse,” *History Teacher*, vol. 30, no. 3 (1997), pp. 357–371, and by Donald R. Kelley, “Horizons of Intellectual History: Retrospect, Circumspect, Prospect,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 48, no. 1 (1987), pp. 143–169, and “What Is Happening to the History of Ideas?” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 51, no. 1 (1990), pp. 3–25. See also an important trilogy by Kelley: *Faces of History*, *Fortunes of History*, and *Frontiers of History*, published by Yale University Press in 1998, 2003, and 2006, respectively.

45. On the concept of periods, see Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, pp. 457–480.

46. The problem of slavery in the South and of the institutionalized discrimination that lasted until the 1960s is a different question, painful and disgraceful, that cannot be dealt with here.

Chapter One. The Clash of Traditions

1. Thomas Paine, *Rights of Man*, with an intro. by Derek Matravers (Ware, U.K.: Wordsworth Classics of World Literature, 1996), p. 31 (the italics are in the original).

2. See Tilo Schabert, “Modernity and History I: What Is Modernity?” in *The Promise of History: Essays in Political Philosophy* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1986), pp. 9–21, 13; Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1987), p. 6, and “Modernity versus Postmodernity,” *New German Critique*, no. 22 (Winter 1981), pp. 3–4. See also my “Modernity and its Enemies: From the Revolt against the Enlightenment to the Undermining of Democracy,” in Zeev Sternhell (ed.), *The Intellectual Revolt against Liberal Democracy, 1870–1945: International Conference in Memory of Jacob L. Talmon* (Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1996).

3. *Essais de Michel de Montaigne*, book 1, presentation, arrangement of the text, commentary and notes by André Tournon (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1998), pp. 215–216. See also p. 214 on “the good and great Socrates,” who “refused to save his life

through disobedience to the judge, although he was a very unjust and iniquitous judge.” Translation of the Latin: “So true is it that no change to the ancient usage may be approved of.”

4. Schabert, “Modernity and History I: What Is Modernity?” pp. 13–15; Charles Perrault, *Parallèle des Anciens et des Modernes en ce qui regarde les Arts et les Sciences* (Munich: Eidos, 1964), pp. 165–171 (this is a copy of the 1688 edition); Fénelon, “Réflexions sur la Grammaire, la Rhétorique, la Poétique et l’histoire ou Mémoire sur les Travaux de l’Académie française à M. Dacier,” in *Oeuvres*, vol. 2, edited, presented, arranged, and annotated by Jacques Le Brun (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), pp. 1197, 1191, 1179–1181. The text is generally known as the “Letter to the Academy.” The appendix to the volume gives the two first versions of this text, of which there were innumerable editions (pp. 1199–1237). In the first version, Fénelon observes that “the Academy’s civil war” could have the beneficial effect of improving taste. If he was worried about “the writers full of talent and delicacy who would be so bold as to abandon and despise the Ancients,” it was not because he expected them to bow down before them. On the contrary, “I hope they will surpass them, but I think one must learn from the Ancients themselves how to surpass them, assuming one can do that” (p. 1225). See also p. 1220: “For my part, I would like the Moderns to surpass all the Ancients”; and p. 1224: “There are only a very small number of outstanding writers among all the Greeks and all the Latins. We have excellent ones in various genres in our age and in our nation.”

5. Fénelon, “Réflexions sur la Grammaire,” p. 1178.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 1178–1181, 1183–1184.

7. Paul Hazard, *La Crise de la conscience européenne, 1680–1715* (Paris: Fayard, 1961), first published in 1935. English translation by J. Lewis May: *The European Mind: The Critical Years, 1680–1715* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953).

8. Jean-Paul Sartre, *L’Existentialisme est un humanisme* (Paris: Gallimard, Folio—Essais, 1996), quoted by Alain Renaut in “Les humanismes modernes,” in Alain Renaut (ed.), *Histoire de la philosophie politique*, vol. 3, p. 38.

9. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “Discours sur l’origine de l’inégalité parmi les hommes,” in *Du Contrat social ou principes du droit politique* (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1954), p. 47; Renaut, “Les humanismes modernes,” pp. 38–41.

10. Fontenelle, “Digression sur les Anciens et les Modernes,” in *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Fayard, 1991), Corpus des oeuvres de philosophie en langue française, vol. 2, pp. 413–414, 416, 420, 418–419, 428, 422, 423, 425.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 426.

12. François Jean de Chastellux, *De la Félicité publique*, quoted in Hazard, *La Pensée européenne au XVIII^e siècle de Montesquieu à Lessing* (Paris: Hachette, 1995), p. 271; Chastellux, *De la Félicité publique*, quoted in Jean-Fabien Spitz, *La liberté politique: Essai de généalogie conceptuelle* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1995), p. 498; François-René de Chateaubriand, *Mémoires d’outre-tombe*, new edition arranged by Jean-Claude Bercher (Paris: Garnier, 1989), part 1, book 6, chapter 7, p. 374. Chateaubriand described his arrival in Philadelphia in 1791, where he was to meet George Washington: “I recognized liberty in the manner of the ancients, the liberty, daughter of the manners and morals of a society coming to birth, but I did not find liberty, daughter of the Enlightenment and of an old civilization, the liberty whose reality has been proved by the representative republic. May God grant that it will last.”

13. Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992): see my Epilogue.

14. Hazard, *La Pensée européenne*, pp. 18–33.

15. Moses Mendelssohn, “On the Question: What Does ‘to Enlighten’ Mean?” in *Philosophical Writings*, trans. and ed. by Daniel O. Dahlstrom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 313–314: “The words ‘enlightenment,’ ‘culture,’ ‘education’ are still new comers to our language. . . . Education breaks down into culture and enlightenment. The former seems to apply more to the practical dimension. . . . Enlightenment seems by contrast, to refer to the theoretical dimension. It seems to refer—objectively—to rational knowledge and—subjectively—to proficiency at rationally reflecting upon things of human life, in terms of their importance and influence on the vocation of human being.”

16. Immanuel Kant, “An Answer to the Question: ‘What Is Enlightenment?’” in Kant, *Political Writings*, ed. with an intro. and notes by Hans Reiss, trans. by H. B. Nisbet, 2d ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 54 (the italics are in the original). On Michel Foucault’s criticism of this text, see his “Qu’est-ce que les Lumières?” in *Magazine Littéraire* (April 1993), pp. 62–74. See also Maurizio Passerin d’Entrèves, *Critique and Enlightenment: Michel Foucault on “Was ist Aufklärung?”* (Barcelona: Institut de ciències polítiques i socials, 1996).

17. F. C. Beiser, *Enlightenment, Revolution and Romanticism: The Genesis of Modern German Political Thought, 1790–1800* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 30–33, 37; Kant, “Remarques,” in *Observations sur le sentiment du beau et du sublime*, trans. and intro. by Roger Kempf (Paris: Vrin, 1980), p. 66.

18. Beiser, *Enlightenment, Revolution and Romanticism*, p. 38.

19. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Schopenhauer as Educator*, in *Unfashionable Observations, The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. by Ernst Behler, vol. 2, p. 243.

20. Kant, “What Is Enlightenment?” p. 55 (the italics are in the original); Éric Weil et al., *La Philosophie politique de Kant* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1962), pp. 16–17 (the italics are in the original).

21. See Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, p. xix. “Modernity—an Unfinished Project” was the title of the lecture given by Habermas on the occasion of his acceptance of the Adorno Prize in September 1980 awarded by the city of Frankfurt: see “Modernity versus Postmodernity,” pp. 3–14. See also Maurizio Passerin d’Entrèves and Seyla Benhabib (eds.), *Habermas and the Unfinished Project of Modernity: Critical Essays on the Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1997).

22. Voltaire, *Traité sur la Tolérance*, introduction, notes, bibliography, chronology by René Pomeau (Paris: Flammarion, 1989), pp. 48–49.

23. Kant, “The Contest of Faculties,” in *Political Writings*, pp. 182–185 (italics in the original); Theodore Ruysen, “La Philosophie de l’histoire selon Kant,” in *La Philosophie politique de Kant*, p. 51.

24. Quoted in Françoise Proust, introduction to Immanuel Kant, *Vers la paix perpétuelle et autres textes* (Paris: Flammarion, 1991), pp. 6–7 (italics in the text).

25. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2, *L’Ancien Régime et la Révolution*, vol. 1, pp. 62–63. On the dimensions of liberty see my chapter 8.

26. Ibid., p. 197; Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Les Confessions*, introduction and notes by Ad van Bever, vol. 1, book 4 (Paris: Garnier, n.d.), p. 221.

27. Tocqueville, *L'Ancien Régime et la Révolution*, vol. 1, pp. 193–195.
28. Ibid. pp. 194, 247. In the “conservative” camp, the only person capable of such praise of the revolution was the young Renan at the beginning of his career.
29. Ibid., pp. 245–246, 96, vol. 2, pp. 340–341. See also pp. 338–339 and 342.
30. Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 45, 244, 96, 63.
31. Hippolyte Taine, *Histoire de la littérature anglaise* (Paris: Hachette, n.d.). 17th ed., vol. 3, pp. 324, 316–317, 325.
32. Ibid., pp. 288–291.
33. Ibid., pp. 288–300, 316.
34. Ibid., pp. 318–319. See Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, in *The Works of Edmund Burke* (London: George Bell, 1902–1912), vol. 2, p. 358, hereafter referred to as *Works*, whereas the Bohn edition of Burke’s works, *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke* (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1854), is referred to as *The Works*, ed. Bohn.
35. Ibid., pp. 321–324. A direct quotation from Burke, albeit a partial one.
36. Burke’s most recent and complete biography is F. P. Lock’s *Edmund Burke*, 2 vols. (New York: Clarendon Press, 1998–2006). See also Lock’s *Burke’s Reflections on the Revolution in France* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1985). A liberal Burke, a figure of the Enlightenment as the neoconservatives understand it, emerges from Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The Roads to Modernity*, and Conor Cruise O’Brien, *The Great Melody: A Thematic Biography and Commented Anthology of Edmund Burke* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). This is not particularly surprising. Ian Crowe has edited a collection, *Edmund Burke: His Life and Legacy* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1997), published on the bicentenary of Burke’s death, which seeks to show him as a thinker who came to save liberalism from itself and to give an overview of his writings, including his influence up to the time Crowe’s volume was published.
37. Despite this, in certain conservative circles, Burke is always considered an heir of Locke: this is the position of O’Brien as well as of Isaiah Berlin. See their correspondence in O’Brien, *The Great Melody*, appendices, pp. 609 and 612. Two observations are in order here: Berlin admits that he only knows about Burke what everyone knows, without realizing that what everyone knows is often incorrect, and in O’Brien Locke’s name appears only once (p. 451) in a work of six hundred pages. O’Brien knew very well that Burke loathed the basis of Locke’s thought, and he only allowed himself to put forward this idea, which he knew to be wrong, in the *New York Review of Books*, though he did not go back to it in his own book on Burke except in the framework of his correspondence with Berlin, which appears as an appendix.
38. The early writings of Burke are collected in volume 1, published in 1997, of *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989–2000). This exemplary scholarly edition, under the general editorship of Paul Langford, is sometimes frankly apologetic, especially on difficult issues like that of the slave trade. Hereafter this edition is referred to as the Oxford edition.
39. Edmund Burke, “An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs,” in *Works*, vol. 3, p. 67.
40. Burke, “Letter No. II: On the Genius and Character of the French Revolution as it Regards Other Nations” (“Second Letter on a Regicide Peace”), in *Works*, vol. 5, p. 258, and *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, in *Works*, vol. 2, p. 382.

41. Michael Freeman rightly thinks that it was in a text of 1795, “Letter to William Elliot,” that Burke gave the best concise exposition of his views on the causes of the French Revolution. See his “E. Burke and the Sociology of Revolution,” *Political Studies*, vol. 25, no. 4 (1977), p. 466. This exposition repeats on general lines but in a more concentrated manner all the arguments put forward in a more scattered form in *Reflections*.

42. Burke, “Letter to William Elliot,” May 26, 1795, in *The Writings and Speeches* (Oxford edition), vol. 9, p. 39. This letter was written in response to a harsh criticism of Burke’s ideas by the Duke of Norfolk in the House of Lords on May 8, 1795. See the complete text of this letter on pp. 29–44; Tocqueville, *L’Ancien Régime et la Révolution*, vol. 1, p. 178, title of chapter 12, book 2.

43. Burke, “Letter to a Member of the National Assembly,” in *Works*, vol. 2, pp. 534–541. See also Michel Ganzin, *La Pensée politique d’Edmund Burke* (Paris: Librairie générale de droit et de jurisprudence, 1972), pp. 112–114.

44. Paine, *Rights of Man*, p. 124.

45. Joseph de Maistre, “Considérations sur la France,” in *Écrits sur la Révolution* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1989), p. 137, and “Réflexions sur le protestantisme,” in *Écrits sur la Révolution*, p. 227.

46. De Maistre, “Essai sur le principe générateur des constitutions politiques et des autres institutions humaines,” in *Considérations sur la France*, edited by Pierre Manent ([Brussels]: Complexe, 1988), pp. 273–274; de Maistre, *Écrits sur la Révolution*, pp. 78–79.

47. De Maistre, *Les Soirées de Saint-Pétersbourg, ou entretiens sur le gouvernement temporel de la Providence* (Paris: Éditions de la Maisnie, 1980), vol. 1, pp. 64, 129, 211, 208. See also pp. 207–213; *Écrits sur la Révolution*, pp. 133–134 and 144.

48. De Maistre, *Considérations sur la France*, pp. 20, 47–48, 64–69, 18–19, 21 (the italics are in the original); de Maistre, “Considérations sur la France,” in *Écrits sur la Révolution*, p. 182.

49. Hippolyte Taine, *Les Origines de la France contemporaine*, vol. 1, pp. 129–154, 189–243, 160–162. Maurras considered this criticism of classicism the great weakness in Taine’s work.

50. *Ibid.*, pp. 162–168.

51. *Ibid.*, pp. 170–172.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 182.

53. *Ibid.*

54. *Ibid.*, pp. 182–183 (the italics are in the original).

55. *Ibid.*, pp. 184–185.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 185. Taine is quoting *Contrat social*, II, 3, p. 253 (in the 1954 Garnier edition used here). The quotation is incomplete, but what is particularly disturbing is the fact that Taine forgot the continuation: “If there are separate societies, one should multiply their number and prevent inequality among them, as Solon, Numa and Servius did.” Chapter IV, 8, “Of Civil Religion,” is the last chapter of *Contrat social*, pp. 327–336.

57. Louis-Sébastien Mercier, *L’An deux mille quatre cent quarante: Rêve s’il en fut jamais*, ed., intro., and notes by Raymond Trousson (Paris: Editions Ducros, 1971). Born in 1740, died in 1814, disparaged by some, and read and appreciated by others, Mercier was translated into several languages. *L’An 2240* was written in 1770 or 1771. Until 1791, the work, which went into many editions, was disseminated throughout Europe

(introduction, p. 66). An admirer of Rousseau, in 1791 Mercier published his impressive *De Jean-Jacques Rousseau considéré comme l'un des premiers auteurs de la Révolution* (Of Jean-Jacques Rousseau Considered as One of the First Authors of the Revolution). A Girondin elected to the Convention, he was saved from the scaffold by the fall of Robespierre (introduction, pp. 22–25).

58. Taine, *Les Origines de la France contemporaine*, vol. 1, p. 186. Taine was referring to *L'an 2240*, volume 1, chapters 17 and 18. These two chapters discuss monastic celibacy and the cult of the Supreme Being. The phrases Taine puts within quotation marks are his own and not Mercier's. Mercier often boasted of having been the prophet of the French Revolution in *L'An 2240* nineteen years before it happened (introduction, p. 73). However, the statements Taine ascribed to him were not his.

59. Ibid., pp. 144–145 (the italics are in the original).

60. Ibid., pp. 149–151, 147. Taine is quoting from the *Essai sur le poème épique*.

61. Ibid., pp. 147–149. Taine is quoting from the *Essai sur le poème épique*.

62. Ibid., pp. 155, 159–160, vol. 5, pp. 242 and 320.

63. Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 220, 236, 242–243 (the italics are in the original).

64. Ernest Renan, “La Monarchie constitutionnelle en France,” in *La Réforme intellectuelle et morale*, 12th ed. (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, n.d. [1929]), p. 238.

65. Quoted in Edouard Richard, *Ernest Renan, penseur traditionaliste?* (Aix-en-Provence: Presses universitaires d'Aix-Marseille, 1996), pp. 162, 131–132.

66. Ernest Renan, *L'Avenir de la science*, in *Oeuvres complètes de Ernest Renan*, definitive edition established by Henriette Psichari (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, n.d. [1956]), vol. 3, p. 749. This edition is hereafter referred to as Psichari ed.

67. Ernest Renan, “La Guerre entre la France et l'Allemagne,” in *La Réforme intellectuelle et morale*, 12th ed. (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, n.d. [1929]), p. 133; Ernest Renan, *La Réforme intellectuelle et morale de la France*, in *La Réforme intellectuelle et morale*, p. 40. See also the “Préface” in Ernest Renan, *Questions contemporaines*, 7th ed. (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, n.d. [1929]), p. iii.

68. In this new text, Renan discussed the republication of his book. “There was one condition I had to follow,” he said, “and that was to reproduce my youthful essay in its naïve, involved and often abrupt form. . . . The framework of my old work is not at all the one I would choose today.” He said that in order to correct and modify “this mass of thoughts” that were no longer his, and to create a new conceptual framework that would correspond to the evolution of his thinking, he would have to have “written a new book” (*L'Avenir de la science*, p. 721). The book was thus published as a document that bore witness to the ideas he held in 1848, but no longer in 1890.

69. Renan, *L'Avenir de la science*, pp. 747, 812, 1039, 747–748, 1124, 1039, 1028–1029, 884, 1029. The Jeu de Paume was the tennis court where at the beginning of the revolution the third estate took its famous oath. See also p. 1124: the Jeu de Paume “will one day be a temple.”

70. Ibid., pp. 990–991, 1032.

71. Ibid., pp. 748–749. See *La Réforme*: “The narrow-visioned men who took charge of the destiny of France” (p. 11), “Their hollow declamations, their moral shallowness” (p. 8).

72. Renan, *La Réforme*, p. 54.

73. Thomas Carlyle, “The New Downing Street,” in *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, vol. 20 of *The Works of Thomas Carlyle*, centenary edition with intro. by Henry Duff Traill (London: Chapman and Hall, 1896–1907), pp. 131–132; hereafter *Works*. For a modern biography of Carlyle, see Fred Kaplan, *Thomas Carlyle: A Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

74. Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-worship and the Heroic in History*, in *Works*, vol. 5, pp. 200, 188.

75. Thomas Carlyle, *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*, vol. 1, in *Works*, vol. 26, pp. 460–461, 464–465 (*Persiflage* in French in the original). The same ideas are expressed in *On Heroes*, p. 14.

76. Carlyle, *Heroes*, p. 208.

77. *Ibid.*, pp. 170, 174, 208, 172, 174, 215–216. See also *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*, p. 461.

78. Thomas Carlyle, “Past and Present,” book 4, chapter 1, in *Works*, vol. 10, p. 241; *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*, p. 461.

79. Carlyle, *Heroes*, p. 171; *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*, p. 415.

80. *Ibid.*, pp. 416, 419, 424–427.

81. Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus: The Life and Opinions of Herr Teufelsdröckh* (London: Carlyle’s House Memorial Trust, n.d.), pp. 24, 240; Carlyle, *Heroes*, p. 14; Carlyle, *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*, vol. 1, in *Works*, vol. 26, pp. 414, 416, 419, 424–427, 436, 411; Carlyle, *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*, vol. 3, in *Works*, vol. 28, p. 246.

82. Carlyle, *Heroes*, pp. 158, 184–188.

83. Max Rouché, introduction to Johann Gottfried Herder, *Une Autre philosophie de l’histoire: Pour contribuer à l’éducation de l’humanité: Contribution à beaucoup de contributions du siècle / Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit* (Paris: Aubier, 1964), pp. 78–80. This exemplary bilingual edition was introduced and edited by Max Rouché.

84. Johann Gottfried Herder, *Another Philosophy of History and Selected Political Writings*, trans. with intro. and notes by Iannis D. Evrigenis and Daniel Pellerin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2004), p. 32. In some cases this translation has been slightly amended; in other cases I have used the Cambridge edition: *This Too a Philosophy of History for the Formation of Humanity*, in *Philosophical Writings*, trans. and ed. by Michael N. Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). The classic edition of Herder’s works, in thirty-three volumes, is *Herder’s Sämtliche Werke*, ed. by Bernhard Suphan (Berlin: Weidmannsche, 1877–1913). *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit* (Another Philosophy of History for the Formation of Humanity), written in 1774, is in volume 5 (1891), pp. 475–586; *Journal meiner Reise im Jahr 1769* (Journal of My Travels in the Year 1769) is in volume 4 (1878), pp. 343–461; *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (Ideas for a Philosophy of the History of Mankind) is in volumes 13 and 14. In most cases, where *Another Philosophy* is concerned, I have, following Rouché, referred the reader to the Suphan edition. An edition that is far more accessible and easy to use, in Latin characters and not in Gothic script, bringing together in three volumes the works with which we are concerned, is Johann Gottfried Herder, *Werke*, edited by Wolfgang Pross (Munich: Carl Hansen, 1984). The first volume, on

Herder and the Sturm und Drang movement, includes *Another Philosophy of History* (pp. 591–689), the *Journal* (pp. 357–473), and an excellent postscript (*Nachwort*) by Pierre Pénisson; volume 2 is devoted to Herder and the anthropology of the Enlightenment, and volume 3 in two parts contains the *Ideen*. All references to *Another Philosophy of History* in the Suphan ed. are to volume 5 and the relevant section. There is a vast bibliography on Herder. One could look first, for example, at two of the most recent bibliographical studies: Doris Kuhles, *Herder-Bibliographie, 1977–1992* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1994), and Tino Markworth, *Johann Gottfried Herder: A Bibliographical Survey, 1977–1987* (Hürth-Efferen: Gabel, 1990). The works most important to our concerns here will be listed throughout the book. To these studies could be added Benjamin Wall Redekop, *Enlightenment and Community: Lessing, Abt, Herder and the Quest for a German Public* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000); Antonio Verri, *Vico e Herder nella Francia della Restaurazione* (Ravenna: Longo, 1984); George Albert Wells, *Herder and After: A Study in the Development of Sociology* (The Hague: Mouton, 1959). For the view of Herder in the first half of the twentieth century, see Adolphe Bossert, *Herder: Sa vie et son oeuvre* (Paris: Hachette, 1916); Robert Reinhold Ergang, *Herder and the Foundations of German Nationalism* (New York: Octagon Books, 1966), first edition in 1931; and F. McEachran, *The Life and Philosophy of Johann Gottfried Herder* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1939).

85. Herder, *Another Philosophy of History*, p. 95 (S. 584).

86. Max Rouché, introduction to Herder, *Auch Eine Philosophie der Geschichte / Une Autre philosophie de l'histoire*, pp. 77–78.

87. Herder, *Another Philosophy of History*, pp. 68–70 (S. 555–556), p. 4 (S. 478).

88. *Ibid.*, pp. 49–51 (S. 534, 537), 90 (S. 578).

89. Quoted by Rouché from the *Journal*, in *Une Autre philosophie de l'histoire*, p. 249, note 1.

90. Herder, *Another Philosophy of History*, pp. 51–52 (S. 538).

91. Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Herder et ses théories sur l'histoire,” in *Regards sur l'Histoire*, Cahiers de l'Institut allemand, published by Karl Epting, vol. 2 (1941), pp. 9–10.

92. Johann Gottfried Herder, *Journal de mon voyage en l'an 1769*, trans., intro., and notes by Max Rouché (Paris: Aubier, 1942), pp. 133–134; *Journal meiner Reise im Jahr 1769*, in the Pross ed. of *Werke*, vol. 1, *Herder und der Sturm und Drang, 1764–1774*, pp. 419, 421–422.

93. *Ibid.*, pp. 135–137, 138–140, 156; Pross ed., vol. 1, pp. 421–425, 438–439.

94. Ernst Behler, “La Philosophie de l'histoire de Herder: Contribution à la querelle des anciens et des modernes,” in Pierre Pénisson (ed.), *Herder et la philosophie de l'histoire* (Iași: Universitaät Alexandre Ioan Cuza, 1997), pp. 18–19.

95. Herder, *Journal de mon voyage en l'an 1769*, pp. 148, 150; *Journal meiner Reise im Jahr 1769*, Pross ed., vol. 1, pp. 432–434. On page 434 Herder said that French could be a philosophical language, but on condition that it is not written by the French or for the French.

96. Quoted from the Suphan edition, vol. 4, pp. 472–473, in Rouché, introduction to Herder, *Journal de mon voyage en l'an 1769*, p. 47. See also pp. 60–61.

97. Herder, *Journal de mon voyage en l'an 1769*, pp. 132–133; *Journal meiner Reise im Jahr 1769*, Pross ed., vol. 1, p. 419.

98. Ibid., p. 121, Pross ed., vol. 1, p. 410. Danilevsky's brittle pan-Slavism often looks like a simple reiteration of Herder's old theories. On Danilevsky see my chapter 7.

99. Johann Gottfried Herder, *Idées pour la philosophie de l'histoire de l'humanité / Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, bilingual ed., abridged, with an intro. and notes by Max Rouché (Paris: Aubier, 1962), book 16, chapter 4, pp. 299, 301–303, and Pross ed., vol. 3, part 1, pp. 640–643. Hereafter referred to as *Idées/Ideen*, with references given to both the Rouché edition and the Pross edition.

100. Ibid., book 16, chapter 5, p. 305; Pross ed., vol. 3, part 1, pp. 645–646.

101. Ibid., book 13, chapter 3, pp. 203–205, Pross ed., vol. 3, part 1, pp. 449–450.

102. Ibid., pp. 201–203; Pross ed., vol. 3, part 1, pp. 448–449.

103. Ibid., book 16, chapter 5, p. 305; Pross ed., vol. 3, part 1, p. 646. Pénisson thinks that “Herder's vocabulary may be suspect but, in the final analysis, on reading this text closely, in reality it proceeds in such a way that it gradually removes the anti-Semitic arguments” to the point of “condemning anti-Semitic States”: J. G. Herder: *La Raison dans les peuples* (Paris: Cerf, 1992), p. 121. Such a reading is not impossible, but it is not the most plausible one.

104. Rudolf Haym, *Herder nach seinem Leben und seinem Werken*, 2 vols (Berlin: Weidmann, 1880–1885). New editions appeared in 1958: Berlin, Aufbau-Verlag, and in 1978: Osnabrück, Biblio-Verlag. This classic biography showed a Herder critical of the Enlightenment and is a work of reference to this day. It is interesting to note that the first major work on Herder and his age was published in France and not in Germany, in 1875 by C. Joret: *Herder et la Renaissance littéraire en Allemagne au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Hachette, 1875).

105. Quoted in Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, “Les idées politiques de Herder,” *La Revue des deux mondes*, vol. 80 (April 15, 1887), p. 931.

106. Alexander Gillies, *Herder* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1945), p. 133. Gillies brought out Herder's contribution to the Sturm und Drang movement. Ten years later, Robert T. Clark Jr. published *Herder: His Life and Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1955), in which he distanced himself from Haym and Gillies, whom he saw as continuing the line of thought of the German writer. Clark minimized the influence of Hamann and showed us a Herder who was an Aufklärer rather than a Stürmer: perhaps a hesitant one, but an Aufklärer nevertheless. He knew that Herder could not pass for a rationalist, but he thought that the dominant tendencies in Herder's thought were not incompatible with rationalism. In 1947 Gillies edited the *Journal meiner Reise* for Blackwell (Oxford).

107. Lévy-Bruhl, “Les idées politiques de Herder,” pp. 931–932.

108. Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 932.

109. Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations et sur les principaux faits de l'histoire depuis Charlemagne jusqu'à Louis XIII*, intro., bibliography, with variants, notes, and index by René Pomeau (Paris: Garnier, 1963), vol. 2, pp. 810–811.

110. Montesquieu, *De l'Esprit des lois*, ed. and intro. by Gonzague Truc (Paris: Garnier, 1961), vol. 1, book 15, chapter 5, pp. 258–259: “De l'esclavage des nègres”; Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs*, vol. 2, p. 805; Rousseau, *Du contrat social*, p. 242. In *Le Code noir ou le calvaire de Canaan* (Paris: PUF, 1987) Louis Sala-Molins makes a very harsh and often unfair indictment of Montesquieu and Rousseau. See the third section of the

work, titled “Le Code noir à l’ombre des Lumières,” especially pp. 221–255. The failure of Montesquieu and Rousseau to say anything about the famous royal ordinance of 1685, made more severe in 1724 (p. 217), is no doubt a great lapse, but does not alter the fact that the philosophes of the Enlightenment fought slavery with the means at their disposal. Anyone who read them understood what they were talking about.

111. Herder, *Idées/Ideen*, book 15, chapter 1, p. 271, book 6, chapter 4, pp. 123–125, 115–119; Pross ed., vol. 3, part 1, pp. 209–212, 583, 193–204.

112. Montesquieu, *De l’Esprit des lois*, vol. 2, book 25, chapter 13, p. 166.

Chapter Two. The Foundations of a Different Modernity

1. *The Autobiography of Giambattista Vico*, translation of *Vita di Giambattista Vico scritta da se medesimo* by M. H. Fisch and T. G. Bergin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1962), p. 134.

2. Mark Lilla, *The Making of an Anti-Modern* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 6. This work includes an excellent critical bibliography.

3. Giambattista Vico, *Vie de Giambattista Vico écrite par lui-même, Lettres, La Méthode des études de notre temps*, trans., intro., and notes by Alain Pons (Paris: Grasset, 1981), p. 8. On this, see the excellent article by Joseph Mali, “Retrospective Prophets: Vico, Benjamin and Other German Mythologists,” *Clio*, vol. 26 (1997), pp. 427–448. In vol. 23 (1994), see James Robert Goetsch, “Expecting the Unexpected in Vico” (pp. 409–422). See also vol. 22, no. 3 (1996), of *Historical Reflections — Réflexions historiques*: Patrick H. Hutton, “Vico and the End of History” (pp. 537–558), Sandra Rudnick Luft, “Situating Vico between Modern and Postmodern” (pp. 587–617), and Celia Miller, “Interpretations and Misinterpretations of Vico” (pp. 619–639). In 1993, Miller wrote a distinguished study of Vico’s autobiography: *Giambattista Vico, Imagination and Historical Knowledge* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993). More recently, Luft published *Vico’s Uncanny Humanism: Reading the New Science between Modern and Postmodern* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).

4. *The New Science of Giambattista Vico*, a revised translation of the third edition (1744) by T. G. Bergin and M. H. Fisch (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968), p. 96 # 330. A more accessible translation by David Marsh, with an introduction by Anthony Grafton, was published in Penguin Classics in 1999 and 2001. Another English edition of *The New Science* entitled *The First New Science* was published under the guidance of Leon Pompa by Cambridge University Press in 2002. In order to enable readers who so desire to consult the original Italian text, *Principi di scienza nuova d’intorno alla comune natura delle nazioni* (different editions, the most recent in 2002), I have provided the number of the paragraph corresponding to the page mentioned. The myth of the solitary Vico is largely exaggerated. In a perspicacious little book intended for the general educated public rather than for specialists, Peter Burke depicted the intellectual milieu to which Vico belonged, the republic of letters of his time. The Neapolitan thinker outstripped many of his contemporaries, but he did not invent everything on his own. See Peter Burke, *Vico* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985). See also Harold Samuel Stone, *Vico’s Cultural History: The Production and Transmission of Ideas in Naples, 1685–1750* (New York: E. J. Brill, 1997); Carmelo D’Amato, *Il mito di Vico e la filosofia*

della storia in Francia nella prima metà dell'Ottocento (Naples: Morano, 1977). See also Bruno Pinchard, "Nouvelles lectures de Giambattista Vico," *Revue de synthèse*, vol. 110 (July–December 1989), pp. 483–498.

5. Paul Hazard, *La Pensée européenne au XVIIIe siècle de Montesquieu à Lessing*, published in Paris by Fayard and later Hachette ("Pluriel" series), undated (first edition in 1946; last edition in 2006), pp. 43, 144: one should savor the irony of this phrase. English translation: *European Thought in the Eighteenth Century* (1954). Hazard's other classic, *La Crise de la conscience européenne, 1680–1715*, translated as *The European Mind*, was published in 1935, between Cassirer and Meinecke.

6. Vico, *On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians, unearthed from the origins of the Latin language*, trans., intro., and notes by L. M. Palmer (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988) from *Della Antica sapienza degl' Italiani riposta nelle origini della lingua latina*, chapter 3, "On the Causes."

7. Vico, *Autobiography*, p. 130. On this question see Robert C. Miner, "Verum-factum and Practical Wisdom in the Early Writings of Giambattista Vico," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 59 (1998), pp. 53–73. In the same journal, twenty years earlier (vol. 59, no. 4 [January 1978]), see James C. Morrison, "Vico's Principle of Verum is Factum and the Problem of Historicism," pp. 579–595.

8. Vico, *Autobiography*, pp. 113, 138, 155. See Pons's excellent introduction to *Vie de Giambattista Vico* (pp. 26–38) on the origins and significance of the work.

9. Vico, *New Science*, p. 104 # 349; p. 425 # 1108; and also p. 97 # 332. The philologists are in fact historians. See also Leon Pompa's introduction to *Vico: Selected Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 9.

10. Vico, *New Science*, p. 62 # 133; pp. 101–102 # 341; p. 425 # 1108; Pompa, introduction to *Vico: Selected Writings*, p. 10.

11. Vico, *Autobiography*, pp. 164–165; Pompa, introduction to *Vico: Selected Writings*, p. 10. See also Leon Pompa, *Vico: A Study of the "New Science"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), second edition in 1990. On Sorel, see my chapter 7.

12. Vico, *New Science*, pp. 100–101 # 331; pp. 104–105 # 349; p. 26 # 41; pp. 101–102 # 341; Vico, *Autobiography*, p. 139.

13. Vico, *Autobiography*, pp. 146 and 139. See also *New Science*, p. 79 # 245. The stages are: rise, development, maturity, decline, and fall.

14. Vico, *Autobiography*, pp. 148, 155, 167, 173. Vico said his work was written for "the glory of the Catholic religion" but also out of Italian patriotism. His discoveries "procured for our Italy the advantage of not envying Protestant Holland, England or Germany their three princes of this science."

15. *Ibid.*, pp. 168–169; Vico, *New Science*, p. 100 # 338; p. 62 # 135; p. 91 # 309.

16. Pompa, introduction to *Vico: Selected Writings*, p. 24.

17. Vico, *New Science*, p. 75 # 215–17; pp. 91–92 # 308–313; p. 337 # 919–921. A few lines after this, Vico claimed that natural law was "instituted by divine providence" (p. 91 # 310).

18. Vico, *Autobiography*, p. 169; Vico, *New Science*, p. 335 # 915.

19. Vico, *Autobiography*, p. 169; Vico, *New Science*, p. 79 # 245 and pp. 104–105 # 349; pp. 63–64 # 145; pp. 243–244 # 245; pp. 104–105 # 349 and p. 124 # 393; p. 63 # 141; pp. 101–102 # 340–341; p. 124 # 393.

20. Pompa, introduction to *Vico: Selected Writings*, p. 23.
21. Vico, *New Science*, pp. 97–98 # 334; p. 70 # 179; and p. 102 # 342. See also pp. 97–98 # 334 and pp. 111–112 # 366.
22. Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 231. The claim that the world of history was discovered in *Another Philosophy of History* is absurd when one is dealing with an author who was not yet born when Montesquieu was reflecting on *The Spirit of Laws*, and who was only beginning his career at the time of the death of Voltaire, whose *Essay on Universal History, the Manners, and Spirit of Nations* (this is the title of the second English edition, published in 1759), appeared eighteen years before *Another Philosophy of History*. Where the discovery of the world of history is concerned, Dubos, Ferguson, Hume, and Robertson each made a contribution.
23. Johann Gottfried Herder, *Another Philosophy of History and Selected Political Writings*, trans., with intro. and notes, by Ionnis D. Evrigenis and Daniel Pellerin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2004), p. 23 (S. 502).
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 23–24 (S. 501–502), p. 39 (S. 522–523), pp. 25–26 (S. 504–505); cf. Martin Bollacher, “‘The mole’s eye [blindness] of this very luminous age’: Herder’s Diagnosis of His Age in *Another Philosophy of History*,” quoted in Pénisson (ed.), *Herder et la philosophie de l’histoire*, p. 63.
25. Max Rouché, *La Philosophie de l’histoire de Herder* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1940), pp. 583–584.
26. Herder, *Idées pour la philosophie de l’histoire de l’humanité / Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, book 15, chapter 5, p. 281; Herder, *Werke*, edited by Wolfgang Pross., vol. 3, part 1, p. 612; Herder, *Another Philosophy*, p. 71.
27. Meinecke, *Historism*, pp. 92–95.
28. *Ibid.*, pp. 101–102.
29. *Ibid.*, pp. 6, 9, 54–63, 68–77.
30. Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs*, vol. 1, chapter 80, p. 751; Voltaire, *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, in *Oeuvres historiques*, text prepared, annotated, and presented by René Pomeau (Paris: Gallimard [Bibliothèque de la Pléiade], 1957), p. 616.
31. Voltaire, *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, pp. 1012, 1017.
32. René Pomeau, preface to *Oeuvres historiques* (Paris: Gallimard [Bibliothèque de la Pléiade], 1957), pp. 12–13.
33. Meinecke, *Historism*, p. 85.
34. Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs*, vol. 1, chapter 33, p. 425; Meinecke, *Historism*, pp. 80–81, 87–88, 55.
35. Meinecke, *Historism*, p. 102.
36. Montesquieu, *De l’Esprit des lois*, vol. 1, p. 5 (italics in the original). When it appeared in 1748, the work was entitled *De l’Esprit des lois ou du rapport que les lois doivent avoir avec la Constitution de chaque gouvernement, les Mœurs, le Climat, la Religion, le Commerce, etc.* An ambitious work, it had an immediate success (there were twenty-two editions in Geneva in less than two years). A quarter of a century earlier, the *Lettres persanes* were also enormously successful.
37. Meinecke, *Historism*, pp. 103–106, 108–114.
38. *Ibid.*, pp. 116, 123–128, 141; Montesquieu, *De l’Esprit des lois*, vol. 2, p. 265.

39. Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs*, vol. 1, chapter 82, p. 775.
40. Meinecke, *Historism*, pp. 144–153 (quotation from Mallet is italicized in the text).
41. *Ibid.*, pp. 156–161, 186.
42. *Ibid.*, pp. 186–198.
43. *Ibid.*, pp. 215–219.
44. *Ibid.*, pp. 220–221. For the *Abridgement* see *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke*, ed. Bohn, vol. 6, pp. 184–422.
45. Meinecke, *Historism*, p. 224.
46. *Ibid.*, pp. 222–223.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 225.
48. *Ibid.*, pp. 226–227.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 155.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
51. *Ibid.*, pp. 322–323.
52. *Ibid.*, pp. 323–325.
53. *Ibid.*, pp. 330–334.
54. *Ibid.*, pp. 337–339.
55. *Ibid.*, pp. 340, 369, 357–358, 368–369. Concerning Berlin, see my chapter 8.
56. Meinecke, *Historism*, pp. 347–348, 352–354.
57. Hans-Georg Gadamer, “Herder et ses théories sur l’histoire,” in *Regards sur l’histoire*, Cahiers de l’Institut allemand, published by Karl Epting, no. 2, 1941, pp. 9–11 and 13–15. The problem of Gadamer’s thought is excellently handled by Richard Wolin, *The Seduction of Unreason: The Intellectual Romance with Fascism from Nietzsche to Post-modernism*, pp. 90–128.
58. Bertrand de Jouvenel, *Après la défaite* (Paris: Plon, 1941). See Gérard Loiseaux’s excellent work *La Littérature de la défaite et de la collaboration* (Paris: Fayard, 1995).
59. Gadamer, “Herder et ses théories sur l’histoire,” pp. 13–16.
60. Pénisson, J. G. *Herder: La raison dans les peuples*, pp. 91–95.
61. Herder, *Idées/Ideen*, book 13, chapter 7, p. 235; Pross ed., vol. 3, part 1, pp. 521–522.
62. Herder, *Another Philosophy*, p. 72. The quotation marks and exclamation points are in the original text; see the Pross edition of the *Werke*, vol. 1, p. 660: “Unendliches Drama von Scenen! Epopee Gottes durch alle Jahrtausende Weltteile und Menschenschlechte, tausendgestaltige Fabel voll eines grossen Sinns!”
63. Herder, *Another Philosophy*, pp. 72, 74 (S. 562).
64. Herder, *This Too a Philosophy of History for the Formation of Humanity*, in *Philosophical Writings*, p. 350 (here the translation is closer to Herder’s text and intentions).
65. Herder, *Idées/Ideen*, book 15, chapter 5, p. 283; Pross ed., vol. 3, part 1, p. 617.
66. Gadamer, “Herder et ses théories sur l’histoire,” p. 17.
67. Herder, *This Too a Philosophy of History*, p. 319. In *Another Philosophy of History*, p. 52, instead of “humanity” we have “being human” (S. 538). See the Pross edition, vol. 1, p. 642: “Hertz! Wärme! Blut! Menschheit! Leben!”
68. Meinecke, *Historism*, pp. 332–334; Gadamer, “Herder et ses théories sur l’histoire,” p. 19.
69. Gadamer, “Herder et ses théories sur l’histoire,” pp. 18–21. Gadamer does not give

his sources, but the text preceding this quotation is easily recognizable: see *Another Philosophy*, p. 53, and my chapter 3.

70. Gadamer, “Herder et ses theories,” pp. 22–24 (the italics are in the original).

71. *Ibid.*, pp. 25–30.

72. Myriam Bienenstock, “Le Sens historique: Un sens de la force? Herder, Hegel et leurs interprètes,” in Pénisson (ed.), *Herder et la philosophie de l’histoire*, p. 165.

73. *Ibid.*, pp. 168–169. In English see *God: Some Conversations* (New York: Hafner, 1949).

74. *Ibid.*, p. 172.

75. *Ibid.*, p. 174.

76. *Ibid.*, p. 176.

77. Montesquieu, *De l’Esprit des lois*, vol. 1, pp. 6, 5; Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, pp. 214–215; Hazard, *La Pensée européenne au XVIIIe siècle*, p. 158.

78. Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), part 3, sections 7 (pp. 161–163, on “the history of the arts”) and 8 (pp. 164–171, on “the history of literature”). See especially p. 162.

79. *Ibid.*, p. 103.

80. Quoted in Rouché’s introduction to *Herder, Journal de mon voyage en l’an 1769*, pp. 34–35.

81. Jeffrey Andrew Barash, “Herder et la politique de l’historicisme,” in Pénisson (ed.), *Herder et la philosophie de l’histoire*, p. 203.

82. Montesquieu, *De l’Esprit des lois*, vol. 2, p. 314; Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse: Lettres de deux amants habitants d’une petite ville au pied des Alpes*, intro., notes, and choice of variants by René Pomeau (Paris: Garnier, 1960), p. 337.

83. Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs*, vol. 1, pp. 220–222, 253, 248, 239; Voltaire, *Lettres philosophiques*, edition presented, prepared, and annotated by Frédéric Deloffre (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), p. 61 (sixth letter).

84. Montesquieu, *De l’Esprit des lois*, vol. 2, book 30, chapter 16, p. 317; Voltaire, “Lettre à M. l’abbé Dubos,” in *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, pp. 605–607. Herder’s borrowings from Iselin, who before him developed the idea of “specific happiness,” and from Ferguson and Helvétius, who admired the vitality and power of the Barbarians, are innumerable. Herder could not have known Turgot, but it should be pointed out that this Enlightenment thinker admired the freedom enjoyed by the Middle Ages owing to their decentralization, just as Herder did. Herder, however, had nothing to say in favor of the Gothic style, whereas Turgot greatly appreciated it; Rouché, introduction to *Herder, Une autre philosophie de l’histoire*, pp. 97–98, and *La Philosophie de l’histoire de Herder*, pp. 24, 144–145; see Jean-Baptiste Dubos, *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture*, preface by Dominique Désirat (Paris: École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts, 1993).

85. Herder, *This Too a Philosophy of History*, p. 273. See also *Another Philosophy*, p. 4 (S. 478).

86. Herder, *Another Philosophy*, p. 25 (S. 504).

87. Quoted in Rouché, introduction to *Herder, Une autre philosophie de l’histoire*, pp. 102–103.

88. Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-worship and the Heroic in History*, pp. 134–135.

89. Ibid., pp. 2–3, 137, 238.

90. Taine, *Histoire de la littérature anglaise*, 17th ed., n.d., vol. 5, p. 296.

91. Ibid., pp. 208–209, 211–212, 227, 236 (italics in the text).

92. Ibid., pp. 232–233.

93. Ibid., pp. 218, 233, 236.

94. Ibid., pp. 218, 233, 238.

95. Ibid., pp. 239–242 (the quotation on p. 239 is from *Sartor Resartus*, book 1, chapter 8).

96. Ibid., pp. 244–246.

97. Ibid., p. 279.

98. Taine, *Histoire de la littérature anglaise*, 11th ed., n.d., vol. 5, p. 274.

99. Ibid., 17th ed., pp. 251–252.

100. Ibid., pp. 255, 259–261.

101. Ibid., pp. 262, 266, 270.

102. Ibid., pp. 271, 282, 280.

103. Ibid., p. 282.

104. Ibid., pp. 283–288.

105. Ernest Renan, “Lettre à M. Strauss,” in *Oeuvres complètes*, Psichari ed., vol. 1, pp. 437–438.

106. Henri Tronchon, *Ernest Renan et l'Étranger* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1928), p. 205, 217. On Herder's place in Renan's thought, see the whole of chapter 6, pp. 205–259. Another work by Tronchon is also recommended: *La fortune intellectuelle de Herder en France: La Préparation* (Paris: F. Rieder, 1920); Renan, *L'Avenir de la science*, p. 837.

107. Quoted in Édouard Richard, *Ernest Renan, penseur traditionaliste?* (Aix-en-Provence: Presses universitaires d'Aix-Marseille, 1996), p. 57.

108. Renan, *Questions contemporaines*, Préface, p. vii. Renan was criticizing here an idea common in France after the 1870 defeat that Prussia's victory was the product of the patriotic indoctrination in its primary schools; Renan, “L'Avenir religieux des sociétés modernes,” in *Questions contemporaines*, pp. 406, 416.

109. Renan, *L'Avenir de la science*, p. 934 (the italics are in the original); “Philosophie de l'histoire contemporaine,” in *Questions contemporaines*, p. 8; J. L. Dumas, “La ‘philosophie de l'histoire’ de Renan,” *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, vol. 77 (1972), pp. 105, 104.

110. Renan, *L'Avenir de la science*, pp. 944–945, 867, 873–874 (the italics are in the original).

111. Dumas, “La ‘philosophie de l'histoire’ de Renan,” p. 107; Renan, *L'Avenir de la science*, pp. 865–866.

112. Renan, *L'Avenir de la science*, pp. 868, 867, 944 (the italics are in the original); Renan, *La Réforme intellectuelle et morale*, quoted in Dumas, “La ‘philosophie de l'histoire’ de Renan,” p. 110; Renan, “Les sciences de la nature et les sciences historiques,” *Dialogues et fragments philosophiques*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, Psichari ed., vol. 1, p. 633. See also Dumas, “La ‘philosophie de l'histoire’ de Renan,” p. 125.

113. Renan, *L'Avenir de la science*, pp. 937–938, 635; Renan, “Les sciences de la

nature et les sciences historiques,” pp. 636, 635–637; Dumas, “La ‘philosophie de l’histoire’ de Renan,” p. 124 (a quote from *Dialogues et fragments philosophiques*).

114. Renan, *L’Avenir de la science*, pp. 938–939 (the italics are in the original).

115. Voltaire, *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, chapter 32, p. 1009.

116. Renan, *L’Avenir de la science*, p. 940.

Chapter Three. The Revolt against Reason and Natural Rights

1. Herder, *Another Philosophy of History and Selected Political Writings*, pp. 8–9 (S. 483–484).

2. Jeffrey Andrew Barash, “Herder et la politique de l’historicisme,” in Pénisson (ed.), *Herder et la philosophie de l’histoire*, pp. 208–210; Herder, *Another Philosophy*, pp. 96–97 (S. 585).

3. Myriam Bienenstock, “Le Sens historique: Un sens de la force? Herder, Hegel et leurs interprètes,” in Pénisson (ed.), *Herder et la philosophie de l’histoire*, p. 182. Quotation from Hegel, *Leçons sur la philosophie de l’histoire* (Paris: Vrin, 1967), p. 23.

4. Herder, *Another Philosophy*, p. 26 (S. 505); Herder, *This Too a Philosophy of History for the Formation of Humanity*, in *Philosophical Writings*, p. 292; Alexander Gillies, *Herder* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1945), pp. 36 and 58.

5. Herder, *Another Philosophy*, pp. 30–31, note at the bottom of p. 31 (S. 512); Herder, *Idées/Ideen*, book 9, chapter 4, p. 159; Pross ed., vol. 3, part 1, pp. 306–347. See especially chapter 4, p. 337 in the Pross ed., and my chapter 2.

6. Herder, *Another Philosophy*, p. 52 (S. 538).

7. Rouché, *La philosophie de l’histoire de Herder*, pp. 241–242.

8. Renaut, “Universalisme et différentialisme: Le moment herderien,” in Renaut (ed.), *Histoire de la philosophie politique*, pp. 247–248.

9. Herder, *Another Philosophy*, p. 57 (S. 545): “Papierkultur.” See also pp. 54–55 where Herder speaks of a “culture of letters” (*Letternkultur*) (S. 541). I prefer “a better position” rather than “a place better” in the translation.

10. Renaut, “Universalisme et différentialisme,” pp. 248–249.

11. Herder, *Another Philosophy*, pp. 55–58 (S. 542–543 and 545).

12. *Ibid.*, p. 55 (S. 541).

13. *Ibid.*, p. 52 (S. 537–538) and p. 69 (translation slightly amended) (S. 556).

14. Rouché, introduction to Herder, *Journal de mon voyage en l’an 1769*, p. 36 (p. 411 in the original); Herder, *Another Philosophy*, p. 53 (S. 540); Herder, *Idées/Ideen*, book 15, chapter 3, p. 275; Pross ed., vol. 3, part 1, p. 595.

15. Herder, *Another Philosophy*, pp. 40–43 (S. 524–527).

16. Herder, *Idées/Ideen*, book 8, chapter 5, p. 137; Pross ed., vol. 3, part 1, p. 298. Compare the almost identical text in *Another Philosophy*, pp. 28–29.

17. Kant, “Review of Herder’s Ideas on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind,” in *Political Writings*, ed. with an intro. by Hans Reiss, trans. by H. B. Nisbet, 2d enlarged ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 219–220. On the Kant-Herder debate see Alexis Philonenko, *La Théorie kantienne de l’histoire* (Paris: Vrin, 1986), chapter 4. For Philonenko, Herder and Kant should both be considered major figures (“suns”) of the Enlightenment.

18. Kant, “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose,” in Kant, *Political Writings*, pp. 45–47.

19. Ibid., p. 46 (the italics are in the original).

20. Ibid., pp. 47–48 (the italics are in the original); Théodore Ruysen, “La Philosophie de l’histoire selon Kant,” in *La Philosophie politique de Kant* (Paris: PUF, 1962), p. 39.

21. Kant, “Idea for a Universal History,” p. 44.

22. Herder, *Idées/Ideen*, book 15, chapter 5, p. 281; Pross ed., vol. 3, part 1, p. 613.

23. Ibid., book 8, chapter 5, p. 141; Pross ed., vol. 3, part 1, p. 302.

24. Kant, “Idea for a Universal History,” p. 42 (the italics are in the original); Kant, “Perpetual Peace, a Philosophical Sketch,” in *Political Writings*, pp. 99 and 102 (the italics are in the original); Ruysen, “La Philosophie de l’histoire selon Kant,” pp. 42–43.

25. *Opus postumum*, ed. with intro. and notes by Eckart Förster, trans. by Eckart Förster and Michael Rosen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 73 (ii, vii, par. 4): “Unvernunft und absichtliche Täuschung ist Aushägeschild Herders.” See *Opus Postumum*, vol. 21 of Kant’s *Gesammelte Schriften* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1936), p. 225. On the prompt response of the Kantians to Herder’s attack see p. 265 of the English translation. See also Ruysen, “La Philosophie de l’histoire selon Kant,” p. 40; Renaut, “Universalisme et différentialisme,” p. 246, note 11; and Pénisson (ed.), *Herder, La Raison dans les peuples*, p. 159.

26. Éric Weil, “Kant et le problème de la politique,” in *La Philosophie politique de Kant*, pp. 11–12.

27. Ibid., pp. 9, 25–29.

28. Kant, “Review of Herder’s Ideas,” pp. 201, 211, 220.

29. Ibid., p. 218.

30. Herder, *Idées/Ideen*, book 9, chapter 4, p. 157; Pross ed., vol. 3, part 1, pp. 336–337; Kant, “Review of Herder’s Ideas,” pp. 219–220 (the italics are in the original).

31. Kant, “Conjectures on the Beginning of Human History,” in *Political Writings*, p. 234.

32. Ibid., pp. 227, 226, 229, 230–231 (the italics are in the original).

33. Kant, “Idea for a Universal History,” pp. 50–51 (the italics are in the original).

34. Ernst Cassirer, Peter Gay, Paul Hazard, René Pomeau, and Alfred Cobban, to mention only the most striking commentators, long ago did justice to Enlightenment thought. Gay is the author of an authoritative work (first edition in 1966) entitled *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, vol. 1, *The Rise of Modern Paganism*; vol. 2, *The Science of Freedom* (New York: Norton, 1995). More recently, a work has appeared by Jonathan I. Israel, a historian specializing in the history of the Netherlands, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650–1750* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). This work by no means lives up to the promise of its title: it is really about Spinoza, Spinozism, and the Netherlands. It ends precisely at the time when the Enlightenment was approaching its greatest influence. More recently Israel published *Enlightenment Contested: Philosophy, Modernity and the Emancipation of Man, 1670–1752* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

35. Rouché, *La Philosophie de l’histoire de Herder*, pp. 9 (note 1), 10, 135–141, 147–148. This opinion has lost none of its validity. See also the introduction to Herder, *Une autre philosophie*, p. 93. Contrary to the idea still held about the Enlightenment, the

philosophes did not believe in the continuous and endless progress of the human race. The various theories of progress put forward in the eighteenth century were not uniform or optimistic where European history was concerned. The differences were profound both with regard to the whole human race and the general history of peoples. Kant, as we have just seen, spoke of a progress toward enlightenment, but other convinced Aufklärer stressed the periods of decline that followed the periods of greatness. In *L'Antiquité dévoilée*, Boulanger even gave antiquity a certain superiority over his own time, but it was particularly Voltaire who showed that the great periods of human history were interrupted by long centuries of decline and barbarity. How did he see the Middle Ages if not as a period of barbarity between the world of Augustus and the Italian Renaissance? There is nothing in Voltaire that allows one to think that there could not be a new period of decline in the future.

36. Montesquieu, *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Gallimard [Bibliothèque de la Pléiade], 1951), vol. 2, p. 558; Meinecke, *Historism: The Rise of a New Historical Outlook*, p. 120 (the italics are in the original); Rouché, *La Philosophie de l'histoire de Herder*, p. 137; Herder, *Idées/Ideen*, book 18, chapter 5, p. 366; Pross ed., vol. 3, part 1, p. 732.

37. See Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, pp. 209–216.

38. Herder, *Another Philosophy*, pp. 51 (S. 536), 78 (S. 566), 80 (S. 567). See note 26 on p. 78: the “three puny nails” or “three miserable platitudes” were Montesquieu’s three principles of government — virtue, honor, and fear — that define the democratic, monarchical, and despotical forms of government, respectively.

39. Montesquieu, *De l'Esprit des lois*, vol. 1, pp. 10, 19; Meinecke, *Historism*, p. 121. Meinecke quoted *Pensées et fragments*, vol. 2, p. 141.

40. Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), pp. 312–313. On Strauss’s reading of Burke see Steven J. Lenzner, “Strauss’s Burkes,” *Political Theory*, vol. 19 (1991), pp. 364–390.

41. Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, in *Works*, vol. 1, pp. 143–144, 50, 127. The text on p. 127 is also quoted in Himmelfarb, *The Roads to Modernity*, p. 76. See also Rodney W. Kilcup, “Burke’s Historicism,” *Journal of Modern History*, vol. 49 (1977), p. 396.

42. *A Vindication of Natural Society: Or a View of the Miseries and Evils Arising to Mankind from Every Species of Artificial Society*, in *Works*, vol. 1, p. 4.

43. Edmund Burke, “Speech on a Motion made in the House of Commons on the 7 of May 1782, for a Committee to inquire into the State of Representation of the Commons in Parliament,” in *Works*, vol. 6, p. 148: “I do not vilify theory and speculation: no, because that would be to vilify reason itself. . . . No, whenever I speak against theory, I mean always a weak, erroneous, fallacious, unfounded, or imperfect theory; and one of the ways of discovering that it is a false theory is comparing it with practice.”

44. See Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, p. 439; Burke, “On the Genius and Character of the French Revolution as it Regards Other Nations,” better known as “Second Letter on a Regicide Peace,” in *Works*, vol. 5, p. 258.

45. Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, pp. 171–172, 155; Strauss, *Natural Right*, p. 312; Seamus F. Deane, “Lord Acton and Edmund Burke,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 33 (1972), p. 329.

46. See Alfred Cobban, *Edmund Burke and the Revolt against the Eighteenth Century*:

A Study of the Political and Social Thinking of Burke, Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1960), pp. 24–25. Cobban does not draw the obvious conclusions from this analysis. He thinks that Burke continued and developed Locke's line of thought and was in fact his disciple (p. 74).

47. John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government*, in *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. by Peter Laslett (New York: New American Library, 1965), chapter 2, sections 4, 6; chapter 9, sections 123–126. The orthography in quotations has been modernized and capital letters, when not necessary, eliminated: “state of nature” and not “State of Nature,” “reason” and not “Reason.”

48. Rouché, introduction to Herder, *Une autre philosophie*, p. 12, quotes the *Essay on the Manners*, chapters 1 and 3; Herder, *Another Philosophy*, p. 4 (S. 478).

49. Herder, *Another Philosophy*, p. 5 (S. 489).

50. *Ibid.*, pp. 5–7 (S. 479–481): “Weltlichen Geschichte” means also profane, secular history.

51. *Ibid.*, pp. 7–8 (S. 482–483).

52. *Ibid.*, p. 8 (S. 483). “Vaterliebe” (Pross ed., vol. 1, p. 596): “love of the country” instead of “love of the father” given by the English translation.

53. *Ibid.*, pp. 9–10 (S. 484–485).

54. Locke, *Second Treatise*, chapter. 11, section 134, chapter 6, section 57.

55. *Ibid.*, chapters 10 to 15, sections 132 to 174; chapter 8, section 97.

56. *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers*, texts chosen and presented by Alain Pons (Paris: Flammarion, “GF” 1986), vol. 1, pp. 257 (article “Autorité politique”), 128, 259, 261.

57. On the *Reflections* as a response to Price's sermon see Lock, *Edmund Burke*, pp. 253–255, 287–297, 302–315.

58. Burke, *Reflections*, p. 284: “Whenever our neighbour's house is on fire, it cannot be amiss for the engines to play a little on our own.”

59. Voltaire, *Lettres philosophiques*, edition presented, prepared, and annotated by Frédéric Deloffre (Paris: Gallimard, “Folio,” 1986), p. 88; D'Alembert, “Discours préliminaire,” in *Encyclopédie*, p. 152.

60. Burke, *Reflections*, p. 455; Burke, “An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs,” p. 113.

61. Burke, “Speech on American Taxation,” in *Works*, vol. 1, p. 432. See also the Oxford edition of *Writings and Speeches*, vol. 2, pp. 406–463.

62. Burke, “Speech on Moving Resolutions for Conciliation with the Colonies,” in *Works*, vol. 1, p. 464. This famous speech is better known as “Speech on Conciliation with America,” and that is how it appears in volume 3 of the Oxford edition, pp. 102–169. In this connection, it is worth glancing at the true meaning of this concrete and nonabstract conception of liberty valued by Burke. Burke said it was the colonists of the south, the people of Virginia and the Carolinas, who were the most attached to liberty. He thought that all the colonists cherished the spirit of liberty, founded on Protestantism. Religion, which was “always a principle of energy,” was “one main cause of this free spirit”: “All Protestantism, even the coldest and most passive, is a sort of dissent,” but the Protestantism that prevailed in the northern colonies was the dissidence of dissent. This explained the colonists' attachment to freedom. In the South, however, this spirit was still

“more high and haughty.” As slave owners who came into contact with slavery in their everyday lives, these colonists were, as was the case everywhere else in the world, “those who are by far the most proud and jealous of their freedom. Freedom is to them not only an enjoyment, but a kind of rank and privilege.” Burke did not pass any value judgment on the situation in the South; he would not go so far as to “commend the superior morality of this sentiment, which has at least as much pride as virtue in it,” but concluded, “I cannot alter the nature of man.” It was a fact that the attachment to freedom in the South was deeper than in the North: “Such were all the ancient commonwealths; such were our Gothic ancestors; such in our day were the Poles, and such will be all masters of slaves, who are not slaves themselves.” Thus, slavery developed and strengthened the spirit of freedom. Burke saw nothing wrong in the freedom of some being based on the absence of freedom or slavery of others. Freedom was a way of maintaining one’s rank; it was the natural characteristic of a minority. This opinion explains Burke’s position with regard to the electoral reform in England in 1782 as well as his defense of the principle of virtual representation and his opposition to the first changes in the constitution in France in May 1789 (pp. 466–467).

63. Burke, “An Appeal,” p. 31; “A Letter to . . . Sheriffs of the City of Bristol on the Affairs of America,” in *Works*, vol. 2, pp. 2–10, 31 (see quotation in Randall B. Ripley, “Adams, Burke and Eighteenth-Century Conservatism,” *Political Science Quarterly*, vol. 80 [1965], p. 220), and volume 3 of the Oxford edition of the *Writings and Speeches*, pp. 228–230.

64. The trial of Warren Hastings, governor of India from 1773 to 1785, lasted until 1795. Hastings was acquitted. Burke, who had prepared this impeachment since 1784, attached extraordinary importance to it. He gave the opening speech, which lasted for four days (February 15, 16, 18, and 19, 1788) and was considered one of the greatest oratorical performances of its time. See *The Writings and Speeches* (Oxford edition), vol. 6, pp. 269–459. See also the introduction in volume 7. It is not possible in the context of this work to attempt to analyze all the texts in volumes 5 to 7, which, by and large, where the subjects that interest us here are concerned, always come down to the same main principles: respect for traditions, history, and local cultures, the danger of revolutions, respect for Christian values, which have a place in Burke similar to the one they have in Herder.

65. See the work by the doyen of American political scientists, Robert A. Dahl, *How Democratic Is the American Constitution?* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

66. Yehoshua Arieli, *Individualism and Nationalism in American Ideology* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964), pp. 50, 82–87. How the Declaration of Rights of Virginia could tolerate slavery, how Thomas Jefferson, a slave owner at his fine property of Monticello, how George Washington, owner of a plantation in the north of the state (today in the suburbs of the federal capital), could not perceive its intolerable nature, is another question that relates to the whole culture of the Southern states. Here it should be noted that the French Revolution liberated France’s slaves, just as it liberated the Jews. But, apart from this enormous lapse on the part of the Americans, the principles of the rights of man were inscribed in the law and the structures of the government of the United States.

67. Paine, *Rights of Man*, p. 117.

68. Burke, “Second Letter on a Regicide Peace,” p. 259; Burke, *Reflections*, p. 396.
69. Burke, “An Appeal,” pp. 29, 30–31 (see also pp. 31–32); Burke, “Speech on the Army Estimates,” in *Works*, vol. 3, p. 278.
70. Burke, “An Appeal,” p. 30; Burke, “A Letter to . . . Sheriffs,” pp. 29–30.
71. Burke, “Second Letter on a Regicide Peace,” p. 259.
72. *Ibid.*, pp. 233–234.
73. Burke, *Reflections*, p. 362; Burke, “Second Letter on a Regicide Peace,” p. 232.
74. Burke, “Second Letter on a Regicide Peace,” p. 247; *Reflections*, p. 352.
75. Burke, “Second Letter on a Regicide Peace,” pp. 255, 245–246.
76. See the following interesting study of *raison d'état* in Burke: David Armitage, “E. Burke and Reason of State,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 61 (2000), pp. 617–634; Burke, “Second Letter on a Regicide Peace,” pp. 231–233.
77. *Ibid.*, pp. 231–233, 257; *Reflections*, p. 361.
78. Burke, “Speech on the Army Estimates,” p. 278.
79. For a view of Burke as a liberal, see especially Sanford Lakoff, “Tocqueville, Burke and the Origins of Liberal Conservatism,” *Review of Politics*, vol. 60 (1998), pp. 435–464, and Cruise Conor O’Brien, *The Great Melody: A Thematic Biography and Commented Anthology of Edmund Burke*. See also Michel Ganzin, *La Pensée politique d’Edmund Burke* (Paris: Librairie générale de droit et de jurisprudence, 1972), pp. 302ff., and Philip Raynaud’s preface to the French translation of the “Reflections”: *Réflexions sur la Révolution de France* (Paris: Hachette, 1989), p. xv. These two texts present Burke as a disciple of Locke. In this connection, see also Isaac Kramnick, “The Left and Edmund Burke,” *Political Theory*, vol. 11 (1983), pp. 189–214.
80. This chapel took its name from its location on the site of a former ghetto.
81. On Richard Price (1723–1791), see Carl B. Bone, *Torchbearer of Freedom: The Influence of Richard Price on Eighteenth Century Thought* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1952), and D. O. Thomas, *The Honest Mind: The Thought and Work of Richard Price* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977). Price’s *Observations* was reprinted a dozen times in the year of publication: see Lock, *Edmund Burke*, vol. 1, p. 406.
82. On Josiah Tucker (1711–1799), see especially J. G. A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).
83. J. G. A. Pocock, introduction to Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), pp. li, xv–xvi.
84. Burke, “A Letter to . . . Sheriffs,” p. 29. Cf. F. P. Lock, *Burke’s Reflections on the Revolution in France*, p. 66.
85. Burke, *Reflections*, pp. 287, 289–290, 304–306. (Burke gives a correct summary of the liberal argument in order the better to refute it.) See also pp. 302–303 and 284–289; “Speech on the Army Estimates,” pp. 278–279.
86. Burke, *Reflections*, pp. 306, 305, 284, 299, 307. See also pp. 305–306; “An Appeal,” pp. 11, 45. To Burke’s argument, Paine replied that one could always go further back in history and find a still more ancient custom, and in fact, through this process, one would ultimately reach the truth: “We shall come to the time when man came from the hand of his Maker. What was he then? Man. Man was his high and only title” (*Rights of Man*, p. 31).
87. Lois G. Schworer, “The Bill of Rights: Epitome of the Revolution of 1688–89,” in

J. G. A. Pocock (ed.), *Three British Revolutions: 1641, 1688, 1776* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 226–237.

88. The most effective of these new editions was an anonymous adaptation of John Milton's *Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, published under the explicit title of "Pro Populo Adversus Tyrannos." Another text that clarified the nature of the public debate of the period was George Lawson's *Politica Sacra et Civilis: or a Model of Ecclesiastical Government*, which anticipated Locke. See Pocock (ed.), *Three British Revolutions*, p. 233; Burke, "Speech on the Army Estimates," pp. 274–275.

89. Pocock (ed.), *Three British Revolutions*, p. 237.

90. Burke, *Reflections*, pp. 439, 351.

91. Burke, "Speech on the Army Estimates," pp. 274–275; *Reflections*, pp. 312, 326, 309. He did not acknowledge that France had produced as perfect a system as the English one, but he thought there was an established order, and its very existence constituted a guarantee.

92. See Éric Weill, *Hegel et l'État* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1950), pp. 21, 27 (the italics are in the original).

93. Joseph de Maistre, *Les Soirées de Saint-Pétersbourg, ou entretiens sur le gouvernement temporel de la Providence* (Paris: Éditions de la Maisnie, 1980), vol. 1, pp. 108, 216; de Maistre, *Écrits sur la Révolution*, pp. 139–140; de Maistre, *Considérations sur la France*, pp. 25, 26.

94. Carlyle, "On History," in *Works*, vol. 27, p. 88; Carlyle, "Chartism," in *Works*, vol. 29, p. 133; Carlyle, "Miscellaneous Essays," in *Works*, vol. 28, p. 5.

95. Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus* (Carlyle's House ed.), pp. 210, 212. This book, called by Taine a "philosophy of costume," contains a metaphysics, a politics, and a psychology. Carlyle regards man as a clothed animal and society as based on a piece of cloth: Taine, *Histoire de la littérature anglaise*, 17th ed., vol. 5, p. 218.

96. "The New Downing Street," in *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, in *Works*, vol. 20, p. 142.

97. Ernst Cassirer, *The Myth of the State* (New York: Doubleday, 1955), pp. 271–272.

98. Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-worship and the Heroic in History* p. 22; Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus* (Carlyle's House ed.), p. 212.

99. Taine, *Histoire de la littérature anglaise*, vol. 3, p. 7, quoted in Éric Gasparini, *La Pensée politique d'Hippolyte Taine: Entre traditionalisme et libéralisme* (Aix-en-Provence: Presses universitaires d'Aix-Marseille, 1993), p. 194.

100. Taine, *Histoire de la littérature anglaise*, 17th ed., n.d., vol. 5, p. 253.

101. Taine, *Les Origines de la France contemporaine* (Paris: Laffont, "Bouquins," 1986), vol. 1, pp. 153–155, 158. The word "majority" is in quotation marks, and "Reason" is italicized. See also p. 160, as well as Taine's analytical table of contents on p. 829.

102. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 158.

103. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 3–4, 165, 175–80.

104. Renan, "La Monarchie constitutionnelle," pp. 236–239, 304; *L'Avenir de la science*, p. 749; *Questions contemporaines*, preface, p. xxvi.

105. Renan, *La Réforme*, p. 9.

106. Renan, *Questions contemporaines*, preface, pp. ii–iv. However, one should not forget the duality that existed in Renan. Renan never completely liberated himself from

the fascination the revolution held for him. One finds innumerable contradictions in his writings. Immediately before the Franco-Prussian War, he wrote the following text (“La Monarchie constitutionnelle,” pp. 235–236): “The French Revolution is so extraordinary an event that it must be the starting point for any consideration of the affairs of our time. Nothing of importance happens in France that is not the consequence of this major occurrence. . . . Like all that is great, heroic, daring, like everything that transcends the common measure of human capacities, the French Revolution will be a subject the world will discuss for centuries. . . . In a sense, the French Revolution (the Empire, in my opinion, forms part of it) is the glory of France, the French epic par excellence: but, nearly always, nations that have an exceptional deed in their history must atone for this deed by long sufferings, and often, by paying with their national existence.” The same thing applies to the Jews: his constant concern to minimize the place of the Jews in Western civilization is counterbalanced by two lectures given two months after his lecture, “What Is a Nation?” and published after it: “The Original Identity and the Gradual Separation of Judaism and Christianity: A Lecture Given at the Society for Jewish Studies on May 26, 1883,” and “Judaism as a Race and Religion: A Lecture Given in the Cercle Saint-Simon on January 27, 1883,” in *Oeuvres complètes*, Psichari ed., vol. 1, pp. 907–944.

107. Renan, “La Monarchie constitutionnelle,” p. 241; *L’Avenir de la science*, p. 1030; *Questions contemporaines*, preface, pp. iii–iv.

108. Renan, “Philosophie de l’histoire contemporaine,” in *Questions contemporaines*, pp. 31–32.

109. Renan, *La Réforme*, p. 7.

110. Renan, “Philosophie de l’histoire contemporaine,” pp. 61–62; Renan, “Monsieur de Sacy et l’école libérale,” in *Essais de morale et de critique*, *Oeuvres complètes*, Psichari ed., vol. 2, p. 47, quoted in Richard, *Ernest Renan*, p. 130, note 62.

111. Richard, *Ernest Renan*, pp. 140–141; “La Monarchie constitutionnelle,” p. 241; *Essais de morale et de critique*, *Oeuvres complètes*, Psichari ed., vol. 2, p. 83, quoted in Richard, *Ernest Renan*, pp. 130–131.

112. Renan, *L’Avenir de la science*, p. 749; Renan, “Dialogues et fragments philosophiques,” in *Oeuvres complètes*, Psichari ed., vol. 1, p. 572; Renan, “La Part de la famille et de l’État dans l’Éducation,” in *Oeuvres complètes*, Psichari ed., vol. 1, p. 526 (this text is also quoted in Richard, *Ernest Renan*, p. 202, note 751); Renan, “La Monarchie constitutionnelle,” p. 242.

113. Carlyle, “Jesuitism,” August 1, 1850, in *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, p. 316.

114. Taine, *Histoire de la littérature anglaise*, 7th ed., n.d., vol. 5, p. 227.

115. Carlyle, “Signs of Times,” in *Critical Essays*, pp. 63–67, 73–74; *Heroes*, pp. 199, 74–75, 298–300.

Chapter Four. The Political Culture of Prejudice

1. Herder, *Another Philosophy of History and Selected Political Writings*, pp. 46–47 (S. 530–532), 96 (S. 584–585), 4 (S. 478).

2. Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, pp. 307; Burke, “An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs,” pp. 79–80.

3. Burke, *Reflections*, p. 307.

4. Ibid., pp. 368–369, 367.
5. Burke, “An Appeal,” pp. 94, 80.
6. Burke, *Reflections*, pp. 362–365, 371, 375, 371–372.
7. Burke, “Letter to Richard Burke, *post* 19 February 1792,” in *Works*, vol. 6, p. 70, and *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke* (Oxford edition), vol. 9, pp. 647–648.
8. Paine, *Rights of Man*, pp. 50–51.
9. Burke, *Reflections*, pp. 424, 362.
10. Russell Kirk, “Burke and the Philosophy of Prescription,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 14 (1953), p. 372.
11. Cf. Kilcup, “Burke’s Historicism,” pp. 395, 397–398, where the “First Letter on a Regicide Peace” and the *Reflections* are quoted.
12. Cobban, *Edmund Burke*, p. 86.
13. Kilcup, “Burke’s Historicism,” pp. 395–396.
14. Burke, “Speech on the Army Estimates,” p. 275; *Reflections*, pp. 331–332; “An Appeal,” p. 95. The italics are in the original. See also p. 11.
15. Francis P. Canavan, “E. Burke’s Conception of the Role of Reason in Politics,” *The Journal of Politics*, vol. 21 (1959), p. 71. The quotation is from *Works*, vol. 13, p. 166, February 16, 1788; Burke, *Reflections*, pp. 282–283, 329–335, 308; Burke, “An Appeal,” p. 95. On the gradual process of Burke’s alienation from his party see Lock, *Burke’s Reflections on the Revolution in France*, pp. 36ff.
16. See Don Herzog, “Puzzling Through Burke,” *Political Theory*, vol. 19 (1991), pp. 351–352.
17. Burke, “Second Letter on a Regicide Peace,” pp. 231–232.
18. Burke, “An Appeal,” p. 80; Cobban, *Edmund Burke*, p. 99 (quoting *Works*, vol. 8, p. 141) and p. 89.
19. Kilcup, “Burke’s Historicism,” p. 398; Kilcup who quotes Burke’s “Impeachment of Warren Hastings,” in *Works*, Boston 1866, vol. 12, p. 164.
20. Burke, *Reflections*, pp. 359–360.
21. Cobban, *Edmund Burke*, pp. 87–89.
22. Burke, “Speech on Moving his Resolution on Conciliation with the Colonies,” in *Works*, vol. 1, pp. 470–471.
23. De Maistre, “Réflexions sur le protestantisme,” in *Écrits sur la Révolution*, p. 335.
24. De Maistre, “Essai sur le principe générateur des constitutions politiques et des autres institutions humaines,” in *Considérations sur la France*, pp. 257 (“Man believed he had the capacity to create, but he does not even have that of naming”), pp. 219–220. See also *Écrits sur la Révolution*, pp. 93–94, 141.
25. De Maistre, *Du pape* (Geneva: Droz, 1966), p. 232 (the italics are in the original); de Maistre, “Principe générateur,” p. 258.
26. De Maistre, *Considérations sur la France*, p. 15; de Maistre, *Les Soirées de Saint-Pétersbourg*, vol. 1, pp. 72, 30–31 (the italics are in the original); on the hangman, see *Les Soirées*, vol. 1, pp. 32–34, and vol. 2, pp. 5–6; de Maistre, “Principe générateur,” pp. 259–260, 246–249; de Maistre, *Écrits sur la Révolution*, p. 112.
27. De Maistre, “Réflexions sur le protestantisme,” pp. 220 and 227.
28. Ibid., pp. 219–223, 227, 234–237, 239 (the italics are in the original); de Maistre, *Du pape*, p. 29.

29. De Maistre, *Écrits sur la Révolution*, pp. 133, 139–140, 182 (the italics are in the original).

30. De Maistre, “Principe générateur,” pp. 238, 212, 218, 233 (the italics are in the original). See also pp. 239–242 and *Écrits sur la Révolution*, pp. 142, 145–146, 150; de Maistre, *Les Soirées*, vol. 1, p. 72 (the italics are in the original).

31. De Maistre, *Considérations sur la France*, in *Écrits sur la Révolution*, p. 145 (the italics are in the original); de Maistre, *Les Soirées*, vol. 1, p. 63; Isaiah Berlin, “Joseph de Maistre and the Origins of Fascism,” in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity* (London: John Murray, 1990), pp. 91–174.

32. De Maistre, “Principe générateur,” pp. 218, 213, 211–212.

33. *Ibid.*, pp. 219–222 (the italics are in the original). See also p. 213.

34. De Maistre, “Principe générateur,” pp. 213, 195–196, 233, 215–217 (the italics are in the original); de Maistre, *Considérations sur la France*, p. 102 (the italicized words, in English, are in the original).

35. De Maistre, *Considérations sur la France*, pp. 102, 107, 101.

36. Herder, *Idées/Ideen*, book 13, chapter 7, p. 235; Pross ed., vol. 3, part 1, p. 521, and book 15, chapter 3, p. 275; Pross ed., vol. 3, part 1, p. 597.

37. Alphonse Aulard, *Taine: Historien de la Révolution française* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1907), pp. 4–6. Aulard quotes the German text in *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, 4 vols. (Riga: 1784–1791). The quotation is from vol. 3 (1787), p. 333. On p. 4 the German quotation is from vol. 3, p. 121. See also Aulard quoting the following text from Herder: “Just as a spring of living waters draws its component parts, its properties and its taste from the matters it encounters in its course, so the original character of a nation is derived from its family traits, its climate, its type of life, its education, its first efforts and its habitual occupations.” On p. 6, in support of his distinction between Herder and Taine, Aulard again quoted Herder: “Even among the least mixed nations, so many geographical and political factors have muddled the course of history that, in order to follow its detours, one needs to have a penetrating and unclouded vision.” Aulard’s work constitutes a devastating criticism of Taine’s work as a historian. The degree to which this criticism is justified is a question about which a great deal has been written. It is not of primary interest in the present context.

38. François Léger, “L’idée de race chez Taine,” in Pierre Guiral and Émile Témime (eds.), *L’idée de race dans la pensée politique française contemporaine* (Paris: Éditions de CNRS, 1977), p. 89. See also André Chevrillon, *Taine: Formation de sa pensée* (Paris: Plon, 1932).

39. Aulard, in *Taine: Historien*, p. 5, quotes Quinet’s translation, vol. 2, p. 414.

40. Herder, *Idées/Ideen*, book 9, chapter 4, p. 159; Pross ed., vol. 3, part 1, pp. 337ff.

41. Taine, *Les Origines de la France contemporaine*, vol. 1, p. 5; Taine, *Histoire de la littérature anglaise*, 17th ed., vol. 5, p. 252.

42. Taine, *Les Origines*, vol. 1, pp. 134–135, 137, 4 (the italics are in the original); Taine, *Les Philosophes classiques du XIXe siècle français*, pp. 370 and 340, quoted in Gasparini, *La Pensée politique d’Hippolyte Taine*, pp. 95–96.

43. Taine, *Les Origines*, vol. 1, pp. 271, 412.

44. *Ibid.*, pp. 271, 412, 414; Taine, *Histoire de la littérature anglaise*, 18th ed., n.d., vol. 1, p. xxxvi.

45. Taine, *Les Origines*, vol. 1, p. 413.
46. Maurice Barrès was to develop this theme, which became one of the great metaphors of the nationalism of the Land and the Dead: the nationalism of the new right of the turn of the twentieth century; see my chapter 7.
47. Taine, *Histoire de la littérature anglaise*, 18th ed., vol. 1, p. xxxiii.
48. Quoted in Gasparini, *La Pensée politique*, p. 290.
49. Ibid., pp. 111–114. In spite of the fact that Gasparini's book is based on an excellent doctoral thesis, it repeats the same clichés.
50. Taine, *Les Origines*, vol. 1, pp. 415, 162, 414, 182 (the italics are in the original).
51. Ibid., vol. 1, p. 156.
52. Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 571, 414, 413, 415.
53. Ibid., vol. 1, p. 415.
54. Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 156, 179–180.
55. Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 178, 571–572, 180–181, 420, 420, 413, 465, 462, 151, 464, 147, 464–465.
56. Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 79–80. See also Gasparini, *La Pensée politique*, pp. 221–222.
57. Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 157–158, 9–11 (the quotation marks are Taine's; Taine is presumably speaking of the three estates: the nobility, the clergy, and the third estate); Taine, *Histoire de la littérature anglaise* (Paris: Hachette, 1964) vol. 4, pp. 297–298, quoted in Gasparini, *La Pensée politique*, pp. 74–75; Taine, *Les Origines*, vol. 2, p. 610. See also vol. 2, p. 67, and Gasparini, *La Pensée politique*, p. 72.
58. Taine, *Les Origines*, vol. 1, p. 462.
59. Ibid., vol. 1, p. 730.
60. Aulard, *Taine: Historien*, p. 17, quotes the well-known *Essai sur Taine* by Victor Giraud, 3d ed., p. 88.
61. Renan, *L'Avenir de la science*, pp. 929, 995–996 (the italics are in the original). Renan returned to this idea, which he expressed in the same way, on p. 995. "It is original" is our choice for "elle est primitive"; Renan, "La Monarchie constitutionnelle," pp. 241–242.
62. Renan, "La Monarchie constitutionnelle," pp. 243–248. See also pp. 238–239 on "the great weighty masses among whom intelligence is possessed by only a small number, but who contribute greatly to civilization by placing at the service of the State, through conscription and taxes, a marvelous fund of abnegation, docility and acceptance"; cf. also quote from Renan in Richard, *Ernest Renan*, p. 143, note 165.
63. Renan, *La Réforme intellectuelle et morale*, pp. 69, 67.
64. Renan, *L'Avenir de la science*, pp. 997–1001.
65. Thomas Carlyle, "The Present Time," February 15, 1850, in *The Latter-Day Pamphlets*, in *Works*, vol. 20, pp. 1–2; Carlyle, "The Nigger Question," in *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*, in *Works*, vol. 29, p. 355.
66. Carlyle, *Critical Essays*, vol. 2, pp. 68–70; Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*, p. 15; Carlyle, *Past and Present*, in *Works*, vol. 10, pp. 241–242.
67. Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*, in *Works*, vol. 1, p. 198.
68. Carlyle, "Chartism," in *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*, in *Works*, vol. 29, pp. 153, 152–153, 157–158. See also Carlyle, "The Nigger Question," pp. 372–373, and "The Present Time," p. 23.

69. Burke, “Letter to Richard Burke *post* February 1792,” vol. 9, p. 657. See also Kilcup, “Burke’s Historicism,” p. 400.

70. Burke, “An Appeal,” p. 115.

71. On this, see Francis P. Canavan, who quoted Burke in “E. Burke’s Conception of the Role of Reason in Politics”: “The lines of morality are not like the ideal lines of mathematicks. They are broad and deep as well as long. They admit of exceptions; they demand modifications. These exceptions and modifications are not made by the process of logick, but by the rules of prudence” (*Works*, vol. 6, p. 97). See also Canavan, p. 77: “Burke believed that ‘no moral questions are ever abstract questions’ and that before judgement could be passed upon ‘any abstract proposition,’ it ‘must be embedded in circumstances.’ For he said, ‘things are right or wrong, morally speaking, only by their relation and connexion with other things.’”

72. Burke, *Reflections*, pp. 318, 359. There is also another important sentence here: “Prejudice renders a man’s virtue his habit, and not a series of unconnected acts. Through just prejudice, his duty becomes part of his nature.”

73. Burke, *Reflections*, 307–308, 359, 327, 350, 359, 454.

74. Canavan, “E. Burke’s Conception of the Role of Reason in Politics,” pp. 74–75. See also James Connif, “Burke and India: The Failure of the Theory of Trusteeship,” *Political Research Quarterly*, vol. 46 (1993), p. 302.

75. See Herzog, “Puzzling Through Burke,” pp. 355–356.

76. Burke, “An Appeal,” p. 85.

77. Quoted in Cobban, *Edmund Burke*, p. 70.

78. Burke, “An Appeal,” pp. 76–77. See also pp. 82–85, 94–95.

79. Burke, *Reflections*, pp. 334, 306.

80. Quoted in Michael Freeman, “E. Burke and the Sociology of Revolution,” *Political Studies*, vol. 25 (1977), p. 464. This quotation comes from the last paragraph of *Thoughts and Details on Scarcity*. See also the letter of October 28, 1790, to Gaëtan-Pierre Dupont.

81. Burke, “An Appeal,” pp. 44–45; Burke, *Reflections*, p. 333 (the italics are in the original).

82. Burke, *Reflections*, p. 366; Burke, “An Appeal,” p. 85.

83. Rouché, introduction to *Journal de mon voyage en l’an 1769*, p. 47 (pp. 472–473 in vol. 4 of the Suphan ed.).

84. Herder, *Another Philosophy*, pp. 29–30 (S. 510).

85. Ibid., pp. 88, 87 (S. 575–576), 52 (S. 538).

86. Ibid., pp. 87–89 (S. 576), 91 (S. 579).

87. Ibid., pp. 87–88 (S. 575–576).

88. Ibid., p. 40 (S. 524).

89. Voltaire, *Le Siècle de Louis XIV*, vol. 4: *Précis du règne de Louis XV*, chapter 41: “Des Lois.”

90. Rouché’s bilingual edition of Herder’s *Another Philosophy of History*, pp. 244–245; the English translation (pp. 50–51) as it stands is pretty incoherent. The translation in *This Too a Philosophy of History* is no clearer.

91. Montesquieu, *L’Esprit des lois*, vol. 1, book 15, chapter 3, p. 257.

92. Herder, *Another Philosophy*, p. 51 (S. 536).

93. Herder, *This Too a Philosophy of History*, p. 322 (S. 542).

94. Herder, *Another Philosophy*, p. 56 (S. 544).
95. Carlyle, *Past and Present*, p. 277. On Burke's idea of ideal parliamentary representation, see my next chapter.
96. Carlyle, "The Present Time," pp. 22, 12, 15, 21–22, 14–15, 34, 15–16, 22–23 (the quotation marks are in the original); Carlyle, "Parliaments," in *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, p. 244.
97. Carlyle, *Past and Present*, pp. 215–216. See also "Downing Street," in *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, p. 12.
98. Carlyle, "Parliaments," p. 246; Carlyle, "The Nigger Question," p. 360; Carlyle, "Chartism," p. 159. See also Carlyle, *Heroes*, p. 164. In a democracy, "whoever can speak . . . becomes a power. . . . The nation is governed by all that has tongue in the nation."
99. Taine, *Histoire de la littérature anglaise*, 17th ed., vol. 5, pp. 291–295.
100. Ibid., p. 296.
101. Ibid.
102. Taine, *Les Origines*, vol. 1, pp. 242, 573.
103. Paine, *Rights of Man*, p. 54.
104. Taine, *Les Origines*, vol. 1, p. 180.
105. Aulard, *Taine: Historien*, quoting Taine, *Vie et correspondance*, vol. 3, p. 266: letter to M. de Boislie of July 26, 1874.
106. Taine, *Les Origines*, vol. 1, pp. 779, 640.
107. Quoted in Gasparini, *La Pensée politique*, p. 222; Aulard, *Taine: Historien*, p. 16, quotes Taine, *Vie et Correspondance*, p. 225, letter of May 6, 1873; Taine, *Les Origines*, vol. 2, p. 595.
108. Taine, *Les Origines*, vol. 1, pp. 417, 416, 418; vol. 2, p. 232.
109. See the vindication of the French monarchy in the first pages of the first volume of *Origines*, especially p. 15; see also p. 158.

Chapter Five. The Law of Inequality and the War on Democracy

1. Paine, *Rights of Man*, p. 39; Jean de Viguerie, *Histoire et Dictionnaire du temps des Lumières, 1715–1789* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1995), p. 557. See also pp. 553–556. This volume is a remarkable working tool.
2. On that aspect of Burke's relation to America see Ross J. S. Hoffman, *Edmund Burke: New York Agent with Letters to the New York Assembly and Intimate Correspondence with Charles O'Hara, 1761–1776* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1956), especially pp. 103–193, covering the years 1771–1775. On the offer of the seat of Bristol see pp. 161–164, and on "The Member for Bristol and New York Agent in the Parliament of 1774" see pp. 165ff.
3. *The Writings and Speeches of Edmund Burke*, Oxford edition, vol. 3, p. 61.
4. Edmund Burke, "To the Electors of Bristol," in *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke* (*The Works*, ed. Bohn), vol. 1, p. 447. In vol. 3 of the Oxford edition, this text is given as "Speech at the Conclusion of the Poll," pp. 64–70 (the italics are in the original).
5. Burke, "Speech on Bill for Shortening the Duration of Parliaments," in *The Works*,

ed. Bohn, vol. 6, pp. 132–133. The exact date of this speech, in which Burke called for a strict adherence to the Septennial Act, is not known. It was probably given in May 1780. A motion for the adoption of measures allowing for more frequent elections was presented to the House every year by John Sawbridge. This speech appears under the title “Speech on the Duration of Parliaments” in vol. 3 of the Oxford edition, pp. 144–153.

6. Burke, “Speech on a Motion made in the House of Commons on the 7th of May 1782, for a Committee to Inquire into the State of Representation of the Commons in Parliament,” in *The Works*, ed. Bohn, vol. 6, p. 144. See also the continuation, pp. 144–153.

7. Burke, “A Letter to Sir Hercules Langrishe . . . on the Subject of Roman Catholics of Ireland . . .,” in *The Works*, ed. Bohn, vol. 3, pp. 334–335.

8. Ross J. S. Hoffmann and Paul Levack (eds.), *Burke's Politics: Selected Writings and Speeches on Reform, Revolution and War* (New York: Knopf, 1949), p. 224. It is true that the frequency of elections, in which votes and seats were bought, favored the powerful by encouraging corruption. Burke used this argument in opposing a plan for reducing the duration of Parliament to three years. After all, there was a simple way of eliminating corruption: the enlargement of the electoral base would have made possible the rehabilitation of the system. The real reason for Burke's opposition, however, was his wish to reduce as far as possible the dependence of those elected and their need to give an account of their activities. See “Speech on a Bill,” pp. 132–143.

9. Richard Price, *Discourse on the Love of Our Country* (Oxford: Woodstock Books, 1992), pp. 39–42.

10. Burke, “Speech on a Motion,” pp. 144–153.

11. Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, pp. 516–517.

12. Burke, “A Letter on the Duration of Parliaments. To the Chairman of the Buckinghamshire Meeting, held on the 13 April, 1780 at Aylesbury,” in *The Works*, ed. Bohn, vol. 6, p. 2. Burke intervened everywhere and on all occasions to block any attempt at electoral reform. Here he sought to convince the voters in the county of Buckinghamshire, who had to decide on the question of the duration of parliaments as well as that of greater equality of parliamentary representation. This important text, which throws light both on Burke's thinking and on his political activity, is not found in volume 3 of the Oxford edition of *Writings*, where it would normally belong.

13. Burke, “Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents,” in *The Works*, ed. Bohn, vol. 1, p. 368. He also said in one of his most famous passages: “Our constitution stands on a nice equipoise, with steep precipices and deep waters upon all sides of it. In removing it from a dangerous leaning towards one side, there may be a risk of oversetting it on the other. Every project of a material change in a government so complicated as ours, combined at the same time with external circumstances still more complicated, is a matter full of difficulties; in which a considerate man will not be too ready to decide; a prudent man too ready to undertake; or an honest man too ready to promise.”

14. See Hoffmann and Levack (eds.), *Burke's Politics*, pp. 216–217. It was only in 1911 that the duration of Parliament was shortened to five years.

15. Burke, “An Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs,” pp. 66–67, 115. This text was aimed first of all at Charles Fox, who was also true to himself, and that was the reason why in February 1793 the Whig leader was the object of a despicable attack by Burke,

who had been his friend. According to Burke, Fox had entered into contact, through a special emissary, with the Russian government without informing the British cabinet, an act that made him virtually guilty of high treason. In order to counteract Fox's influence, Burke, the inventor of modern ideological warfare, did not hesitate to use this vulgar pretext in order to defame this man for whom he began to have a boundless hatred from the moment he supported the revolution. Cf. Edmund Burke, *A Letter from the Right Honourable Edmund Burke to his Grace the Duke of Portland, on the Conduct of the Minority in Parliament. Containing Fifty-Four Articles of Impeachment against the Rt. Hon. C. J. Fox. From the Original Copy, in the Possession of the Noble Duke* (London: Printed for the editor and sold by J. Owen, no. 168, Piccadilly, MDCCXCVII), pp. 1–6. Fox was accused not of “absolute high treason” but of acts “not very remote from that offence.” This text, addressed to the Duke of Portland as well as another eminent figure of the British aristocracy in order to convince them of the danger represented by Fox's “subversive” ideas, was not intended for publication. Portland rejected Burke's attack on Fox. See *The Writings*, Oxford edition, vol. 8, pp. 403–452.

16. Burke, “Speech on a Motion,” pp. 145–146, 151. On this, see Killup, “Burke's Historicism,” p. 400.

17. Burke, “Speech on a Motion,” p. 148.

18. Ibid., pp. 149–150; Burke, *Reflections*, p. 458; Paine, *Rights of Man*, p. 39. According to Paine, Yorkshire had almost a million inhabitants and Rutland had “not a hundreth part of that number.”

19. Burke, “Speech on a Motion,” p. 153; Burke, *Reflections*, pp. 516, 307, 328–329.

20. See Georges Lefebvre's classical work, which French neoconservative writing would prefer to ignore: *La Révolution française* (Paris: PUF, 1957), 2d ed., pp. 122–124.

21. Burke, *Reflections*, pp. 351, 284; Burke, “A Letter to a Member of the National Assembly,” in *Works*, vol. 2, p. 534; Burke, “An Appeal,” p. 14. Burke's admirers do everything they can to convince the reader that he was speaking not of the people in general but of a certain crowd on a certain occasion. See Himmelfarb, in *The Roads to Modernity*, p. 90, who invoked the authority of another neo-conservative, O'Brien, who expressed this view in his introduction to the Penguin Classics edition of Burke's *Reflections* in 1976.

22. See Herzog's excellent “Puzzling Through Burke,” pp. 356–357.

23. Burke, “Observations on the Conduct of the Minority, particularly in the last Session of Parliament, 1792,” in *The Works of the Right Honorable Edmund Burke*, 3d ed. (Boston: Little Brown, 1865), vol. 5, pp. 45–47.

24. Quoted in Ripley, “Adams, Burke and Eighteenth Century Conservatism,” p. 230.

25. Burke, *Reflections*, pp. 455, 320, 322.

26. Ibid., pp. 454–455.

27. Here one may recall a famous passage from Montesquieu that was quoted by Lord Acton at the end of the nineteenth century. It says that liberty can only exist in a state “when authority is not abused, but experience has always shown that any man who has authority tends to abuse it. . . . In order that authority should not be abused, it is necessary that, through the way in which things are arranged, authority should restrain authority.” Montesquieu, *De l'Esprit des lois*, vol. 1, book 9, ch. 4, pp. 161–162. Lord Acton finally turned away from Burke.

28. Burke, *Reflections*, p. 396.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 348.
30. *Ibid.*, pp. 315, 319, 348–350, 422–423, 377–379, 324–325.
31. *Ibid.*, pp. 395–398; Burke, “Substance of the Speech on the Army Estimates, 1790,” p. 276.
32. Burke, “Speeches on African Slave Trade, 5 June 1777,” in *The Writings*, Oxford edition, vol. 3, pp. 341–342.
33. Burke, “Speech on Conciliation with America,” in *The Writings*, Oxford edition, vol. 3, p. 131; Burke, “Sketch of a Negro Code [*post* 9 April 1780],” in *The Writings*, Oxford edition, vol. 3, pp. 562–563. See the whole document, pp. 562–581.
34. Carlyle, “The Nigger Question,” pp. 358, 360, 363, 371–379; Carlyle, “Shooting Niagara: And After?” in *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*, vol. 5 (vol. 30 of *Works*), pp. 4–5; Carlyle, “Chartism” (1839), p. 200.
35. Carlyle, “The Nigger Question,” pp. 374–377.
36. Renan, *La Réforme intellectuelle et morale de la France*, p. 53; Renan, “La Monarchie constitutionnelle en France,” p. 249; “races vertueuses.”
37. “La Monarchie constitutionnelle,” p. 242.
38. Renan, *L’Avenir de la science*, pp. 1060–1061; Renan, “Philosophie de l’histoire contemporaine,” p. 24.
39. Renan, “Réflexions sur l’état des esprits” (1849), in *Questions contemporaines*, p. 302. The fact that this was also the bleak era of the Dickensian workhouse was irrelevant for Renan; Renan, “L’Avenir religieux des sociétés modernes,” in *Questions contemporaines*, pp. 401, 300–301; Renan, preface to “Dialogues et fragments philosophiques,” in *Oeuvres complètes*, Psichari ed., vol. 1, p. 557.
40. Renan, “Philosophie de l’histoire contemporaine,” pp. 27, 46. Guizot served under Louis-Philippe as minister of education and prime minister. He became the living symbol of the new era of liberalism and capitalist exploitation.
41. Renan, *L’Avenir de la science*, pp. 1016–1017.
42. Renan, “Réflexions sur l’état des esprits (1849),” in *Questions contemporaines*, p. 302. Renan, *L’Avenir de la science*, pp. 999–1001 (the italics are in the original).
43. Renan, *L’Avenir de la science*, p. 1037.
44. Renan, *La Réforme*, pp. 97–99; Renan, *L’Avenir de la science*, p. 1056; Richard, *Ernest Renan*, p. 158, quotes *Souvenirs*, p. 784.
45. Renan, “La Monarchie constitutionnelle,” pp. 239–240; Renan, “Philosophie de l’histoire contemporaine,” pp. 21–23, 27–29, 12–13.
46. Renan, “Philosophie de l’histoire contemporaine,” p. 65. See also p. 61; cf. Richard, *Ernest Renan*, pp. 212–213.
47. Renan, “La Monarchie constitutionnelle,” pp. 244–246; Renan, *La Réforme*, p. 113.
48. Renan, *L’Avenir de la science*, pp. 1037, 1030.
49. Renan, *L’Avenir de la science*, pp. 1031–1032; Renan, “La Monarchie constitutionnelle,” p. 305; Renan, *La Réforme*, pp. 82–83, 93–94.
50. Renan, “Dialogues et fragments philosophiques,” preface, p. 556; Renan, *La Réforme*, pp. 82–83; Renan, *L’Avenir de la science*, p. 1033 (the italics are in the original).
51. Renan, *Histoire générale et système comparé des langues sémitiques*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, Psichari ed., vol. 8, p. 144.

52. Renan, *L'Avenir de la science*, p. 941 (the italics are in the original); Renan, "L'Avenir religieux des sociétés modernes," in *Questions contemporaines*, pp. 347–351.

53. Renan, *Histoire générale et système comparé*, pp. 144–156; Renan, *La Réforme*, p. 82; Zeev Sternhell, *Maurice Barrès et le nationalisme français*, new edition (Paris: Fayard, 2000), chapter 6.

54. Renan, *Histoire générale et système comparé*, pp. 145–146; Renan, "Lettre à M. Strauss," "Nouvelle lettre à M. Strauss," "Dialogues et fragments philosophiques," in *Oeuvres complètes*, Psichari ed., vol. 1, pp. 438, 454, 591, 618. In his 1890 preface to *L'Avenir de la science* (p. 723), Renan regretted that in 1848 he did not have "a sufficiently clear idea of the inequality of races."

55. Where Tocqueville is concerned, see *Correspondance d'Alexis de Tocqueville et d'Arthur de Gobineau*, in Tocqueville, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 9, p. 197.

56. Renan, *L'Avenir de la science*, p. 859; Renan, *La Réforme*, p. 24. See Richard, *Ernest Renan*, pp. 72–73, 76, who quotes a text from "Mélanges d'histoire et des voyages": "It seems to me that the more one studies history in its true sources, the more one is led to avoid all general formulas and limit oneself to purely ethnographic considerations."

57. Renan, *Histoire générale et système comparé*, p. 139. See also the preface to the 1928 soft-cover Calmann-Lévy edition, p. 15.

58. Renan, "Qu'est-ce qu'une nation? Conférence faite en Sorbonne, le 11 mars 1882," in *Oeuvres complètes*, Psichari ed., vol. 1, p. 898.

59. Renan, *La Réforme*, pp. 2, 14–15, 46–47.

60. Ibid., pp. 45–49. Flaubert also thought that "universal suffrage was the shame of the human spirit. . . . Number overrides spirit, education, race, and even money, which is better than number." Quoted in Richard, *Ernest Renan*, p. 147, note 208.

61. See Heinrich von Treitschke, *Treitschke's History of Germany in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. by Eden and Cedar Paul, intro. by William Harbutt Dawson, 7 vols. (New York: McBride, Nast, 1915–1919).

62. Renan, *La Réforme*, p. 75.

63. Renan, "La Monarchie constitutionnelle," pp. 279, 303; *L'Avenir de la science*, pp. 928–929. See also p. 1030.

64. Renan, *La Réforme*, pp. 52, 43–44, 27–28.

65. Ibid., pp. 18, 22–23, 2, 31–43, 50–54, 58. To the workers and peasants should be added women, considered unworthy of the right to vote. Their husbands or brothers could vote for them. In any case, if there was no way of dispensing with the electoral system, one should at least limit its damage by avoiding universal suffrage: see pp. 77–78.

66. Ibid., p. 75.

67. Renan, "Philosophie de l'histoire contemporaine," pp. 37, 41; Renan, "La Monarchie constitutionnelle," p. 250; Renan, *La Réforme*, pp. 75, 71, 75–76.

68. Renan, "La Monarchie constitutionnelle," pp. 249–250.

69. Ibid., p. 302.

70. Renan, "Philosophie de l'histoire contemporaine," pp. 18, 10–11, 17–18; Renan, "La Monarchie constitutionnelle," pp. 250–252; Renan, *La Réforme*, pp. 24–25.

71. Renan, *La Réforme*, 26–27, 97; on Catholicism, the quotation is in Richard, *Ernest Renan*, p. 57.

72. Renan, *La Réforme*, pp. 27–28, 115.

73. Renan, *L'Avenir de la science*, p. 1101; Renan, "Philosophie de l'histoire contemporaine," pp. 17–19.

74. Carlyle, letter to the *Times* of November 11, 1870, in *Critical Essays*, vol. 5, p. 59.

75. Renan, "Lettre à un ami d'Allemagne à propos du discours précédent," in *Oeuvres complètes*, Psichari ed., vol. 1, p. 750; Renan, *La Réforme*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, Psichari ed., vol. 1, p. 327.

76. Renan, "Dialogues et fragments philosophiques," pp. 570–572; Renan, *L'Avenir de la science*, p. 1037.

77. Renan, "Dialogues et fragments philosophiques," pp. 608–610, 618; Renan, "La Part de la famille et de l'État dans l'éducation," in *Oeuvres complètes*, Psichari ed., vol. 1, p. 523; Renan, *L'Avenir de la science*, pp. 884–885.

78. Renan, *La Réforme*, quoted in Dumas, "La 'philosophie de l'histoire' de Renan," p. 113; Renan, "Dialogues et fragments philosophiques," p. 607; *La Réforme*, pp. 75–76. See also pp. 67–70: "The people as such and the peasants, today absolute masters of the house, are really intruders, drones become bosses in a hive they never built."

79. Renan, *La Réforme*, pp. 69–70; Renan, *L'Avenir de la science*, p. 997. Cf. *La Réforme*, p. 68: "What would have become of Athens if they had granted suffrage to its two hundred thousand slaves and submerged in numbers the small aristocracy of free men who had made it what it was?"; Renan, "Dialogues et fragments philosophiques," p. 591.

80. Renan, *Questions contemporaines*, preface, p. xxii; Renan, *La Réforme*, pp. 48, 54, 64–69, 82–84. See also p. 81: "The democratic witches' Sabbath where we have lost all our virtue"; Richard, *Ernest Renan*, p. 180.

81. Renan, *La Réforme*, p. 55.

82. Renan, *L'Avenir de la science*, pp. 919–1000, 717 (preface), 1007, 1001–1002 (the italics are in the original).

83. Ibid., 1036–1037, preface to the 1890 edition, p. 720.

84. Renan, "Caliban," in *Drames philosophiques*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, Psichari ed., vol. 3, pp. 372–435; Richard, *Ernest Renan*, p. 298.

85. Ferdinand Brunetière, *Pages sur Ernest Renan*, preface by Pierre Moreau (Paris: Perrin, 1924), pp. 218–220 (the italics are in the original). A conscientious reader, Brunetière quoted passages from the *Langues sémitiques*, a scientific work, in order to oppose them, in a lecture given at the invitation of Baron de Rothschild to the Society of Jewish Studies, and published under the title "The Original Identity and Gradual Separation of Judaism and Christianity." The aim of this lecture was to please the Jews, and that is how Brunetière treated it. Here I take the liberty of referring the reader to my *Droite révolutionnaire*, where I broached these questions for the first time. At the time I wrote it, I was not acquainted with the following passage from *Pages sur Ernest Renan*: "Open *la France juive*, and tell me if the theoretical part is not pure Renan, and the best Renan, the most serious, the writer of *Histoire générale et comparée des langues sémitiques*" (pp. 219–220).

86. Brunetière, *Pages sur Ernest Renan*, p. 224.

87. Paul Bourget, *Oeuvres complètes* (Paris: Plon, 1899), vol. 1, pp. 64–65. See the whole chapter, pp. 64–80.

88. On his cult of Goethe, see, for example, *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*, pp. 247,

249, and introduction, pp. 36–39; Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-worship and the Heroic in History*, pp. 211–212; Taine, *Histoire de la littérature anglaise*, 17th ed., n.d., vol. 5, pp. 271–272.

89. Carlyle, “Chartism” (1839), 161–162. See also his letter to the *Times* of November 11, 1870, in which he adopted the classic position of German nationalism: that is, Alsace and Lorraine were German provinces. The genius of Richelieu and Louis XIV’s conquest were the only title to these provinces that France could claim, apart from the treachery of the Strasbourg magistrates who delivered the city to the French army in a single night: *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*, vol. 5, pp. 49–59. This harsh, sarcastic, and derisive text proclaims the decadence of France, and gives it only one recommendation: to accept reality and submit to German superiority.

90. A good example of the fascination he exerted just after the Second World War is the article by J. Salwyn Schapiro, “Thomas Carlyle, Prophet of Fascism,” *Journal of Modern History*, vol. 17 (June 1945), p. 111.

91. See, for example, “The Present Time,” published on February 1, 1850, and “The New Downing Street” of April 15, 1850, in *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, in *Works*, vol. 20.

92. Taine, *Histoire de la littérature anglaise*, 17th ed., vol. 5, pp. 253–254, 271, 263.

93. Carlyle, “Chartism” (1839), p. 158.

94. Carlyle, “Parliaments,” p. 238; Carlyle, “Shooting Niagara: And After?” pp. 4, 11.

95. Carlyle, “Parliaments,” pp. 249–252, *Past and Present*, pp. 210–211, 251; Carlyle, “Chartism,” p. 189.

96. Carlyle, “Parliaments,” p. 227; “The Present Time,” pp. 8–10, 21.

97. Carlyle, *Heroes*, pp. 135–138, 145–146, 207.

98. *Ibid.*, p. 210.

99. *Ibid.*, pp. 204, 209, 210.

100. *Ibid.*, pp. 210–211 (the italics are in the text).

101. *Ibid.*, pp. 237, 239–240, 202.

102. *Ibid.*, pp. 237, 200–203, 201.

103. Taine, *Histoire de la littérature anglaise*, 17th ed., vol. 5, pp. 288–290.

104. Aulard, “Avertissement,” in Carlyle, *Histoire de la Révolution française*, new ed., trans. by Jules Roche, with “Avertissement” by A. Aulard (Paris: F. Alcan, 1912), p. v.

105. See his *Taine: Historien de la Révolution française*, published in 1907 and quoted in my chapter 4.

106. Quoted by Aulard in “Avertissement,” p. vii, quoting from Carlyle, *The French Revolution: A History*, with an Introduction, Notes and Appendixes by John Holland Rose (London: George Allen and Sons, 1902), vol. 3, p. 369.

107. *Ibid.*, p. viii.

108. Carlyle, *Histoire de la Révolution Française*, vol. 3, pp. 332–338.

109. Carlyle, *Heroes*, p. 169, Carlyle, “Signs of the Times,” in *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays*, in *Works*, vol. 2, p. 73.

110. Carlyle, “Chartism,” pp. 322–323; Carlyle, “The New Downing Street,” pp. 127, 133–134.

111. Carlyle, *Heroes*, pp. 203–204, 243, 13, 1, 29, 198, 123; Carlyle, “Chartism,” pp. 159–160; Carlyle, “Parliaments,” pp. 246–247.

112. Carlyle, *Heroes*, pp. 45–46, 155–156, 3, 79, 80.

113. *Ibid.*, pp. 156–158.

114. Ibid., pp. 80–81, 45.
115. Ibid., p. 124.
116. Carlyle, “Chartism,” p. 160; Carlyle, *Heroes*, p. 199; Carlyle, “The Present Time,” pp. 23–24, 29–30; Carlyle, *Past and Present*, pp. 33, 215, 241–246; Carlyle, “The New Downing Street,” p. 131. The term “the strong man” appears in “Chartism,” p. 147, and is synonymous with “the wise man.”
117. Carlyle, *Heroes*, pp. 197–199. See also Carlyle, “The Nigger Question,” p. 379.
118. Jean Izoulet, introduction to the French edition of *Les Héros*, p. ix.
119. Carlyle, “Chartism,” pp. 167–169, 180; Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus* (Carlyle’s House ed.), pp. 216 and 239.
120. Carlyle, *Past and Present*, p. 179.
121. Ibid., pp. 195–199, 186, 272, 211. See pp. 183–184, 207: “For there is a perennial nobleness, and even sacredness, in Work”; “Work is of a religious nature: work is of a brave nature; which it is of all religion to be.” See also Carlyle, “The Nigger Question,” p. 365. With money one can buy the work of others but not their obedience.
122. Carlyle, “Chartism,” pp. 144–145. Cf. also pp. 148, 187, 149, 159 (the italics are in the original).
123. Carlyle, “Chartism,” pp. 155–157, 159, 185–186; Carlyle, *Past and Present*, p. 212; Carlyle, “The New Downing Street,” p. 164; Carlyle, *Heroes*, p. 199.
124. Carlyle, “The New Downing Street,” pp. 134, 167, 131.
125. Carlyle, “Chartism,” pp. 135–137 (see also *Critical Essays*, vol. 1, p. 424); Carlyle, *Heroes*, p. 189; Carlyle, “The Nigger Question,” pp. 349–350.
126. Carlyle, “Chartism,” p. 192; Carlyle, *Past and Present*, pp. 262–263, 265–268.
127. Carlyle, “Chartism,” p. 123; Carlyle, *The Present Time*, p. 25.
128. Carlyle, “Chartism,” p. 131; Carlyle, *Heroes*, p. 241.
129. Carlyle, “Chartism,” p. 142.
130. Carlyle, “Parliaments,” pp. 214–215, 224–228, 232–233.

Chapter Six. The Intellectual Foundations of Nationalism

1. Lionel Gossman, *Basel in the Age of Burckhardt: A Study in Unseasonable Ideas* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 252.
2. Isaiah Berlin, *Vico and Herder: Two Studies in the History of Ideas* (London: Hogarth Press, 1976), pp. 156–157. A new edition, arranged by Henry Hardy, which I shall discuss later, appeared a few years ago with the title *Three Critics of the Enlightenment: Vico, Hamann, Herder* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000). Berlin alluded to Frederick M. Barnard’s *Herder’s Social and Political Thought: From Enlightenment to Nationalism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965). In its broad outlines, although in a more qualified manner and much better argued, Berlin’s position has been restated today by Alain Renaut. This is that far from breaking away from the heritage of the Enlightenment, far from destroying it, Herder provided the means of enriching it with a new dimension. This view of Herder as an Aufklärer caused Renaut a certain discomfort, but in the final analysis that was the view he accepted: See his excellent “Universalisme et différentialisme: Le moment herderien,” p. 247. The same applies to Pierre Pénisson, the writer of a remarkable work that preceded Renaut’s by several years: see Pénisson’s *J. G. Herder: La raison dans les peuples*.

3. See, for example, Rouché, *La Philosophie de l'histoire de Herder*, pp. 246–248, 298–303, 539 (the italics are in the original). See also the rest of the last hundred pages, especially chapters 6–8.

4. Régine Otto, “‘Just a Word on Herder’s Philosophy of History’: The Effects of the Bückeburg Treatise,” in Pénisson (ed.), *Herder et la philosophie de l'histoire*, p. 83. From 1900 onward, Horst Stephan considered the works of Bückeburg superior to those of Weimar. The same was true for Theodor Litt, who wrote his book on the “liberation of historical consciousness” by Herder in 1942: *Befreiung des geschichtlichen Bewusstseins durch J. G. Herder* (Leipzig: E. A. Seeman, c. 1942). Since 1918 and especially since 1933, this same tendency has continued.

5. Herder, *Another Philosophy of History*, p. 29.

6. *Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (Lausanne: Sociétés typographiques, 1781), vol. 44, entry on “Nation,” p. 221; Hume, *Political Essays*, twelfth essay, “Of National Characters,” p. 79; Montesquieu, *De l’Esprit des lois*, vol. 1, p. 147; Herder, *Idées pour la Philosophie de l’Histoire de l’Humanité / Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, book 9, chapter 4, p. 159; Pross ed., vol. 3, part 1, p. 337.

7. Herder, *Another Philosophy*, p. 57 (S. 544).

8. Jeffrey Andrew Barash, “Herder et la politique de l’historicisme,” in Pénisson (ed.), *Herder et la philosophie de l'histoire*, pp. 200–201. See Herder, *Another Philosophy*, p. 26.

9. Barash, “Herder et la politique de l’historicisme,” pp. 34–35.

10. Herder, *Another Philosophy*, pp. 94–95 (S. 583).

11. Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs*, foreword, vol. 1, p. 196.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 197. In note 1 on page 196, one will find a pre-Voltairian text from Bossuet concerning historical method.

13. Herder’s dislike of the Renaissance makes him deserve the reproach that Nietzsche made about the Germans in general: that they deprived of its significance the last great period of history. Cf. Nietzsche’s *Daybreak*, # 197. See also Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of Modern Times*, p. 470.

14. Herder, *Another Philosophy*, p. 24 (S. 502).

15. Hume, *Political Essays*, Essay 12, pp. 82–83.

16. Herder, *Another Philosophy*, pp. 64–65 (S. 551).

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 23–24 (S. 502). The translation is somewhat different, so in this case it has been adapted a great deal.

18. See especially Berlin, *Vico and Herder*, and chapter eight of this book.

19. Voltaire, *Essai sur les mœurs*, vol. 1, p. 23; vol. 2, p. 350. See also pp. 354–359.

20. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 206–276.

21. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 205–213.

22. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 306.

23. Herder, *Idées/Ideen*, book 18, chapter 4, p. 363; Pross ed., vol. 3, part 1, p. 337.

24. *Ibid.*, book 16, chapter 3, pp. 293–299; Pross ed., vol. 3, part 1, pp. 635–640; book 18, chapter 5, pp. 371–373; Pross ed., vol. 3, part 1, pp. 735–736.

25. *Ibid.*, book 19, chapter 6, p. 445; Pross ed., vol. 3, part 1, p. 786; book 18, chapter 6, p. 383; Pross ed., vol. 3, part 1, pp. 742–743.

26. Voltaire, *Essai sur les moeurs*, vol. 1, pp. 385, 304, 393, 444, 448, 443–445, 522, 638.

27. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 638, 18.

28. Herder, *This Too a Philosophy of History for the Formation of Humanity*, p. 342 (S 567). In *Another Philosophy of History*, p. 79, the translation is inaccurate; Rouché, *La Philosophie de l'histoire de Herder*, pp. 102 and 540, quotes Herder's *Commentaries on the New Testament* (1775).

29. Quoted in Rouché, introduction to Herder, *Une autre philosophie de l'histoire*, p. 77.

30. Herder, *Another Philosophy*, pp. 14–15 (S. 490–491). Herder quoted vol. 3 of Shaftesbury's *Characteristicks*.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 69 (S 555).

32. *Ibid.*, p. 19 (S 496); Herder, *Idées/Ideen*, book 13, chapter 4, p. 229; Pross ed., vol. 3, part 1, p. 501.

33. Herder, *Another Philosophy*, p. 81 (S. 568–569); Herder, *Idées/Ideen*, book 13, chapter 4, p. 227; Pross ed., vol. 3, part 1, p. 500.

34. Herder, *Another Philosophy* pp. 21–23, 35 (S. 499–501, 517).

35. *Ibid.*, pp. 32–33 (S. 513–514). Similar ideas are expressed on pp. 42–43 (S. 527–528).

36. *Ibid.*, pp. 40–41 (S. 524–525).

37. *Ibid.*, pp. 34, 43 (S. 516, 528).

38. Herder, *Idées/Ideen*, book 15, chapter 4, p. 279; Pross ed., vol. 3, part 1, p. 611.

39. Voltaire, *Essai sur les moeurs*, vol. 1, pp. 309–310.

40. Hume, *Political Essays*, no. 14, pp. 105–114; Voltaire, *Essai sur les moeurs*, vol. 1, p. 393, vol. 2, p. 11.

41. Herder, *Another Philosophy*, p. 45 (S. 530). “There arose our thought” renders “es war unser Denken,” literally, “there was our thought,” which, as Rouché pointed out, was a parody of “and there was light” (Genesis 1:3).

42. *Ibid.*, pp. 44–45 (S. 529).

43. *Ibid.*, pp. 48, 42 (S. 533, 526); Herder, *Idées/Ideen*, book 19, chapter 2, p. 403; book 20, chapter 1, p. 447; chapter 3, p. 471; chapter 4, p. 487; Pross ed., vol. 3, part 1, pp. 755, 789, 806, 818.

44. Herder, *Another Philosophy*, p. 34 (S. 516).

45. Herder, *Idées/Ideen*, book 20, chapter 2, p. 457; Pross ed., vol. 3, part 1, p. 797.

46. Quoted in Lévy-Bruhl, “Les idées politiques de Herder,” p. 922

47. See Herder, *Idées/Ideen*, book 9, chapter 4, pp. 158–159; Pross ed., vol. 3, part 1, p. 337: “Die Natur erzieht Familien; der natürlichste Staat ist also auch Ein Volk, mit Einem Nationalcharakter.”

48. Meinecke, *Historism*, p. 352: cf. full quotation in the Pross ed., vol. 3, part 1, p. 436: “Das Reich Eines Volks ist eine Familie, ein wohlgeordnetes Hauswesen: es ruhet auf sib selbst, denn est ist von der Natur gegründet und stehet und fällt nur mit den Zeiten.”

49. Quoted in Rouché, *La philosophie de l'histoire de Herder*, p. 64, from *Journal*, S. 4, p. 473.

50. Herder, *Idées/Ideen*, book 19, chapter 2, p. 411; Pross ed., vol. 3, part 1, pp. 759–760.

51. Ibid., book 15, chapter 3, p. 275; Pross ed., vol. 3, part 1, p. 597; Herder, *Another Philosophy*, p. 25 (S. 503).

52. Herder, *Another Philosophy*, pp. 64–65 (S. 550–551).

53. One result of this, among others, is that he misses the economic aspect of history almost completely. Another is that, unlike Vico, Herder is unaware of the close relationship of social life to thought and of thought to social life.

54. Barnard, *Herder's Social and Political Thought*, p. 57.

55. Quoted in Lévy-Bruhl, “Les idées politiques de Herder,” p. 932. Rouché gave the same text in his introduction to *Une autre philosophie de l'histoire*, p. 9, as well as in his 1940 thesis, p. 36.

56. Herder, *Another Philosophy*, pp. 66–67 (S. 552–553). “At Louis’ courts, Corneille found heroes to copy, Racine, emotions.” Herder attacked Montesquieu and Voltaire for their generalizations, but he did not hesitate to make worse ones himself. With a few rapid strokes, he described peoples’ characteristics, often in naïve, ready-made and sometimes ridiculous formulas, especially where France was concerned. The French, he claimed, lacked depth and imagination, their spirit was more theatrical than sincere, and so on. It was the land of etiquette, of stylization, of ceremony: in short, the China of the West. Things were quite different where Germany was concerned. Although not original, the portrait Herder paints of Germany, and whose broad lines are already to be found in Luther, Lessing, and Leibniz, was the image the Germans had of themselves until the middle of the twentieth century.

57. On this, see Rouché’s point of view, expressed at a time when Nazism was already in power but before the worst atrocities had taken place (*La philosophie de l'histoire de Herder*, p. 28).

58. Marc Crépon, “Langues et histoire (Herder, critique de Voltaire),” in Pénisson (ed.), *Herder et la philosophie de l'histoire*, p. 126.

59. Ibid., pp. 133–134.

60. Lévy-Bruhl, “Les idées politiques de Herder,” p. 933.

61. Gillies, *Herder*, p. 37.

62. Quoted in Crépon, “Langues et histoire (Herder, critique de Voltaire),” p. 126.

63. Herder, *Idées/Ideen*, book 19, chapter 2, p. 411; Pross ed., vol. 3, part 1, p. 759.

64. Quoted in Lévy-Bruhl, “Les idées politiques de Herder,” pp. 933–934. In 1671 the French Jesuit Dominique Bonhours described French as the natural language of mankind. Only the French really spoke: the other peoples sang, whistled, sighed, or, like the Germans, growled. In Bonhours, one finds Charles V’s observation, also attributed to King Frederick II of Prussia, that he spoke German only to his horses, and Italian or French to human beings. See Martin Bollacher, “‘L’Oeil de taupe de ce siècle très lumineux’: Herder’s Analysis of the Contemporary Situation in *Une autre philosophie de l'histoire*,” appears in Pénisson (ed.), *Herder et la philosophie de l'histoire*, p. 61, which quotes Dominique Bonhours, *Les Entretiens d’Ariste et Eugène*. The most recent edition of this work, published by Champion and arranged by Bernard Beunot and Gilles Declercq, came out in 2003.

65. Quoted in Bollacher, “‘L’Oeil de taupe,’” p. 61.

66. Lévy-Bruhl, “Les idées politiques de Herder,” p. 935.

67. Ibid., pp. 939–941.
68. Ibid., p. 942. The “German Negroes” were of course immigrants from Germany.
69. Herder, *Another Philosophy*, p. 27 (S. 507).
70. Quoted in Lévy-Bruhl, “Les idées politiques de Herder,” p. 943.
71. Adam Müller likewise claimed in 1806 that Germany was a particularly human nation, and Fichte, in his *Addresses to the German Nation*, also said that the character of the German was one of universality. Fichte did not get this idea from Herder, whose poem was only published in 1812, but Herder gave Fichte another important idea: that German was an original language, not derived from others, and owing to that very fact superior to the Latin languages. See Rouché, *La philosophie de l’histoire de Herder*, pp. 567–568. On the superiority of the German language, Rouché quotes the first collection of *Fragmente* (S. i, p. 189, and S. ii, p. 30) and the 101st “Letter for the Advancement of Humanity” written in 1796 (S. xxxviii, pp. 112 and 208).
72. Herder, *Another Philosophy*, pp. 29 (S. 509), 22 (S. 500), 31 (S. 512: “Fortgang und Entwicklung”), 43 (S. 528)
73. Ibid., p. 46 (S. 530).
74. Rouché, *La philosophie de l’histoire de Herder*, pp. 242–244.
75. Barash, “Herder et la politique de l’historicisme,” in Pénisson (ed.), *Herder et la philosophie de l’histoire*, p. 163.
76. Ibid., pp. 213–217. Barash was quoting *Letters for the Advancement of Humanity* which date, as we have already seen, from the last years of the eighteenth century.
77. Ibid., p. 217 (a quotation from the *Letters*).
78. Ibid., p. 218.
79. Voltaire, *Essai sur les moeurs*, vol. 2, p. 811.
80. Herder, “Do We Still Have the Fatherland of the Ancients?” second part of a text appended to the fifty-seventh Letter toward the Advancement of Humanity, in *Another Philosophy*, p. 117.
81. Herder, *Another Philosophy*, p. 5. Cf. Pross ed., vol. 1, p. 592: “Herrschaft und Gottregentschaft eines Hauses, das Urbild aller Bürgelichen Ordnung und Eirichtung.”
82. Herder, *Idées/Ideen*, book 9, chapter 4, p. 159; Pross ed., vol. 3, part 1, p. 337.
83. Voltaire, *Essai sur les moeurs*, vol. 1, p. 399.
84. Rouché, introduction to Herder, *Journal de mon voyage en l’an 1769*, pp. 41–42 (p. 472, S. iv). This sentence is not found in the *Journal*, but it appears in the extracts and Herder’s notes on reading written in Nantes and Paris.
85. Herder, *Idées/Ideen*, book 16, chapter 3, p. 297; book 18, chapter 3, p. 355, and chapter 5, p. 369; book 17, chapter 1, p. 317; Pross ed., vol. 3, part 1, pp. 640, 713, 734–735, 655–656.
86. Rouché, *La Philosophie de l’histoire de Herder*, p. 126.
87. Herder, *Idées/Ideen*, book 18, chapter 5, pp. 365–367; Pross ed., vol. 3, part 1, p. 732.
88. Herder, *Idées/Ideen*, book 18, chapter 2, p. 349, chapter 5, p. 369; Pross ed., vol. 3, part 1, pp. 709–710, 732–733.
89. Voltaire, *Essai sur les moeurs*, vol. 1, p. 338. See pp. 324–329 on the conquest of the Saxons.

90. Ibid., vol. 2, chapter 142, p. 317.

91. Herder, *Idées/Ideen*, book 4, chapter 5, p. 107; Pross ed., vol. 3, part 1, p. 142. See also book 4 as a whole.

92. Kant, “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose,” in Kant, *Political Writings*, p. 51 (the italics are in the original).

Chapter Seven. The Crisis of Civilization, Relativism, and the Death of Universal Values at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century

1. On Barrès see my *Maurice Barrès et le nationalisme français*; René Vincent, “Retour à Barrès,” *Combat* (March 1939); on the influence of Barrès in Vienna, see R. Stablein, “Dissociation du sujet et culte du Moi: La réception de la décadence barrésienne par Hugo von Hoffmannsthal et Hermann Bahr,” in François Latraverse and Walter Moser (eds.), *Vienne au tournant du siècle* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1988), pp. 217–257. On the influence of Barrès in South America, see Alberto Spektorowski, *The Origins of Argentina's Revolution of the Right* (Notre Dame: Indiana University Press, 2002); Ernst Jünger, who died in 1998 at the age of 103, became famous with the publication of his *Storm of Steel: From the Diary of a German Storm-Troop Officer on the Western Front*. Among the recent works on Jünger, the most useful are Jan Poma, *The Worker: On Nihilism and Technology in Ernst Jünger* (Brussels: Economische Hogeschool Sint-Aloysius, 1991); Thomas R. Nevin, *Ernst Jünger and Germany: Into the Abyss, 1914–1945* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996); and Elliot Y. Neeman, *A Dubious Past: Ernst Jünger and the Politics of Literature after Nazism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. by George Schwab, foreword by Tracy B. Strong (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), pp. 26–27. See Fritz Stern, *The Politics of Cultural Despair: A Study of the Rise of the Germanic Ideology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), p. xv; Michael Freund, *Georges Sorel: Der Revolutionäre Konservatismus* (Frankfurt am Main: V. Klostermann, 1932), new edition in 1972. See Armin Mohler's doctoral thesis published as *Die konservative Revolution in Deutschland 1918–1932: Grundriss ihrer Weltanschauungen* (Stuttgart: F. Vorwerk, 1950). Under a slightly modified title (*Ein Handbuch*) this work is regularly being republished (most recently in 2005). On two of the authors studied by Stern see Vincent Viaene, “Paul de Lagarde: A Nineteenth-Century ‘Radical’ Conservative—and Precursor of National-Socialism?” *European History Quarterly*, vol. 26, no. 4 (1996), pp. 527–557, and Augustinus P. Dierick, “Julius Langbehn's *Rembrandt als Erzieher*: Politics and Cultural Esthetics,” *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*, vol. 21, no. 1 (1988), pp. 25–35. For Viaene, Lagarde was a classic conservative very far from the “conservative revolution” school, while Dierick is more interested than Stern in Langbehn's esthetic thinking. On Schmitt's campaign against liberal democracy, parliamentarism, and the idea of the sovereignty of the people see B. [William E.] Scheuerman, “The Rule of Law under Siege: Carl Schmitt and the Death of the Weimar Republic,” *History of Political Thought*, vol. 14, no. 2 (1993), pp. 265–280, and by the same author in the same journal, “Review Article: The Return of Weimar,” vol. 19, no. 3 (1998), pp. 484–495; David Dyzenhaus, “Legal Theory in the Collapse of Weimar: Contemporary Lessons?” *American Political Science Review*, vol. 91, no. 1 (1997), pp.

121–134. For a comparison of the “conservative revolution” in Germany with the Barresian tradition in France as well as with other ideological currents with a similar rejection of liberal democracy, see the new edition of my *La Droite révolutionnaire, 1885–1914: Les Origines françaises du fascisme* and my *Neither Right nor Left: Fascist Ideology in France*. *Neither Right nor Left* was first published in 1983, in French. See also an interesting article on this point that is based on *Neither Right nor Left*: “The Anarchy of Twilight: Aladdin’s Problem by Ernst Jünger,” *New York Review of Books*, June 24, 1993. Cf. also Zeev Sternhell (ed.), *The Intellectual Revolt against Liberal Democracy, 1870–1945*. The complete works of Barrès had a place of honor in Jünger’s library.

2. Herder, *Another Philosophy of History*, p. 64.

3. Maurice Barrès, *Scènes et doctrines du nationalisme*, vol. 1 (Paris: Plon, n.d. [1925]), pp. 84, 38, 68, 93, 84–86; Barrès, *Mes Cahiers* (Paris: Plon, 1930), vol. 2, p. 163. *Mes Cahiers* was published by Plon in twelve volumes between 1929–1938 and 1947–1957. Cf. also Barrès, *Les Déracinés* (Paris: Fasquelle, 1897), p. 322.

4. Barrès, *Scènes*, p. 17; Barrès, *Mes Cahiers*, vol. 10, p. 99.

5. Barrès, *Mes Cahiers*, vol. 13, p. 161; vol. 10, pp. 219, 98, 186; vol. 9, pp. 290–291; vol. 8, pp. 77–78; vol. 9, pp. 24 and 290; vol. 2, p. 83; Barrès, *Le Jardin de Bérénice* (Paris: Perrin, 1891), p. 197.

6. Barrès, *Le Jardin*, p. 179; Barrès, *L’Appel au soldat* (Paris: Fasquelle, 1900), p. 359; Barrès, *Scènes*, vol. 1, p. 13.

7. Jules Michelet, *Introduction à l’histoire universelle*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. 2, 1828–1831, ed. by Paul Viallanex (Paris: Flammarion, 1972), p. 243.

8. The Hachette edition of 1835 was reprinted by Paul Viallanex in volume 1 of *Oeuvres complètes* (1971), pp. 260–624: *Oeuvres de Vico, contenant ses mémoires écrits par lui-même, la Science nouvelle, les opuscules, lettres, etc., précédées d’une introduction sur sa vie et ses ouvrages*.

9. Gustave Lanson, “La Formation de la méthode historique de Michelet,” *Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine*, vol. 7 (1905–1906), pp. 11–13; Henri Gouhier, *L’Histoire et sa philosophie* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1952), p. 87. See also Eric Fauquet, “Michelet et Herder,” in Pénisson (ed.), *Herder et la philosophie de l’histoire*.

10. Montesquieu, *De l’Esprit des lois*, vol. 1, pp. 319–322.

11. Lanson, “La Formation,” p. 10; de Maistre, *Écrits sur la Révolution*, p. 71 (the italics are in the original); de Maistre, *Les Soirées de Saint-Petersbourg*, vol. 1, p. 91 (the capitals are in the original); de Maistre, “Principe générateur,” in *Considérations sur la France*, p. 270.

12. Michelet, *Introduction à l’histoire universelle*, pp. 253–254, 248, 253 (this text has a note attached to it: “Need one say that it is a matter of equality of rights, or rather of an equality of means to achieve enlightenment, and the exercise of the political rights that must accompany it?”).

13. Jules Michelet, *Le Peuple*, the original edition, published with notes and variants by Lucien Refort (Paris: Marcel Didier, 1946), pp. 242–243, 246–247; Gabriel Monod, *La Vie et la pensée de Jules Michelet: Les débuts, la maturité* (Paris: E. Champion, 1923), vol. 1, p. 222; Michelet, *Introduction à l’histoire universelle*, pp. 257, 249.

14. Michelet, *Le Peuple*, pp. 330, 247, 240, 239, 236.

15. Lanson, “La Formation,” p. 21; Michelet, *Le Peuple*, pp. 231–232.

16. Renan, *La Réforme intellectuelle et morale de la France*, p. 94.
17. Herder, *Another Philosophy of History*, p. 49; Hippolyte Taine, *Notes sur Paris: Vie et opinions de M. Frédéric-Thomas Graindorge receuillis et publiés par M. Taine* (Paris: Hachette, 1867), pp. 147, 287–288. Here one should mention an interesting M.A. thesis, often drawn upon but seldom acknowledged: Anik Schuin, *Le Pessimisme historique au XIXe siècle: Hyppolyte Taine* (Geneva: Published by the author, 1982).
18. Charles Maurras, *Mes Idées politiques*, preface by Pierre Gaxotte (Paris: Albatros, n.d. [1993]), p. 17; Maurras, *Romantisme et Révolution*, in *Oeuvres capitales* (Paris: Flammarion, 1954), vol. 2, pp. 33–36; Maurras, “Trois Idées politiques,” in *Oeuvres capitales*, vol. 2, p. 87.
19. Maurras, “Trois Idées,” pp. 86–87; Maurras, *Romantisme*, pp. 32–33.
20. Maurras, *Mes Idées*, pp. 198, 256, 253, 127, 204, 123–124, 132; Maurras, “Trois Idées,” p. 64; Maurras, *Romantisme*, pp. 48–49.
21. Maurras, *Mes Idées*, pp. 122, 120, 101–103; Maurras, *Romantisme*, pp. 49–51.
22. Maurras, *Romantisme*, pp. 49–50; Maurras, *Mes Idées*, pp. 87–89 (where Hobbes was concerned, this idea was incorrect), 170, 268 note 1, 170.
23. Maurras, *Mes Idées*, pp. 173, 171–172, 163, 157, 129, 180; Maurras, *Romantisme*, p. 51.
24. Maurras, *Mes Idées*, pp. 157, 171.
25. Ibid., p. 160 (the italics are in the original).
26. Carl Schmitt, *Political Romanticism*, trans. by Guy Oakes (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1986), p. 62.
27. Maurras, *Mes Idées*, pp. 100, 103, 275–277.
28. Ibid., pp. 182, 278–279, 281, 287, 283–286 (the italics are in the original).
29. Ibid., p. 134.
30. Ibid., pp. 145, 143–146.
31. Colette Capitan-Peter, *Charles Maurras et l'idéologie d'Action française: Étude sociologique d'une pensée de droite* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1972), pp. 20 and 43–45; Maurras, *Mes Idées*, pp. 148–152.
32. *Mes Idées*, p. 167.
33. Ibid., pp. 64–65 (the italics are in the original), 205–206, 187–188, 212, 203, 236–239, 288.
34. Quoted in Capitan-Peter, *Maurras*, p. 61, note 1.
35. See my *Birth of Fascist Ideology* (with Mario Sznajder and Maia Asheri), trans. by David Maisel (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).
36. Georges Sorel, *Le Procès de Socrate: Examen critique des thèses socratiques* (Paris: Alcan, 1889), pp. 235. See also pp. 90–99, 101, 154–161, 178–179, 183–184, 207–209, 211–216, 236–239, 277, 218, 346.
37. Ibid., pp. 108–109, 172, 239–240, 349; Georges Sorel, *Réflexions sur la violence*, 11th ed. (Paris: Marcel Rivière, 1950), pp. 13–22.
38. Georges Sorel, *Les Illusions du progrès*, 5th ed. (Paris: Marcel Rivière, 1947), pp. 16–17, 22–24, 29–33, 37. On the “Querelle” see my chapter 1.
39. Ibid., pp. 44–48, 35, 179. Cf. also p. 49.
40. Ibid., p. 49.
41. Georges Sorel, “Étude sur Vico,” *Le Devenir social*, second year (1896), pp. 758–

817, 906–941, 1013–1046. This essay was translated into Italian in Georges Sorel, *Considerazioni politiche e filosofiche: Saggi vichiani e lettere a Lagardelle*, ed. and with an intro. by Renzo Raghianti (Pisa: ETS, n.d. [1983]), pp. 35–117.

42. Sorel, “Étude sur Vico,” p. 786. See pp. 808–810, 813, 906, 912, 920, 935–938 on the idea of revolution (“The greatest conceivable revolution would be the most peaceful, as it would not be faced with forces capable of revival”), 809–810, 801, 911, 941, 797, 940.

43. Benedetto Croce, *The Philosophy of Giambattista Vico*, with an intro. by Alan Sica, trans. by R. G. Collingwood (New Brunswick: Transaction, 2007), p. 277. This work appeared in Italian in 1911. Two years later, an English translation followed, which can be found today in the reprintings of 1964, 2002, and 2007. The original used here is from the Italian national edition of Croce’s works: Naples: Bibliopolis, undated. This edition includes an essay written in 1946, “Intorno alla vita ed il carattere di G. B. Vico,” pp. 253–282. Sorel returned to these themes throughout his works, and it would be useless to multiply quotations. In this case, see “Étude sur Vico,” p. 912, and pp. 800, 806, 810–811, 911–913, 1025–1026, 1030–1031, 1034.

44. Sorel, *Le Procès*, pp. 332, 106, 12. See Fernand Rossignol, *Pour connaître la pensée de Georges Sorel* (Paris: Bordas, 1948), pp. 64–65; Sorel, “Vues sur les problèmes de la philosophie,” *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, vol. 18 (1910), pp. 605–606; Sorel, *Les Illusions*, pp. 51, 40.

45. Sorel, *Les Illusions*, pp. 52–53, 87.

46. *Ibid.*, pp. 52–53.

47. See Sternhell, Szajder, and Asheri, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology*, chapters 2 and 3. Croce mentioned this preface in his *Philosophy of Giambattista Vico*, p. 214, note 1.

48. Alain Pons, “Avant-Propos,” in Vico, *Vie de Giambattista Vico écrite par lui-même, Lettres, La Méthode des études de notre temps*, p. 1; Croce, *The Philosophy of Giambattista Vico*, p. 270. In Italian see *La filosofia di Giambattista Vico* (Naples: Bibliopolis, 1997), pp. 284–285.

49. Croce, *The Philosophy of Giambattista Vico*, pp. 276–277 (pp. 294–295 in the Italian edition).

50. Pons, “Avant-Propos,” in *Vie de Giambattista Vico*, p. 10.

51. It is worth reading a very interesting essay written by Croce in 1942, which has been well known in Italy for a long time: “Why We Cannot Do Otherwise Than to Say We Are Christians,” in *La Philosophie comme histoire de la liberté: Contre le positivisme*, texts selected and edited by Sergio Romano (Paris: Le Seuil, 1983). This text was republished in the French quarterly *Commentaire*, no. 101 (Spring 2003), p. 145. This tranquil essay is already that of a writer who would soon begin to explain away fascism: he would prefer to forget his long campaign against democracy and the Enlightenment.

52. Croce, *The Philosophy of Giambattista Vico*, pp. 6–7.

53. *Ibid.*, pp. 22–23, 36, 45, 214, 200, 40. Chapter 3, pp. 36–43 (pp. 43–49 in the Italian edition) is devoted to the structure of *Scienza nuova* and the genius of Vico’s thought.

54. *Ibid.*, pp. 60–61 (see chapter 4 [pp. 44–61], as a whole), 46, 50–55, 49, 159. Cf. also pp. 50–53.

55. *Ibid.*, pp. 77–78 (p. 79 in the Italian text, English translation amended). Croce sensed the weakness of Vico’s arguments against Grotius and Pufendorf and the school of

natural rights, and he defended his idol by saying that Vico “makes the perfectly just remark that their ponderous tomes, in spite of the impressive titles they bear, contain nothing that is not universally known” (p. 82). Cf. also pp. 85–89.

56. Ibid., p. 76 (p. 78 in the Italian edition, English translation amended).

57. Ibid., pp. 206–209, 215, 224 (the title of chapter 18 is “The Return of Barbarism: The Middle Ages”), 217–223, 214.

58. Stanley Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914–1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), p. 107; Sternhell, Sznajder, and Asheri, *The Birth of Fascist Ideology*, pp. 226–227; Benedetto Croce, “Fatti politici e interpretazioni storiche,” *La critica* (1924), pp. 190–191, quoted in Pier Giorgio Zunino, “La faiblesse de la tradition démocratique en Europe: Le cas de l’Italie, 1920–1940,” in Zeev Sternhell (ed.), *L’Éternel Retour: Contre la démocratie, idéologie de la décadence* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, 1994), p. 238.

59. Benedetto Croce, *Pagine sulla Guerra* (Bari: Laterza, 1928), 2d ed., pp. 105–107, 109; Benedetto Croce, *Materialismo storico ed economia marxista* (Bari: Laterza, 1968), 1912 preface, p. xiv.

60. Quoted in Carlo Antoni, *L’Historisme*, trans. from the Italian by Alain Dufour (Geneva: Droz, 1963), p. 118.

61. Croce, *Pagine*, p. 66; Daniel Gasman, *Haeckel’s Monism and the Birth of Fascist Ideology* (New York: Peter Lang, 1998), p. 48; See also Zunino, “La faiblesse de la tradition démocratique en Europe,” p. 239.

62. Fritz Stern, *Dreams and Delusions* (New York: Knopf, 1987), pp. 156–157 and 164–165; the Italian title of the work by Riccardo [Richard] Korrherr was *Regresso delle nascite: Morte dei popoli* (Rome: Libreria del Littorio, 1928), and it showed that a regression in the number of births was a clear sign of the sickness that was destroying Europe. See Didier Musiedlak’s excellent work, *Mussolini* (Paris: Presses de Sciences-Po, 2005), pp. 261–267; *The Decisive Years* has been translated into English as *The Hour of Decision*.

63. Gilbert Merlio, *Oswald Spengler: Témoin de son temps* (Stuttgart: Akademischer Verlag Hans-Dieter Heinz, 1982), vol. 1, pp. 2–5. Merlio’s work is undoubtedly one of the best on Spengler in any language; Oswald Spengler, *Preussentum und Sozialismus* (Munich: O. Beck, 1921). Merlio has written an introduction to the French translation of that work. No English translation exists.

64. Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, trans. by Charles Atkinson (New York: Knopf, 1947), vol. 1, *Form and Actuality*, p. 19; vol. 2, *Perspectives of World History*, p. 403. According to Spengler, Burke said to Mirabeau: “We demand our liberties, not as rights of man, but as rights of Englishmen.” A new German edition is now available: *Der Untergang des Abendlandes: Umrisse einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch, 2000). Among various interpretations of Spengler, see for example Northrop Frye, “‘The Decline of the West’ by Oswald Spengler,” *Daedalus*, vol. 103, no. 1 (Winter 1974), pp. 1–13; Frye believes that the philosophical framework of Spengler’s argument is a Romantic one, derived ultimately from Fichte’s adaptation of Kant. On Hegel and Spengler see John Farrenkopf, “Hegel, Spengler and the Enigma of World History: Progress or Decline,” *Clio*, vol. 19, no. 4 (1990), pp. 331–344.

65. Spengler, *The Decline*, vol. 1, p. 46.

66. The pan-Slavist manifesto of N. J. Danilevsky (1822–1885), well known in Eastern Europe and often referred to by scholars of nationalism, has never been translated into English. A German translation appeared only in 1920, when the success of *The Decline of the West* showed the interest that the German reader took in these questions: *Russland und Europa: Eine Untersuchung über die kulturellen und politischen Beziehungen der slawischen zur germanisch-romanischen Welt*, trans. and intro. by Karl Nötzel (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1920). In French there was only a résumé, accompanied by direct quotations, published in Bucharest in 1890, when the influence of the work, which had gone into its fourth edition, began to be felt. It was only in 1888, with the third edition that sold out in a few months, that Danilevsky's work, which expressed a hard anti-Occidentalism, reached the public at large, at the very moment when the nationalist writers of France and Germany became best sellers. The translation made in Rumania clearly had the aim of warning the countries of Western Europe, and especially France, of the Russian danger. See *La Doctrine panslaviste d'après N. J. Danilewski (La Russie et l'Europe: Coup d'oeil sur les rapports politiques entre le monde slave et le monde germano-roman*, 4th ed. [Russian], Saint Petersburg, 1889), summarized by J. J. Skupiewski, Bucharest, offices of "Rumanian Liberty," 1890: all quotations are from this edition. Danilevsky is at present enjoying a spectacular revival, and since the fall of communism, his work has been republished several times in Moscow. There is no doubt that the idea of the self-sufficiency of different types of culture, or, in other words, the emphasis placed on all that separated people and not on what they had in common, found its way more or less everywhere, without it always being possible to establish a clear connection between all these phenomena. However, the concept of the specificity of cultures, or in Danilevsky's words, "of different types of civilization" (p. 46, a direct quotation), was indisputably a Herderian concept. Similarly, the attack on Europeocentrism and Herder's celebrated Slavophilic tendencies were to be found in the Russian writer, but in a highly radicalized form. Herder saw the distant future as belonging to the Slavs; Danilevsky took this up in turn and showed the non-European world as the bearer of the future. According to him, the law of history was that "societies that have grown old, that have lived their time, that have fulfilled their mission, must leave the scene of history. . . . Everything that lives, an individual, a species, a kind or biological type, has only a certain amount of life, and must die when it has used it up" (p. 49, a direct quotation). Danilevsky, it should be understood, although writing ten years after the appearance of *The Origin of Species*, was not a Darwinist or an evolutionist, but to say that humanity only exists in the form of particular races that constitute types of civilizations, just as in zoology or botany types are merely abstract ideas that are only manifested in species, one does not necessarily have to be a Darwinist (pp. 61–62). This was obviously an idea of the development of humankind that was easily reconcilable with the Herderian heritage. Danilevsky sought to introduce into history, on the analogy of natural history, the distinction between the degree of development and the type of development. Every cultural type passed through the phases of youth, maturity, old age, and death. In the history of humankind, he distinguished ten types of civilization, of which the first was the Egyptian type and the tenth was the Romano-German type. Each type of civilization had a common language or a group of very closely related languages, and belonged to a race or a "family." But in order for the civilization proper to each particular type of civilization to come into being and develop, the peoples

that belong to it have to gain political independence. The principles of a civilization of one type cannot serve as the basis for the development of another type. Finally, the development of a civilization highly resembles that of a plant whose period of growth is infinitely long, but whose flowering and fruition last a very short time and permanently exhaust the vital forces of the organism (pp. 56–59).

Here Danilevsky put forward two ideas that were fundamental to Spengler's thought: first of all the idea that no historico-cultural type can adopt the civilization of another type, and then the absurdity of thinking that "development and progress can be infinite" (p. 59). Two immediate conclusions follow from this: any attempt to Europeanize Russia is a destruction of Russian specificity and must be strongly rejected. Russia must be cured of its attraction to Europe, even by reforms like those of Alexander II. The time had come for Slavism to appear on the scene of history as a particular type of civilization, and it had to preserve its special genius. One had to prevent Russia from being touched by European individualism and materialism, and by the multifaceted violence that at all times characterized this individualistic civilization: the attempt to impose the Western church as universal by fire and sword from the time of the crusades onward, and by colonization and revolution as a means to social reform. Against this, Slavism was the contrary of Europe: it was anti-individualistic, communitarian, and pacifist. There was only one sad exception, and that was Poland (pp. 66–69).

Danilevsky also had a view of universal history that Spengler adopted, one that was opposed to European historiography: "In reality, Rome, Greece, India, Egypt, China, and all the other peoples had their ancient history, their Middle Ages and their modern times" (p. 52, a direct quotation).

Finally we come to the main question: "Is the West rotting?" (p. 65). According to Skupiewsky, Danilevsky does not give a clear answer, but it is difficult not to sense what he is implying. European civilization has already produced its fruits, and so its period of decline must soon be at hand, just as the Slavic succession is already prepared (pp. 65–66). This succession also means that Slavism, before arriving on the scene of history, would have to fight a decisive battle against Europe (p. 109).

67. Spengler, *The Decline*, vol. 1, pp. 3, 50, 34 (the italics are in the original).

68. Ibid., pp. 17–18 (the italics are in the original); Merlio, *Spengler*, vol. 1, p. 29.

69. Spengler, *The Decline*, vol. 1, pp. 21–22 (the italics are in the original).

70. Cf. Merlio, *Spengler*, vol. 1, pp. 39–40. Further on, Merlio pointed out that Spengler's critique of civilization was based on the opposition between culture and civilization. This opposition, widely accepted in Germany, was not invented by Spengler, but he transformed two synchronic aspects of a society into two inevitable successive stages of "high culture": "each culture has its own civilization." There was a "strict and necessary organic succession. Civilization is the inevitable destiny of a culture" (pp. 263–264).

71. Spengler, *The Decline*, vol. 1, p. 23.

72. Ibid. (the italics and quotation marks are in the original). "Validity" renders the term *Gültigkeit*.

73. Ibid., p. 48; vol. 2, pp. 12, 341–342 (the italics are in the original). Spengler refers the reader, which is unusual for him, to *Beyond Good and Evil*, 260.

74. Ibid., vol. 1, p. 24.

75. Ibid., pp. 368, 369, 371, 372, 370, 350 (the quotation marks and the italics are in the original).

76. Ibid., pp. 24–25, 345–346 (the italics are in the original). “No one is free to choose” is omitted in the English translation. The English translation also says “morale” where we have put “morality,” as it is clearer.

77. Ibid., pp. 25, 346. Here too “morales” is replaced with “moralities.”

78. Ibid., pp. 31–32 (the italics are in the original).

79. Ibid., pp. 32–36 (the italics are in the original).

80. Ibid., pp. 36–37, 39–40 (the italics and quotation are in the original).

81. Ibid., pp. 40, 44, 40–41.

82. Ibid., p. 41: “Unvergänglichkeit gewordener Gedanken ist eine Illusion.” See *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (Munich, 1920), p. 58 (the italics are in the original).

83. Ibid., pp. 41, 43, 45.

84. Ibid., pp. 45–46 (the italics are in the original, translation amended).

85. Ibid., vol. 2, p. 12.

86. Merlio, *Spengler*, vol. 1, p. 277.

87. Spengler, *The Decline*, vol. 2, p. 305.

88. Ibid., pp. 305, 311, 306 (the quotation marks, including “reason,” and italics are in the original).

89. Ibid., pp. 306–308.

90. Ibid., pp. 308, 309, 310, 312.

91. Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 149–150, 148, 423–424.

92. Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 339, 440, 403 (the italics are in the original).

93. Ibid., p. 401. In an interesting article John Farrenkopf has argued, not always convincingly, that the early Spengler was not vehemently antidemocratic in the pre–Great War period. During this time he was a cynical and opportunistic conservative or even “neoconservative” thinker: “The Early Phase in Spengler’s Political Philosophy,” *History of Political Thought*, vol. 13, no. 2 (1992), p. 319. See also John Farrenkopf, *Prophet of Decline: Spengler on World History and Politics* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001).

94. Spengler, *The Decline*, vol. 2, p. 402 and note 4 (translation amended).

95. Ibid., p. 448.

96. Ibid., pp. 449–450 (the italics are in the original). In Nietzsche, equality was “that modern idea par excellence,” that “most venomous of poisons,” “the greatest of all lies”: quoted in Merlio, *Spengler*, vol. 1, p. 324.

97. Spengler, *The Decline*, vol. 2, pp. 442, 441, 440, 442–443 (the italics and the quotation marks are in the original).

98. Ibid., pp. 441, 455.

99. Ibid., pp. 446–447, 456–457, 415–416 (the italics are in the original).

100. Ibid., pp. 431, 464, 432, 465. See also pp. 475–476 and 471–472.

101. Ibid., pp. 102, 358.

102. Merlio, *Spengler*, vol. 1, p. 406.

103. See the new edition of my *Maurice Barrès et le nationalisme français* (Paris: Fayard, 2000); Spengler, *The Decline*, vol. 1, p. 343; Merlio, *Spengler*, vol. 1, pp. 528–531.

104. Spengler, *The Decline*, vol. 1, p. 233.

105. Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 170, 172 (the italics are in the original).

106. Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 106, 300–301 (the italics are in the original).

107. Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 331–332.

108. Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 106, 353 (the italics are in the original).

109. Ibid., p. 104 (the italics are in the original).

110. Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 36–37 (the italics are in the original). Translation changed: the English translation says “the history of the Raptore or the Coniferae.”

111. Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 108, 107, 119 (the italics are in the original).

112. Ibid., pp. 221–222, 62 (the italics are in the original).

113. Ibid., vol. 2, p. 185 (the italics are in the original).

114. Ibid., pp. 376–378, 181–182 (the italics are in the original).

115. Merlio, *Spengler*, vol. 2, p. 727. Spengler presents a terrifying picture of the subjection of the individual he considers his ideal, which, he says, is to be found in Nietzsche. “But Nietzsche, too romantic to face the very prosaic social consequences . . . omits to say that his whole doctrine, as a derivative of Darwinism, presupposes socialism and, moreover, socialistic *compulsion* as the *means*” (Spengler, *The Decline*, vol. 1, p. 371). This vision of a “socialist” state that was the culmination of obedience (“You *must*”) was the essence of Spengler’s *Prussianism and Socialism*. However, what Spengler failed to understand, or did not want to understand, in Nietzsche was the idea expressed by the following text: “He who has learnt to bend his back and bow his head before the power of history ends by saying ‘yes’ in the mechanical Chinese manner to any power whatsoever” (quoted in Merlio, *Spengler*, vol. 1, p. 121). Merlio (pp. 111–112) thought that Spengler’s relativity derived from Nietzsche and not from Herder, for in *The Decline* there is no longer the belief in a divine plan that in Herder coordinated the diversity of nations and periods. Spengler’s relativity was ethnic and not historical; it was not determined by the time factor, as there was no such thing as the history of the human race as a whole. If the ancient world was different from the modern Western world, it was not because it came earlier but because it was the product of a different blood and a different soil. For Herder, the various civilizations were stages in God’s education of humanity. Each was necessary in its time and had its place in the total scheme of things. Opposing this, in Spengler civilizations were defined solely by their geographical and ethnic coordinates.

116. Spengler, *The Decline*, vol. 2, p. 181 (the italics are in the text). The translation has been considerably amended. In the English translation, the passage reads: “It was the class-ideal of chivalry that . . . impressed upon an immense area that which within the individual nations is felt and experienced as race. On this rest . . . the nations—so *historical*, so alien to the Classical—of equivalence by birth [*peer-age, Ebenbürtigkeit*] and blood-purity.”

117. Ibid., p. 444, and see pp. 445–447 (the italics are in the original).

118. Ibid., pp. 171–172.

119. See, for example, Paul Bourget, *Essais de psychologie contemporaine* (Paris: Lemerre, 1885), 4th ed., p. 15: “A universal nausea at the insufficiency of this world stirs the heart of the Slavs, the Germans, and the Latins, and is manifested in the first by nihilism, in the second by pessimism, and among us by solitary and strange neuroses.” On this subject, one may refer to a special issue, devoted to decadence, of *Romantisme: Revue du Dix-Neuvième siècle*, no. 42 (4th quarter, 1983). On Spengler as a forerunner of the late twentieth-century New Right see a very “Spenglerian” article: Tomoslav Sunic, “History and Decadence: Spengler’s Cultural Pessimism Today,” *Clio*, vol. 19, no. 1 (1989), pp. 51–62.

120. Spengler, *The Decline*, vol. 1, pp. 43–44.

121. *Ibid.*, p. 41.

Chapter Eight. *The Anti-Enlightenment of the Cold War*

1. As decided by their mutual publisher, Secker and Warburg, and with the agreement of the authors, Arendt's work *The Origins of Totalitarianism* appeared in London in 1951 under the title *The Burden of Our Time*. Talmon's book appeared in 1952 under the title *The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*; A. D. Lindsay, *The Modern Democratic State* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 14; Ernest Barker's introduction to *Social Contract: Essays by Locke, Hume and Rousseau* (London: Oxford University Press, 1953), first edition in 1947, p. li.

2. Taine is not mentioned in *Totalitarian Democracy*, however, and his name only appears incidentally in a note, and even then it is in order to criticize "the admittedly distorted picture painted by Taine and others of eighteenth century thought" (p. 261).

3. Talmon, *Totalitarian Democracy*, p. 261. Instead of being buried in the notes, this observation should normally have been placed at the beginning of the book.

4. The only difference in this matter between Talmon and Taine was the importance that Talmon gave to "the lost children of the party," Mably and Morelly, whom Taine rightly dismissed as insignificant (*Les Origines de la France contemporaine*, vol. 1, p. 172). In Taine's book Mably was not mentioned and Morelly appeared once. It is interesting that Rousseau and Mably, who were the two showpieces of Benjamin Constant's account of modern tyranny, played the same role in Talmon, and then in Berlin. The answer to the question of why Mably came to be regarded as an accepted representative of the French Enlightenment is probably to be found in Constant. There, next to "the subtle metaphysics of the *Contrat social* [which] in our day only provides arms and pretexts to all types of tyranny," one finds Mably, "the representative of that numerous class of well or ill-intentioned demagogues who . . . spoke of the sovereign nation in order that the citizens should be more completely subjugated." See Benjamin Constant, "De l'esprit de conquête et de l'usurpation dans leurs rapports avec la civilisation européenne," in *Oeuvres*, text presented and annotated by Alfred Roulin (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1964), pp. 1014–1016. Meinecke, on the other hand, regarded Mably as no more than a superficial chatterer: *Historism: The Rise of a New Historical Outlook*, p. 155.

5. Jacob Leib Talmon, *Utopianism and Politics* ([London:] Conservative Political Centre, 1957), pp. 7–12, 14–15.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 12–13.

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 16–21. In the 1960s, the idea of a confrontation between what Talmon considered a Utopist International with its headquarters in Moscow and the free world lost some of its credibility, and his tone changed. Moreover, the Six-Day War in 1967 faced Talmon with another problem that he experienced with unparalleled intensity until his death in 1980. A daily confrontation with Jewish radical nationalism made him aware of the fact that the true problematics of the modern world and of his own country lay elsewhere. Talmon, a classical liberal conservative, for whom the return of the Jews to the land of their forefathers was the means of building a free and open society, very soon

understood what Berlin, who had always been a Herderian nationalist, failed to see or did not want to see in the deep tranquility of the “nature reserve,” often cut off from the outside world, of an Oxford college. Until the end of his life, Talmon felt that nationalism, which in its Jewish or Israeli variant burst forth in the Greater Land of Israel movement, was a very present danger. It still is, in the early twenty-first century.

8. Steven Lukes, “Isaiah Berlin: In Conversation with Steven Lukes,” *Salmagundi: A Quarterly of the Humanities and Social Sciences*, no. 120 (Autumn 1998), p. 98. Steven Lukes was also from Oxford. He gained notoriety in the 1970s, especially because of his works on Durkheim and individualism. Cf. his *Emile Durkheim, His Life and Work: A Historical and Critical Study* (London: Allen Lane and Penguin Press, 1973), and *Individualism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1973). Later, he published in particular *Marxism and Morality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985) and *Moral Conflict and Politics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991). Berlin acknowledged in his correspondence with Conor Cruise O’Brien that he had not taken Talmon’s work sufficiently into consideration: Berlin in O’Brien, *The Great Melody: A Thematic Biography and Commented Anthology of Edmund Burke*, appendix, p. 614.

9. Lukes, “Isaiah Berlin: In Conversation with Steven Lukes,” pp. 94–96, 107–108; Jahanbegloo, *Conversations with Isaiah Berlin*, pp. 32–33.

10. Jahanbegloo, *Conversations with Isaiah Berlin*, pp. 81–85. Berlin spoke about Arendt in the same way in his conversation with Lukes.

11. In the catalogues of the major national and university libraries, including the British Library, there is nothing under his name apart from the introduction mentioned here and his work as an editor with Hardy on another collection of Berlin essays, *The Proper Study of Mankind*. Hausheer described Berlin as an “intellectual colossus,” one of the “half-dozen or so” most important political thinkers since the time of the Enlightenment. See his “Enlightening the Enlightenment,” in Mali and Wokler (eds.), *Isaiah Berlin’s Counter-Enlightenment*, p. 48; Isaiah Berlin, *Against the Current: Essays in the History of Ideas* (London: Hogarth Press, 1979). “I should like to express my sincere thanks to this most promising young scholar,” wrote Berlin in an “Author’s Note” at the beginning of the book. He thanked Hausheer “for providing so sympathetic and luminous an account of my views on the topics discussed in these essays.” For Hausheer’s quote, see p. xiv.

12. Benedetto Croce, *Bibliografia Vichiana*, enlarged and revised edition by Fausto Nicolini, 2 vols. (Naples: Riccardo Ricciardi, 1947–1948). Examples of works on Vico are: Elio Gianturco, *Joseph de Maistre and Giambattista Vico (Italian Roots of De Maistre’s Political Culture)* (Washington, D.C., 1937); Henry Packwood Adams, *The Life and Writings of Giambattista Vico* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1970), first edition in 1935; and Thomas Mary Berry, *The Historical Theory of Giambattista Vico* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1949).

13. In both cases the translators were Thomas Bergin and Max Fisch, Cornell University Press. On Berlin and Vico, see Joseph Mali, “Berlin, Vico, and the Principles of Humanity,” in Mali and Wokler (eds.), *Isaiah Berlin’s Counter-Enlightenment*, pp. 51–71. See also Mali’s *The Rehabilitation of Myth: Vico’s New Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). A sign of the vitality of Vico studies was the translation into Hebrew of *Scienza nuova* in 2005, with an excellent introduction by Mali.

14. Lukes, "Isaiah Berlin: In Conversation with Steven Lukes," pp. 96–97, 102.
15. Berlin, foreword to Meinecke, *Historism*, pp. ix–x.
16. *Ibid.*, p. xi.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. xii–xiii. All this very much resembles Sorel's distinction between myth and utopia. A utopia is a rationalist construction, a rational model that can be refuted, which is not the case with myth. Myth cannot be deconstructed into its component parts. It is consequently irrefutable, and reason has no hold on it.
18. *Ibid.*, p. xiv (the italics are mine).
19. *Ibid.*, p. xvi.
20. Lionel Gossman, *Basel in the Age of Burckhardt: A Study in Unseasonable Ideas*, pp. 448–449.
21. Gossman, *Basel in the Age of Burckhardt*, pp. 448–450; Iggers, *The German Conception of History*, p. 228.
22. Iggers, *The German Conception of History*, p. 228; Gossman, *Basel in the Age of Burckhardt*, p. 450. Cf. also, Lepenies, *The Seduction of Culture in German History*, p. 146.
23. Friedrich Meinecke, *The German Catastrophe: Reflections and Recollections*, trans. by Sidney B. Fay (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), p. 15.
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 60–61, 95–96 (the italics are in the original).
25. Jahanbegloo, *Conversations with Isaiah Berlin*, pp. 70, 66.
26. Lukes, "Isaiah Berlin: In Conversation with Steven Lukes," p. 91; Berlin, "The Divorce between the Sciences and the Humanities," in *Against the Current* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 92 (the italics are in the original).
27. Berlin, "Giambattista Vico and Cultural History," in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. 52–53; André Versaille, "Le Besoin de comprendre et de faire comprendre," in *Dictionnaire de la pensée de Voltaire*, selection of texts and editing by André Versaille, preface by René Pomeau, historical introduction by Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie (Brussels: Complexe, 1994), pp. xxxix–xlv; Voltaire, *Dictionnaire philosophique*, pp. 351–359.
28. Berlin, "Joseph de Maistre and the Origins of Fascism," in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, pp. 159–160.
29. Cf. the most recent biography of Voltaire, devoted to the last twenty-five years of his life: Ian Davidson, *Voltaire in Exile: The Last Years, 1753–1778* (London: Atlantic Books, 2005). Whatever qualities this work written for the general reader may have, nothing can replace the monumental biography edited by René Pomeau, *Voltaire en son temps*, 2 vols. (Paris: Fayard; Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 1995).
30. Berlin, "Joseph de Maistre," p. 173; Voltaire, *Dictionnaire philosophique*, pp. 492, 356–357; Nietzsche, *Human, All too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*, vol. 1, in *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, # 221, pp. 102–104, on "the revolution in poetry," and # 25–26, p. 36.
31. Berlin, *Freedom and Its Betrayal: Six Enemies of Human Liberty* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 5. Published through the good offices of his executor Henry Hardy, these texts have aged very badly.
32. Berlin, "Alleged Relativism in Eighteenth-Century European Thought," in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, p. 73; Berlin, *Freedom and Its Betrayal*, pp. 21–23, 25.

33. Berlin, *Freedom and Its Betrayal*, pp. 23–24, 26.

34. Berlin, “Hume and the Sources of German Anti-Rationalism,” in *Against the Current*, pp. 162–187; Berlin, “Montesquieu,” in *Against the Current*, pp. 130–132, 135, 143, 144, 135–136, 152, 153–154, 161.

35. Lukes, “Isaiah Berlin: In Conversation with Steven Lukes,” p. 88. On Voltaire, see p. 91; Berlin, “Alleged Relativism,” pp. 71–72, see also pp. 30–31, 80–81; Meinecke, *Historism*, pp. 108–114; Berlin, “Giambattista Vico and Cultural History,” p. 52, and “The Apotheosis of the Romantic Will,” p. 210, in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*. Here it is interesting to see Hausheer’s observations. According to him, Montesquieu had a right to Berlin’s sympathy because he was only partly a man of the Enlightenment, and because his lack of enthusiasm for radical schemes annoyed his more optimistic contemporaries, whose way of seeing was more rationalistic and linear. “In his heart,” Montesquieu was not a rationalist or a Cartesian, “and his practice belies his professions.” Here Hausheer went a step further: he said that Montesquieu was deeply distrustful of the concept of man in general. See his introduction to Berlin, *Against the Current*, pp. xxvi–xxvii.

36. Berlin, “Alleged Relativism,” pp. 73–74.

37. Berlin, *Freedom and Its Betrayal*, pp. 20, 26.

38. *Ibid.*, pp. 36–39, 44–45.

39. *Ibid.*, pp. 47–49. Let us recall here one of Rousseau’s most famous passages: “To renounce one’s liberty is to renounce one’s essence as a man, the rights of humanity and even one’s duties. No compensation is possible for anyone who renounces everything. Such a renunciation is incompatible with the nature of man, and to deny his will any liberty is to deny any morality to his actions” (*Du contrat social*, book 1, chapter 4, pp. 239–240). In this chapter on slavery, Rousseau also made the following famous statement: “One can also live peacefully in a dungeon. Is that enough to make one feel good there?” (p. 239).

40. Jean-Fabien Spitz, *La Liberté politique: Essai de généalogie conceptuelle* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1995), pp. 158–166, 173–174.

41. Rousseau, *Du contrat social*, book 1, chapter 3, p. 238; Rousseau, quoted in Spitz, *La Liberté politique*, p. 384 from *Considérations sur le Gouvernement de Pologne*.

42. Rousseau, *Du contrat social*, book 4, chapter 2, p. 310; Ernst Cassirer, *Rousseau, Kant, Goethe: Two Essays*, trans. by James Gutmann, Paul Oskar Kristeller, and John Herman Randall Jr. (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), and *The Question of Jean-Jacques Rousseau*, trans. and ed. by Peter Gay (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963).

43. O’Brien, *The Great Melody*, appendix, pp. 614, 611, 615, 616; Émile Faguet, *Politiques et moralistes du XIX siècle*, first series (Paris: Société française d’imprimerie et de librairie, n.d.), p. 41.

44. Benjamin Constant, “De l’esprit de conquête et de l’usurpation dans leurs rapports avec la civilisation européenne,” in *Oeuvres*, p. 1015.

45. François-René de Chateaubriand, *Essai historique, politique et moral sur les révolutions anciennes et modernes*, in *Oeuvres complètes de Chateaubriand* (Paris: Garnier, 1861), vol. 1, p. 320, 343, 549–550. See also pp. 553–557; Starobinski, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: La transparence et l’obstacle*, pp. 310–311.

46. Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, # 473, p. 255; see Jean Lacoste, “Postface,” in Nietzsche, *Oeuvres*, ed. by Lacoste and Jacques Le Rider, p. 1303; Friedrich Nietzsche, *Schopenhauer as Educator*, in *Unfashionable Observations*, in *The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche*, ed. by Ernst Behler, p. 200.

47. Keith Ansell-Pearson, *Nietzsche contra Rousseau: A Study of Nietzsche’s Moral and Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 215–219, 223–224.

48. Berlin in O’Brien, *The Great Melody*, appendix, p. 615. Outside the restricted circle of historians of the nineteenth century, Constant was a writer relatively little known in the English-speaking world. Strange as it may seem, the first English translation of the political writings of Benjamin Constant appeared in 1988: *Political Writings*, trans. and ed. by Bianca-Maria Fontana (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Isaiah Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” in *Liberty: Incorporating Four Essays on Liberty*, ed. by Henry Hardy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 209; Constant, “De l’esprit de conquête et de l’usurpation dans leurs rapports avec la civilisation européenne,” pp. 1010, 1012 and chapters 6 to 9.

49. Norberto Bobbio, “Deux notions de liberté dans la pensée politique de Kant,” in *Annales de philosophie politique: La philosophie politique de Kant* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1962), pp. 105–118. See also his *Diritto e stato nel pensiero di Emanuele Kant* (Turin: G. Giappichelli [1957]).

50. Montesquieu, *De l’Esprit des lois*, vol. 1, p. 162; Rousseau, *Du contrat social*, book 1, chapter 8, p. 247.

51. Immanuel Kant, “Toward Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch,” in Kant, *Toward Perpetual Peace and Other Writings on Politics, Peace, and History*, ed. and with an intro. by Pauline Kleingeld, trans. by David L. Colclasure (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 74.

52. Kant, “Toward Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch,” and Kant, “Idea for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Perspective,” in Kant, *Toward Perpetual Peace and Other Writings on Politics, Peace, and History*, pp. 13–14.

53. Bobbio, “Deux notions de liberté,” pp. 14–15, 117–118.

54. Maurras, *Romantisme et Révolution*, in *Oeuvres capitales*, p. 47.

55. Lukes, “Isaiah Berlin: In Conversation with Steven Lukes,” pp. 92–93.

56. Alexis Keller, *Le Libéralisme sans la démocratie: La pensée républicaine d’Antoine-Élise Cherbuliez (1797–1869)* (Lausanne: Payot, 2001). See the collection of contributions to a seminar that took place at the University of Tel-Aviv in the academic year 1999–2000, edited by Joseph Mali and Robert Wokler, *Isaiah Berlin’s Counter-Enlightenment* (cf. my Introduction above). In 1998, a symposium to commemorate the first anniversary of the death of Isaiah Berlin was held New York University. The contributions were assembled in Mark Lilla, Ronald Dworkin, and Robert Silvers (eds.), *The Legacy of Isaiah Berlin* (New York: The New York Review of Books, 2001). The first of the volumes devoted to Berlin was the collective work edited by Alan Ryan, *The Idea of Freedom: Essays in Honour of Isaiah Berlin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979); the second, edited by Edna and Avishai Margalit, was *Isaiah Berlin: A Celebration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

57. Bobbio, “Deux notions de liberté,” p. 105.

58. See *Vico and Herder: Two Studies in the History of Ideas* (London: Hogarth Press, 1976). The differences between this first edition and that following Berlin's death bear witness to Hardy's rather unusual editing. See *Three Critics of the Enlightenment*, a work published by Princeton University Press in 2000 that reprints *Vico and Herder* and adds the essay on Hamann. With regard to the changes and additions, see pages 160–161 of the 1976 edition of *Vico and Herder*, where Berlin gives three quotations from a Russian work, *Iogan Gotfrid Gerder*, published in Moscow and Leningrad in 1959. The first quotation is taken from Herder's *Briefe zur Beförderung der Humanität* (Letters for the Advancement of Humanity) of 1793–1797, the second is a quotation whose origin Berlin does not mention, and the third is taken from *Arastea*. All three are covered by a single note. Hardy checked: he suppressed notes 1 and 2 on page 161 that refer the reader to the Russian work, and replaced them with two notes (on p. 184 of the 2000 edition) that refer the reader to the Suphan edition, note 6 referring the reader to volume 5, p. 546, that is to say, to *Another Philosophy of History*, and the other to volume 23, p. 498, and so to *Arastea*, and added in the middle note 5, which refers the reader to volume 18, pp. 222–223, that is to say, to letter 44 — and not 114 — of *Letters for the Advancement of Humanity*. A similar procedure was used in the case of note 4 on page 161 of the 1976 edition. The two references to Suphan, volume 5, are apparently taken from Frederick M. Barnard's *Herder on Social and Political Culture*. Hardy eliminated the first of the two because it is incorrect and suppressed the reference to Barnard, who in the English-speaking world is an important source for the study of Herder, and whom Berlin read carefully. The same applies to the end of the main paragraph on that same page 161 of the 1976 text (p. 185 in the 2000 edition): the faithful Hardy rewrote this passage in the third person and paraphrased a text that Berlin presented in the first person as a direct citation within quotation marks, which raises doubts as to Berlin's reading of his sources. Another example: page 191 of *Vico and Herder*, which became page 216 of *Three Critics of the Enlightenment*, was suddenly covered with seven notes, absent from the original text, all referring the reader to *Another Philosophy of History*. Page 176 of the 1976 text, in which Berlin refers the reader to Barnard's work (notes 1 and 2) now also refers the reader to volume 5 of the Suphan edition, that is to say, to *Another Philosophy of History*: see page 201. The same happens on pages 178–179: Barnard disappears and is replaced by note 2 of p. 204. The whole of this note is rewritten: the note on page 203 (page 178 in the original) no longer exists. The same applies to page 180 of the original (p. 205 in the new edition). On page 223 of the 2000 edition there are two notes that do not exist on page 197 of the original text, and the note that refers the reader to a text by Voltaire now refers the reader to the 1877–1885 edition of his *Oeuvres complètes*, whereas Berlin gave a reference to a 1785 edition. Another quotation, taken from an article in the *Journal of the History of Ideas*, was very expediently replaced by a reference to another volume of the *Oeuvres complètes*. See also page 198 of *Vico and Herder* and compare it with page 223 of *Three Critics of the Enlightenment*. The question whether systematically omitting the secondary sources and replacing them with texts that Berlin himself did not mention, which probably means he did not read them, can be considered a legitimate procedure is highly dubious.

59. This phenomenon is still more surprising when its scale is compared to the relative obscurity of Michael Oakshott, also a liberal conservative in the true meaning of the

term. In *On Human Conduct*, Oakeshott gives his view of liberalism a sophisticated theoretical framework that is more subtle than that in Berlin's inaugural lecture and very much in the tradition of Tocqueville and Mill. For an excellent study of Oakeshott see Efraim Podoksik, *In Defence of Modernity: Vision and Philosophy in Michael Oakeshott* (Exeter, U.K.: Academic Imprint, 2003), pp. 198–201.

60. Alexis de Tocqueville, *De la démocratie en Amérique*, vol. 2 of *Oeuvres complètes*, intro. by Harold Laski (Paris: Gallimard, 1961), pp. 126 ff., 194–201; vol. 2, pp. 331, 337.

61. See Gerald MacCallum, "Negative and Positive Freedom," in Peter Laslett et al. (eds.), *Philosophy, Politics and Society*, fourth series (Oxford: Blackwell, 1972), pp. 174–193. One can find an extremely interesting example of the debate on this question in *The Legacy of Isaiah Berlin*. Unlike Dworkin, Thomas Nagel thinks that Berlin considered the values of liberty and equality to be incompatible rather than opposed: see his "Pluralism and Coherence," in Lilla, Dworkin, and Silvers (eds.), *The Legacy of Isaiah Berlin*, p. 107. Against this, Dworkin's analysis, based on a rigorous interpretation of Berlin, leaves little room for doubt about the true significance of the questions raised by the conflict of liberal values in the author of *Two Concepts of Liberty*. See "Do Liberal Values Conflict?" in Lilla, Dworkin, and Silvers (eds.), *The Legacy of Isaiah Berlin*, pp. 73–90, 121–125, and 126–132.

62. Isaiah Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty: An Inaugural Lecture Delivered before the University of Oxford on 31 October 1958* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), pp. 14, 7–11, 16, 56–57. Berlin gives the most succinct definition of negative liberty as "*freedom from*" as against "*freedom to*" (the italics are in the text).

63. Ibid., p. 10 (the quotation marks are in the text); Harold Laski, *Liberty in the Modern State: With a New Introduction* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1937), p. 7.

64. Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty*, pp. 16–17. See also the introductory essay by Alan Ryan to *The Idea of Freedom: Essays in Honour of Isaiah Berlin*, pp. 4–5.

65. Criticisms of Berlin, implicit, polite, and moderate or more radical and violent, are numerous. See Jean-Fabien Spitz's *La Liberté politique*, which makes an excellent analysis from Charles Taylor's classical piece to C. B. McPherson's Marxist-inspired essay, to Quentin Skinner, and not forgetting the harsher criticisms that followed the appearance of *Two Concepts of Liberty*: see particularly pp. 97–121. The collection of essays edited by Alan Ryan, *The Idea of Freedom*, mentioned earlier, despite its generally very laudatory tone, contains many reservations: see especially Taylor's contribution, "What's Wrong with Negative Liberty?" pp. 175ff. Skinner thought that Berlin's argument only held together because the conclusions were already to be found in its premises, and the premises of negative liberty as formulated by Berlin need to be revised. See Quentin Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 114–115. See also William I. McBride, "'Two Concepts of Liberty' Thirty Years Later: A Sartre-Inspired Critique," *Social Theory and Practice*, vol. 16, no. 3 (Autumn 1990), pp. 297–322.

66. Berlin, introduction to *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. lviii, note 1. This volume in turn was incorporated in a third anthology, *Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Lukes, "Isaiah Berlin: In Conversation with Steven Lukes," pp. 92, 112; Berlin, "The Apotheosis of the Romantic Will," pp. 236–237.

67. See my chapter 1.

68. Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty*, in *Four Essays on Liberty*, p. 171. The defense of Berlin's memory has involved, among other things, the necessity of demonstrating that there was no real connection between pluralism and the definition of liberty as negative liberty. See Bernard Williams, "Liberalism and Loss," in Lilla, Dworkin, and Silvers (eds.), *The Legacy of Isaiah Berlin*, p. 93.

69. Jahanbegloo, *Conversations with Isaiah Berlin*, p. 114.

70. Berlin in O'Brien, *The Great Melody*, appendix, pp. 608 and 613. In his article "Alleged Relativism in Eighteenth-Century European Thought," Berlin had included Burke among the reactionaries together with Hamann, Justus Möser, and de Maistre: *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, p. 78; Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty*, p. 55.

71. Berlin, "The Apotheosis of the Romantic Will," p. 209; Berlin, "Hume and the Sources of German Anti-Rationalism," pp. 162–163, and see Wolin, *The Seduction of Unreason: The Intellectual Romance with Fascism from Nietzsche to Postmodernism*.

72. Hausheer, introduction to Berlin, *Against the Current*, pp. xvii–xx.

73. *Ibid.*, pp. xx–xxi, xxvi.

74. *Ibid.*, pp. xxiv–xxv, xxvi.

75. Berlin, "Giambattista Vico and Cultural History," pp. 59–63; Berlin, *Vico and Herder*, pp. 38–41; Berlin, "The Counter-Enlightenment," in *Against the Current*, p. 5.

76. Berlin, "The Counter-Enlightenment," pp. 1 and 6 and the whole of pp. 1–6; Berlin, "Alleged Relativism," pp. 74–76; Berlin, *Vico and Herder*, pp. xvi–xix.

77. Isaiah Berlin, *The Magus of the North: J. G. Hamann and the Origins of Modern Irrationalism* (London: John Murray, 1993), pp. 3–4, 121, 120, 117.

78. *Ibid.*, pp. 122, 117, 91–92, 124.

79. Friedrich Meinecke, *Machiavellism: The Doctrine of Raison d'État and Its Place in Modern History*, trans. by Douglas Scott, intro. by W. Stark (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), p. 8. *Die Idee der Staatsräson* was first published in 1924; Berlin, "The Originality of Machiavelli," in *Against the Current*, pp. 66–68, 70–71, 74, 78, 77.

80. Berlin, "Joseph de Maistre," pp. 171–172, 107–108. On Berlin on de Maistre, see Graeme Garrard's eulogistic article, despite some reservations, "Isaiah Berlin's Joseph de Maistre," in Mali and Wokler (eds.), *Isaiah Berlin's Counter-Enlightenment*, pp. 117–131, 107–108.

81. Berlin, "Joseph de Maistre," pp. 109, 100 (the italics are in the original). In many ways, this long article recalls Émile Faguet's essay in which, around 1890, the famous right-wing publicist described de Maistre's thought with precision, exactitude, and sympathy. See Émile Faguet, *Politiques et moralistes du XIXe siècle*, first series, 12th ed. (Paris: Société française d'imprimerie et de librairie, n.d.), pp. 1–67.

82. Berlin, "Georges Sorel," in *Against the Current*, pp. 316–317.

83. *Ibid.*, pp. 331–332.

84. Gay, *The Party of Humanity: Essays in the French Enlightenment*, pp. 284–285; Hausheer, introduction to Berlin, *Against the Current*, p. xxxv.

85. Mark Lilla, "What Is Enlightenment?" in Mali and Wokler (eds.), *Isaiah Berlin's Counter-Enlightenment*, pp. 1–11; John Robertson, "The Case for the Enlightenment: A Comparative Approach," in Mali and Wokler (eds.), *Isaiah Berlin's Counter-Enlightenment*, p. 73. It is interesting to compare this article with that of Graeme Garrard, "The Counter-Enlightenment Liberalism of Isaiah Berlin," *Journal of Political Ideologies*, vol. 2 (1997), pp.

281–296. Garrard depicts Berlin as he would have wished to have been seen. Berlin's attack on the Enlightenment was said to have been motivated by his pluralistic and hence liberal convictions.

86. Berlin, "The Divorce between the Sciences and the Humanities," p. 92; Berlin, *Vico and Herder*, pp. xxii–xxiii.

87. Berlin, *Vico and Herder*, pp. 187–189, 206–207.

88. Ibid., pp. 153–154; Lilla, "Wolves and Lambs," in Lilla, Dworkin, and Silvers (eds.), *The Legacy of Isaiah Berlin*, pp. 35–36. Many apparent contradictions in Berlin's thought disappear when one decides to state matters plainly.

89. Berlin, "The Bent Twig," in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, p. 244; Berlin, *Vico and Herder*, pp. 195–201. Hausheer, representing Berlin, adopted Herder's view of the Germans. He said they "discovered in themselves superior moral and spiritual depth, a noble and selfless love of truth and the inner life of the spirit, which they contrasted with the hedonistic, worldly, superficial and morally empty French. In comparison with the polished and decadent French they felt themselves to be young, vigorous and untried, the true bearers of the future." One seems to be dreaming! See Hausheer, introduction to Berlin, *Against the Current*, p. xliii.

90. Berlin, "The Bent Twig," p. 245; Berlin, *Vico and Herder*, p. 201.

91. Berlin, "The Decline of Utopian Ideas," in *The Crooked Timber of Humanity*, p. 38.

92. Berlin, *Vico and Herder*, pp. 157–163, 175–176, 182, 181.

93. Ibid., pp. xxiii–xxiv.

94. Berlin, "The Decline of Utopian Ideas," p. 39; Berlin, "The Apotheosis of the Romantic Will," pp. 224–225; Berlin, *Vico and Herder*, pp. xxiii–xxiv; Berlin, "Alleged Relativism," p. 87.

95. Berlin, "The Apotheosis of the Romantic Will," p. 237. It is interesting in this context to see how Roger Hausheer, the mouthpiece of his master, described Berlin's contribution. Berlin, he said, opposed "the essential values of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century faith in liberal rationalism, cosmopolitanism, science, progress and rational organization." According to Hausheer, the doctrine that the experimental sciences provided the only possible way to gain knowledge, a doctrine that excluded the possibility of any transcendental or nonrational forms of knowledge, was a principal tenet of the French Enlightenment. This idea provoked a profound "reaction against dry rationalism, materialism and ethical naturalism," which also took place in France with Diderot and especially with Rousseau, the main spokesman for this liberation of sensibility and the natural passions. The true liberation, however, came from Germany. That is exactly what Meinecke said. See Hausheer, introduction to Berlin, *Against the Current*, pp. xxiii–xxiv, xlv.

96. Berlin, *Vico and Herder*, pp. xxiv, 184.

97. Berlin, "The Counter-Enlightenment," p. 6; Berlin, *Vico and Herder*, pp. 174, 208–209; Arnaldo Momigliano, "On the Pioneer Trail," *New York Review of Books*, November 11, 1976.

98. Berlin, "Alleged Relativism," pp. 96–97. See also p. 85.

99. Leo Strauss, "Relativism," in Schoeck and Wiggins (eds.), *Relativism and the Study of Man*, pp. 138, 137, 139, 140. In this connection, Strauss was careful to point out that Berlin insisted on the fact that "Kant and the rationalists of his type do not regard all ends

of equal value.” “Sacred” (p. 137) is quoted from *Two Concepts of Liberty*, p. 57, and “absolute” (p. 138) is taken from p. 51 (Strauss’s italics). When I wrote this book in French, I was unaware of the existence of Strauss’s text. I’m indebted to my friend Heinrich Meier, professor of philosophy at the University of Munich, who is now publishing the complete works of Strauss in German, for drawing my attention to it.

100. Quoted in Robert Wokler, “Isaiah Berlin’s Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment,” in Mali and Wokler (eds.), *Isaiah Berlin’s Counter-Enlightenment*, p. 14. Savile Row is a street in London where the great tailors of the British capital are to be found. See John Gray, *Isaiah Berlin* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

101. Ernst Gellner, “Anything Goes: The Carnival of Cheap Relativism Which Threatens to Swamp the Coming Fin-de-Millénaire,” *Times Literary Supplement*, June 16, 1995.

102. Raymond Boudon, “Les Sciences sociales françaises: Does Anything Go?” *Commentaire*, no. 110 (Summer 2005), pp. 357, 352. Boudon considered the problematics of “anything goes” in the context of an excellent analysis of the weaknesses of French academic research in the social sciences. The weaknesses he perceived, however, were limited neither to the social sciences nor to France.

103. Lukes, “Isaiah Berlin: In Conversation with Steven Lukes,” p. 88. Berlin was simply intrigued by the fact that, separated from the German thinkers in time and space, Vico was able to express in total isolation the main gist of their ideas, above all those of Herder.

104. On this aspect of Berlin’s personality, see Pierre Birnbaum’s excellent *Géographie de l’espoir: L’exil, les lumières, la désassimilation* (Paris: Gallimard, 2004).

105. Berlin, “The Apotheosis of the Romantic Will,” pp. 236–237.

Epilogue

1. Tocqueville, *De la démocratie en Amérique*, vol. 2 of *Oeuvres complètes*, p. 339; *Correspondance d’Alexis de Tocqueville et d’Arthur de Gobineau*, vol. 9 of *Oeuvres complètes*, p. 197 (the italics are in the original).

2. Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1966), p. 176; Schmitt, *Political Romanticism*, p. 63.

3. Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, p. 299.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 229.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 300.

6. Becker, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*: the 1965 edition used here was the twenty-ninth reprinting; Raymond O. Lockwood (ed.), *Carl Becker’s Heavenly City Revisited* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1958), new edition in 1968. Becker’s thesis was by no means universally accepted, however. Peter Gay, who a few years later was to produce an interesting history of the Enlightenment, in 1956 gave a devastating critique of Becker’s book. The text of this paper, first given in the work edited by Lockwood, was reissued by Gay in the 1971 edition of *The Party of Humanity*, a collection of his own essays, pp. 188–210.

7. The expression “climate of opinion” is another way of saying the *Zeitgeist*, or the “spirit of the age.”

8. Becker, *The Heavenly City*, pp. 29–31, 161.

9. See, for example, Peter Eli Gordon, “Continental Divide: Ernst Cassirer and Martin Heidegger at Davos, 1929: An Allegory of Intellectual History,” *Modern Intellectual History*, vol. 1 (2004), pp. 219–248. This article has an excellent up-to-date bibliography (note 6, p. 222). Cf. also the records of a symposium held at University of Paris X, Nanterre, in 1988: Jean Seindengart (ed.), *Ernst Cassirer: De Marbourg à New York, l’itinéraire philosophique* (Paris: Cerf, 1990).

10. Edmund Husserl, *La Crise de l’humanité européenne et la philosophie* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1977), pp. 31, 20.

11. Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, p. xi.

12. Cassirer, *The Myth of the State*. Note that in chapters 13 and 14 of *The Myth of the State*, devoted to the questions with which we are concerned here, Becker and Lovejoy were only mentioned once, and then only in footnotes. From Becker, Cassirer was content to borrow a fine quotation from Chastellux, without saying a word about the author’s book (p. 227). Lovejoy was also mentioned once, in a very critical manner, as one of those who wrongly associated the Romantic spirit with Hitler: p. 230. He was mentioned as the writer of an article in the *Journal of the History of Ideas*, but his major work, *The Great Chain of Being*, was not mentioned. It would seem that Cassirer thought that there was no reason to dwell on the two works, about which so much was written in the United States. Cassirer also mentioned Lovejoy’s article “The Meaning of Romanticism for the History of Ideas,” *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 2 (1941), and Leo Spitzer’s answer published in the same journal, vol. 5 (1944) (see my Introduction).

13. Quoted in Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, p. 216.

14. Renan, *La Réforme intellectuelle et morale*, pp. 114–115.

15. Renan, “La monarchie constitutionnelle en France,” p. 297. See also pp. 294–295.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 240.

17. Renan, “Philosophie de l’histoire contemporaine,” p. 19.

18. Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The Roads to Modernity: The British, French and American Enlightenments*, pp. 71–72, 85, 91. This idea had already been expressed by Talmon, almost word for word: “The French Revolution compared with the American Revolution had been an event on quite a different plane. It had been a total revolution in the sense that it had left no sphere and no aspect of human existence untouched, whereas the American Revolution had been a purely political change-over” (*The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy*, p. 27).

19. François Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, trans. by Elborg Forster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 19, 25, 62.

20. Taine, *Les Origines de la France contemporaine*, vol. 1, pp. 462, 730.

21. Renan, “La Monarchie constitutionnelle en France,” pp. 237–238: “une voie pleine de singularités.”

22. Furet, *Interpreting the French Revolution*, p. 79.

23. *Ibid.*, pp. 48–49.

24. Éric Vigne, *Le Livre et l’éditeur* (Paris: Klincksieck, 2008), pp. 136–137.

25. A more recent book by Gertrude Himmelfarb, also beginning with Burke, is *The Moral Imagination: From Edmund Burke to Lionel Trilling* (2006).

26. Irwin Stelzer (ed.), *The Neocon Reader* (New York: Grove Press, 2004), p. 19. This

anthology has contributions from some of the leading intellectuals and “thinking” political personalities of neoconservatism, from its ideologist Irving Kristol and his son William to Condoleezza Rice, John Bolton, the former ambassador to the United Nations, and Jeane Kirkpatrick, his predecessor in the time of Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher, and Tony Blair, which may surprise some people despite the logic of this choice.

27. *Ibid.*, pp. 304–306, 129–139.

28. Irving Kristol, *Neoconservatism: The Autobiography of an Idea* (Chicago: Elephant Paperbacks, 1999), first edition in 1995, p. 191.

29. Michael Oakeshott, “On Being Conservative,” in *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* (London: Methuen, 1962), pp. 168–196; Kristol, *Neoconservatism*, pp. 373–374. *Encounter*, published in London, was financed by the United States within the framework of the cultural cold war of the period.

30. Oakeshott, “On Being Conservative,” pp. 168–182, 187.

31. Kristol, *Neoconservatism*, p. 375.

32. *Ibid.*, pp. 376, 377, and 386.

33. Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1978), pp. xxviii, 155, 158, xxiv, 85, 69–79.

34. Himmelfarb, *The Roads to Modernity*, p. 72. Himmelfarb also supported her argument with the opinion of John Pocock, who, among other things, has produced a new edition of *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, and, more recently, a study of Gibbon: *Barbarism and Religion*, vol. 1: *The Enlightenment of Edward Gibbon*; vol. 2: *Narratives of Civil Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

35. O’Brien, *The Great Melody: A Thematic Biography and Commented Anthology of Edmund Burke*, appendix, p. 609.

36. *Ibid.*, pp. 614, 596–601.

37. *Ibid.*, pp. 601–602.

38. See Lawrence Birken, *Hitler as Philosopher: Remnants of the Enlightenment in National Socialism* (Westport, Conn.: Prager, 1995), pp. 1, 16; Zygmunt Bauman, “The Camps, Western, Eastern, Modern,” *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, vol. 13 (1997), p. 39.

39. Zeev Sternhell, “Fascist Ideology,” in Walter Laqueur (ed.), *Fascism: A Reader’s Guide: Analyses, Interpretations, Bibliography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), pp. 368–371. This book has gone through many editions.

40. *Forever in the Shadow of Hitler? Original Documents of the Historikerstreit, the Controversy Concerning the Singularity of the Holocaust*, trans. by James Knowlton and Truett Cates (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1993).

41. François Furet/Ernst Nolte, *Fascism and Communism*, trans. by Katherine Golsan, preface by Tzvetan Todorov (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), p. 28.

42. Contemporaries were not wrong when they spoke, like the French fascist intellectuals of the 1930s Pierre Drieu la Rochelle and Bertrand de Jouvenel, of a “fascism 1913.” “Historians of the future will ask themselves if, were it not for the explosion of August 1914, France would not have been the first country to have a national revolution,” wrote Jouvenel (*Le Réveil de l’Europe* [Paris: Gallimard, 1938], p. 148). Two years earlier, in 1936, Drieu la Rochelle, according to Pierre Andreu, had said something similar: “Certainly, when one looks at that period, one sees that certain elements of the fascist atmo-

sphere had come together in France around the year 1913, before they had done elsewhere. . . . Yes, in France, around Action française and Péguy, there was the nebulous form of a kind of fascism” (quoted in Pierre Andreu, “Fascism 1913,” *Combat*, February 1936). Drieu La Rochelle readily spoke at that time of a “red fascism.”

43. Raymond Aron, *Democracy and Totalitarianism* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970), pp. 198, 203–204.

44. Furet/Nolte, *Fascism and Communism*, p. 2.

45. For a detailed demonstration of this point, see my *Birth of Fascist Ideology* (with Sznajder and Asheri) and the essay “Morphology and Historiography of Fascism in France” published at the beginning of the third edition, revised and enlarged, of my *Ni Droite ni gauche* (Paris: Fayard, 2000). An abridged English version is available in Brian Jenkins (ed.), *France in the Era of Fascism*, pp. 22–64. See also my “From the Counter-Enlightenment to the Revolutions of the Twentieth Century,” in Avineri and Sternhell (eds.), *Europe’s Century of Discontent: The Legacies of Fascism, Nazism and Communism*, pp. 3–22, and my “Le Fascisme, ce ‘mal du siècle,’” in Michel Dobry (ed.), *Le Mythe de l’allergie française au fascisme* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2003). Another example of a strange mechanical comparison—to say the least—is the question of the role of the veterans whom the three new regimes used as “the means of imposing the undivided domination of a single party”: Furet/Nolte, *Fascism and Communism*, p. 1. The neoconservative historians forget that if the original troops, or rather the original nucleus of the shock troops, of the fascists and Nazis came from the ranks of the veterans, the opposite was the case with the Bolsheviks. In Lenin’s camp, and later in the failed revolutions in Hungary and Germany, it was violently antinationalistic, often Jewish professional revolutionaries who set the tone. Moreover, the Russian soldiers had an extraordinary hatred for the war; they never engaged in trench warfare, they never knew the kind of experiences celebrated by Jünger, and in addition some of them, already quite politicized, had a deep dislike of the regime. The idealization of war, the Sorelian and futurist cult of violence as the source of morality and virtue, was totally foreign to the millions of Russian men-in-arms for whom this confrontation had no meaning and no purpose. The same was true for the Austro-Hungarian armies in which Schweiks abounded. Moreover, one should remember that the whole of Russian political thought of the beginning of the twentieth century, revolved around the idea of revolution. The earth was trembling in Eastern Europe from the end of the nineteenth century, and in 1905 it became clear to everyone that the fall of the regime was only a matter of time and opportunity.

46. François Furet, *The Passing of an Illusion: The Idea of Communism in the Twentieth Century*, trans. by Deborah Furet (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 502 (the italics are in the original).

47. Kristol, *Neoconservatism*, pp. 198–199 (the article “Utopianism, Ancient and Modern,” 1973).

48. Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Avon Books, 1993).

49. *Ibid.*, p. xi. On Fukuyama’s elegant retreat from hard-core neoconservatism, see his *America at the Crossroads: Democracy, Power, and the Neoconservative Legacy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

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