

HEGEL

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TO KAREN

who came in at the beginning
and thought it would never end



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Aims of a New Epoch

Hegel was born in 1770, at the moment that German culture was entering the decisive shift known as the *Sturm und Drang*, and when the generation which would revolutionize German thought and literature at the turn of the century was being born. Hegel belongs to this, the 'Romantic' generation, as it has been called, a bit loosely. In fact such party labels are misleading; there were certain pre-occupations which captured the thinkers and artists of this generation, whether they qualify as Romantics or not, pre-occupations which were shared even by sharp critics of the Romantics, as Hegel was. We cannot really understand what he was about until we see the basic problems and aspirations which gripped him, and these were those of the time.

It was a revolutionary time, of course. This has become to us a hackneyed phrase, because revolution in the world is become almost a constant of our experience. But in the 1790s Revolution had its full impact, as the shock waves from Paris spread across Europe; and its impact was all the stronger for being bi-valenced: enthusiasm followed by perplexed horror, among the young intelligentsia of Germany. Much in the writings of Hegel and his contemporaries can be explained by the need to come to terms with the painful, perturbing, conflict-ridden moral experience of the French Revolution. But we have also to understand something of the medium in which this epochal event reverberated, the climate of thought and feeling in which the rising generation of young educated Germans was formed and evolved.

Perhaps the most economical way of sketching this climate, or those aspects of it which will most help us in understanding Hegel, is to delineate a central problem, which insistently demanded solution of the thinkers of this time. It concerned the nature of human subjectivity and its relation to the world. It was a problem of uniting two seemingly indispensable images of man, which on one level had deep affinities with each other, and yet could not but appear utterly incompatible.

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Both these views arose as reactions to, and hence partly as developments of, the main stream of radical Enlightenment thought as this had developed through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in England and France. By this I

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mean the line of thought which begins with the epistemological revolution which was part inspirer, part beneficiary of the seventeenth-century scientific revolution. It develops through such diverse thinkers as Bacon, Hobbes, Descartes, Locke, and authenticated by the science of Galileo and Newton, it entrenches its hold in the eighteenth century not only as a theory of knowledge, but as a theory of man and society as well. In the hands of its more radical protagonists it develops towards a thoroughgoing atomism and mechanism, sometimes going as far as materialism, in its account of man and society, and it becomes a radical utilitarianism in ethics. Helvétius, Holbach, Hume, Bentham can be thought of as representatives of different currents of this broad stream.

Now there are many ways of reading this movement of ideas; the most common is the one just mentioned: that we see it as primarily an epistemological revolution with anthropological consequences. But it will be more relevant to our purposes if we try to concentrate on the notion of the subject which underlay this revolution from the start.

As epistemological innovators, the moderns of the seventeenth century directed their scorn and polemics against Aristotelian science, and that view of the universe which had become intricately with it in Medieval and early Renaissance thought. Final causes and the related vision of the universe as a meaningful order of qualitatively differentiated levels give way first to a Platonic-Pythagorean vision of mathematical order (as in Bruno, Kepler, and partly too, in Galileo), and then finally to the 'modern' view of a world of ultimately contingent correlations, to be patiently mapped by empirical observation. From the modern point of view, these earlier visions betrayed a deplorable if understandable weakness of men, a self-indulgence wherein they projected on things the forms which they most desire to find, in which they feel fulfilled or at home. Scientific truth and discovery requires austerity, a courageous struggle against what Bacon called the 'Idols of the human mind'.

We are all 'moderns' enough to have bought a good deal of this story. It is with a mixture of condescension and embarrassment that we read a passage like the following, an early seventeenth-century 'refutation' of Galileo's discovery of the moons of Jupiter.

There are seven windows given to animals in the domicile of the head, through which the air is admitted to the tabernacle of the body, to enlighten, to warm and to nourish it. What are these parts of the *microcosmos*? Two nostrils, two eyes, two ears, and a mouth. So in the heavens, as in a *macrocosmos*, there are two favourable stars, two unpropitious, two luminaries, and Mercury undecided and indifferent. From this and from many other similarities in nature, such as the seven metals, etc., which it were tedious to enumerate, we gather that the number of planets is necessarily seven.¹

¹ Quoted from S. Warhaft (Ed.) *Francis Bacon: A selection of his works*, Toronto, 1965, p. 17.

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What seems to underlie this reasoning as an 'anthropomorphic' assumption is the vision of meaningful order. It can be called a meaningful order because the notion is that different elements in creation express or embody a certain order of ideas – this is why the apertures in the head, the planets, the metals, and other phenomena 'which it were tedious to enumerate' can all be put in relation with each other. They all embody the same idea reflected in different media, rather as 'it's hot' and 'il fait chaud' express the same statement in different languages. And because of this correspondence, we can conclude to the nature of one from the other just as I know from learning that someone said, in French, 'it's hot' that he said 'il fait chaud'. The idea of a meaningful order is inseparably bound up with that of final causes since it posits that the furniture of the universe is as it is and develops as it does in order to embody these ideas; the order is the ultimate explanation.

Understanding the world in categories of meaning, as existing to embody or express an order of Ideas or archetypes, as manifesting the rhythm of divine life, or the foundational acts of the gods, or the will of God; seeing the world as a text, or the universe as a book (a notion which Galileo still makes use of) – this kind of *interpretive* vision of things which in one form or another played such an important role in many pre-modern societies may appear to us the paradigm of anthropomorphic projection onto the world, suitable to an age in which man was not fully adult. And if this is our only way of seeing this transition in our intellectual and cultural history, then we must interpret the revolts against mechanism of the late eighteenth century, the vision of Goethe, the Romantic imagination, the philosophies of Nature of a Schelling or a Hegel, simply as a failure of nerve, a nostalgic return to earlier, comfortable illusions.

This way of seeing things is not uncommon, but it very much misses the point of these reactions, as well as obscuring the way in which the issues raised then remain central today. Instead of seeing the issue between Galileo and the Paduan philosophers, between modern science and medieval metaphysics, as a struggle between two tendencies in the self, one deploying comforting illusions, the other facing stern realities, we might see it as a revolution in the basic categories in which we understand self. This is not to say that it was understood in this way at the time, but that this formulation is best suited to help us understand the movements of the late eighteenth century.

The moderns' reading of their predecessors and opponents as caught in a web of illusion which they themselves have spun, self-indulgently projecting meanings devised in the mind onto the facts, arose understandably out of the struggle of innovators to free themselves from a venerable orthodoxy. But it persists partly because the very completeness of the modern revolution militates against our understanding the view it replaced. The very modern notion of the self, which is the locus for this struggle between indulgence and

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austerity, really only comes to be in the seventeenth century, although the epicurean view foreshadows it to some extent.

The essential difference can perhaps be put in this way: the modern subject is self-defining, where on previous views the subject is defined in relation to a cosmic order.

Any account of the human subject has to cope with certain universal facets of experience: that at times we can be 'in touch' with ourselves, with our central concerns, we can be clear about who we are and what our purposes are; while at other times we are confused, unclear, or distraught, torn this way and that, or obsessed with the inessential, or just giddily forgetful. Many concepts and images can be used to describe these opposed conditions: harmony vs. conflict, depth vs. superficiality, self-possession vs. -loss, self-centring vs. dispersal. And of course none is neutral, in the sense that each proposes an interpretation of what is at stake which can be contested. For different notions of the subject suggest very different interpretations.

If we pick 'self-presence' as against 'distraction' or 'dispersal' as provisional terms to designate the oppositions here, then we can say that the view of the subject that came down from the dominant tradition of the ancients, was that man came most fully to himself when he was in touch with a cosmic order, and in touch with it in the way most suitable to it as an order of ideas, that is, by reason. This is plainly the heritage of Plato; order in the human soul is inseparable from rational vision of the order of being. For Aristotle contemplation of this order is the highest activity of man. The same basic notion is present in the neo-Platonist vision which through Augustine becomes foundational for much medieval thought.

On this view the notion of a subject coming to self-presence and clarity in the absence of any cosmic order, or in ignorance of and unrelated to the cosmic order, is utterly senseless: to rise out of dream, confusion, illusion is just to see in the order of things. We might say that on this view, there is no notion of the self in the modern sense, that is, of an identity which I can define for myself without reference to what surrounds me and the world in which I am set. Rather, I am essentially vision of... either order or illusion.

Now the shift that occurs in the seventeenth-century revolution is, *inter alia*, a shift to the modern notion of the self. It is this kind of notion which underlies Descartes' *cogito*, where the existence of the self is demonstrated while that of everything outside, even God, is in doubt. Similarly, it is this notion which underlies the emancipation from meaning. If man only comes to self-presence in a rational vision of cosmic order which is an order of ideas; and if science as the highest mode of consciousness presupposes self-presence, then science must be founded on a vision of meaningful order. Not deployed as an argument, but rather as an unspoken boundary to thought, this must have underlain the argument of Galileo's opponents. If there had to be a mean-

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ingful order, then the set of correspondences they deploy are pretty convincing, granted other current assumptions. But at base there had to be an order because this was a condition of the rational grasp of the world we call science, on the assumption that rationality = vision of this order. Of course, it would be anachronistic to place this as an *argument* in the mouths of contemporaries. For it is we post-Kantians who can cast it as a transcendental argument from the fact of science. But it is not incoherent or illegitimate to think of it as an inarticulate limit of thought.

But plainly the obverse relation holds as well, and to dispense with the notion of meaningful order was to re-define the self. The situation is now reversed: full self-possession requires that we free ourselves from the projections of meanings onto things, that we be able to draw back from the world; and concentrate purely on our own processes of observation and thought about things. The old model now looks like a dream of self-dispersal; self-presence is now to be aware of what we are and what we are doing in abstraction from the world we observe and judge. The self-defining subject of modern epistemology is thus naturally the atomic subjectivity of the psychology and politics which grow out of the same movement. The very notion of the subject takes on a new meaning in the modern context, as a number of contemporary writers have pointed out.¹

Of course, as mentioned above, this modern notion of the self was not without precedents. The Epicureans and Sceptics among the ancients presented a view of the self which was defined in abstraction from any order; and it is not surprising that this minority tradition among the ancients provided some of the fuel for the modern revolution, or that many figures of the Enlightenment felt great affinity for Epicurus and Lucretius. But the modern subject provided a significantly new twist.

The Epicureans and Sceptics achieved a notion of self-definition by withdrawal from the world; their weapon was scepticism about cosmic order, or a plea for the irrelevance of the Gods. By contrast the modern shift to a self-defining subject was bound up with a sense of control over the world - at first intellectual and then technological. That is, the modern certainty that the world was not to be seen as a text or an embodiment of meaning was not founded on a sense of its baffling impenetrability. On the contrary, it grew with the mapping of the regularities in things, by transparent mathematical reasoning, and with the consequent increase of manipulative control. That is what ultimately established the picture of the world as the locus of neutral, contingent correlations. Ancient sceptics while denying our ability to know the nature of things, had claimed that men had enough immediately relevant grasp on their situation to go about the business of life. While sometimes taking

¹ E.g. Heidegger: 'Die Zeit des Weltbildes' in *Holzwege*, Frankfurt a.M., 1950, 81-5.

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up the same formulae, the seventeenth century changed their content radically. The immediately relevant knowledge which was not to be compared with knowledge of final causes came to enjoy a higher and higher prestige. It came to be understood as the paradigm of knowledge.

This control over things which has grown with modern science and technology is often thought of as the principal motivation behind the scientific revolution and the development of the modern outlook. Bacon's oft-quoted slogan, 'knowledge is power' can easily give us this impression, and this 'technological' view of the seventeenth-century revolution is one of the reasons why Bacon has often been given a greater role in it than he deserves, alongside Galileo and Descartes. But even in Bacon's case, when he insists on the nullity of a philosophy from which there cannot be 'adduced a single experiment which tends to relieve and benefit the condition of man',¹ we can read his motivation in a different way. We rather see the control as valuable not so much in itself as in its confirmation of a certain view of things: a view of the world not as a locus of meanings, but rather of contingent, de facto correlations. Manipulability of the world confirms the new self-defining identity, as it were: the proper relation of man to a meaningful order is to put himself into tune with it; by contrast nothing sets the seal more clearly on the rejection of this vision than successfully treating the world as object of control. Manipulation both proves and as it were celebrates the vision of things as 'disenchanted' (entzaubert) to use Max Weber's famous phrase.

Technological progress has so transformed our lives and produced so many things we could barely do without, that we easily think of the 'pay-off' of the seventeenth-century revolution in terms of these benefits (if such they unambiguously are). But in the seventeenth century itself, this pay-off was very slim. For Bacon and the other men of his time, control was more important for what it proved. In the very passage quoted above where he speaks of relieving and benefiting the condition of man, Bacon says: 'For fruits and works are as it were sponsors and sureties for the truth of philosophies.' And later he makes an explicit comparison of the relative importance of the two considerations: 'works themselves are of greater value as pledges of truth than as contributing to the comforts of life.'² We have no reason to think of this as false scientific piety.

Bacon later defines this goal which 'is in itself more worthy than all the fruits of inventions' as 'the very contemplation of things as they are, without superstition or imposture, error or confusion'.³ My suggestion is that one of the powerful attractions of this austere vision, long before it 'paid off' in technology, lies in the fact that a disenchanted world is correlative to a self-defining subject, and that the winning through to a self-defining identity

¹ Novum Organum, Book I, LXXIII.

² Book I, cxxix.

³ Op. cit. Book I, cxxix.

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was accompanied by a sense of exhilaration and power, that the subject need no longer define his perfection or vice, his equilibrium or disharmony, in relation to an external order. With the forging of this modern subjectivity there comes a new notion of freedom, and a newly central role attributed to freedom, which seems to have proved itself definitive and irreversible.

In the preceding pages we have been speaking of a transformation in philosophical outlook, which as such could only touch a minority in seventeenth-century Europe. But the modern notion of the subject has left no one untouched and unchanged in European society, or indeed the world. In part we can see this as the result of changes, political, economic, social which spread under the influence of minorities first over Western society as a whole, and then over alien societies. But in the European case there was another powerful influence at work which seems to have moved in the same direction. For the majority of non-philosophical men the sense of being defined in relation to a larger order is carried by their religious consciousness, and most powerfully for most men in most ages by their sense of the sacred, by which is meant here the heightened presence of the divine in certain privileged places, times and actions. Catholic Christianity retained the sacred in this sense, both in its own sacraments and in certain pagan festivals suitably 'baptized'. But protestantism and particularly Calvinism classed it with idolatry and waged unconditional war on it. It is probable that the unremitting struggle to desacralize the world in the name of an undivided devotion to God waged by Calvin and his followers helped to destroy the sense that the creation was a locus of meanings in relation to which man had to define himself. Of course the aim of this exercise was very far from forging the self-defining subject, but rather that the believer depend alone on God. But with the waning of Protestant piety, the desacralized world helped to foster its correlative human subjectivity, which now reaped a harvest sown originally for its creator.

In any case, under the impact of philosophical revolution and religious reformation, we can discern the development in these countries of a modern notion of the subject, which I have characterized as self-defining, and correlative to this a vision of things as devoid of intrinsic meaning, of the world as the locus of contingent correlations to be traced by observation, conforming to no a priori pattern. I have spoken above of this vision of the world as 'disenchanted' using Weber's term, or as 'desacralized' in speaking of the religious development. Perhaps I can introduce the term of art 'objectified' here to cover this denial to the world of inherent meaning, that is, the denial that it is to be seen as embodied meaning. The point of using this term is to mark the fact that for the modern view categories of meaning and purpose apply exclusively to the thought and actions of subjects, and cannot find a purchase in the world they think about and act on. To think of things in these terms is to project subjective categories, to set aside these categories is thus to

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'objectivity'. This marks a new, modern notion of objectivity correlative to the new subjectivity.

The new notion of objectivity rejected the recourse to final causes, it was mechanistic in the sense of relying on efficient causation only. Connected with this it was atomistic in that it accounted for change in complex things not by gestalt or holistic properties, but rather by efficient causal relations among constituents. It tended towards homogeneity in that seemingly qualitatively distinct things were to be explained as alternative constructions out of the same basic constituents or basic principles. One of the most spectacular results of the new physics was to collapse the Aristotelian distinction between the supra- and sub-lunar to account for moving planets and falling apples in the same formula. Thus this science was mechanistic, atomistic, homogenizing, and of course saw the shape of things as contingent.

But this notion of objectivity could not be confined to external nature. Man is also an object in nature, as well as the subject of knowledge. Hence the new science breeds a type of understanding of man, mechanistic, atomistic, homogenizing and based on contingency. Hume gives us a prime example of this kind of view of man, in its first mode where the medium of observation was introspective; but the same notions underlie later 'behaviouristic' attempts at a science of man. The attempts at such a science of the radical Enlightenment, of a Helvétius, a Holbach, a Condorcet, a Bentham were founded on this notion of objectivity, and the age of Enlightenment was evolving an anthropology which was an amalgam, not entirely consistent of two things: the notion of self-defining subjectivity correlative to the new objectivity; and the view of man as part of nature, hence fully under the jurisdiction of this objectivity. These two aspects did not always sit well together. They reinforced each other in support of atomism, an atomistic science of nature matching a political theory whose starting point was the individual in a state of nature. But they seemed to conflict on an issue like that of determinism, for example, where the freedom of man as subject seemed compromised by the strict causal necessity under which he lay as part of nature. And this was reflected in diverging notions of the relevance of nature to practical reason. For Kant, for instance, the promptings of nature stood in contrast to the demands of freedom. While for the mainstream of the Enlightenment, nature as the whole interlocking system of objective reality, in which all beings, including man, had a natural mode of existence which dovetailed with that of all others, provided rather the basic model to man as a natural, desiring being, the blueprint of reason for happiness and hence good.

But in spite of tensions the amalgam held, and these two perspectives, partly converging, partly conflicting, combined in different ways to generate a wide gamut of views, from the mildest deism which stressed the spiritual nature and destiny of man to the most radical materialism; from the deepest pessimism

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about the common man's capacity for enlightenment to the wildest Utopian hopes of a world rebuilt by science. These were the views of the era we know of as the Enlightenment.

This anthropology was the point of attack, or perhaps recoil would be a better term, of two major tendencies in German thought whose reconciliation was the key problem of Hegel's generation. But this is not to say that the radical, mechanistic, materialist Enlightenment was strong in Germany. Quite the contrary. If we think of the French materialists as the fully developed form, then the Enlightenment unfolds in Germany in a mitigated version.

In so far as the radical Enlightenment presupposed a tremendous confidence in human subjectivity and human powers, we can perhaps understand the German variant as a result of German backwardness, the legacy of the Thirty Years War: internal division into a crazy-quilt of often absurdly minuscule states, the slow development of a middle class which could stand on its own, the economic backwardness relative to West Europe, the late cultural development in the vernacular. And obviously some good part of the explanation for the form the Enlightenment took in Germany lies in its religious background. The Lutheran churches never got to the point of head-on opposition, of a knock-down, drag-out fight with the Enlightenment, that French Catholicism so quickly reached. In this respect Germany resembled rather Protestant England. But beyond this, both the Enlightenment in Germany and the reaction to it was shaped in part by an important movement of religious revival, generally referred to as Pietism.

Pietism - which had some affinities to Methodism in the English-speaking world - was a movement of renewal in spiritual life. Starting in the seventeenth century it reached its culmination in the eighteenth. It reacted against the formalism of official Lutheranism, its stress on right beliefs and its concern for the established structures. All this was made secondary to the main point; the inward, heartfelt relation to Christ. Pietism was in this sense another outgrowth of the old German spiritual tradition, going back to the medieval mystics Eckhart and Tauler, and passing through Boehme - a tradition on which Luther himself had drawn - which made central the inner encounter of the soul and God.

It turned to a religion of the heart, one of enthusiastic devotion, of a renewal (Wiedergeburt) in which men are filled with the fire of the Spirit. The result was that it found itself allied with the Enlightenment on certain important points, for all the profound difference in spiritual basis between them. Thus Pietism too tended to denigrate the concern with dogma and confessional differences. It too ended up defending the individual, his sincere

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convictions and his freely chosen community against the larger official structures of state and church which commanded allegiance. It too tended to galvanize men towards works of improvement, education and social welfare. Indeed, the Pietists with their stress on a religion of the heart paid initially less heed to differences of class and education than the *Aufklärer*.¹

Alongside this agreement, there was of course also a spiritual gulf fixed between Pietism and the spirit of the *Aufklärung*. This latter shared with Pietism's orthodox opponents that stress on adherence to the right propositions, on the truth as correctedly stated and proved, at the expense of the spontaneous response of the heart. Thus Pietism, as we shall see later, was a very important factor in the reactions to the *Aufklärung*.

But even before these arose it coloured the atmosphere and tone of the German Enlightenment. Intensely suspicious of reasoning as many Pietists were – 'He who wishes to comprehend God with his mind', declared Zinzendorf, leader of the Herrnhuter, 'he becomes an atheist'² – nevertheless Pietism helped shape the thought of some of Germany's greatest *Aufklärer*, e.g., Lessing and Kant. Lessing's *Nathan*, which greatly influenced the young Hegel as we shall see, is a plea for a rational and humane religion beyond differences of dogma and independent of 'cold booklearning'³ which owes something both to Enlightenment reason and to Pietist spirituality. With this kind of interweaving, religion and Enlightenment could never be two opposed camps, as in France.

But whatever the reasons, the German *Aufklärung* developed its own intellectual climate. This was much more receptive to deism than it was to radical materialism. Eighteenth-century deism of course reflected the new sense of the self and its relation to the world. And it reflected this at its clearest in its notion of God, as supreme architect of a universe constructed to run according to objective causal laws. The cosmic order so built was not an order of meanings, that is, an order in virtue of its embodying ideas, but rather in virtue of its elements meshing perfectly in their reciprocal effects. Hence the image of the universe as clock. And what God was as super-subject, man was destined to approach as he grasped more and more of the laws of the universe and became more and more able to second the order of nature with his own artifice.

But European deism took on a different, characteristic form in Germany, that of Leibniz's system, which as interpreted by Christian Wolff dominated the philosophical world of Germany in the eighteenth century. This philosophy

¹ I.e., the men of the Enlightenment. German is lucky in having a single word where in English we need four. For this reason, I shall sometimes use the German word in the text, as also, for variety, the German term for the Enlightenment, *Aufklärung*.

² Quoted in Koppel S. Pinson *Pietism as a Factor in the Rise of German Nationalism*; Columbia University Theses, 1934, v. 23, p. 52.

³ *Kalte Buchgelehrsamkeit*, Act v, scene 6, the words are Recha's.

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can be seen from one point of view as a kind of half-way house between a philosophy of cosmic order and the radical Enlightenment, although from another and more fruitful viewpoint, it is clearly the seed of the important post-Enlightenment departures which created the climate of Hegel's time. Leibniz does indeed present us with a cosmic order, where the ultimate explanation is in terms of final causes, that this world is 'the best of all possible worlds'; and yet the order is made up of beings, monads, who develop out of themselves, who are really subjectivities in the modern sense. The Leibnizian order of things is not there to instantiate a certain order of ideas, but rather to realize the greatest variety compatible with the greatest amount of order or harmony. This means that we are to understand things not by attempting to interpret the world like a text, but rather by seeing how the purposes of monads dovetail with each other, and this is a framework of understanding which can consort well with a mathematical physics. (Another such half-way house, Shaftesbury's harmonious order of natures, influenced ultimately by the Cambridge Platonists, was very popular in Germany as well.)

In any case, on the basis of this German variant, and proceeding *pari passu* with a reaction against the presumption shared by the French and many Germans that the French Enlightenment was the paradigm to be followed, and that French culture was the model to be copied, there develops in Germany a post-Enlightenment climate, at once critical of some of the main themes of the modern revolution, and yet striving to incorporate much of it. In this schematic background sketch, I want to single out two strands.

The first comes to expression in the decade of the 1770s, the period of the so-called *Sturm und Drang*, a revolution in German literature and criticism which was decisive for the future of German culture. Perhaps the man whose thought is most worth singling out here is Herder, the major theoretician and critic of the *Sturm und Drang*, who greatly influenced Goethe in the crucial formative years of his life.

Herder reacts against the anthropology of the Enlightenment, against what I called above the 'objectification' of human nature, against the analysis of the human mind into different faculties, of man into body and soul, against a calculative notion of reason, divorced from feeling and will. And he is one of the principal of those responsible for developing an alternative anthropology, one centred on the categories of expression.¹

I would like to try to examine a bit more closely what is involved in a theory of man based on these categories because these are central to any understanding

¹ 'Expression' here is necessarily a term of art, but I am following here Isaiah Berlin in his 'Herder and the Enlightenment' in Earl Wasserman (ed.) *Aspects of the eighteenth century*, Baltimore 1965 where he identifies one of Herder's innovative ideas by the term 'expressivism'. I think I am making the same point in somewhat different form, though to avoid confusion with the twentieth-century movement, I shall rather use the term 'expressivism' – a term also suggested by Berlin (Private Communication).

ing of Hegel or indeed of this period. The central notion is that human activity and human life are seen as expressions. Now we saw above that the model of a self-defining subject brought along with it an objectifying of things, that is, it debarred notions like 'meaning', 'expression', 'purpose' as inappropriate descriptions of objective reality and confined them rather to the mental life of subjects. For instance the theories of linguistic meaning which run from Hobbes through to Condillac see meaningfulness as an external relation which certain marks, sounds, things or ideas (representations) have for us. That is to say, this relation is in the mind of subjects and consists in the marks, sounds, etc. being thought or used by us to refer to something else. That there be some things in the world about which we can speak in categories of meaning requires that there be other things to which these categories cannot apply, for the first (signs, words, ideas, etc) only fit these categories because of their relation of reference to the second. Further, that some things can be described in meaning-categories is not an 'objective' fact about them, that is, one that holds independently of the particular contents and beliefs in men's minds; the connections which make meaning are subjective. This theory of linguistic meaning is a thoroughly 'objectifying' one in the sense above; it rigorously segregates meaning from being. It makes the medieval and early Renaissance view of the world as text incapable of coherent statement. The notion of things in the world as expressing some ideal order, and this regardless of whether we grasp the order or not, makes no sense. This early modern theory is an uncompromising extension of medieval nominalism to its farthest conclusion.

Does then the anthropology of expression mean simply a return, a reversal of the modern revolution of subjectivity? As mentioned above, many have thought so; but this is a serious misreading. For a different notion of expression is at stake here. In talking of the reigning model which inspired Galileo's opponents above, I said that we could see the corresponding terms - apertures in the head, planets, metals, etc. - as corresponding because they express or embody the same ideal order. Here we speak of expression as of an ideal which the expression presents. This is the sense of the term, or related to the sense of the term, in which we talk about expressing our thoughts in speech. But there is another sense in which we speak of expression as giving vent to, a realizing in external reality of something we feel or desire. This is the sense in which we might speak of my expressing my anger in cursing, or striking the man who provoked me. Now in the latter sense what is expressed is a subject, or some state of a subject, or at the minimum some life form which resembles a subject (as when we speak of animals expressing feeling).

Now in saying that the central notion in this new anthropology was of human action or life as expression, I was using the term in something closer to this latter sense. Though in fact as we shall see something of the first is incorporated as well. On the anthropology developed by Herder and those who

followed him, there is certainly a rehabilitation of some basic Aristotelian concepts; to see life as an expression is to see it as the realization of a purpose, and in so far as this purpose is not meant to be ultimately blind, one can speak of the realization of an idea. But this is also understood as the realization of a self; and in this respect the notion is modern, it goes beyond Aristotle and shows a filiation to Leibniz.

To talk about the realization of a self here is to say that the adequate human life would not just be a fulfilment of an idea or a plan which is fixed independently of the subject who realizes it, as is the Aristotelian form of a man. Rather this life must have the added dimension that the subject can recognize it as his own, as having unfolded from within him. This self-related dimension is entirely missing from the Aristotelian tradition. In this tradition a proper human life is 'my own' only in the sense that I am a man, and this is thus the life fit for me. It was Herder and the expressivist anthropology developed from him which added the epoch-making demand that my realization of the human essence be my own, and hence launched the idea that each individual (and in Herder's application, each people) has its own way of being human, which it cannot exchange with that of any other except at the cost of distortion and self-mutilation.

But what more precisely is added to the Aristotelian notion of the realization of a form when we also see it as the unfolding of self? There are two related strands here which are worth tracing a little further.

First, realizing the human form involves an inner force imposing itself on external reality, perhaps against external obstacles. Thus where Aristotelian philosophy saw the growth and development of man and the realization of human form as a tending towards order and equilibrium constantly threatened by disorder and disharmony, the expressivist view sees this development more as the manifestation of an inner power¹ striving to realize and maintain its own shape against those the surrounding world might impose. Thus the ideal realization is one which not only conforms to the idea, but is also internally generated; indeed these two requirements are inseparable in that the proper form of a man incorporates the notion of free subjectivity.

It is evident that Rousseau played an important role in the development of this theory in that he virtually reinterpreted the traditional opposition of virtue and vice into the modern opposition of self- versus other-dependence. But the corresponding theory of man is barely hinted at, and not even consistently, in his writings. It was left to German thinkers, and particularly to Herder, to develop the anthropology around the notion of the self-unfolding subject.

Leibniz too is obviously of central importance, whose notion of the monad

¹ Cf. Herder's 'Kräfte'.

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was seminal for that of a self-unfolding subject. But Herder and those of his generation and the succeeding one were also greatly influenced by Spinoza. This may be surprising in that Spinoza was the great philosopher of the anti-subject, the philosopher who more than any other in the Western tradition seems to take us beyond and outside of subjectivity. But the age in receiving him imposed a certain reading on Spinoza. His philosophy was not seen as denying an understanding of human life as self-unfolding; rather the Spinozan notion of a *conatus* in all things to preserve themselves was read in this light. What Spinoza seemed to offer, why he drew Goethe, and tempted so many others, was a vision of the way in which the finite subject fitted into a universal current of life. In the process Spinoza was pushed towards a kind of pantheism of a universal life force. In other words he was re-interpreted to incorporate the category of self-unfolding, now seen as the act of a universal life which was bigger than any subject, but qua self-unfolding life very subject-like. Why such a strong need was felt for a relation to this universal current of life, I shall return to below.

The second important strand in expressivism is the notion that the realization of a form clarifies or makes determinate what that form is. If we return to our guiding analogy, the way in which an action or gesture can express what is characteristic about a person, we can see that there are two aspects which can be united in this idea. Something I do or say can express my feelings or aspirations in the sense of making these clear to others or to myself. In this sense we can speak of a person expressing himself when he finally gets out and thus makes determinate, perhaps for the first time, what he feels or wants. In another sense we can speak of someone's actions as expression of his feelings or desires when they carry out what he wants, or realize his aspirations. These two aspects can be separated: I can bring my desires to verbal expression without acting, I can act and remain an enigma to myself and others; but they often do go together, and frequently we are inclined to say of ourselves or others, that we did not really know what we felt or wanted until we acted. Thus the fullest and most convincing expression of a subject is one where he both realizes and clarifies his aspirations.

It is this fuller model of subjective expression which underlies what I have called here the expressivist theory. If we think of our life as realizing an essence or form, this means not just the embodying of this form in reality, it also means defining in a determinate way what this form is. And this shows in another way the important difference between the expressivist model and the Aristotelian tradition: for the former, the idea which a man realizes is not wholly determinate beforehand; it is only made fully determinate in being fulfilled. Hence the Herderian idea that my humanity is something unique, not equivalent to yours, and this unique quality can only be revealed in my life itself. 'Each man has his own measure, as it were an accord peculiar to him of

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all his feelings to each other'.¹ The idea is not just that men are different; this was hardly new; it was rather that the differences define the unique form that each of us is called on to realize. The differences take on moral import; so that the question could arise for the first time whether a given form of life was an authentic expression of certain individuals or people. This is the new dimension added by a theory of self-realization.

Thus the notion of human life as expression sees this not only as the realization of purposes but also as the clarification of these purposes. It is not only the fulfilment of life but also the clarification of meaning. In the course of living adequately I not only fulfil my humanity but clarify what my humanity is about. As such a clarification my life-form is not just the fulfilment of purpose but the embodiment of meaning, the expression of an idea. The expression theory breaks with the Enlightenment dichotomy between meaning and being, at least as far as human life is concerned. Human life is both fact and meaningful expression; and its being expression does not reside in a subjective relation of reference to something else, it expresses the idea which it realizes.

This provides a new interpretation of the traditional view of man as a rational animal, a being whose essence is rational awareness. This idea is now formulated in a new concept of self-awareness. As we saw, our life is seen as self-expression also in the sense of clarifying what we are. This clarification awaits recognition by a subject, and man as a conscious being achieves his highest point when he recognizes his own life as an adequate, a true expression of what he potentially is – just as an artist or writer reaches his goal in recognizing his work as a fully adequate expression of what he wanted to say. And in one case as in the other, the 'message' could not have been known before it was expressed. The traditional view receives a new formulation in expressivism: man comes to know himself by expressing and hence clarifying what he is and recognizing himself in this expression. The specific property of human life is to culminate in self-awareness through expression.

The expressivist anthropology thus sharply breaks with the modern scientific objectification of nature, at least as far as human nature is concerned (we shall see later how it goes beyond this). In seeing human life as expression, it rejects the dichotomy of meaning against being; it deals once more in the Aristotelian coin of final causes and holistic concepts. But in another respect it is quintessentially modern; for it incorporates the idea of a self-defining subjectivity. The realization of his essence is a subject's self-realization; so that what he defines himself in relation to is not an ideal order beyond, but rather something which unfolds from himself, is his own realization, and is first made

¹ 'Jeder Mensch hat ein eignes Maß, gleichsam eine eigne Stimmung aller seiner sinnlichen Gefühle zu einander' *Ideen*, VIII.1 in Bernhard Suphan *Herders Sämtliche Werke*, Berlin, 1891, xiii, 291.

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determinate in that realization. This is one of the key ideas underlying the revolution of the late eighteenth century. But it is more than that; it is one of the foundational ideas of the civilization which has grown up since. In different forms, it is one of the major idées-forces which has shaped the contemporary world. It is worth examining further what it involves.

It is evident that a theory of this kind had to break with the Enlightenment accounts of language and meaning. It needed a theory of meaning which was not exclusively concerned with linguistic meaning and did not restrict meaningfulness to the single relation of reference for a subject. It seems clear to us who are heirs of this revolution that art provides us the paradigms needed, for we are familiar with an understanding of art objects as expressing something without necessarily referring beyond themselves.

But in the eighteenth century this understanding of art had yet to be defined. The reigning view of art was in terms of the Aristotelian concept of mimesis; art was principally understood as an imitation or picturing of reality. The expressivist view of man, like all profound changes in thought, had to create its own paradigms. It needed a theory of art as expressive, and a theory of meaning in which linguistic meaning, the meaning of signs, was not sharply marked off from other forms of meaning, but was rather continuous with the expressive meaning of art. But it needed this new understanding of linguistic and artistic expression not just to have models for the understanding of human life as expression; the point was not just to see life as like a work of art, although this is undoubtedly one of the important legacies of this period. If man's life is to be expression in the strong sense, that is both fulfilment of purpose and clarification of meaning, then it is because man is more than just a living being, but one capable of expressive activity. What makes man capable of expression is language and art. Thus these provide not just models for human life as expression, they are the privileged media through which this expression is realized.

There is both a continuity here with the Western tradition and a radical new twist imparted to it. The continuity lies in the fact that language is still central to man, as it has been ever since the ancient definitions of man as the 'rational animal'. The new twist is that language is no longer of crucial importance as the vehicle of the Ideas – indeed, it ceases to be so for some writers of this period like Herder, who in this respect can be classed as a nominalist – but rather as the expression of self. Consequently, it is now in danger of being supplanted by art as the paradigm human activity. The human centre of gravity is on the point of shifting from logos to poesis.

These three related transpositions: a new theory of language, a new understanding of art, and a new understanding of their centrality, can all be seen developing through the work of Herder, other writers of the Sturm und Drang, and the following 'Romantic' generation. Thus in Herder's important

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treatise *On the Origin of Language* of 1772, we see a break with the Enlightenment mode of theory about language as this had developed from Hobbes to Condillac. Herder radically displaces the problem. He quotes the Condillan account of how language could arise between two children in a desert, as they gradually learn to associate certain signs with certain objects. In a passage which reminds us at points of Wittgenstein combating a not-dissimilar theory some two centuries later, Herder points out that this account presupposes the really important step as already taken; how do the children get the idea in the first place that some things can stand for others, that there can be such a thing as a sign? In other words how do they step from animal to linguistic, hence human consciousness?

Herder does not really answer the question himself, which has led many to comment that the treatise is misleadingly named. But the important point is that Herder has transformed our understanding of language. For his Enlightenment predecessors, representative consciousness, the understanding that something stands for or refers to something else, was taken for granted. It arose naturally in the play of associations in the subject's experience. The institution of language, that is, arbitrary signs, only served to put us in control of the flow of association, to allow us to introduce order in our thoughts, to have 'empire sur notre imagination', as Condillac put it.¹ On this view words are a sub-class of signs, their having meaning is simply their being given a relation of reference to things.

But for Herder the existence of this representational or linguistic consciousness is the central question. What is it which makes it possible for us to have this distinct, focussed awareness of things, where animals remain caught in the dream-like, melodic flow of experience? It is language that makes this possible. Hence language must be probed from an entirely different point of view. It is not just a set of signs which have meaning in virtue of referring to something, it is the necessary vehicle of a certain form of consciousness, which is characteristically human, the distinct grasp of things which Herder calls 'reflection' (Besonnenheit). In other terms, words do not just refer, they are also precipitates of an activity in which the human form of consciousness comes to be. So they not only describe a world, they also express a mode of consciousness, in the double sense outlined above, that is, they realize it, and they make determinate what mode it is.

This is one of Herder's great seminal ideas. If man is a being who is to be understood under the category of expression, if what is characteristic of him is a certain form of consciousness, Besonnenheit, and if this is only realized in speech, then thought, reflection, the distinctively human activity is not something which can be carried on in a disembodied element. It can only exist in a

¹ Sur l'Origine des Connaissances humaines, Part I, Section 2, Chapter IV §46.

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medium. Language is essential to thought.¹ And if thought or the characteristically human activity can only be in the medium of language, then the different natural languages express each the uniquely characteristic way in which a people realizes the human essence. A people's language is the privileged mirror or expression of its humanity. The study of language is the central and indispensable road to the understanding of human variety. Herder's work is thus at the origin of the great growth in philological studies which begins at this time.²

Hence language is understood in a different dimension by Herder than by his Enlightenment predecessors. It is not only referential sign, it is also expression. And in this aspect it is continuous with art. Hence Herder's view that language in its origin was inseparable from poetry and song (not original with him, true, but to which the *Sturm und Drang* gave a new twist.), and that the most adequate language united description of the world and expression of feeling. This notion of language as expression of feeling in the strong sense had no place in the Enlightenment theories of man and meaning – although it was already beginning to appear in some of their writings on art, in particular in discussions about 'genius' of, e.g. Diderot. The idea was current of the cry, for instance, as the natural 'expression' of feeling in the sense of that which gave vent to feeling, its natural outlet, and which later could be chosen as a sign. But the idea of an expression in the strong sense, which also defines what the feeling is, only arises with the new theory of man. Language describes the world, but it also has to realize man and through this clarify what he is.

It was in this respect that it was continuous with art, at least with the new understanding of art which was developed by the generation of the *Sturm und Drang*. Where the standard view of the time saw art as primarily either imitative or didactic or pleasing in function, that is as existing either to picture the world, to improve men or to give them pleasure, the *Stürmer und Dränger* evolved a notion of art as expressive, as expressing the profound feelings of the artist, and in the process completing him, expanding his existence; Goethe uses the expression 'purification' (*Läuterung*). As Goethe's term implies, this expression is not just a giving vent to feelings, but a transformation of them to higher form. For the same reason, this expression of feeling is not subjective in the restrictive sense, making no claim to truth. On the contrary, the highest art is so because it is true to Nature; but not in the sense of an imitation, rather the highest and fullest expression of its potentialities.

Because art was seen as expressive in this new sense, the artist was seen as a creator, and a new impetus was given to the eighteenth-century theme of

¹ Herder did not always see the implications of this idea, but they were of central importance for Hegel, as we shall see later.

² Herder was also the originator of the great interest in folk-song and folk culture which starts in the period.

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genius, a power for which no formula could be given beforehand, but which could only be revealed in its unfolding.

As the most authentic expression of man, in the eyes of the *Stürmer und Dränger*, art was also the principal way in which men recovered community with other men and communion with nature. I shall return to this below.

Hence the 1770s in Germany saw a new philosophy of language and a new theory of art which formed part of a new developing theory of man. As a result of this art was given a central part to play in the realization of human nature, in the fulfilment of man. It is from this time that art begins to take on a function analogous to religion, and to some extent replacing it. In so far as this quasi-religious function of art is a fundamental feature of contemporary civilization, the 1770s can be considered a watershed in the development of the modern world.

The central importance of art is bound up with an enhanced role for feeling. The realization of man, as we saw, involved an expression, in the sense of a clarification, of what he is; and this is why the highest fulfilment comes in expressive activity. In its highest form, this expression must be recognized by him and be a mode of self-awareness as we saw above, since subjectivity at its highest is self-consciousness. But the life of a subject is also one of feeling, his self-realization or lack of it is not a matter of indifference but is experienced with joy or pain. And the feeling here referred to is not simply a passive state of mind, but is also a disposition of the will. Hence this self-awareness is not just a vision of self, but also a self-feeling, and as such also pregnant with the aspiration to remain or to become oneself, and it is all these inseparably. Thus the highest expressive activity is the vehicle of both vision and feeling together, and this is why language, not only in its origins but in its highest functions, is continuous with art.

Feeling here is not what it was for the mainstream of the Enlightenment, a passive state of affect only contingently linked with what provokes it on one hand, and with the action it motivates on the other. Rather we have a notion of feeling in the pregnant sense as inseparable from thought, just as thought, if it truly engage with reality is inseparable from feeling. Thus Herder: 'All [passions and sensations] can and must be operative, precisely in the highest knowledge, for this grew out of them all and can only live in them.'¹ Only idle speculation can be unaccompanied by feeling. Only 'liars or enervated beings' (Lügner oder Entnervte) can be satisfied with this.

Since we are expressive beings, our life is a unity, it cannot be artificially divided into distinct levels: life as against thought, sentience as against rationality, knowledge as against will. Man is not an animal with reason added, but a totally new indivisible form.² Feelings are thus modes of awareness, their

¹ *Vom Erkennen und Empfinden der Menschlichen Seele*, Suphan-VIII, 199.

² *Über den Ursprung der Sprache*, Suphan, v 28-9.

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thought content is internal to them, and they can be qualitatively differentiated by the thoughts or awareness they embody. A hierarchy of feeling is thus inseparably bound up with the hierarchy of self-awareness, and with a hierarchy of dispositions of the will, for 'Impulse (Reize) is the driving force of our existence, and it must remain this even in our noblest knowing.' Hence 'love is, the noblest form of knowing, as it is the noblest feeling'.¹

Thus an essential component of man's highest realization is a certain quality of feeling, a feeling of self which is also a vision of self, which feeling/vision is expressed in our highest activities, language and art. At his fullest man is realized not only as life but also as a being capable of expressive activity and therefore of achieving self-clarity and freedom. This is what Herder expresses in his notion of 'reflection' (*Besonnenheit*) as the crucial property of man. In this definition of human fulfilment we see once more the filiation and yet the break with the classical tradition. Man is a rational animal: 'Humanität' is defined by Herder as 'reason and justice' (*Vernunft und Billigkeit*).² But rationality is not a principle of conformity with cosmic order. Rather it is self-clarity, *Besonnenheit*. Achieving this, we become what we have in us to be, we express our full selves, and hence are free.

Thus essential to our fulfilment is the feeling/vision we have of ourselves at our fullest, as natural and spiritual beings, as subject of natural desires and of the highest aspiration to self-clarity and freedom and expressive form, and all of these in harmonious unity. This is why art, as the vehicle whereby this feeling/vision comes to be, can expand our existence and purify us.

In order to set the stage for the problems of the 1790s, let us look at some of the aspirations which flowed from this new theory of man. The expressivist anthropology was a response to the mechanist, atomist, utilitarian picture of human life. If we can think of the Enlightenment anthropology as recommitting itself through the sense of freedom, even exhilaration, of self-destroying life. For the sense of freedom as a self-defining, reasoning subject was won by objectifying nature, and even our own nature in so far as we are objects for ourselves. It was won at the expense of a rift between the subject who knows and wills, and the given: things as they are in nature. And this realm of the given includes not only external things in the world, but also what is given in the subject, his desires, feelings, leanings and affinities.

The Enlightenment developed a conception of nature, including human nature, as a set of objectified facts with which the subject had to deal in acquiring knowledge and acting. Of course, nature as a harmonious whole whose parts meshed perfectly also represented a model or blueprint for man as well as offering the raw material for its fulfilment. But the rift was still there

¹ *Vom Erkennen und Empfinden der Menschlichen Seele*, Suphan, viii, 199-200.
² In *Ideen*, xv. 3 (Suphan, xiv, 230).

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between nature, whether as plan or instrument, and the will which acted on this plan.

It was this rift which the originators of the expressivist theory – Rousseau, Herder, later the Romantics – could not tolerate. They experienced this vision of things as a tearing apart of the unity of life in which nature should be at once the inspiration and motive force of thought and will. It was not enough that nature provide the blueprint for the will, the voice of nature must speak through the will.¹

Thus what is experienced as affirmation of self for one view of the subject is felt as exile or inner cleavage by the other. The objectified world is the proof for one of the subject's self-possession, for the other it is a denial of the life of the subject, his communion with nature and his self-expression in his own natural being.

This experience of an objectified world as exile explains why the expressivist reaction was partly seen, and partly saw itself, as a nostalgia for an earlier time when the world was seen as a text, when nature was the locus of meaning. But as should be clear from the above discussion, the aspiration was not really for a return. Because the expressivist view held on to, even accentuated the idea of subjectivity, communion with the surrounding world was desired not in the form of the contemplation of a cosmic order of ideas, but rather as a communion appropriate to subjectivities, as we shall see below.

Let us look at the aspiration which sprang from this view. First, there was a passionate demand for unity and wholeness. The expressivist view bitterly reproached the Enlightenment thinkers for having dissected man and hence distorted the true image of human life in objectifying human nature; they divided soul from body, reason from feeling, reason from imagination, thought from senses, desire from calculation, and so on. All these dichotomies distorted the true nature of man which had rather to be seen as a single stream of life, or on the model of a work of art, in which no part could be defined in abstraction from the others. These distinctions thus were seen as abstractions from reality. But they were more than that, they were mutilations of man. These false views were more than just intellectual errors. Because man is a self-expressive being, and he realizes himself in part through the definitive shape he gives to his feelings and aspirations in expressions of art and language, such a false view is an obstacle to human fulfilment. A man who sees his feelings as in another category from thought, as facts about him to be

¹ Obviously, the Enlightenment view of nature as the model for human action provides one of the transitions to the expressivist notion of the voice of nature. And some of the passages in praise of nature of such radical thinkers of the Enlightenment as Holbach seem to verge on expressivist sentiments. But the people I have called originators of expressivism – Rousseau, Herder, and those who built on them – were the ones who developed a theory of man consonant with this notion of the voice of nature. Of course, the background had also been partly provided by Shaftesbury and the theorists of moral sentiment.

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explained mechanistically, cannot rise higher to a transformed expression of them. Hence this intellectual error is to be fought with moral passion, as we find Herder combating the various theories of faculty psychology.

Along with the attack on dichotomies within man, we find the mainstream Enlightenment sometimes taxed with another kind of abstraction, introducing a false world of representation which cuts man off from the real living sources. This is one of the dominant themes in Rousseau and usually bespeaks his influence. We can see how it flows from the same order of ideas, Man's self-expression is distorted, his life does not express him, but rather an illusory substitute for his real feelings and aspirations.

At this point we can see one powerful thrust of the expressivist theory which is of prime importance for understanding Hegel's work: it is strongly anti-dualist, it strives to overcome the body-soul dichotomy, or the spirit-nature dichotomy, which is the legacy of Descartes. It turns more towards categories of life which straddle this division, and draws on Aristotle in the way we saw above. The rejection of any disembodied spiritual reality is as we shall see one of the basic principles of Hegel's philosophy.

Secondly, expressivist theory makes freedom a, if not the central, value of human life. Freedom becomes an important value with the modern notion of self-defining subjectivity, as we saw. But the expression theory both alters the notion of freedom, and greatly enhances its importance. It alters the notion in that the standard Enlightenment view of freedom was that of independence of the self-defining subject in relation to outside control, principally that of state and religious authority. New freedom is seen as consisting in authentic self-expression. It is threatened not only by external invasion but by all the distortions that expression is menaced by. It can fail through a mis-shaping which is ultimately of external origin, but may become anchored in the self. Rousseau presents us with a theory of this kind.

Freedom takes on central importance because it is synonymous with self-realization which is the basic goal of men. It may be only a, rather than the central value in this sense, that freedom is only one of the ways we can characterize this goal: we can also speak of it as unity, maximum fulfilment, harmony, and so on. Not every author will make freedom his privileged description of the goal, but it always is one available description.

Thirdly, expression theory contained an inspiration towards union with nature which the Enlightenment was held to have jeopardized. We saw above how an objectified nature was experienced as an exile. And indeed the exigencies of life conceived as expression which could not brook the dichotomy between body and soul, between thought and sense, could not stop at the boundaries of the body. If I am not satisfied with an image of myself as a mind confronting internal and external nature, but must think of myself as life in which nature speaks through thought and will, if therefore I as a subject am

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one with my body, then I have to take account of the fact that my body is in interchange with the greater nature outside. Nature knows no fixed boundary at the limits of the body, and hence I as a subject must be in interchange with this greater nature.

But then, if my life is to be fully reflected in my expressive activity, if the feeling/vision of myself which this expresses is to be adequate to my real existence, then this feeling cannot stop at the boundary of my self; it has to be open to the great current of life that flows across it. It is this greater current, and not just the life of my own body, which has to be united with higher aspiration to freedom and expression, if there is to be unity in the self. Thus our self-feeling must be continuous with our feeling for this larger current of life which flows through us and of which we are a part; this current must nourish us not only physically but spiritually as well. Hence it must be more than a useful interchange of matter. It must be experienced as a communion.

Thus Herder: 'See the whole of nature, behold the great analogy of creation. Everything feels itself and its like, life reverberates to life.'¹ Man, as the image of God, 'an epitome and steward of creation' (ein Auszug und Verwalter der Schöpfung), is called to this, 'That he become the organ of sense of his God in all the living things of creation, according to the measure of their relation to him.'²

Thus one of the central aspirations of the expressivist view was that man be united in communion with nature, that his self-feeling (Selbstgefühl) unite with a sympathy (Mitleid) for all life, and for nature as living. We can see how the objectified universe, which allowed of only mechanical relations within itself and with the subject, was experienced as dead, as a place of exile, as a denial of that universal sympathy which obtained between creatures.

We can see also how this demand could become confused with that for a return to the pre-modern idea of a world-text, but how this equivalence does not really hold. Both views stand against the modern vision of an objectified universe which is devoid of significance for man. But in one case the world is seen as embodying a set of ideal meanings, our way of contact with it is the contemplation of ideas; in the other case, nature is seen as a great stream of life of which we are part, our way of contact is thus by sympathetic insertion into this stream. What is sought for is interchange with a larger life, not rational vision of order.

We can see this if we look at the most important form of nostalgia for the pre-modern in the period, the admiration, even worship for classical Greece.

¹ 'Siehe die ganze Natur, betrachte die große Analogie der Schöpfung. Alles fühlt sich und seines Gleichen, Leben waltet zu Leben.' *Vom Erkennen und Empfinden der Menschlichen Seele*, Suphan, VII, 200.

² 'daß er Sensorium seines Gottes in allem Lebenden der Schöpfung, nach dem Maße es ihm verwandt ist, werde.' loc. cit.

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This was one of the most powerful and deeply-felt themes in German letters in the latter third of the eighteenth century. Winckelmann's studies triggered off a deep and lasting response. We can throw some light on this if we see it in the context of the expression theory of man. For the ancient Greeks represented to the men of this age a mode of life in which the highest in man, his aspiration to form and expression and clarity was at one with his nature and with all of nature. It was an era of unity and harmony within man, in which thought and feeling, morality and sensibility were one, in which the form which man stamped on his life whether moral, political or spiritual flowed from his own natural being, and was not imposed on it by the force of raw will. And of course in this age, the great current of life in nature was not alien to the human spirit; on the contrary, it was inhabited by gods of human shape, with whom man sustained communion, and who drew from him his highest feats.

Thus what many *Stürmer und Dränger* saw in the Greeks was less an authentic pre-modern consciousness, man defined in relation to an order that transcended him and was in many ways incommensurable with him, but rather what they themselves yearned for, unity with self and communion with nature. And this communion was one of feeling. In Schiller's *The Gods of Greece*, one of the best known statements of this longing nostalgia, we find:

Da der Dichtung zauberische Hülle
Sich noch lieblich um die Wahrheit wand,
Durch die Schöpfung floß da Lebensfülle,
Und was nie empfinden wird, empfand,
An der Liebe Busen sie zu drücken,
Gab man höhern Adel der Natur,
Alles wies den eingeweihten Blicken,
Alles eines Gottes Spur.
[When poetry's magic cloak
Still with delight enfolded truth
Life's fulness flowed through creation
And there felt what never more will feel.
Man acknowledged a higher nobility in Nature
To press her to love's breast;
Everything to the initiate's eye
Showed the trace of a God.]

But this communion is now irrevocably destroyed as man stands before a 'Godless nature':

Unbewußt der Freuden die sie schenket,
Nie entzückt von ihrer Herrlichkeit,
Nie gewahr des Geistes, der sie lenket,
Selger nie durch meine Seligkeit,
Fühllos selbst für ihres Künstlers Ehre,
Gleich dem toten Schlag des Pendeluhrs,

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Dient sie knechtisch dem Gesetz der Schwere,
Die entgötterte Natur.
[Unconscious of the joys she dispenses
Never enraptured by her own magnificence
Never aware of the spirit which guides her
Never more blessed through my blessedness
Insensible of her maker's glory
Like the dead stroke of the pendulum
She slavishly obeys the law of gravity,
A Nature shorn of the divine.]

What was the ontological foundation for this communion thought to be? Schiller in the above poem seems to imply that there is none, that rather the world of Gods in nature was the creation of poetry (*Dichtung*). Schiller was in fact very divided in his attitude to the expression theory, as we shall see. But in another famous poem, the *Ode to Joy*, which Beethoven used for the final of his choral symphony, he speaks of Joy as the great unifying course of life flowing through all.

Among those who moved more fully in the orbit of the expression theory, the foundation was variously seen. With Herder, for instance, it does not seem to have gone farther than a notion of universal sympathy, an idea which was already in currency before the *Sturm und Drang*, in e.g. Shaftesbury. But others went farther towards the notion of a universal life flowing through nature, basing themselves on a Spinoza transposed into life-categories. Goethe seems to have had some view of this kind. Later we see a more far-reaching ontological assumption, endowing this universal life with subjectivity; Hegel's solution will be one variant of this.

In this case we find once again a theory which is reminiscent of the pre-modern world-text view, in that different aspects of nature are seen as embodying different ideas. Thus the philosophies of nature of Schelling and Hegel seem to be returns to the past. But the crucial point is that these readings of meaning in nature are supported by the notion of a cosmic subject; and the meanings themselves are derived from the notion of subjectivity as developed by these authors. In this respect they do not depart an inch from the principle of modern subjectivity.¹

Fourthly, what has been said of communion with nature applies with the same force to communion with other men. Here too, the expressivist view

¹ It might be thought that the case of Hamann does not fit this portrait of the age, that in speaking of nature as a language of God, he is harking back to a pre-modern view of the world as embodiment of Ideas. But apart from the fact that Hamann is far from typical of the movement he helped to inspire in that he remains very much an orthodox Christian, and has no truck with the Socinianist pantheist tendencies evident in Herder, and of course still more in avowed non-Christians like Goethe; his language of God in nature is anything but an order of ideas embodied, it is rather the living speech of God to man; it is not *langue* but *parole* de Dieu; in that respect it is put alongside the Bible.

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responds with dismay and horror to the Enlightenment vision of society made up of atomistic, morally self-sufficient subjects who enter into external relations with each other, seeking either advantage or the defence of individual rights. They seek for a deeper bond of felt unity which will unite sympathy between men with their highest self-feeling, in which men's highest concerns are shared and woven into community life rather than remaining the preserve of individuals.

Here, too, the Greek polis seemed to provide the paradigm which modern man had lost to his sorrow. Many Germans in this period – among them Hegel – saw in the ancient polis a summit of human achievement yet unequalled. They saw in it a society whose public life was the locus of all that was of greatest importance to its citizens. So that not only did these have Montaigne's *virtu* to the highest degree in that they were ready to give their all for their city; but they also had a hand in shaping its life and found themselves expressed in it. The identification with, and expression in the city were two sides of the same coin. So that the ancient polis united the fullest freedom with the deepest community life, and was thus an expressivist ideal.

These four demands, for unity, freedom, and communion with man and nature, reflect the aspirations of expressivist consciousness. These demands, and the complaints against modern society that go with them, were seen as inextricably connected, and this not just in the ways that have been traced here, but in a number of others.

Thus Schiller in his 6th Letter on the *Aesthetic Education of Man* traces the cleavages which man has suffered in the evolution from ancient Greek to modern society. Modern man has divided up the faculties which were united in the men of classical times; and in doing so, men have become specialized, so that instead of expressing the whole, each is only a fragment (Bruchstück) of humanity. This specialization, fruit of the dichotomies of the understanding, is in turn linked to the division in society between classes, which are each confined to a function. This division into classes transforms the living unity of society into a mechanical interdependence. Running the complex machine of modern society cannot be left to spontaneous initiative of the members, but must follow bureaucratic formulae. Men are treated no longer as concrete beings but as mere intellectual constructs, and in return they can feel no identification with the state, which finally loses all authority and sinks to mere ruling power.

This passage of Schiller makes us aware of how the basic ideas of the theory of expression have continued to recur in different formulations up to the present day. The complaint against the Enlightenment, and the society which had developed in modern times, is now directed against technological society which is in so many ways the heir of the Enlightenment. In our day, too, it is reproached for dividing reason from emotion, thought from feeling, for

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narrowing men and blunting their creativity, and in the process deforming them and thus dividing them from each other in a class society, and hence negating the community with which men can identify and confronting them instead with naked power which denies them freedom.

Hence in May 1968 in Paris, the aspiration which caught fire was that of a society '*déclousoinnée*', one in which the barriers between different aspects of life, work and play, love and politics, are broken down, and by the same act the barriers between classes; while this *déclousoinnement* is both carried by and releases a flood of creative energy; so that the ultimate barrier which is overcome is that between art and life. It is evident that the expressivist conception of man is of more than merely historical interest.

We have drawn a portrait of expressivist consciousness as an aspiration to escape from a predicament in which the subject is over against an objectified world, to overcome the gap between subject and object, to see objectivity as an expression of subjectivity or in interchange with it. But does not this impetuous desire to unite with the world threaten the existence of the subject? This is the question or dilemma that inescapably arises. Before we try to face it, we should see how the notion of subjectivity was also developed in opposition to nature by this age.

There was another powerful reaction against the radical objectification of the Enlightenment, this time against the objectifying of human nature and in the name of moral freedom. If man was to be treated as another piece of objectified nature, whether in introspection or external observation, then his motivation would have to be explained causally like all other events. Those who accepted this view argued that this was not incompatible with freedom, for was one not free in being motivated by one's own desire, however caused?

But from the standpoint of a more radical view of freedom, this was unacceptable. Moral freedom must mean being able to decide against all inclination for the sake of the morally right. This more radical view of course rejected at the same time a utilitarian definition of morality, the morally right could not be determined by happiness and therefore by desire. Instead of being dispersed throughout his diverse desires and inclinations the morally free subject must be able to gather himself together as it were and make a decision about his total commitment.

Now the main figure in this revolution of radical freedom is without question Immanuel Kant. Rousseau in some ways foreshadowed the idea, but Kant's was the formulation, that of a giant among philosophers, which imposed itself, then and still today. In a philosophical work as powerful and as rich in detail as Kant's critical philosophy, the tracing of any single theme must

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involve over-simplification, but it is not too great a distortion to say that the revindication of this radically free moral subjectivity was one of the main motivations of Kant's philosophy.

Kant's critical theory takes a new departure, and one which would be immensely influential: in trying to define the subject by transcendental argument. It was taken for granted by Enlightenment thinkers like Hume that the subject could only be studied as another object. True, it was special in that one gained access to it by 'reflection' rather than the ordinary perception which yielded us knowledge of external things; but in either case one was dealing with the given, a set of phenomena which presented themselves to our gaze. It was because Hume was dealing with the self as a set of phenomena that he could say such an outrageous thing as that the self was a mere 'bundle of perceptions' with no visible principle of unity.

By transcendental argument, on the other hand, Kant's aim was to define the subject not as a given to inner attention, but as we must conclude it to be, granted the type of experience of objects we have. Transcendental argument tries to infer from experience back to the subject of that experience: what must we be like in order to have the kind of experience we do? In this way it can claim to say things about the nature of the subject which could never be founded in the objects of experience. The Kantian answer to Hume's bundle theory of the self is to point out that the subject is not exhausted by the phenomena given in introspection, that underlying the observation of self as much as that of the external world is the subject of this observation, who *pro tanto* as observer is not the observed. But this dimension of the subject can only be reached by inference, by arguing back from what experience is like to what the structure of the subject must be if this experience is to be possible.

This is transcendental argument, and in introducing this dimension Kant was to open a new and as yet unclosed chapter in the history of philosophy. But Kant did not push his new line of argument as far as his successors would, as Fichte, Schelling and Hegel. By transcendental argument he showed that the subject of experience has to be a unity, that of the 'I think' which must potentially accompany all my representations; and that the necessary connections which Hume wanted to deny the phenomenal world must necessarily inhabit it, for they form its indispensable structure. But for Kant this kind of claim about phenomenal necessity could only be made provided one clearly distinguished phenomena from things in themselves, for a claim to prove from the nature of the subject the shape of necessity in things as they are even independent of the subject would be wild and baseless presumption.

Thus the Kantian world of experience was distinguished from the ultimate reality. It took its shape partly from the subject, from the shape of our minds, and these structures could be explored by transcendental argument; but by the very fact that its shape was partly given by us, it could allow us to conclude

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nothing about the shape of things as they were in themselves. Such things there must be because we as finite subjects are affected, our intuition receives its content from outside of us; but the nature of this ultimate reality is a closed book to us, and that insurmountably.

We shall see directly how this separation from ultimate reality was felt as intolerable by Kant's immediate successors. For them Kant stopped half-way. But for Kant, this position was not just a compromise which enabled him to hunt with the hounds of the Enlightenment in running to ground all the baroque structures of Leibnizian metaphysics, while saving the central unity and freedom of the moral subject. When Kant said that he wanted to demolish claims to speculative knowledge about God to make room for faith, he was not just offering a consolation prize. His principal interest here was in the moral freedom of the subject, and this in a radical sense, that man should draw his moral precepts out of his own will and not from any external source, be this God himself. Thus in the *Critique of Practical Reason* Kant makes the point that it is fortunate for us that our speculative reason cannot take us farther. If we could convincingly see God and the prospect of immortality, we would have always acted out of fear and hope, and would never have developed the inner motivation of duty, which is the crown of moral life.

It is in this second critique that Kant sets out his notion of moral freedom. Morality is to be entirely separated from the motivation of happiness or pleasure. A moral imperative is categorical, it binds us unconditionally. But the objects of our happiness are all contingent, none of them can be the ground of such an unconditional obligation. This can only be found in the will itself, in something that binds us because of what we are, i.e., rational wills, and for no other reason.

Hence Kant argues that the moral law must be binding a priori: and this means that it cannot depend on the particular nature of the objects we desire or the actions we project, but must be purely formal. A formally necessary law, that is, one whose contradictory is self-contradictory, is binding on a rational will. The argument that Kant uses here has been much disputed, and it appears rightly: the Kantian appeal to formal laws which would nevertheless give a determinate answer to the question of what we ought to do has always seemed a little like squaring the circle. But the exciting kernel of this moral philosophy, which has been immensely influential, is the radical notion of freedom. In being determined by a purely formal law, binding on me simply qua rational will, I declare my independence, as it were, from all natural considerations and motives and from the natural causality which rules them. 'Such independence, however, is called *freedom* in a strict, i.e. transcendental sense.'¹ I am free in a radical sense, self-determining not as a natural being, but as a pure, moral will.

¹ Book II, sect. IV.

² *Critique of Practical Reason* Book I, Part I, sect. 5.

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This is the central, exhilarating notion of Kant's ethics. Moral life is equivalent to freedom, in this radical sense of self-determination by the moral will. This is called 'autonomy'. Any deviation from it, any determination of the will by some external consideration, some inclination, even of the most joyful benevolence, some authority, even as high as God himself, is condemned as heteronomy. The moral subject must act not only rightly, but from the right motive, and the right motive can only be respect for the moral law itself, that moral law which he gives to himself as rational will.

This vision of moral life induced not only the exhilaration of freedom, but also a changed sentiment of piety or religious awe. In fact, the object of this sentiment shifted. The numinous which inspired awe was not God as much as the moral law itself, the self-given command of Reason. So that men were thought to come closest to the divine, to what commands unconditional respect, not when they worship but when they act in moral freedom.

But this austere and exciting doctrine exacts a price. Freedom is defined in contrast to inclination, and it is plain that Kant sees the moral life as a perpetual struggle. For man as a natural being must be dependent on nature, and hence have desires and inclination which just because they depend on nature cannot be expected to dovetail with the demands of morality which have their utterly different source in pure reason.¹ But what is more, one has the uneasy sense that an ultimate peace between reason and inclination would be more of a loss than a gain; for what would become of freedom, if there were no more contrast? Kant never really solved this problem, and he was raked over the coals more than once by Hegel for it. And it is an embarrassing problem, since it is part of the duty of a moral man to strive for perfection, that is, to strive to overcome the contrary drive of inclination, hence to aim at a state of holiness, as Kant calls it, where the very possibility of a desire which would spur us to deviate from the moral law would no longer arise, where we would always do the moral law gladly (gerne).²

Kant can avoid facing this problem the more easily in that he plainly believed that such holiness was impossible in this vale of tears; that we are faced rather with the endless task of struggling-to-approach perfection. But for his successors this became a point of acute tension. For they were strongly drawn both by Kant's radical freedom and by the expression theory of man.

On reflection, this is not at all surprising; there were profound affinities between the two views. The expression theory points us towards a fulfilment of man in freedom, which is precisely a freedom of self-determination, and not simply independence from external impingement. But the highest, purest, most uncompromising vision of self-determining freedom was Kant's. No wonder it turned the head of a whole generation. Fichte clearly poses the

¹ op. cit. Book I, Part III, 149.

² Loc. cit.

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choice between two foundations for philosophy, one based on subjectivity and freedom, the other on objectivity and substance, and opts emphatically for the first. If man's fulfilment was to be that of a self-determining subject, and if subjectivity meant self-clarity, self-possession in reason, then the moral freedom to which Kant called had to be seen as a summit.

But the lines of affinity run the other way too. Kantian freedom of self-determination called for completion, it must strive to overcome the boundaries in which it was set and become all-determining. It cannot be satisfied with the limitations of an inner, spiritual freedom, but must try to impress its purpose on nature as well. It must become total. This is in any case how this seminal idea was experienced by the young generation which received Kant's critical writings in its formative youth, and which was seized with enthusiasm for the idea, however older and wiser heads may have felt.

But along with this deep affinity between the two views which tended to draw the same people into their orbits, there was an obvious clash. Radical freedom seemed only possible at the cost of a diremption with nature, a division within myself between reason and sensibility more radical than anything the materialist, utilitarian Enlightenment had dreamed, and hence a division with external nature, from whose causal laws the free self must be radically independent, even while phenomenally his behaviour appeared to conform. The radically free subject was thrown back on himself, and it seemed on his individual self, in opposition to nature and external authority, and on to a decision in which others could have no share.

For young, and some not so young intellectual Germans of the 1790s these two ideas, expression and radical freedom, took on a tremendous force. It was born partly no doubt of the changes in German society which made the need for a new identity to be felt all the more pressing. But the force was multiplied many times by the sense that the older order was breaking and a new one was being born which arose from the impact of the French Revolution. The fact that this Revolution began after the Terror to arouse ambivalent feelings or even hostility among its erstwhile admirers did nothing to still the sense of urgency; on the contrary. There was a sense that a great transformation was both necessary and possible and this aroused hopes which at other times would have seemed extravagant. It was felt that a great break-through was imminent, and if because of the situation in Germany and the turn taken by the French Revolution, this hope soon deserted the political sphere, it was all the more intense in the sphere of culture and human consciousness. And if France was the homeland of political revolution, where else but Germany could the great spiritual revolution be accomplished?

The hope was that men would come to unite the two ideals, radical freedom and integral expression. Because of the affinities between them mentioned above, it was almost inevitable that if either were deeply and powerfully felt, the

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other would be as well. Members of the older generation could remain aloof from one or the other; thus Herder never warmed to the critical turn of Kant's thought, and the two from having been close during Herder's time of study at Königsberg became somewhat estranged in the 1780s. Herder saw in the transcendental exploration of Kant only another theory which divided the subject. Kant for his part was snooty about Herder's philosophy of history, and seems to have felt little attraction to this powerful statement of the expression theory.

It is true that Kant's third critique shows signs of being moved by the *Zeitgeist*. Part of it is devoted to an examination of aesthetic judgement and this is seen by Kant as mediating between the purely factual and the purely moral judgements, and another part is devoted to the study of teleological concepts which in some way unite matter and form more closely. In his discussion of the beautiful, Kant seems to shift from a view of beauty as founded on the sheer play of our faculties of intuition and understanding, to a view which sees the beautiful object as a shadowy and necessarily fragmentary representation of a higher reality which cannot be fully presented in experience. He even speaks in a passage reminiscent of Hamann of 'the text in cypher [...] by which Nature through its beautiful forms speaks to us in figures'.

But although for this very reason the third critique was immensely important for all those who tried to unite the two ideals, it was the generation of the 1790s which really threw itself into this task. The poles were variously identified. For the young Friedrich Schlegel the task was to unite Goethe and Fichte, the former's poetry representing the highest in beauty and harmony, the latter's philosophy being the fullest statement of the freedom and sublimity of the self. To unite the two, as Schlegel for a time thought he saw them united in Wilhelm Meister, would bring men to a new height of consciousness and art. Where the French had revolutionized the political world, the Germans inaugurate a new, higher cultural era.

Others, such as Schleiermacher and Schelling, talked of uniting Kant and Spinoza, the latter being transposed as mentioned above into life-categories and as such a paradigm of that unity of the subject with the All demanded by expression theory.

But one of the most basic ways of stating the problem was in terms of history, as a problem of uniting the greatest in ancient and modern life. We find this in Schiller. Friedrich Schlegel, the young Hegel, Hölderlin and many others. The Greeks as we saw above represented a paradigm of the expressionist perfection. This is what helps to explain the immense enthusiasm for ancient Greece which reigned in Germany in the generation which followed Winckelmann. Ancient Greece had supposedly achieved the most perfect unity

¹ 'Chiffreschrift... wodurch die Natur in ihren schönen Formen figurlich zu uns spricht', *Critique of Judgement*, sect. 42, p. 170.

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between nature and the highest human expressive form. To be human came naturally, as it were. But this beautiful unity died. And moreover, it had to, for this was the price of the development of reason to that higher stage of self-clarity which is essential to our realization as radically free beings. As Schiller put it, 'the intellect was unavoidably compelled [...] to dissociate itself from feeling and intuition in an attempt to arrive at exact discursive understanding'... and below? 'If the manifold potentialities in man were ever to be developed, there was no other way but to pit them against each other.'

In other words the beautiful Greek synthesis had to die because man had to be inwardly divided in order to grow. In particular the growth of reason and hence radical freedom required a diremption from the natural and sensible. Modern man had to beat war with himself. The sense that the perfection of the expression model was not enough, that it would have to be united with radical freedom, was clearly marked in this picture of history by the realization that the loss of primal unity was inevitable and that return was impossible. The overpowering nostalgia for the lost beauty of Greece was kept from ever overflowing its bounds into a project to return.

The sacrifice had been necessary to develop man to his fullest self-consciousness and free self-determination. But although there was no hope of return, there was hope once man had fully developed his reason and his faculties of a higher synthesis, in which both harmonious unity and full self-consciousness would be united. If the early Greek synthesis had been unreflective, and had to be, for reflection starts by dividing man within himself, then the new unity would fully incorporate the reflective consciousness gained, would indeed be brought about by this reflective consciousness. In the *Hyperion Fragment*, Hölderlin put it thus:

There are two ideals of our existence: one is a condition of the greatest simplicity, where our needs accord with each other, with our powers and with everything we are related to, just through the organization of nature, without any action on our part. The other is a condition of the highest cultivation, where this accord would come about between infinitely diversified and strengthened needs and powers, through the organization which we are able to give to ourselves.³

Man is called on to tread a path from the first of these conditions to the second. This spiral vision of history, where we return not to our starting point but to a higher variant of unity, expressed at once the sense of opposition between the two ideals and the demand, flaming up to a hope, that the two be united. The

¹ *Aesthetic Education of Man*, 6th letter, para 11.

² Para 12.

³ 'Es gibt zwei Ideale unseres Daseins; einen Zustand der höchsten Einfachheit, wo unsere Bedürfnisse mit sich selbst, und mit unsern Kräften, und mit allem, womit wir in Verbindung stehen, durch die bloße Organisation der Natur, ohne unser Zutun, gegenseitig zusammenstimmen, und einen Zustand der höchsten Bildung, wo dasselbe stattfinden würde bei unendlich vervielfältigten und verstärkten Bedürfnissen und Kräften, durch die Organisation, die wir uns selbst zu geben im Stande sind.'

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prime tasks of thought and sensibility were seen as the overcoming of profound oppositions which had been necessary, but which now had to be surmounted. These were the oppositions which expressed most acutely the division between the two ideals of radical freedom and integral expression.

These were: the opposition between thought, reason, morality, on one side, and desire and sensibility on the other; the opposition between the fullest self-conscious freedom, on one side, and life in the community, on the other; the opposition between self-consciousness and communion with nature; and beyond this the separation of finite subjectivity from the infinite life that flowed through nature, the barrier between the Kantian subject and the Spinozist substance, *Deus sive natura*, or in Lessing's phrase, the '*Hen kai pan*'.

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How was this great re-unification to be accomplished? On what could one's hopes be founded? One foundation for the hope was a more and more far-reaching idealism, a total idealism. Fichte inaugurated this. Recognized at first as the most brilliant young disciple of Kant, by the master as well, he moved under the profound pull of the age to transform the whole system. The intolerable thing about kantianism was the division from the thing-in-itself. Fichte rejected the thing-in-itself. Ultimately, there was not a subjectivity meeting a foreign world of reality never to be fully known; rather subjectivity was at the basis of everything; the world of objects was posited by the 'I think' and was thus not ultimately independent of it.

Of course, this is not something the ordinary finite subject is aware of: it has to be won through to by an 'intellectual intuition'. Nor can the subjectivity that posits the world be thought of as identical to finite subjectivity; it is more like the all-encompassing subject of which the finite ones are emanations. Fichte developed this aspect of his thought through the 1800's and up to his premature death in 1814, and God as the ultimate subject took on a greater role. But the crucial point of Fichte's system, what gave tremendous impact to his *Wissenschaftslehre* when this was published in 1794, was the declaration of omniscience on behalf of the Kantian moral subject. Not only was dualism overcome, but this was accomplished by throwing down all barriers limiting the subject of knowledge and will.

Fichte's theory was immensely exhilarating. Perhaps the pain of division could be overcome by pushing the initially divisive self-consciousness to its fullest development where it would be seen to englobe its opposition. But in the end it could not fill the bill. Fichte was really too onesidedly Kantian, in spite of spectacular departures from Kant, to unite the two ideals. That is, his interest was still exclusively for moral freedom. Fichte understands the positing of a world by the subject as taking place in order that there may be a subject of

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knowledge and above all will. The subject of knowledge requires an object known, the will requires an obstacle to work on. The highest activity of the subject is the free will, and this is the ultimate goal of the positing activity of the 'I think'. But then Fichte runs into the same problem as Kant: if we are free only in struggling against the obstacles of nature, then our struggle is an endless one; we never can reach unity of nature and free will, on pain of the disappearance of the latter. Thus although Fichte returns us to monism ontologically, he holds out no prospect of a return to harmony. The perfection in which nature and morality come together is something we always strive after but which never can come to be; we approach it, but can never reach it. It is always in the domain of what ought to be (*Sollen*) never what is. Fichte has not united the two ideals; he cannot satisfy the demand for integral expression.

Another, and equally seminal approach was taken by Schiller in his famous Letters on the *Aesthetic Education of Man*. Schiller was older than the generation to which Hegel, and Hölderlin, the Schlegels, etc. belonged. Perhaps this has something to do with the fact that he did not rush into a monist ontology, and seek a unified foundation in being. Schiller remains with a rough approximation to the Kantian account of subjectivity: we form as subjects the stuff which we receive through the senses. As men we have a 'sense drive' (*sinnlicher Trieb*), which spurs us to experience the sensible, and a 'drive to form' (*Formtrieb*) tries to bring order and form to experience. Both these are essential to knowledge, but limit each other; in the practical sphere they oppose each other as desire and freedom.

But Schiller sees the possibility of a third drive which unites these two functions inseparably, where the sensible matter before us itself effortlessly takes on form, and form finds expression in matter, where desire spontaneously meets the exigencies of freedom. The object of this third drive unites life and form, it is living form (*lebende Gestalt*), and this says Schiller is the same as beauty. It is in beauty that the two sides of our nature meet in harmony. The beautiful object is a sensible form, that is, one in which every bit of the sensible content is relevant to the form, the form can only take this content and the content can only have this form; in contrast to the subsumption of some observed reality under a concept, where only some of its properties justify the subsumption, and the rest are only contingently related. This latter subsumption is always arbitrary, as it were, but in the beautiful object, the form demands just this content, the content takes on spontaneously and irresistibly this form in our perception of it.

This third drive takes us beyond the strain of opposition, where form and sensible drives limit each other and reciprocally impose necessity on each other (*notigen*). This third drive is beyond the seriousness of effort, it is play; and Schiller accordingly calls it the 'play drive' (*Spieltrieb*), pointing out that this far

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from diminishing its importance shows it to be the perfect realization of man and his freedom. We can recognize here the ideal of the expression theory, an expressive harmony in which natural desires and the highest human forms are effortlessly united in a single élan. This is freedom, in the sense of integral, undivided, unconflicted self-expression. It is all this, the effortlessness, harmony, free creativity, which Schiller wants to convey in the word 'play'.

Hence it is that 'Man only plays when he is human in the fullest sense of the word, and he is only fully human when he plays.'

It will come as no surprise after the above discussion of the expression model, that man recovers his unity in the aesthetic dimension. Schiller obviously here has built on Kant's third critique. But he has obviously gone much farther. The experience of beauty is not just that of the effortless agreement of our faculties, nor just a shadowy vision of the realization of the Ideas of reason in the world, but it represents a recovered unity of the receptive and the spontaneous in us, where they are not just in agreement, but fused. In the play drive, nature and spirit speak with one voice.

Of course the ultimate doctrine of the work on *Aesthetic Education* is not unambiguously clear; Schiller speaks in some passages as though the aesthetic were a stage on the road to moral freedom, a help in getting there, in other passages as though it were an embellishment on moral freedom. But in passages like the one quoted above, it would seem that the unity achieved in the play drive is the perfection and realization of man itself. This is not to say that it replaces moral freedom, rather that moral freedom comes to its fullest when it no longer is in conflict with nature, and it is this overcoming of conflict which the play drive can provide. Realized humanity would live entirely in the creation and love of beauty.

In any case, this is the vision that emerges from the *Letters* for those who hunger to unite freedom and integral expression. But Schiller himself does not give way to extravagant hope. Rather he ends up presenting a rather Kantian perspective, not of a realized humanity, but of a gradual progression towards it.

What Schiller lacks in order to answer the demand for integral unity of the two ideals is what Fichte was beginning to provide, an ontological foundation for this unity.

If the highest spiritual side of man, his moral freedom, is to come to more than passing and accidental harmony with his natural being, then nature itself has to tend to the spiritual. In order even to formulate this demand we have to go beyond Kant's terms. We have to think of nature not as Kant did most of the time, as the object of phenomenal awareness, whose ultimate ontological foundation, the thing in itself, is shrouded in impenetrable mystery; but rather

¹ 'der Mensch spielt nur, wo er in voller Bedeutung des Wortes Mensch ist, und er ist nur da ganz Mensch, wo er spielt' (15th letter, para 9).

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following the expression theory, as a set of underlying forces which manifest themselves in phenomena.¹

Then the requirement of unity is that nature in this sense come to have or come to be seen as having a bent to realize spiritual goals. Of course, the mere aspiration to be at one with the great current of life in nature can be met by a naturalist vision: natural, unregenerate man is such that his spontaneous desires and feelings are in accord with nature. Nature is at one with him and always answers his call. Other living things are bound with him in the same chain of sympathy which runs through the whole.

This kind of vision was not without its protagonists in the late eighteenth century as it is not without its defenders today. But it could not satisfy the Romantic generation whose aim was to bring man back to unity with nature within and without, while maintaining his highest spiritual achievements, consciousness and moral freedom, intact. But it is these which must go in the union envisaged by naturalism. For man depends so much on the great course of nature outside him, that it is he who must adapt to nature in order to achieve harmony. In this unequal union the 'spiritual' being is the lesser partner. He must adapt to unconscious, unreflective forces which are beyond the call of reason; and he can only reach harmony with them by listening to what is most unconscious, unreflective in him, the voice of instinct.

As long as we think of nature in terms of blind forces or brute facts then it can never fuse with the rational, the autonomous in man. We must either choose capitulation, with naturalism; or content ourselves with an occasional partial accord within ourselves, won by unremitting effort and constantly threatened by the massive presence of untransformed nature around us with which we are in constant, unavoidable interchange. If the aspirations to radical freedom and to integral expressive unity with nature are to be totally fulfilled together, if man is to be at one with nature in himself and in the cosmos while being most fully a self-determining subject, then it is necessary first, that my basic natural inclination spontaneously be to morality and freedom; and more than this, since I am a dependent part of a larger order of nature, it is necessary that this whole order within me and without tend of itself towards spiritual goals, tend to realize a form in which it can unite with subjective freedom. If I am to remain a spiritual being and yet not be opposed to nature in my interchange with it, then this interchange must be a communion in which I enter into relation with some spiritual being or force.

But this is to say that spirituality, tending to realize spiritual goals, is of the essence of nature. Underlying natural reality is a spiritual principle striving to realize itself.

Now to posit a spiritual principle underlying nature comes close to positing

¹ Kant himself slips into this way of speaking at certain moments of the third critique, e.g., where he speaks of 'nature in the subject' giving 'the rule to art'. *Critique of Judgement*, sect. 46, 182.

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a cosmic subject. This is where Fichte was going, but he stopped crucially short of there. Like Kant, Fichte's main focus was on man's moral vocation and his freedom. Hence, though the world of nature is posited by the 'I think' in Fichte's radical idealism, this nature is still the object of perception or the raw material of the will. It is not yet an independent reality, the articulation of its own underlying forces. Nature is essentially related to subjectivity. But its relation is to be vis-à-vis, the essential other which a subject needs to realize himself through striving; it is not the bodily expression of a subject. True, Fichte's absolute subject is not identical with the individual; it is rather the universal with which the individual strives to unite. But just for this reason it must be identified with the universal moral subject rather than with a cosmic subject whose life would be visible in the great current of nature. Fichte's theory is still in this respect the transcendental idealism of Kant, but with the *Ding-an-sich* left out, i.e., where the phenomena shaped by the 'I think' constitute the only objective reality. The objective world has, as it were, no depth. It merely provides props for the moral drama.

This conception of freedom and nature can never allow a fully realized unity of the two, as Hegel clearly expounds in his first published philosophical work.¹ For the self posits a not-self which it struggles to overcome. But subjectivity needs to be related to something else in order to be. Consequently, the overcoming of the not-self can never be completed, if the subject himself is not to disappear. It must therefore be seen as an infinite progress of self-realization towards a goal which ought to be realized but never fully is.

This must be the case, Hegel argues, as long as we see Nature, the vis-à-vis of subject, as simply posited as the foil for the subject in his self-realization. A real unity of subject and object can only come about if nature is an expression of subjectivity in its own right, as it were, an independent spiritual reality which can come of its own to realise its unity with freedom.

What is missing in Fichte, the grounding of nature in some cosmic spiritual principle, can be found in Spinoza, who offers union with a cosmic substance. But this system suffered from the opposite fault, that in it finite subjectivity seemed to sink without trace.

If the task was to find an ontological foundation for the unity of freedom and nature in a union of finite subjectivity and a cosmic spiritual principle or subject, then what was needed was a kind of synthesis of Fichte and Spinoza. And this in some form or another (a synthesis of Fichte and Goethe for Friedrich Schlegel, of Kant and Spinoza for Schleiermacher) was the recurrent theme of this generation of the 1790s, the generation of Romanticism.

The young Romantics, the Schlegels and Novalis, for instance, were im-

¹ The *Difference* of 1801, when he was still under Schelling's influence.

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mensely excited by Fichte. They draw from him the idea of a free, creative subjectivity, sublimely disengaged even from its own creations (cf. Friedrich Schlegel's doctrine of 'Irony'), which was not entirely consonant with the stern moral purpose of Fichte's philosophy. But they soon came to find this philosophy inadequate. For they were also looking for communion with nature, with the greater life outside man, and following the *Sturm und Drang*, and more recently the leading intuition of Schiller's *Letters*, they saw this communion as something to be realized through art. They draw on Jacob Boehme, Spinoza, and Goethe to develop a vision of Nature as expression, a kind of poetry of cosmic spirit, with which men can unite through their own poetic expression. And this necessarily took them beyond Fichte. They wanted to unite his radical notion of creative subjectivity with their own poetic vision of nature. Schelling was the philosopher who answered this need.

Schelling was a boy wonder. He was five years younger than Hegel (born in 1775), and yet he was the senior partner in their period of collaboration at Jena, where he had Hegel called in 1800. He began publishing in his late teens, and for a decade a spate of books came out.

It is difficult to follow Schelling's evolution in detail, but the general direction is clear. He started off as a Fichtean, but then went on to complement Fichte with Spinoza. He took the Fichtean thesis that subjectivity posits the world and extended it into a view of subjectivity as the underlying principle which expresses itself in nature. In doing this, he gave a shape to the poetic vision of a cosmic spiritual principle and developed it into a philosophy of Nature.

In his *System of Transcendental Idealism* of 1800, Schelling puts forward the view that nature is the unconscious product of subjectivity. But as such it has an inherent bent to realize subjective life. This inner bent explains the articulation of nature into different levels, from the lowest level of inanimate existence in time and space through mechanical laws and chemical bonding to the summit in organic nature. For life manifests subjectivity in the objective world, it shows us nature which is also teleological, directed towards its own goals. It thus realizes at one level the harmony between necessity and freedom.

This is the principle of Schelling's philosophy of nature, that the unconscious subjectivity in nature strives to rejoin full subjectivity. But reciprocally, conscious subjectivity tries to unite itself to its objective counterpart. And this is essential. For the best nature can do on its own is life. But this, although uniting necessity and freedom, does not incorporate consciousness. There must be a higher unity, where conscious subjectivity reaches out to incorporate nature, and this is attained in art.

Schelling has taken up Schiller's vision, and beyond Schiller Kant's third critique, whose two main topics, beauty and teleology, are put at the apex of the

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system. But Schiller's notion of the aesthetic as the locus of recovered unity between freedom and necessity is now given an ontological foundation. Art is the point where the conscious and the unconscious meet, where conscious activity fuses with inspiration from the depths of unconscious nature in us, and where the two thus reach a harmony beyond opposition. It is therefore the point at which spontaneity and receptivity, freedom and nature are one. And this meeting point is, as it were, foreordained in the ontological fact that nature and consciousness have ultimately the same source, subjectivity.

Subjectivity thus spawns two worlds, as it were, the unconscious world of nature, and the conscious one of moral action and history. Having the same foundation, these two strive to rejoin each other. Nature's hierarchy of being shows the bent of the first towards the second, history the development of the second towards the first. The spiral vision of history mentioned above is given ontological foundation.

Schelling thus gave philosophical expression to the poetic vision of the Romantics, the vision which drew Schlegel and Novalis, of nature as slumbering spirit. He seemed at last to answer the need for the fulfilment together of the two ideals: radical freedom and integral expression; for the self-consciousness of radical freedom could now see itself expressed in the whole of nature, within and without, and could achieve unity with this great current of nature in art.

In this synthesis Schelling, along with the Romantic thinkers, linked up not only with the developing line of post-Kantian thought and the expressionist theory, they also gave a new interpretation to currents of religious thought which had long had popular following without much recognition by the learned. We have already seen that Boehme influenced them. At the same time their spiral vision of history gave a new formulation to the old prophetic scheme of history as divided between the three ages, of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost; and this spiral vision was itself a transposition of the Christian drama of Paradise-Fall-Redemption. These links were not just the fruit of accidental convergence. The Romantics were very conscious of these mystical and eschatological roots, and their use of religious terms both reflected and enhanced their sense that an important transformation was at hand.¹ In this respect, Hegel was at one with the Romantic generation, as we shall see.

But Hegel cannot be called a Romantic. Schiller is not generally classed as a Romantic, although he shared their hunger for unity; and this is partly because he would not take the ontological step, either as philosopher or writer, to a divinized nature, or an absolute subjectivity. But this was not Hegel's disagreement with Romanticism. On the contrary, his system centres on the notion that the Absolute is subject. What sets him apart is a certain rigour and

¹ Cf. M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, N.Y., 1971, Chapters 3 & 4.

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consequence in his thought; that he pushed through to the end in a uniquely consistent way the requirements of a unity between radical freedom and integral expression. For in fact the synthesis of Schelling, and even more those of the Romantics, fell far short of fulfilling these requirements.

Hegel's distance from the Romantics, and the great inadequacies of their attempts at solution, can be seen if we examine a little more closely what the desired synthesis of subjectivity and nature entails.

This synthesis requires that we posit a cosmic subjectivity, as we saw. But what is the relation of this cosmic spirit to finite spirits, that is, men? At one end, the cosmic spirit could be thought to be identical with that of man at his highest; so that at its ultimate fulfilment the human ego would be seen to be at the base of all objective reality. This seems to have been Fichte's conception of the absolute ego, with this important reservation, that this ultimate fulfilment never comes, and can never come, but we are always striving towards it.

On the other hand, if nature is to be more than the necessary *point d'appui* of human consciousness and will, and if we think therefore of the cosmic spirit as the inner power which comes to articulated expression in all the varied manifold of nature, including man, then the temptation is strong to adopt some kind of 'pantheistic' view. For if the principle of expressive unity – the unity of body and spirit – is to apply to the cosmic spirit as well, then the whole of nature is his 'body', that is, the expression from which he is inseparable.

But pantheism as this is generally understood will not do. For man is only an infinitesimal part of the divine life which flows through the whole of nature. Communion with the God of nature would only mean yielding to the great current of life and abandoning radical autonomy. Hence the view of this generation, which it drew from Herder and Goethe, was not a simple pantheism but rather a variant of the Renaissance idea of man the microcosm. Man is not merely a part of the universe; in another way he reflects the whole, the spirit which expresses itself in the external reality of nature comes to conscious expression in man. This was the basis of Schelling's early philosophy, whose principle was that the creative life of nature and the creative power of thought were one.¹ Hence as Hoffmeister points out, the two basic ideas which we see recurring in different forms from Goethe to the Romantics to Hegel: that we can really know nature only because we are of the same substance, that indeed we only properly know nature when we try to commune with it, not when we try to dominate or dissect it in order to subject it to the categories of analytic understanding;² and secondly, that we know

¹ J. Hoffmeister *Goethe und der deutsche Idealismus*, Leipzig, 1932, 10.
² So Goethe: War nicht das Auge sonnenhaft,

Die Sonne könnt' es nie erblicken;

Lag nicht in uns des Gottes eigne Kraft,

Wie könnt' uns Göttliches entzücken?

nature because we are in a sense in contact with what made it, the spiritual force which expresses itself in nature.

But then what is our relation as finite spirits to this creative force which underlies all nature? What does it mean to say that it is one with the creative power of thought in us? Does it just mean that this is the power to reflect in consciousness the life which is already complete in nature? But then in what sense would this be compatible with radical freedom? Reason would not be an autonomous source of norms for us; rather our highest achievement would be to express faithfully a larger order to which we belong. If the aspiration to radical autonomy is to be saved, the microcosm idea has to be pushed further to the notion that human consciousness does not just reflect the order of nature, it completes or perfects it. On this view, the cosmic spirit which unfolds in nature is striving to complete itself in conscious self-knowledge, and the locus of this self-consciousness is the mind of man.

Thus man does more than reflect a nature complete in itself, rather he is the vehicle whereby the cosmic spirit brings to completion a self-expression the first attempts at which lie before us in nature. Just as on the expressivist view man achieves his fulfilment in a form of life which is also an expression of self-awareness, so here the power underlying nature, as spirit, reaches its fullest expression in self-awareness. But this is not achieved in some transcendent realm beyond man. If it were, then union with the cosmic spirit would require that man subordinate his will to a higher being, that he accept heteronomy. Rather spirit reaches this self-awareness in man.

So that while nature tends to realize spirit, that is, self-consciousness, man as a conscious being tends towards a grasp of nature in which he will see it as spirit and one with his own spirit. In this process men come to a new understanding of self: they see themselves not just as individual fragments of the universe, but rather as vehicles of cosmic spirit. And hence men can achieve at once the greatest unity with nature, i.e., with the spirit which unfolds itself in nature, and the fullest autonomous self-expression. The two must come together since man's basic identity is as vehicle of spirit.

A conception of cosmic spirit of this kind, if we can make sense of it, is the only one which can square the circle, as it were, that is, which can provide the basis of a union between finite and cosmic spirit which meets the requirement that man be united to the whole and yet not sacrifice his own self-consciousness and autonomous will. And it was something of this kind which the generation of the Romantics was struggling towards, and which Schelling wanted to define in his notion of the identity between the creative life in nature and the creative force of thought; and in formulae like: 'die Natur ist der sichtbare Geist, der Geist die unsichtbare Natur'.

And it was a notion of this kind which Hegel in the end hammered out. Hegel's spirit, or *Geist*, although he is often called 'God', and although Hegel

claimed to be clarifying Christian theology, is not the God of traditional theism; he is not a God who could exist quite independently of men, even if men did not exist, as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob before the creation. On the contrary, he is a spirit who lives as spirit only through men. They are the vehicles, and the indispensable vehicles, of his spiritual existence, as consciousness, rationality, will. But at the same time *Geist* is not reducible to man, he is not identical with the human spirit, since he is also the spiritual reality underlying the universe as a whole, and as a spiritual being he has purposes and he realizes ends which cannot be attributed to finite spirits qua finite, but on the contrary which finite spirits serve. For the mature Hegel, man comes to himself in the end when he sees himself as the vehicle of a larger spirit.

We shall examine Hegel's notion in Chapter III. But it must already be clear that it is not easy (if indeed it is possible at all) to win through to a coherent view of a cosmic spirit on this model, or to maintain clearly in view what it requires. And in fact the Romantics never succeeded in doing so. It requires at least two things: (1) that we be able to give a plausible interpretation of nature as 'petrified spirit', as the precipitate of a cosmic spirit on the way to a fuller realization in self-consciousness. We must find in nature 'the history of *Geist*'.¹ And this means not just that we find in Nature a set of images which allow us to portray it in this light. Rather it must be that this vision of nature as the first incomplete attempts at the self-realization of spirit provide the ultimately true and basic account of nature and why it is as it is. (2) Reciprocally, we must develop a notion of what it is for man to be the vehicle of *Geist* which is not incompatible with his vocation to rational autonomy.

It is the first task into which the Romantics threw themselves with their poetry of nature, the mystical 'physics' of a Ritter, and ultimately with the philosophy of Nature of Schelling. But it is in the second where they went most grievously astray.² For what if our conception of the self-awareness of spirit, of

¹ Hoffmeister *op. cit.* 18.

² A word here would perhaps be in order about Goethe and his relation to the Romantics. In fact he was one of the inspirers, almost the paragon, of the Romantic generation. And there is no doubt that they drew from him the idea of nature as the emanation of a spiritual life in which man could discover the secrets of his own life. 'Suchet in euch, so werdet ihr alles finden und erfrenet euch, wenn da draußen, wie ihr es immer heißen möget, eine Natur liegt, die ja und Amen zu allem sagt, was ihr in euch gefunden habt' (Hoffmeister *op. cit.* 7).

But Goethe's classicism was also far removed from the restless striving, the heady enthusiasms of the Romantics. For although Goethe's work had deep roots in the expressivist conception of man, he remained unmoved by the other pole of this younger generation's aspirations – the ideal of radical moral autonomy of Kant and Fichte. That side of Kant which excited Fichte and through him the generation of the 1790s left Goethe cold. The exhilaration of radical freedom was not for him. Not that the ideals of freedom and reason meant nothing to him. On the contrary; only he was not tempted to interpret them in terms of Kantian autonomy, a self-given law of human reason.

Consequently, he was content with a vision of things in which man was not the centre. He could accept without protest the idea that man was related to a larger life which dwarfed him and which he could never fully understand, even if man was in some sense its highest realization. He could envisage an expressive unity of man with the whole without feeling compelled to find a place in it

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which we are the vehicles, in fact pulls us away from conscious self-possession sinks us more into a stream of life which we cannot fully grasp by reason? The once more we fall into heteronomy; the careful synthesis veers again toward a pantheistic view in which man sinks himself in a larger whole. And in the end if we follow this road far enough man finds himself once more in face of a God who is complete without and beyond him, more like the God of traditional faith.

And in fact, after going through a more 'pantheistic' phase, most of the Romantic generation ended up more or less orthodox theists: Schleiermacher and Novalis first; but then Friedrich Schlegel converted to Catholicism; and even Schelling made a later comeback as an orthodox Christian.

Whether this development was inevitable or not, the fact is that the Romantic synthesis was inadequate from the start. First, they were deeply attracted to a view of this synthesis, the meeting point of finite and cosmic spirit, as a process or activity which is endlessly inventive, which constantly creates new forms and never takes on a definitive embodiment; rather than as one which reaches a final shape which can be encompassed in a vision of things, or a work of art, or a way of living (or all of these together). This vision of continuous creation was implicit in Friedrich Schlegel's notion of 'Irony', or in Novalis' 'magical Idealism'. In this way, they saw man's vocation as vehicle of cosmic Geist as fully consonant with his free subjectivity, for was not originality, boundless creative power, the essence of free subjectivity? This in any case was the idea they drew from Fichte, and what excited them in idealism.

But this notion of an endlessly original creative power contradicts the requirements of a complete union of autonomy and expression, of subjectivity and nature. A subjectivity which is inspired tirelessly to create new forms is one which by definition can never achieve integral expression, can never find a form which truly expresses itself. This Romantic ideal of infinite change ultimately inspired by Fichte's philosophy of endless striving and shares the same inadequacy, which Hegel will castigate with the term 'bad infinity'. The romantic notion of Irony, Hegel will argue in his lectures on aesthetics, ¹ denies the ultimate seriousness of any of the external expressions of spirit, all of which are of no significance before the endlessly creative 'I'. But this 'I' is at the same

for radical subjectivity. By an irony which may become more understandable below Goethe's serene 'classicism' ends up finding a surer place for reason and self-clarity than the heady visions of the Romantics who were trying at all costs to secure the unrestricted freedom of the subject, the recognition 'daß die Willkür des Dichters kein Gesetz über sich leide', as Fr. Schlegel put it realized in *Wilhelm Meister*.

Only Hegel won through to a comparable equilibrium between creativity and form, and he was generally well seen by Goethe - who, it must be said, appreciated in general the attempts at a philosophy of Nature of the Romantics and Schelling, even though their brand of idealism was not to his liking.

¹ *Die Idee und das Ideal*, 95-102.

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time seeking, indeed craves external expression, and thus the triumphal self-affirmation of Irony gives way to the sense of loss, of longing (Sehnsucht), ¹ to the withdrawal from the world as abandoned by spirit, which many Romantics experienced and which Hegel characterizes in the portrait of the 'beautiful soul'. On Hegel's view there is an inner link between the Romantic subject's claims to boundless creativity and his experience of the world as God-forsaken, which Hegel constantly combats in the name of his own vision of the rationality of the real.

And when Fichte is thus transposed into the domain of fantasy, as in the Romantic notion of originality, or in Novalis' 'magical Idealism', the difficulty is compounded. For this activity of the subject, this endless originality of the imagination, which operates in the twilight zone between conscious and unconscious life, is something which is not fully understood by the subject himself. But this contradicts one of the main requirements of autonomy, rational self-consciousness. The inexhaustibly fertile flow of fantasy can never be fully grasped, let alone encompassed in a single vision, by Reason. But if Reason is out of its depths in this realm, where it moves rather with the instinct of the sleepwalker than what becomes of moral autonomy, which requires that Reason provide the rule?

This brings us to a second basic issue which divided Hegel from the Romantics and which concerns precisely the place of reason in the synthesis. For the Romantics the unity between subjectivity and nature was achieved by intuition or imagination. Reason was seen as a divisive, dissecting, analytic faculty, one which could only take us further away from union with nature. This ultimate exclusion of reason was in a sense also implicit in Schelling's solution. As long as the highest synthesis was to be found in art, the unity of the conscious and the unconscious, it must remain something not fully understood, not transparent to reason, the object of an intuition which can never be fully explicated. The point about artistic creation, as Kant pointed out, is that we cannot give the formula.²

But if we accept this we are sacrificing something in our synthesis. For the full clarity of rational understanding is of the essence of self-determining freedom, which obtains, after all, where pure reason gives the law. To achieve a unity with nature in pure intuition, one of which we can give no rational account, is to lose oneself in the great current of life, and this is not a synthesis between autonomy and expression, but a capitulation in which we give up

¹ 184d, 99.

² And later, when Schelling moved beyond the *System of Transcendental Idealism*, he went further from Fichte towards the Spinozan end of the spectrum. He no longer defined the source of both nature and mind as subjectivity, but rather as an absolute which was beyond subject and object, the 'indifference'. But of this absolute it was even truer to say that free subjectivity was swallowed up in it without trace. Hegel's objections to this - 'the night in which all cows are black' - were the roots of his break with Schelling in 1807.

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autonomy. It is a return to the original unity which was broken by reflective rather than the higher synthesis to which the spiral ascends.

In other words our conception of spirit and its self-realization must have place for reason if man is to be the vehicle of cosmic spirit and yet retain its autonomy. This is the central insight which Hegel alone of his generation can in full clarity and worked out to its full conclusion. Without it, the Romantics either fell into the despair of exile in a God-forsaken world, or recovered unity with nature and God only in the twilight zone of intuition and fantasy.

But this is not to say that the Romantics were just guilty of oversight. In fact our difficulties just begin when we accept the central role of reason; and it was these difficulties which motivated them in turning away from it to fantasy, invention and art.

For if we abandon the view of spirit as endless creative power and see the synthesis of subject and nature as taking some definitive shape, are we not denying some of the essential properties of free subjectivity? For we seem to be positing a final, static condition, while the life of a subject is continuing activity. And in seeing the solution in one encompassable form, we seem to limit the subject unduly, to make him merely finite where the cosmic subject should be infinite.

The requirements of our synthesis seem to put us in a dilemma. Hegel was not unaware of it. But he claimed to have hammered out a solution which avoided both horns. He was pitiless towards Romantic visions of the power of fantasy and endless creativity. He insisted that the final synthesis be one which reason could encompass. But at the same time he had a conception of the subject as essentially activity, and infinite activity. The solution lay in his conception of infinity, which incorporated the finite, and which returned to itself like a circle. Just what this notion involved we shall examine later, but only a conception of this kind can resolve the dilemma of confining infinite activity to encompassable form.

Then again, Hegel agrees as he must with the main Romantic objection to Reason that it (or rather 'understanding' to use his own terminology) divides, analyses, individuates, kills.¹ In other words, rational understanding is not possible without a clear consciousness of the distinction between subject and object, self and other, the rational and the affective. And just because of this, Hegel will insist that the ultimate synthesis incorporate division as well as unity. Once again, Hegel will claim to combine the seemingly uncombinable. He will claim to arrive at the 'identity of identity and non-identity' (*Differenz*, 77), for

¹ In the preface of his *PhG*, Hegel likens this analytic power of the understanding to the power of death, the power to wrench things from the unity of life. But he insists that the way to reconciliation with spirit is not to flee this death as a certain 'powerless beauty' does, but to 'hold it fast', to 'bear it and maintain oneself in it', to 'sojourn' with it. 'This sojourning is the magical power which returns it to being.' (*PhG* 29-30).

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unity of the single current of life and the division between subject and object implicit in rational consciousness. This is perhaps the central and most 'mind-blowing' idea of the Hegelian system, which we shall shortly try to tackle. It is what most clearly singles him out from the whole generation whose aspirations he shared.

The synthesis in art is not rejected – Hegel throws nothing away – but it is subordinated as the first stage of absolute spirit to the higher realizations in religion and, at the summit of clarity, in philosophy. Hence reason as conceptual clarity takes the central role in his synthesis. Nor can this be thought of as a matter only of our mode of access, through intuition or reason, to what is substantially the same vision. For in fact substance and mode of expression cannot be separated here, as in all expression theories. It is integral to spirit as reason that it come to a full rational understanding of itself. But our understanding of spirit is not in the end distinct from its self-understanding. So that if we could only come to an unexplicated intuition of the synthesis, and spirit's understanding of itself were thus similarly unexplicated and intuitive, then the nature of cosmic subjectivity would be different; it would not incorporate rationality.

Thus Hegel in his mature system developed an original stand vis-à-vis the generation to which he belonged in time and aspiration. He did not slough off their aspirations – to combine the fullest moral autonomy of the subject with the highest expressive unity within man, between men and with nature. He shared the hope that this unprecedented and epoch-making synthesis could be made only if one could win through to a vision of a spiritual reality underlying nature, a cosmic subject to whom man could relate himself and in which he could ultimately find himself.

But he stood out in his uncompromising attempt to think through the requirements of this synthesis with surprising rigour and a quite impressive thoroughness. And as a result he produced one of the great monuments to the aspiration of his age – a seminal age for modern civilization. Indeed, if it could ever be claimed that these aspirations were met, this claim could only be made on behalf of the Hegelian system. Hegel's notion of the cosmic subject, or *Gesetz*, his concept of infinity which incorporates finitude, and his insistence on the unmitigated claims of reason mark him as the ultimately serious contender.

With this in mind we can already begin to see why the Hegelian synthesis is of perennial and recurring interest in our civilization. For the two powerful aspirations – to expressive unity and to radical autonomy – have remained central preoccupations of modern men; and the hope to combine them cannot but recur in one form or another, be it in Marxism or integral anarchism, technological Utopianism or the return to nature. The Romantic rebellion continues undiminished, returning ever in unpredictable new forms –

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Dadaism, Surrealism, the yearning of the 'hippy', the contemporary cult of unexpressed consciousness. With all this surrounding us we cannot avoid being referred back to the first great synthesis which was meant to resolve our central dilemma; which failed but which remains somehow unsurpassed.

I have tried in the preceding pages to give an idea of the basic objective which guided Hegel's philosophical thought. But I have presented these in the general form they took for his generation. Before trying to outline how he tried to meet these objectives, it would be useful to look briefly at his personal itinerary, at how these philosophical goals took shape in his mind. This is what the next chapter will attempt.

CHAPTER II

Hegel's Itinerary

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Hegel as a young man in the 1780s, first at the Stuttgart Gymnasium then at the *Tübinger Stift*, was deeply moved by the expressivist current of his time. The image of a whole, integrated life in which man was at one with himself, and men were at one with each other in society, also assumed its paradigmatic form for him in the classical past of Greece.

But there were two other important poles of his thought and aspiration which were already evident at that time and remained vital to him through many transformations: the first was the moral aspiration of the Enlightenment, that man should at last come to the freedom of self-direction through reason. Later he will come to think of Kant as the paradigm proponent of this aspiration, but at the beginning Mendelssohn and Lessing were more important for him. The second major reference point was the Christian religion. That theology was one of his preoccupations might be thought to flow normally from the fact that he received his higher education in a theology seminary. But his interest in Christianity was much deeper. Indeed, the theology he was taught at Tübingen aroused his opposition. It is one of the negative poles *against* which he defines his position in the early writings. And the fact that his conception of the Christian religion underwent profound changes and yet remained central to his basic views right through to the mature system shows that this orientation was not the result of a passing influence.

These three reference points were potentially in deep conflict and Hegel's mature thought is a heroic attempt to reconcile them. But in his early, Tübingen days he felt that the three corresponding aspirations thrust in the same direction. The age was seen by Hegel and many of his generation as one of division and repression of spontaneity. They longed to restore it to the wholeness of expressive unity, so that men's moral activity and social life would spring out of a living experience of unity and the good, rather than be ruled by dead formulae.

But this expressive aspiration seemed to them at base no different from the demands of *Aufklärung*, that man live by his own reason instead of external, irrational authority based on the prestige of the past. In both cases, it was a matter of restoring man's autonomy against external authority, something