Introduction

A few thinkers in the history of the West have put forward transcendent and compelling cultural visions. These visions are transcendent in that they break from previous thought, and compelling in that they force subsequent thinkers to attend to them with great seriousness. The thinkers who articulate such visions are properly characterized as agenda setters: they set the order of intellectual priorities for those who follow. They live on the boundaries, in the hope of discovering something new. Obviously, Nietzsche is one such thinker. The vision that he presented in his writings set the agenda not only for the three other thinkers whom I shall be considering in this book but for the whole of modernist and postmodernist art and thought. The impact of this style of thought is not confined to the sphere of intellectual life. Ideas do have consequences. These consequences are often of a quite material kind. The daring sortie of one generation is the universally accepted commonplace three generations later. On such commonplaces worlds are built or lost.

Though the vision with which I am here concerned is an influential one, it has never, to my knowledge, been systematically explored. The sequence from Nietzsche to Derrida has, I believe, a unity of its own—a unity that helps make sense of a large part of recent Western intellectual history. With Nietzsche something finishes and something new begins, while with Derrida the new beginning seems to me to come to an end. Moreover, this sequence connects in a number of interesting ways with other, increasingly well-accepted realities in our intellectual history. Looking to the past, it connects with what has come to be called the "failure" of the Enlightenment.[1] Looking to the present, it connects with

many of the assumptions that late twentieth-century artists and intellectuals still hold. These assumptions—the assumptions of modernism and postmodernism—are put forward in their most powerful and consistent form by the thinkers with whom we are concerned here. To examine these assumptions as they appear in Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, and Derrida is to examine views that are still current. In criticizing these thinkers, we are indirectly criticizing ourselves.

Aestheticism

Looking at these thinkers together, one is struck by how they are all peculiarly aesthetic, or "aestheticist," in their sensibility. This may not always be clear when one looks at them separately, but we shall have occasion enough to see that a multitude of connections exists between them, and that considering them as a group makes a great deal of sense. As it is usually employed, the word *aestheticism* denotes an enclosure within a self-contained realm of aesthetic objects and sensations, and hence also denotes a separation from the "real world" of nonaesthetic objects. Here, however, I am using the word in a sense that is almost diametrically opposed to its usual sense. I am using it to refer not to the condition of being enclosed within the limited territory of the aesthetic, but rather to an attempt to expand the aesthetic to embrace the whole of reality. To put it in another way, I am using it to refer to a tendency to see "art" or "language" or "discourse" or "text" as constituting the primary realm of human experience. This tendency has become pervasive in much recent avant-garde thought. The irony that pervaded modernism tried to uncover a Man or Culture or Nature or History underlying the flux of surface experience. In postmodernism, this has given way to a new irony, one that holds these erstwhile realities to be textual fictions. We are seen as cut off from "things" and confined to a confrontation with "words" alone.

At this preliminary point, I cannot proceed further in defining the aestheticist stance. For it is a question of different modes of aestheticism, and a further attempt at definition would embroil us prematurely in these differences. To these different aestheticisms, we might plausibly attach the names Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, and Derrida. But in order to help the reader see more clearly what I have in mind, I can at least point to a few characteristically aestheticist statements in the four writers in question.

When Nietzsche says in *The Birth of Tragedy* that "it is only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* that existence and the world are eternally justified," and when in a *Nachlass* fragment he characterizes "the world" as "a work

of art that gives birth to itself," he is adumbrating an aestheticist position. This is also true of the various *Nachlass* fragments in which he suggests, or seems to suggest, that "facts" and "things" are created, Orpheus-like, by the interpreter himself. Nietzsche expressed these possibilities in a somewhat tentative way, and it is not my argument that he was unequivocally an aestheticist. Rather, aestheticism is one of the possibilities that his work suggests (though for us, I think, it is the most compelling possibility).

By way of contrast, in later Heidegger the notion of the ontologically creative potential of "art" becomes absolutely decisive. In the middle 1930s, Heidegger came to lay great stress on "the work of art." Extremely important in this regard is his essay "The Origin of the Work of Art," which he gave in lecture form in 1935–36 and published in 1950 as the first essay in *Holzwege* (*Woodpaths*). Here art is seen as bringing worlds into existence. As Heidegger puts it, "towering up within itself, the work opens up a *world* and keeps it abidingly in force." After the 1930s, Heidegger characteristically attributes this world-creating force not just to the work of art but to "language" in general.

The French successors to Nietzsche and Heidegger also work within—and now, increasingly, against—aestheticism. The aestheticist foundations of Foucault's position are most clearly visible in his first major work, *History of Madness* (1961). A recurring motif in this book is Foucault's concern with the experience of the artist and with the embodiment of that experience in the work of art. But whereas in Heidegger the relationship between work and world is harmonious, in Foucault it is antithetical. Thus, Foucault tells us at the end of *History of Madness* that from now on "the world . . . becomes culpable (for the first time in the Western world) in relation to the work; it is now arraigned by the work, obliged to order itself by its language, compelled by it to a task of recognition, of reparation." As those familiar with Foucault's career will know, this incipient concern with "the work of art" soon gave way to a concern with "discourse." But Foucault's "discourse," like Heidegger's "language," stands as the successor to the work of art. Just as, in the post-Romantic aesthetics upon which these writers depend, the work of art creates its own reality, so too does language/discourse. One thinks of Nietzsche's reflections on the relationship between "fact" and "interpretation," which I shall consider in Part I, below. Art, language, discourse, and interpretation can be viewed as ultimately the same. Each makes the world that ostensibly it only represents.

Finally, there is Derrida, perhaps the most puzzling and elusive of the four. When Derrida avers that "there is nothing outside of the text," he is

working within an aestheticist perspective, even as he parodistically tries to reduce that perspective to absurdity. Such, in brief, is the strand of thought that we shall here explore.

My reading of Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, and Derrida is unusual. But it is not altogether new, for both the aestheticist notion itself and the particular genealogy that I attribute to it have been anticipated by other writers. I am thinking especially of Stanley Rosen's book, *Nihilism: A Philosophical Essay.* Rosen published the book in 1969, before Foucault and Derrida were at all well known outside France. Not surprisingly, he says nothing about these two more recent writers. But he discusses Nietzsche and Heidegger in some detail. From the standpoint of the present study, this discussion has two main points of interest. Firstly, Rosen repeatedly emphasizes the role that the poetic plays in the work of both writers. He sees the notion of radical creativity as central to their projects. He refers to Nietzsche's "cosmogonical poetry" and to the "onto-poetic historicism" that both writers share.[2] Secondly, he connects Nietzsche and Heidegger with the earlier project of Kant. In particular, he sees Kant's third critique, the *Critique of Judgment,* as foreshadowing the positions of the two writers.[3] In both respects, I find Rosen to be importantly right, though we shall not be able to see precisely how he is right until we have worked our way through all four thinkers.

Yet, my focus is different from Rosen's. Rosen attempts to show that nihilism has arisen because we have gotten away from the classical linkage of the good, the true, and the beautiful. He contends that in modern intellectual life the concept of reason has been illegitimately separated from that of good, and that the two need to be brought back together again. I cannot aspire to such a wide-ranging critique of the Western tradition. Instead, I see the present book as a study of the continuing impact on us of the thought of the Enlightenment. I see Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, and Derrida (but especially the first two of these thinkers) as responding (at one remove) to the Enlightenment pretension to construct a science of society modeled on natural science. The intellectual problems that this Enlightenment project gave rise to are most clearly embodied in the writings of Kant. Rosen's complaint about the separation from each other of the good, the true, and the beautiful is translatable into a complaint about the Kantian separation of the practical, the theoretical, and the aesthetic. Indeed, we can see our four thinkers as responding, both positively and negatively, to Kant—or, more accurately, to the tradition to which Kant gave rise. They engage in a rebellion against Kant, even as they exploit the intellectual resources that Kant gave them.

Romanticism

To refer to Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, and Derrida in this way is implicitly to connect them with another movement that rebelled against Kant and yet used Kant's own resources in that rebellion—namely, Romanticism. The Romantics were the first to argue that the Enlightenment had failed—and not for adventitious reasons but because its program was fundamentally flawed. I am acutely aware, let it be noted, that nothing is more difficult to pin down than Romanticism. The term is usually applied to certain aspects of European intellectual life in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries—between, say, 1790 and 1850. But just which aspects of intellectual life in that period actually define the movement is a matter of much disagreement.

This is so partly because Romanticism took different forms in the different countries in which it appeared. In England, for example, it was almost entirely an aesthetic movement, concerned with breaking down artistic and poetic conventions that its protagonists regarded as unnatural and stultifying. In France, under Rousseau's inspiration, it was mainly a protest against *social* convention, with the aesthetic aspects of the movement (often dated from the first performance of Victor Hugo's *Hernani* in 1830) coming very late. Finally, in Germany it began as an aesthetic movement but quickly broadened out to become an explicit and comprehensive world-view. Moreover, within each country there were great differences between the individual sponsors of the movement. In consequence, it is extremely difficult to isolate any single collection of beliefs that one might willingly identify as the Romantic credo. This difficulty has led some commentators to argue that there were Romanticisms, but no "Romanticism" in the singular, and that its use as a general term ought to be abandoned.[4]

But whatever the problems with the term, in the context of the present study its use cannot be avoided. Fortunately, we do not need to define in all its complexity the whole of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century intellectual history. We need only look at the Romantic period with an eye to the connection with crisis thought. For our prime concern is with Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, and Derrida, not with their precursors.

What is first of all worthy of note is the extent to which intellectuals circa 1800 saw themselves as living in a period of radical change. Looking back on these years from the perspective of the late twentieth century, we continue to see them as decisive in the shaping of the modern world. Politically, we still live in the shadow of the so-called Atlantic Revolution—

American and Western European—of the late eighteenth century. And beneath the clear disjunctions occurring in the politics of that time, we can also detect the workings of longer-term economic and demographic forces that were destined to bring into being the distinctly urban and industrial civilization that dominates the modern West. The social and political changes evident by the early nineteenth century had a great impact on intellectuals in that period.

But however important these changes were, the fact remains that ideas also have a history of their own. Looking at the particular history in question here, one is struck by the degree to which it can be viewed as historically independent. One can understand this history without continually referring to social and political events, though admittedly those events did impart an air of urgency to it. Leonard Krieger notes how the Enlightenment synthesis was already showing signs of dissolution as early as the 1770s, well before the social and political upheavals of the last years of the century.[5] It is tempting to regard this dissolution as a kind of organic process. But such a view is relatively unilluminating. I prefer to see the shift from the Enlightenment to its successoral movements not as a natural process of decay and rejuvenation but rather as a conscious attempt to bring to light and to respond to theoretical inadequacies in the Enlightenment position. In short, it is a matter of the "failure" of the Enlightenment, and of various attempts to confront that failure. Viewed from this perspective, the decline of the French Revolution into Terror might be seen as merely the most striking manifestation of the inadequacy of the Enlightenment's social, moral, and political theory.

Certainly, this was the way that many thinkers of the time, including those whom we consider Romantics, saw the matter. Focusing on the inability of Enlightenment thought to provide the hoped-for synthesis, they viewed their own time as an age not of established truth but of transition. The notion that European consciousness was on the way to something fundamentally new and unprecedented was decisive for the major intellectual projects of the time. A similar conviction is decisive for the four thinkers with whom we are concerned here, with one crucial difference. For whereas the Romantics and their contemporaries entertained a good deal of hope for the future, Nietzsche and his successors have not. The notion of an "age of transition" entails a *limited* crisis, a crisis contained by a unifying dialectic or by some similar promise of return. Nietzsche and his successors find no such promise. They are thus linked to the Romantics, but at the same time divided from them.

A second point of contact between the Romantics and the four thinkers

at issue here is to be found in the role played by the aesthetic. As Erich Auerbach points out, Romanticism "presents rather a unity of poetic atmosphere than a systematic unity whose contours can be clearly delineated."[6] From the point of view of the present study, the aesthetic or poetic character of Romanticism is extremely important. It is not simply that the poet and artist, now liberated from the arid rules of a restrictive and overly conventionalized classicism, was seen as the epitome of Romantic freedom. This was certainly an important aspect of the Romantic view, but of greater interest to us is the elevation not only of the artist but of art itself, not only of the singer but the song. Many Romantic thinkers saw art as a manifestation, even a source, of truth—one that rivaled and ultimately surpassed the analytical reason of the Enlightenment. Wordsworth, with his intimations of immortality and his animadversions on analysis ("We murder to dissect"), is the representative of this position most familiar to the reader of English. Consider also Shelley's "Defence of Poetry," with its ringing assertion that poets are "the unacknowledged legislators of the world." The German Romantics were even more insistent on the central role that poetry played in human culture, as we shall see. Finally, one needs to note how the Romantic idea of genius, with its stress on the unconscious, unlearnable character of artistic creation, appeared to suggest that even the artist himself was unequal to his work. Thus, art was elevated above artist. As the objective embodiment of fleeting, inarticulate insight, art was seen as allowing access to a dimension of reality from which the merely analytical understanding was entirely barred. Finding its highest expression in poetry, art pushed well beyond the limiting confines of the calculative and prosaic spirit of the Enlightenment.

I am well aware that the connection that I wish to establish between the Romantics on the one hand and Nietzsche and his successors on the other will evoke challenge. The problem is not that the connection has never been made before, but rather that it has been made with an all too polemical intent. One thinks especially of Georg Lukács's *Destruction of Reason,* which presents Nietzsche and Heidegger as participants in an 'irrationalist" current of thought having its roots in Schelling.[7] *The Destruction of Reason* is surely the crudest of Lukács's writings. Nonetheless, Lukács seems to me to be on the right track in attempting to find the antecedents of their thought in Romanticism.

Of our four thinkers, Nietzsche is of most interest for this problem of antecedents. He inaugurates the strand of thought with which we are concerned in this study, and as its inaugurator he stands closest to what precedes it. In my essay on Nietzsche, I shall explain how, exactly, I view his

project. This will allow me to consider in some detail its affinities with and differences from the earlier Romantic project. I cannot anticipate that task here. Instead, leaving my own Nietzsche interpretation in abeyance, I shall content myself with appealing to the sound scholarship of two other interpreters, Ernst Behler and Benjamin Bennett. Both have explored, with great tact and learning, the relation between Nietzsche and the Romantics.

In his very substantial essay, "Nietzsche and the Early Romantic School," Behler examines the connection between Nietzsche's thought and the thought of those figures who, in the years 1795–1800, gathered around the journal *Athenaeum:* Friedrich and August Wilhelm Schlegel, Novalis, Wackenroder, Tieck, and Schleiermacher. Behler demonstrates that many themes that are importantly present in Nietzsche's writings appeared earlier in the writings of the Schlegel circle. He notes a similar cult of the mythical, manifesting itself in the search for a "new mythology," a similar divinization of art, a similar scorn of philistinism, a similar predilection for a fragmentary or aphoristic style, a similar desire for an "aesthetic revolution" based on a recovery of the Greek spirit, a similar search for an "aesthetic thinking," and a similar anticipation of a "philosophy of the future" that would somehow draw on the resources of art.[8] As is well known, throughout most of his intellectual career Nietzsche attacked "Romanticism." One of the great merits of Behler's essay is his account of what Nietzsche seems to have had in mind in his use of this term. Certainly, he did *not* have in mind the early German Romantics.[9]

Bennett deals with similar issues in his essay, "Nietzsche's Idea of Myth: The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Eighteenth-Century Aesthetics." But whereas Behler focuses on the affinities between Nietzsche and Friedrich Schlegel,Bennett emphasizes those between Nietzsche and that proto-Romantic, Friedrich Schiller. Bennett sees Nietzsche's idea of myth as an extension of Schiller's idea of art—as "an attempt to go further toward Schiller's avowed but not achieved goal, toward a conception of absolute validity and necessity in art, a conception of art as the true generating center of human existence, serving no purpose higher than itself."[10]

In short, important connections can indeed be established between Nietzsche and the late eighteenth-century proto-Romantics and Romantics. They are united, most obviously, by their common aesthetic concern. In fact, it was the late eighteenth-century thinkers who invented aesthetics as a field of thought. Prior to that time, there were many attempts at the philosophical criticism of art. One prominent example of this was the abbé Dubos's *Réflexions critiques sur la poésie et sur la peinture* (first

edition, 1719). But there was little or nothing that could be called aesthetics in the sense of a philosophical consideration of art as such. Most works focused, as the *Réflexions critiques* did, on one or more particular arts, not on art in general. Only toward the end of the century did a general, philosophical aesthetics become established. The rise of such an aesthetics was a matter of immense significance for the thought of the time, especially in Germany. As Wilhelm Windelband notes in his classic *History of Philosophy*, "problems and conceptions of aesthetics" now came to play a decisive role in German philosophy: "aesthetic principles gained the mastery, and the motifs of scientific thought became interwoven with those of artistic vision to produce grand poetical creations in the sphere of abstract thought."[11] This development is significant for aestheticism, for it was on the ground of aesthetics that aestheticism came into being.

Kant

At this point, it becomes necessary to recur to Kant, who stands as the crucial linking figure between the Enlightenment, Romanticism, and the new thought initiated by Nietzsche. As one recent commentator notes, Nietzsche wrote in the wake of the "Kantian revolution."[12] In Nietzsche's eyes, Kant was a deeply subversive thinker, who had unwittingly undermined the optimistic logic of the Enlightenment (see, e.g., *B. T.* chap. 18; *NBW*, p. 112). And it is interesting how important a role Kant plays in the writings of Heidegger, Foucault, and Derrida. As I have noted, all four thinkers can be viewed as attempting, in one way or another, to respond to Kant. But Nietzsche and his successors were far from being the first to respond to this thinker. On the contrary, the honor of priority goes to the Romantics, whom Kant heralded without in any way intending to do so. To understand Kant's importance for the emergence of aestheticism, we must look at his project within the wider context of Enlightenment thought. Kant is in some ways a profoundly ambivalent philosopher. His ambivalence is perhaps best seen in the light of the tension between his first and second critiques, the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) and the *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788). In the former work, he explores the territory of theoretical, or scientific, reason, analyzing to its very limits our understanding of the empirical world of nature. In the latter work, he explores the territory of practical, or moral, reason, seeking to constitute an independent moral realm.

We need not concern ourselves here with the details of Kant's theories of science and of morality. Rather, we are concerned with the more gen-

eral problem of the relationship of the two theories to each other—a problem (admittedly, not the only problem to come out of Kant) deeply felt by the Romantics and their successors. The problem can be posed in the following way. Natural science attributes a determinism to the objects of its concern. If things were free rather than determined, they could not be the objects of science. Newton was able to explain the workings of the physical universe in terms of the theory of universal gravitation because the objects within that universe operate according to the pre-given laws of nature. Central to the whole project of Enlightenment thought was the ambition to do for the human world what Newton had done for the natural world. In other words, enlightened philosophers aspired to construct a science of society analogous to Newton's science of nature. At the same time, the philosophers of the Enlightenment also believed in the legitimacy of moral codes. But the existence of a moral code presupposes that people are free to govern their own actions, since entities incapable of governing their own actions obviously cannot be judged in moral terms. There was thus a radical contradiction between the Enlightenment project for a science of society on the one hand and its continuing belief in morality and freedom on the other.

To state the problem in another way, science can be seen as dealing with a realm of unfree objects, and morality as dealing with a realm of free subjects. Posing the disjunction in this way, we can place Kant within the broader context of post-Cartesian thought. Descartes views the world in rigidly dualistic terms: a substance that thinks but has no extension confronts a substance that has extension but does not think. Thus, in both the Cartesian and the Kantian perspectives there is a sharp dichotomy between subject and object. It is true that Kant attacked Descartes's view that mind and body are separate in substance. But looking at him in broader perspective, we can see that he was simply carrying out a further development of the Cartesian frame of reference. Moreover, by dealing explicitly with the problem of morality—as Descartes did not—he made glaringly obvious the contradictions raised by the Enlightenment project for a science of society.

Readers familiar with Heidegger will be well aware of this way of locating Kant historically. In *Being and Time* (1927), Heidegger is largely concerned with attacking what he sees as the modern West's deeply ingrained tendency to look at the world in terms of the subject/object division. Heidegger traces this tendency back to Descartes; and whatever the differences between the two thinkers, he sees Kant as continuing along the same road. Against the Cartesian and Kantian insistence on looking at

the world in terms of the subject/object division, he proposes the notion of "Being-in-the-world." As will be seen in the Heidegger section of the present book, I am much more interested in the later Heidegger than in the Heidegger of *Being and Time,* for only in his later writings does he turn in an aestheticist direction. But the concern with the subject/object division, so well epitomized in the tension between the "practical" and the "theoretical" in Kant, is of tremendous importance for Heidegger throughout his career.

It is also important for Nietzsche, Foucault, and Derrida. To be sure, the preoccupation with circumventing the subject/object division is less obvious in these other writers than it is in Heidegger. But it is nonetheless present, particularly in their various discussions of the process of interpretation and in their polemics against (and residual attraction to) phenomenology. In short, there is an important connection between Kant and our four thinkers. All four can be seen as working against Kant, as trying to respond in an un-Kantian way to a problem that Kant made obvious. Nor were they the first to concern themselves with this problem of the subject/object opposition. On the contrary, the German idealist philosophers were preoccupied by precisely this issue. In their respective philosophical systems, Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel all tried to attain a unity of subject and object, of ego and non-ego. And it was not only the philosophers who became caught up in the issue. When Wordsworth notes that it was his attempt to apply "formal *proof*" to matters of morality that brought about the breakdown in which he "yielded up moral questions in despair," he, too, shows how preoccupied he was by the question of how a free, moral subject can exist within the deterministic world of science.[13]

If Kant, more than any other eighteenth-century thinker, poses this problem in a clear and systematic manner, he also seems to suggest a solution to it. Indeed, he seems to suggest several solutions, though only one of these is of any interest to us here. In the eyes of many of Kant's readers, his third critique provided a way out of the dilemma that the first and second critiques had so baldly posed. Admittedly, the *Critique of Judgment* is far less forceful and original than the two critiques that preceded it. As an intellectual performance, it is clearly inferior to them, especially to the first. Yet, it had a greater impact on Kant's contemporaries than did the first two critiques. It proved immensely suggestive for poets, artists, philosophers, and aesthetic theorists alike.

From the perspective of the present study, the *Critique of Judgment* is important because it unequivocally maintains the autonomy of aesthetic

judgment. In so doing, it appears to suggest that there exists an independent realm of the aesthetic, a realm quite distinct from the other realms of morality and of nature. On the one hand, Kant opposes those previous theorists, such as Hutcheson and Shaftesbury, who by portraying both aesthetic judgments and moral judgments as matters of feeling or sentiment had in effect assimilated the former to the latter. On the other hand, he opposes any tendency to assimilate art to physiology or psychology, as would have been the case had he identified aesthetic pleasure with sensual pleasure. Thus, he diverges from such seventeenth- and eighteenth-century writers as Saint-Evrémond and La Mettrie. This divergence is reflected in his definition of aesthetic pleasure as "*disinterested* satisfaction" (*interesseloses Wohlgefallen*) and in his conception of form in art as "purposiveness *without purpose*" (*Zweckmässigkeit ohne Zweck*). To be sure, Kant denies that there exists any third realm of being, distinct from the realms of nature and freedom.[14] Nonetheless, he can be read—and *was* read—as insisting on the existence of an autonomous realm of the aesthetic, a realm whose function is to mediate between the other two. Something of this sense of art as mediator underlies Nietzsche's contention, in *The Birth of Tragedy,* that in aesthetics "the whole opposition between the subjective and objective . . . is altogether irrelevant" (*BT,* chap. 5; *NBW,* p. 52).

A second matter, in addition to mediation, is the issue of whether art in any way conveys truth. Kant's insistence on the autonomy of aesthetic judgment leads him to deny that art has "truth value." Art is a matter of pleasure (albeit a disinterested pleasure), not of knowledge. At the same time, however, some of his statements in the *Critique of Judgment* can be taken as contradicting this view. For he does hint that while art certainly cannot supply us with knowledge in any logical sense, it can put us into contact with something that cannot be fully presented in experience or grasped through concepts.

Note Kant's contention that aesthetic judgments make a claim to universal validity. In other words, when someone says, "this is beautiful," he is saying that the judgment that he has just made ought to have universal assent. Thus, a beautiful object is one that excites a delight that is not only disinterested but also necessary and universal. In establishing this point, as he attempts to do in the final stages of his transcendental deduction of the judgment of taste, Kant touches on issues of morality. Specifically, he argues that underlying the judgment of aesthetic taste is the concept of the purposiveness of nature. The "determining ground" of this concept, he

says, "lies perhaps in the concept of that which may be regarded as the supersensible substrate of humanity."[15]

This is the same substrate that he uncovers, through his analysis of our moral judgments, in the *Critique of Practical Reason.* In consequence, beauty is "the symbol of the morally good."[16] Only when we view it in this light can we grasp its claim to universal acceptance. Beauty thus points toward the realm of morality, of which it gives sensual intimations. Also important is Kant's conception of the "aesthetic idea." An "aesthetic idea" is a "representation of the imagination which occasions much thought" but for which "an adequate concept can never be found," and which consequently "cannot be completely encompassed and made intelligible by language."[17] This conception points toward a view of art as expressing the inexpressible, as manifesting the ineffable. Thus it, too, suggests that art is something more than a mere purveyor of pleasure.

Schiller, Schelling

In rather different, yet at the same time in complementary ways, Schiller and Schelling develop and extend Kant's discussion of the aesthetic. Schiller is important in the present context because he was the first to take up Kant's inchoate suggestions of a higher role for art. As Richard Kroner puts it, Schiller was the first to see "that 'aesthetic unity' has shown itself to be active not only in art but also in thought itself"—the first to see "that the philosopher can only entirely fulfill his calling if he not only separates, but also once again unites what was separated."[18] In his highly influential *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1794–95), Schiller puts forward nothing less than a history of the whole of Western culture. His heroes are the Greeks, whose lives, in his view, combined fullness of form with fullness of content, the "first youth of imagination" with "the manhood of reason." By way of contrast, modern man is divided from himself, for the unity of human nature has been destroyed by the advance of culture.[19] In short, Schiller is one of the first theorists of the idea of modern alienation, now a commonplace of cultural commentary.

Schiller argues that the cure for this alienation lies in art. He holds that there are two fundamental drives in man: the sensuous drive (*sinnliche Trieb*), which is always pressing for change; and the formal drive (*Formtrieb*), which insists on "unity and persistence."[20] Both need to have limits placed upon them, the former so that it does not encroach upon the domain of moral law, the latter so that it does not encroach upon

that of feeling. Stated in slightly different terms, both need to be relaxed, but this relaxation must spring from an abundance of feeling and sensation rather than from physical or spiritual impotence. Such a harmonization can only be accomplished by the operation of a third, "play" drive (*Spieltrieb*), which exerts upon the psyche a constraint that is at the same time moral and physical. This constraint annuls all contingency. Indeed, it annuls constraint itself, setting man both morally and physically free.

According to Schiller, it is in art that the play drive emerges. Whereas the object of the sensuous drive is life and that of the formal drive form, the play drive has as its object "living form." The concept of living form designates "all the aesthetic qualities of phenomena and, in a word, what in the widest sense of the term we call *beauty*."[21] Only in the play of art are the sensuous drive and the formal drive brought together. Only in contemplating the beautiful is man harmonized, for only here does the psyche find a happy medium between the moral law on the one hand and physical exigency on the other. Beauty, for Schiller, offers us an instance of moral freedom being compatible with sense. It leads the sensuous man back to form and thought, while bringing the spiritual man back to the world of sense.

In all of this, Schiller hews to Kant's distinction between the aesthetic and the nonaesthetic. He treats art as a matter of *Schein,* of semblance or illusion. It is the "free play" of art, not any supposed revelation of truth, that draws us to it. Indeed, he explicitly declares that any blurring of the distinction between art and not-art is dangerous. In his tenth letter, he entertains the objection to his theory that "just because taste is always concerned with form, and never with content, it finally induces in the mind a dangerous tendency to neglect reality [*Realität*] altogether, and to sacrifice truth and morality to the alluring dress in which they appear. All substantial difference between things is lost, and appearance alone determines their worth."[22] In his twenty-sixth letter, he tries to meet this objection, noting that there are two kinds of semblance, the aesthetic and the logical. Logical semblance is marked by a confusion with "actuality [*Wirklichkeit*] and truth." In aesthetic semblance, on the other hand, we distinguish between semblance and truth, and love the semblance because it is semblance and not because we take it to be something better. Aesthetic semblance is play, while logical semblance is mere deception. Nor can aesthetic semblance ever be prejudicial to truth, for "one is never in danger of substituting it for truth, which is after all the only way in which truth can ever be impaired."[23] Indeed, Schiller sees the delight in pure formal beauty as protecting the autonomy of truth, for by keeping sem-

blance clear of actuality, it at the same time sets actuality free from semblance. In this way, it preserves intact "the frontiers of truth."[24]

Schiller is thus not an aestheticist. That is to say, he does not take up a position wherein notions articulated on the basis of a distinction between the aesthetic and the nonaesthetic are then employed as if that distinction had not been postulated. On the contrary, he explicitly asserts that the poet must not "transgress his proper limits."[25] But Schiller's was only one of several possible ways of moving beyond the *Critique of Judgment.* In their development of Kant, his *Aesthetic Letters* suggested to a number of younger thinkers that art could indeed be a source of truth, and that philosophy ought in consequence to become aesthetic. Such a view was expressed by Hölderlin, for example.[26] It also finds expression in a document crucial for the history of German idealism, the so-called "Earliest Systematic Program of German Idealism." Dating from 1796–97, and probably written by Hegel, this document anticipates the systems that Hegel and Schelling would construct a few years later.[27] Most important from our perspective is the fact that the author of the "Systematic Program" declares that the highest Idea is that of beauty and that the "highest act of reason" is "an aesthetic act." It follows that "the philosophy of the spirit is an aesthetical philosophy" and that the philosopher "must possess just as much aesthetic power as the poet."[28]

It was the Schelling of circa 1800–1803, however, who most insisted on the need to turn philosophy in an aesthetic direction. The crucial work for this theme is his *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800). Schelling starts out from the problem that Kant's philosophy had made so obvious, that of relating subject and object—which is also the problem of relating freedom and necessity, ego and nature, Idea and actuality, practical and theoretical. He finds the means for overcoming these oppositions in the *Critique of Judgment.* With respect to natural philosophy (which does not concern us here), he finds this bridge in the section of the third critique dealing with teleological judgment. With respect to transcendental philosophy, which does concern us, he finds it in the conception of art that Kant puts forward in the critique of aesthetic judgment.

But whereas in Kant the primacy of the aesthetic is only formal or regulative, in Schelling it is substantive. Schelling contends that nature on the one hand and the work of art on the other are the product of one and the same activity, an activity that is in its essence aesthetic. The only difference between the world and the work of art is that in the former the creative activity is unconscious whereas in the latter it is conscious. As Schelling puts it, "the objective world is only the original, still uncon-

scious poetry of the spirit."[29] In short, Schelling anticipates Nietzsche's views on the aesthetic character of reality. Whereas Nietzsche's closest predecessor, Schopenhauer, sees the world as "idea" or "representation" (*Vorstellung*), Nietzsche, like Schelling, sees it as a work of art. Though it is to Schopenhauer that Nietzsche is customarily linked, he in fact reaches back to the earlier, Schellingian moment in the history of Romanticism.

Given Schelling's conviction that reality is poetic, we are not surprised to find that he sees philosophy as culminating in art. Philosophy starts out from the principle of absolute identity, as in A = A. Absolute identity can be grasped in self-consciousness, for in self-consciousness the subject of thought and the object of thought are one and the same: ego = ego. This identity can only be grasped directly, through intellectual intuition; it cannot be grasped indirectly, through the mediation of concepts. Hence, intellectual intuition is "the organ of all transcendental thought."[30] But this raises a problem, for the intuition of absolute identity in the ego is purely subjective. Where is its external, objective manifestation to be found? In Schelling's view, it is to be found in the "aesthetic product." The aesthetic product starts out from "the feeling of a seemingly insoluble contradiction." But it ends (as all artists, and all who share their inspiration, know) in a feeling of infinite harmony that serves to indicate "the complete resolution of the contradiction."[31]

In other words, the aesthetic product gives us a vision of identity. Indeed, it gives us an objectification of identity, since it clearly exists outside the ego. As Schelling puts it, the "generally recognized and entirely undeniable objectivity of intellectual intuition is art itself. For aesthetic intuition is nothing other than intellectual intuition become objective. The work of art only reflects to me what otherwise is reflected through nothing, that absolute identity which already in the ego has divided itself."[32] In consequence,

> art is the sole organon, both true and permanent, and document of philosophy, which always and in continually new forms sets forth what philosophy cannot represent outwardly. . . . For this . . . reason art occupies the highest place for the philosopher, since it opens up to him the holy of holies, so to speak, where in primal union, as in a single flame, there burns what is sundered in nature and history and what must eternally flee from itself in life and action as in thought.[33]

Only art can make objective what the philosopher represents in thought. Schelling therefore suggests that philosophy, having completed this task of representation, is about to return, along with all the other sciences, to