Philosophy After Postmodernism

Civilized values and the
scope of knowledge

Paul Crowther

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Has the idea of civilization become outmoded? Do such things as postmodern cultural relativism and the atrocities of September 11th 2001 mean that it is no longer possible to talk of progress in the fields of knowledge and value?

In this book Paul Crowther answers no to both questions. Formulating a new approach to philosophy which, instead of simply rejecting postmodern thought, tries to assimilate some of its main features, the author identifies conceptual links between value, knowledge, personal identity, and civilization understood as a process of cumulative advance.

To establish these links Crowther deploys a refoundational mode of analytic philosophy influenced by Cassirer. This approach recontextualizes precisely those aspects of postmodernism which appear, superficially, to be fuel for the relativist fire. This method also enables him to illuminate some of the great practical dangers of the postmodern era – most notably the widespread inability or unwillingness to distinguish between signs and reality. Through these means Crowther renews analytic philosophy as a searching form of conceptual and cultural critique that pushes beyond the limits of postmodern thought.

Essential reading for advanced students and academics interested in Twentieth Century Philosophy, *Philosophy After Postmodernism* will also be of value to scholars working in the fields of Cultural Studies and Sociology.

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Acknowledgements

Introduction

Postmodernity, perspectivalism and supermodernism

Every age has its special vanity. In the case of 'postmodernity' this takes the form of an emphatic relativism (in all spheres of knowledge and value) which posits itself as a radical break with the foundationalist and utopian traditions of the modern intellectual world. I will analyse this relativism in detail as the present work progresses. Suffice it to say that it centres on the general notion that there is no perspective-free analysis of knowledge and value; or, to put it another way, that there is no theoretical framework which is not, in some way, fatally tainted by the particular nature of its socio-cultural origins and by the complexities of signification as such. All that we have are cognitive perspectives whose validity does not outreach the interests and prejudices of those who formulate them. Indeed, the very claim that there is a more general foundation to knowledge should itself be taken to be no more than the expression of a perspective based on white, male, middle-class, western, dominant-class interests. A number of related notions constellate around this central viewpoint – for example, the supposed 'ex-centricity' of the self and the primacy of signification in all cognitive contexts. And there are also many associated negative notions – such as the use of the terms 'metaphysics', 'high culture', and (even) 'modernist' itself, as terms of intellectual abuse.

Relativism of this kind has, unfortunately, become something of a dogma, especially in social and cultural theory and discussions of the arts. Derrida, Foucault, Lacan or whoever are taken to have 'shown' the bankruptcy of foundationalist theories. This dogmatic acceptance is powerfully consolidated by the congruence between some of its key elements and broader tendencies in contemporary society. The information and media revolutions, and the speed of societal change consequent upon them, for example, might seem of themselves to 'deconstruct' the fixity of cognitive categories and of personal and social identity. Radical technoscientific change seems to go hand in hand with 'epistemological breaks' and the like.

Now there is a genuine parallel of sorts involved here – and I shall consider it later on. However, I would claim that, in fact, contemporary relativism does not mark a break with modernist foundationalism, but is, rather, an unrecognized and one-sided emphasis on hitherto neglected aspects of it.

This claim can be provisionally justified as follows. There are, indeed, many different cognitive perspectives which can be taken upon reality, but even

without reference to the question of their truth there is a deeper level of consistency involved. For one must ask how is it possible to have different cognitive perspectives? What factors are logically presupposed by this? Any answers to such questions have a claim to fundamental status precisely because they involve factors which are presupposed by any cognitive perspective whatsoever. For example, to be able to talk of 'different' perspectives itself presupposes stable criteria of sameness and differentiation whose application is enabled only by a stable ontology of re-identifiable phenomenal items in a unified spatio-temporal continuum. Fashionable relativism emphasizes the universality of cognitive perspectivalism, but is in denial about the foundational status of this claim and the broader stable ontology which makes it intelligible.

A broadly similar bad faith is operative in relation to value. Contemporary relativism is scathing of the universalist aspirations of the 'Enlightenment project' and affirms that the worth of value-systems is entirely relative to the social formations which produce them. However, this involves a presumption of equality which is actually made to carry a significant universalist load. The equal status of value-systems is taken to entail a respect for difference which demands that minority and marginalized social formations should be defended against the globalizing encroachment of dominant western value-systems. However, far from this involving an abandonment of the Enlightenment project, it is simply a narrowing of its focus on to group rights rather than individual ones. Again, a universalist feature is given a one-sided emphasis and presented as if it were some kind of radical anti-foundationalist position.

If these points are correct, they suggest that postmodernity is not at all the significant break which it is often taken to be. Indeed, we are now living in what – in cultural terms – would be far better described as *supermodernity*. This term is warranted insofar as the contemporary world continues to be driven by the same socio-economic force which was central to the creation of modernity, namely the market. (Indeed, answering to this force and its 'values' has now become a narrow criterion of 'modernization' in all aspects of social life, with the direst consequences.)

The term supermodern is also warranted by virtue of the fact (described above) that contemporary relativism is, in a sense, an obsessive narrowing of previously neglected modernist criteria into one-sided global principles. The fact that these are not recognized as (at least) neo-foundational but thought to be opposed to it is all the more testimony to the current *super* character of modernity. It is able to present and define itself as something putatively other than itself. It absorbs the opposition.

This carries terrible dangers both culturally and in terms of the continuation of the human species. Now, in this work I do not wish to carry the equation of postmodernity and supermodernity any further than the suggestions which I have just made. Neither do I pretend to undertake some exhaustive critique of every aspect of 'postmodern' thought. True, I will identify in more detail the weaknesses of contemporary relativism and, most notably, the phenomenon of what in later chapters will be called 'symbolic arrest'. However, my overriding

goal will be *to develop a refoundational philosophy which learns from and assimilates opposing viewpoints rather than merely rejecting them outright.* By so doing, I will be able to develop the universalist dimension which is repressed by one-sided contemporary relativism. This will hopefully prepare the philosophical conditions for both understanding and creating what comes after the postmodern/supermodern phenomenon. The means to this will be a theory of civilization and the justified claims of value and knowledge correlated with it, which can bridge the seemingly ever-widening divide between analytic philosophy and other traditions of philosophy and social theory.

Part I

Civilization, postmodernity and philosophy

1 The intrinsic value and scope of civilization

Introduction

Why should the connection between civilized values, knowledge and postmodernity form the context for a philosophical project? At first sight, the relationship between philosophy and civilization as such seems relatively straightforward. Philosophy is one branch of the multitude of cultural activities which – in concert with great socio-economic and technological transformations – form the overall field of human civilization.

This is a valid claim, but philosophy's role goes deeper still. In certain epochs, philosophical works help inaugurate great changes in humanity's conception of its relation to the world. (The role of Aristotelian philosophy in shaping Renaissance culture and society, and the influence of Enlightenment thinkers in forming conceptions of the modern world are examples of this.)

Philosophy also has an even deeper significance for civilization insofar as it can identify those factors in self-consciousness which – in concert with the regulation of animal drives – form the basis of the civilizing process. (This claim and, indeed, other general points made in this chapter will be developed in much more detail as my book as a whole progresses.)

For present purposes, however, it is sufficient to note that specific characteristics of the postmodern world demand that philosophy not only should intervene in the shaping of contemporary circumstances but should do so precisely on the basis of its power to reveal those constitutive factors in self-consciousness which have just been alluded to. The reason for this is that civilization is now at a crossroads. It has the possibility of further development, but equally it faces great dangers. In this book I will work out a philosophical position which is of general significance but which can also assimilate and criticize key characteristics of the postmodern world. Hopefully this will assist in the creation of an intellectual context where that which comes after postmodernism can, in part, be critically directed. The alternative is an age of supermodernity where uncontrolled technological innovation threatens not only the civilizing process, but even the human species itself.

Now, in a previous work[1] I considered the relationship between postmodernism, aesthetics and to a lesser degree epistemology, in a provisional way. In particular, I argued that aesthetic experience has an integrative power which can

compensate for and stabilize the frequently noted fragmentation of postmodern sensibility. This analysis remains true, but is no longer, I think, decisive. As will be shown in due course, there is both a positive and a negative dimension to postmodernity, which necessitates a more critical response and a radicalizing of my basic philosophical position. In specific terms, this means a *refoundational philosophy*.

It should be emphasized that 'refoundational' used in this context does not mean a simple 'return' to some established system; nor does it mean an aspiration to total definitiveness in philosophical comprehension. Rather, it signifies a *constant historical re-interrogation of the conceptual preconditions of any possible experience*. Those constants which it articulates will all admit of more precise definition and subdivision, and will take on a new meaning in each historical context in which they are investigated. Refoundational philosophy, in other words, seeks an *active* universal content which both illuminates and is illuminated and developed by the places and times of its realization.

In the rest of this chapter my strategy will be as follows. Section i will present Norbert Elias's theory of the civilizing process and offer a defence of it against fashionable relativism. I shall also indicate, however, the need to give the process a more positive characterization. This is provided in section ii, where it is shown how the civilizing process is a development of avenues of intrinsic value bound up with four constitutive factors in self-consciousness. In section iii I go on to consider what criteria can be taken as evidence of greater or lesser degrees of civilization and identify both positive and negative factors in this respect. I also identify the historical paradox of civilization, namely the fact that the centralizing process which is so important for the positive factors very often involves that dimension of violence which is implicated in the worst of the negative factors.

I

For Elias the concept of civilization is a fusion of two ideas.[2] The first is the notion of that which is opposed to barbarity. The second, and much more instructive, notion is that of a process which admits of continuing development. The basis of this process consists of a complex interplay between four factors. The first is a network of drives bound up with our animal nature and encompassing such things as the satisfaction of hunger and thirst and the need to procreate. The second factor is the way in which the satisfaction of needs is constrained by our dependence on the natural environment. We need, for example, to search out or grow food and to construct shelters which can protect us from natural hazards. The third factor is a function of humans existing together in groups. Such existence involves an interdependence of individuals wherein both groups and individuals exert external social, economic or psychological constraint upon the behaviour of others. The fourth factor involves the capacity of individuals to exert self-regulation over their own animal drives, and ways of seeking out the means of physical subsistence. The development of

conscience, for example, is an instance of the former, and the development of powers of reason and rational planning is an instance of the latter.

Now, whilst the civilizing process involves an interplay between all the factors just described, the relation between external constraint and self-regulation is of particular importance. In the context of western civilization Elias traces a key trajectory whereby the scattered societies of early or proto-feudal times – dominated by a warrior class – are gradually pacified and integrated through the monopolization and centralization of fiscal and military resources in the courts of absolute monarchs. It is from this matrix that the modern state emerges.

Elias describes this trajectory and its possible continuing direction as follows:

> We see the following movement: first one castle stands against another, then territory against territory, then state against state, and appearing on the historical horizon today are the first signs of struggles for an integration of regions and masses of people on a still larger scale. We may surmise that with continuing integration even larger units will gradually be assembled under a stable government and internally pacified, and that they in their turn will turn their weapons outwards against human aggregates of the same kind until, with a further integration, a still greater reduction of distances, they too gradually grow together and world society is pacified.[3]

This macro-trajectory has correlated effects in micro-social terms, i.e. on the sensibility and behaviour of and personal relations between individual agents. It creates the conditions whereby such agency is able to adapt its own standards of conduct and drive control in self-regulatory terms.

One striking example of such self-regulation is the advent of eating with the fork after the eleventh century. According to Elias, this is not bound up with an awareness of hygiene, but rather with a 'standard of delicacy'[4] based on institutionalized feelings of displeasure, distaste, disgust and the like.

The 'standard of delicacy' here is of great importance, for it embodies a dimension of social cohesion which accentuates that macro-trajectory of social integration described earlier. In observing codes of manners and propriety *vis-à-vis* the regulation of basic animal drives and modes of realizing them, social agents achieve a level of self-control which stimulates social bonding of a non-aggressive kind or which displaces such aggression into symbolically secured arenas – such as the joust or tournament, or, later still, the world of sport. In this self-regulated behaviour instinctual energy is channelled into an activity of *symbolic display*. Those agents who have mastered such symbolic display achieve kudos and recognition from others insofar as it manifests the fact that they have advanced beyond the barbarous level of animality.

It should be emphasized that Elias's *oeuvre* extends his analysis of the civilizing process far beyond what I am able to indicate in this highly schematic account of his central argument. However, we have enough before us to subject that central argument to sustained philosophical scrutiny and development. Let us focus initially on his claim that the civilizing process defines itself in opposition to

perceived barbarity. We must ask *whose* perception is operative here. A fashionable contemporary relativist might object to Elias as follows.

The perceived 'barbarians' are those who are excluded by the ruling white male middle-class heterosexist patriarchy. Women, the lower-classes, racial and sexual minorities, non-European and (especially) tribal cultures are the 'barbaric' other in relation to how white male middle class (etc.) defines itself. What Elias finds in history (although he does not use this specific term) is a 'grand narrative', i.e. an underlying pattern whereby the human species moves towards a state of 'emancipation' which is, in fact, no more than the standardization of a set of values specific to the white male middle class. In particular, the rights and heterogeneity of life-patterns other than this dominant one are implicitly devalued and degraded.

A second objection to Elias's theory (of a more localized kind) might arise from a radicalization of Pierre Bourdieu's analyses of social distinction.[5] That symbolic display which functions as a cohesive factor in the micro-social aspect of the civilizing process is, in fact, no more than *a sign of difference*. Its function is not to civilize, but rather to justify a ruling class's belief in its own superiority. The symbolic display allows the ruling class to misrepresent itself as different from the lower orders on the grounds of culture, rather than on the *true* grounds of difference – namely its economic and social supremacy over the lower classes.

The third putative objection to Elias is an extreme refinement of an aspect of the fashionable relativist view. It holds that in the final analysis all that Elias should offer us is a descriptive account, i.e. one that should drop any notion of the 'barbaric' except insofar as it figures as an explicit concept in the self-understanding and activities of the specific historical agents (or groups thereof) which he is describing. Other than this, terms such as 'barbaric' have no prescriptive force. All we have are *different* forms of socio-cultural life, some of which *choose* to call themselves 'civilized' and which choose to regard other such forms of life as 'barbaric'.

In response to these objections, I shall first rehearse some further points from Elias's own writing and then formulate a much more systematic philosophical defence.

It is quite clear that, for Elias, the development of the civilizing process is by no means a necessary one. Western societies have developed differently, and they have no intrinsic 'right' to the status of civilized. Indeed, far from the process being some cheerful grand narrative of unfolding emancipation, Elias shows that it is a precarious achievement, often accompanied by barbaric reversals of the most unspeakable kind. (The case of Nazi Germany is such an example.) For Elias the civilizing process is not only precarious but also widely distributed, with various levels of accomplishment across the globe. It is something which both can cut across racial divides and social strata, and can also be implicated in the breaking down of barriers between such strata. Interestingly, Elias not only acknowledges that but even shows the way in which the codification of manners can function negatively so as to dress up oppressive social relations. However, his key point is that it does not *have to* function in this negative way. In an important

paper on 'Informalization and the Civilizing Process', for example, Elias analyses the way in which rigid codes of social conduct in twentieth-century Germany have been transformed for the better through new patterns of self-regulation.[6]

However, perhaps the best retort in Elias's writings to those attitudes exemplified in the first two objections is found in the following passage:

> If one wanted to try to reduce the key problem of any civilizing process to its simplest formula, then it could be said to be the problem of how people can manage to satisfy their elementary animalistic needs in their life together, without reciprocally destroying, frustrating, demeaning or in other ways harming each other time and time again in their search for this satisfaction – in other words, without fulfilment of the elementary needs of one person or group of people being achieved at the cost of another person or group.[7]

The civilizing process, in other words, is the sustained and painful endeavour to eliminate violence and its sources in ignorance and poverty. Elias does not offer magic formulae for how this endeavour might be brought to completion; rather, he maps the contours of its historical development and identifies the key factor which drives that development – namely *the development of socio-economic and general cultural conditions whereby people can take responsibility for their own lives*. If the civilizing process is to continue, this factor must find new forms of realization.

A reply on these lines to the putative objections noted earlier is not, as yet, absolutely compelling. There remains an element each from the first objection and the third objection *per se* which have not been answered. The first objection might be countered thus. Even if we allow that the civilizing process is of qualified worth, we must still emphasize its limitations. There are *many* so-called 'primitive' communities whose customs and rituals are 'barbaric' in Elias's sense. But surely we should acknowledge their worth and integrity as distinctive modes of being human.

Now there is nothing in Elias's notion of the civilizing process which necessitates the denial of this point. Indeed, this relativist objection itself implicitly presupposes an affirmation of that process. For it is only within the perspective of an advanced civilization that the claims to worth of more basic forms of social organization can be regarded with due respect. In the absence of a civilized sensibility of self-regulation such communities appear as *merely* different, i.e. to be regarded with utter indifference, or as a threat to be overcome. We ignore them, assimilate them or destroy them. (This, of course, is precisely the basis of Nazi tyranny.)

We are thus led to the problem of the third objection, which denies that values can be sufficiently derived from facts. On these terms, 'civilized' and 'non-civilized' societies are merely different from one another. Each will regard itself of worth, but the values so constructed are internal to each society. 'Civilized' and 'barbaric' or 'non-civilized' are too prescriptively weighted terms to carry real analytic significance. They suggest a difference based on *intrinsic* value, when, in reality, the only legitimate values are those which are determined by

specific social and practical contexts. Forget 'civilization' and 'barbarity' and talk *only* of 'difference'.

This extreme relativist position raises, of course, the profoundest questions about the nature of value *per se*. And, in this context, Elias's position is a little awkward. It is quite clear that he himself – with due acknowledgement to its many reversals and general fragility – regards the civilizing process as a desirable thing. In a sense, he is a liberal humanist of the old school. Unfortunately, in his accounts of 'self-regulation' and its concomitant social codes and symbolic displays he tends rather to emphasize the negative element – the dimension of self-restraint – without offering a philosophical justification of its claim to intrinsic value.

Now, to offer a fully comprehensive justification would require a book in itself. This said, it is still possible to formulate some key arguments which form the substance of a philosophical justification of civilization's claim to intrinsic value. I shall offer these in the next section.

II

The arguments focus initially on the nature of value. Since it makes no sense to describe mechanical processes *per se* as having value – either in themselves or in relation to one another – the context which makes the notion of value intelligible is that of the behavioural activity of specific sentient life-forms. However, not just any life-form will do in this respect. To invest something with value, a creature must be able to discriminate between things in terms of their relevance to its needs, and it must also be able, volitionally, to inaugurate actions which will satisfy those needs. Something is of value only insofar as its realization is connected (directly or otherwise) with appropriate forms of goal-oriented activity. And it is, of course, the human life-form which engages in such discriminative and goal-oriented activity in the most unambiguous terms.

Given, therefore, the context of specifically human activity, we can identify two basic structural modes of value. These are the *instrumental* and the *intrinsic*. The former pertains to factors which provide the means for realizing specific ends, whilst the latter consists of those factors which are ends in themselves, i.e. can be valued for their own sakes rather than in terms of what they can be used for (though this does not, of course, preclude them from having utility in contexts additional to those of their own intrinsic value).

Now, of these two axiological modes, the instrumental dimension seems relatively straightforward. But what could justify the notion of intrinsic value? There is at least one compelling argument: for if something is not only a precondition of the capacity to value, but is a precondition of human activity as such, then it would be absurd to regard it as anything other than intrinsically valuable. In this respect, however, one must distinguish between that which has such value and that which is merely a condition of human activity. Space and time and the having of a central nervous system, for example, are factors which are presupposed as conditions of human agency in a very basic sense. However, in order to be in space and time and to have a central nervous system it is not required that

we engage in any activity directed towards the realization of such goals. They take care of themselves as long as we are able to stay alive.

There are other factors, however, which are not only conditions of our activities, but require quite specific activity in order to be maintained. Insofar as they are ends to be attained, it is they which are intrinsically valuable. I shall now consider three such factors. The first is the having of a body. This is not only the basis of our inherence in the physical world, but is something which can be put at risk through happenstances in that world. Our activity, accordingly, is geared towards protecting the body from coming to harm and providing it with shelter. This is treated, thereby, as an intrinsically valuable end of human activity.

Second, in order to be sustained the body's physical demands for the ingestion of nutrients and the discharge of waste must be met. Insofar as these necessitate the performing of specific bodily functions and activities of procurement and disposal, they are, again, objects of intrinsic value in the human behavioural field.

Similar considerations hold in relation to a third factor, namely the reproductive function. The human agent is genetically programmed with the urge to realize this end, but the act of procreation and the searching out of mates involve complex modes of activity in order to be achieved. The survival of the species through time depends, of course, on such achievement.

I am arguing, then, that these three factors are intrinsically valuable in what might be called a natural sense. They define ends which must be realized through appropriate forms of activity. Now, as we have already seen, for Elias the civilizing process is of vital import in facilitating a context which allows these natural values to be pursued without threat or destruction to the agent. However, this points towards a limitation, for, viewed in its relation to natural value, the civilizing process seems to be of instrumental rather than intrinsic value. It is a means to the safe realization of natural ends rather than an end in itself.

An instrumental justification of this sort *is*, of course, a justification – but of an empirical rather than a conceptual kind. The civilizing process indeed facilitates the safe pursuit of natural value, but were civilization to break down completely this would not entail that the successful realization of such value would likewise come to an end. Rather, its attainment would become more episodic and precarious.

It follows, then, that in order to justify the intrinsic value of the civilizing process we must go beyond its self-regulatory function in the context of natural value. We must identify something about self-regulation which is worthwhile for its own sake. This demands a clarification of the distinctively human dimension of our valuational activity, and, more specifically – to clinch its intrinsically valuable status – the identification of factors which are both conditions and ends of such activity. These factors must then be shown to be constitutive features of the civilizing process.

In furtherance of this task I shall now address the transition from animal consciousness to self-consciousness. If a life-form has evolved, this entails that it has the ability to adapt its physical constitution in relation to changes in the physical environment over a long period of time. Clearly this characterizes

humanity's evolution from, in Darwin's phrase, 'anthropoid stock'. At the basic animal level this adaptability is of phylogenetic significance – it is not something consciously intended or planned. However, at a higher level a volitional element can enter into things. The behaviour of animals – in contrast, say, with that of insects – is not as rigidly determined by instinct. Their cognitive and sensory-motor competences allow for an element of choice in how they adapt themselves to stimuli and changes to stimuli. It is of key importance here to emphasize the relation between volition and stimulus, for, whilst the animal can in a crucial sense regulate its behaviour on the basis of choice, volition in this context does not amount to freedom. This is because the animal's choices are exclusively determined by stimuli in the immediate perceptual field. The animal shows no clear evidence of being able implicitly to negotiate factors beyond those which are immediately given. Its cognitive and volitional activities are *ostensively rigid*.

Human beings, in contrast, can inaugurate activity which takes into account factors which are not immediately given in perception. Their cognitive and sensory-motor competences are even less tied to instinct than are other animals', and, crucially, have the additional capacity to articulate symbolic relations. Through the reciprocal action of its particular mode of embodiment and its symbolizing activities, the human animal is able to comprehend itself in relation to space and time as horizons of location, i.e. it can conceive itself as having occupied and as being able to occupy positions in the space–time continuum other than the one it currently occupies. Through its being able to reflect upon its situation, the field of activities available to a human ranges beyond immediate stimuli and becomes thereby a field of meaning. This opens up a range of different possibilities in terms of how the agent positions himself or herself in relation to the field. It constitutes, thereby, the possibility of *free agency*.

On these terms, then, animal adaptability can develop into self-consciousness. The self-conscious agent is still tied to the attainment of intrinsic natural value, but this value is now recontextualized. Such an agent can prioritize the attainment of some natural values over others, and can defer gratification in some respects so as to facilitate greater medium- or short-term benefits in relation to others. The satisfaction of intrinsically valuable natural needs is now mediated within an *economy of desire* and this brings about a momentous transition, for *such an economy engenders its own dimension of value*. There is a complex ebb and flow of preference, aversions and gratifications in relation to things lost, things found, things close, things far, things different, things the same, things that were, things that will be, things that could be and things that might have been had things been different.

In this economy, the human struggle for survival goes beyond natural value into the realm of meaning and narrative.[8] Mere shelters become dwelling-places, and locales become places of belonging in an emotional sense. Self-consciousness is achieved, not simply in relation to common physical conditions of existence, but through the realization of personal and shared narratives concerning one's family, one's community as a whole and their place in the more general order of

social and natural phenomena. The comprehension and expression of these relations becomes a need over and above those intrinsic natural values around which the field gravitates. By becoming self-conscious, an agent is located in relation to a realm of past actualities and future and counterfactual possibilities. This means that the world he or she inhabits now exceeds that of the immediate physical environment and practical needs and generates a need to find meaning in the broader sense.

On these terms, then, self-consciousness is not simply a useful evolutionary appendage or tool. It is a process of realization which recontextualizes the arena of natural value. A key criterion of this is the fact that human beings can and do choose to lay down their lives for others, for beliefs or, in the case of suicide, on the basis of existential anxiety. The natural values still have an intrinsic worth, but it is not of an absolute kind. Under certain circumstances, the self-conscious agent can repudiate them.

These considerations suggest that self-consciousness is the major condition of all specifically human activity and valuation. Does this mean, then, that it too is of intrinsic value, or is it merely a condition of such activity in the way that, say, being in space and time is? The answer is the former. This is because self-consciousness is *a process of realization whose development is itself the end of much human activity*. Like the natural values, it is both a condition and object of pursuit. It has, accordingly, intrinsic value.

Now it might seem strange to regard self-consciousness as an end of human activity. But there are two clear factors which warrant such a claim. The first is that, while the propensity for self-consciousness is innate to humans, it can only be achieved given the appropriate conditions of nurture. The infant does not simply grow into a self-consciousness being; it has to be initiated through complex social processes which involve the individual regulating his or her behaviour in relation to the demands of these processes.

The second relevant factor is that, whilst the child is generally able to comprehend that he or she is one member of a class of beings called 'persons' by the age of about five, the processes which make this minimum achievement possible are not closed thereafter. Indeed, this minimum stage is only a beginning, in that it opens up the ability to explore possibilities of meaning (and action based upon them) on the basis of individual choice and responsibility. Self-consciousness and its correlate – freedom – exist so as to be developed in relation to changing circumstances. They are not just properties, but rather *modes of being* – multiple possibilities of choice and activity which range far beyond animality *per se*.

Given that the achievement of self-consciousness involves the individual adapting his or her behaviour in relation to certain initiating factors, it is possible now to make the vital connection to the civilizing process. For that process extends far beyond the self-regulation of behaviour emphasized by Elias. Selfhood is achieved through regulation in positive directions as well as through the control of animal drives. More specifically, it involves initiation into processes which develop four basic cognitive competences, which in concert (and together with other factors) are constitutive of self-consciousness. These competences are

capable of continuing development. They are avenues wherein specific aspects of self-consciousness's intrinsic value can be cultivated indefinitely as positive factors in the civilizing process.

I shall now analyse these constitutive cognitive competences, beginning with language. Language is self-evidently a means of communication. But it is not one which can be learnt through external constraints alone. True, teachers can adopt punitive measures in order to make their pupils learn, but at some point, and to some degree, the pupil must regulate his or her receptiveness individually in order to adapt to language – learning to distinguish between the correct and incorrect way of following linguistic rules. This, of course, is even more the case in learning the written forms of language and other symbolic codes.

The *uses* of language and cognate symbolic codes also involve a crucial positive dimension of self-regulation. In verbal, danced or pictorial ritual, the symbolic content is simply not addressed to deity, prey or whatever; rather, the agent must adapt him or herself to those forms and rhythms of the medium which are taken to be consonant with the nature of that which is being symbolically addressed. The ritual does not simply refer to the addressee; rather, the nature of the addressee is evoked through the self-regulation of the symbol user. The agent of the ritual shares in the being of that which is addressed.

In basic language acquisition and ritual symbolic activity, then, the self-conscious being already goes beyond purely natural and instrumental value, for in its symbolic activity such an agent is involved in a dimension of self-regulation which seeks correlation with that which is *other* than him- or herself. In striving to adapt to natural and social factors so as to facilitate the survival of itself or its kind, the self-conscious being opens out another horizon of meaning with possibilities of value in its own right.

Before spelling out these possibilities, I shall consider three other competences which are constitutive of self-consciousness. The first is a response to the other which is more specific than that just described. It consists of *empathy* with *other people*. In order to be aware of oneself *as* a 'person', rather than just a source of animal drives, it is logically presupposed not only that one has been initiated into language at a basic level, but also (through this initiation) that one can understand that there are other beings who perceive and belong in the world on broadly the same terms as oneself – but who nevertheless, as distinct embodied creatures, each possess a unique perspective upon this world. Such a competence entails – in however rudimentary a way – that one can imagine what it is like to be another person, that one can represent seeing, feeling and believing, etc. from the other's point of view. The self only becomes conscious of itself, in other words, through regulating its own experiential perspective empathically in relation to that of other people.

Now, of course, there are psychopathic personalities whose behaviour does not take much account of the other person's points of view, but even they – in order to find fulfilment in treating other people as mere vehicles for their own fantasies – must at least have some basic capacity to consider the world from another's viewpoint. The problem is that, in this case, whilst the psychopath can

understand what it means to be another person in abstract terms, he or she cannot feel the other's perspective. There is no sense of belonging or empathy with that other perspective. The psychopath, however, is a pathological aberration. The vast majority of humans have at least some empathic identification and kindred sensitivities through which they regulate their own experiential viewpoints in relation to those of other persons. Again, as I will show in a little while, this, in itself, opens up a complex value-dimension.

The third constitutive factor in self-consciousness is that of the aesthetic.[9] In its most basic sense the aesthetic is a capacity to enjoy formal configurations (i.e. relations between elements in a phenomenal or imaginatively intended field). Such enjoyment hinges on the way in which formal configurations stimulate our cognitive capacities through their harmonious combination of structural unity and sensible or imaginative diversity. A pleasure of this kind may have some survival-oriented utility, in that it stimulates our cognitive attentiveness to the phenomenal world, but, whatever its origins, it can be enjoyed for its own sake and cultivated in ways that have no necessary bearing on natural or instrumental values. This is why aesthetic pleasure is often characterized as disinterested. A child's play and explorations of the possibilities of its environment are enjoyable for their own sake. And this motivation stimulates cognitive processes, just as, reciprocally, cognitive achievement stimulates the child to further aesthetic explorations.

Now, whilst many of our most basic pleasures (especially gustatory and tactile ones) are directly tied to the gratification of survival- and procreation-based animal drives, aesthetic pleasure is not. It is one which itself flows from the basic cognitive structure of self-consciousness. More important still, the very notion of a person is, in a sense, an aesthetic structure, insofar as it is founded on a regulation of behaviour in relation to a personal narrative of the unity of the self (a fact which I will explore more fully in Chapter 5).

The final constitutive factor in self-consciousness which I shall address is that of imagination as such. Its decisive significance in this context has been little acknowledged (except in an important but obscure way by Kant[10] and, to a lesser extent, Sartre[11]). I will now discuss imagination's complex role in self-consciousness in broad outline.

First, however variously the term 'imagination' may be used it has a central core of meaning. This can be defined as the capacity to generate mental imagery, i.e. thoughts which individuate sensible items and relations by possessing quasi-sensory qualities which are loosely iconic with those items and relations. This capacity is involved in all three of the preceding constitutive factors in self-consciousness. The reason for this (as will be shown in detail in Chapter 4) is that the ability to form and apply concepts and the ability to empathize with the ways in which other persons might think and feel each presuppose a projective capacity other than that of language *per se*. Nothing can be a concept, for example, unless we recognize that it has application in a field of reference over and above that given in immediate perception. To learn the concept 'dog' it is not sufficient to be able to apply the concept whenever a dog happens to come into view. Rather, we only understand the concept when we

know that it also has application to dogs other than this one in other times and in other places. This means that in order for a concept to be learnt as ranging beyond the immediately given, we must have some non-linguistic capacity for projecting times, places and items other than those which are so given.

Imagination provides this factor. It also has a necessary role in knowledge of other persons and in relation to aesthetic experience. In respect of the former, for example, ordinary linguistic description can tell us that some person has a certain body of beliefs, and feels about *x*, *y* and *z* in quite specific ways. But it is only through imagination that we can achieve empathic identification with how the other might think and feel so as to form thereby an adequate sense of both their experiential perspective and/or ourselves as beings who *share* the same kind of experiential perspectives. Empathic identification is not a mere recognition of modes of otherness. It is the capacity to see the world *as if* one were another person.

The role of imagination in aesthetic experience is much more complex than this, and, again, for the present an outline must suffice.[12] In the simplest mode of aesthetic experience our cognitive capacities enjoy a mutually stimulating inter-action. The formal configuration's gestalt character allows different ways of conceptualizing its phenomenal unity, and this in turn opens up avenues of playful imaginative association. In the aesthetic experience of art the imaginative dimension is even more central insofar as – in pictorial art and literature at least – the artist fabricates an image. This image is stylized and interpretative. It evokes experience from the artist's personal viewpoint, but in a publicly accessible idiom.

This completes my short exposition of the four competences which are consti-tutive features of self-consciousness. There may be many other factors involved, but for present purposes the ones just discussed are fundamental. It is, however, important to emphasize that, whilst the constitutive factors can be described individually (from an analytic viewpoint), in the general life of self-consciousness they are utterly inseparable from one another. In order to comprehend oneself as a person who has existed at times and places other than those defined by the present, and who will occupy future times and places, it is necessary to have language, imagination, a 'feel' for what it is to be another person and also a meaningful aesthetic structure of the self. All these factors are profoundly enmeshed with one another.

I am now able to draw some important conclusions. First, we will recall that Elias's presentation of the micro-social aspect of the civilizing process has a somewhat negative emphasis. Self-regulation primarily involves the individual controlling the satisfaction of his or her animal drives. My point, however, is that the self-regulation involved in the civilizing process also has a more positive content insofar as self-consciousness is just a process of regulation in relation to the demands of otherness by developing the four constitutive factors of self-consciousness as ends of activity. The individual must adapt himself or herself to the learning of linguistic rules and other symbolic forms; he or she must regulate powers of empathic identification so as to fully recognize a sense of what it is to

be a person; he or she must also find a direction or meaning to his or her individual life through the construction of an aesthetic narrative.

The decisive point here is that these avenues of regulating individual behaviour so as to develop self-consciousness *are pleasurable in their own right*. They form basic needs which cannot be reduced to animal drives, but, rather, form a distinct dimension of intrinsic value. An evolutionary reductionist might claim that language use and self-consciousness evolve and are found pleasurable because of their practical utility in sustaining the species' survival chances, but one might equally well claim that such factors can be adapted for practical purposes precisely because they have their own instinctive gratification. The evolution of language, for example, should be understood in a total context and not through a retrospective projection of means–end practical rationality as a kind of crude teleological goal which sufficiently explains its development. Even in the animal world, it may be, for example, that instinctive modes of communication such as vocalization serve crude expressive functions over and above their functions as warnings or in mating rituals etc.

Whatever the case concerning their origins, it is undeniable that the constitutive self-regulatory competences have been developed by *Homo sapiens* as sources of value and gratification – as conditions and ends of activity – in their own right. In terms of language, for example, laughter, jokes and poetry all have their practical uses, but, even more, they allow the individual to realize him- or herself; literally, to become a specific person with an individual identity. In terms of imaginative identification with the other, a whole network of interactions is opened up. Individuals find satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their social roles; they find that social and psychological interactions with other persons have an intrinsic interest – that rules of social observance have a positive significance over and above the dimension of restraint. And again, whilst embellishing artefacts, adopting personal ornamentation and dancing may be invested with ritual significance, one must ask why it should be thought that these particular aesthetic activities are the kinds of things which can 'deliver' on the practical or ritual functions which are assigned to them. I would suggest that it is because they have already been experienced intuitively as sources of intrinsic power and gratification.

Now it might be thought that the avenue of intrinsic value opened up by the other constitutive factor – imagination – is, primarily, the development of art. There is some truth in this, but it is important to stress that art is profoundly implicated in all the constitutive factors, as, indeed, is imagination. In respect of imagination, for example, it is through its co-ordination with language that the individual learns to adapt him or herself not only to people but also to the objective demands of the spatio-temporal world as a unified field of phenomena, relations and events. And, reciprocally, the aesthetic expression of this involvement in the social and physical world through artistic media results in not just pleasing artefacts, but ones which reveal *profoundly* the interplay of all the constitutive factors in self-consciousness. This is why artistic development is of such vital import in relation to the civilizing process.

Let me now summarize my position. The civilizing process does not just involve a regulation of our animal drives; rather, it involves avenues of intrinsic value which are developments of four interwoven constitutive factors in self-consciousness – namely language, empathic identification, aesthetic experience and imagination in general. The development of these competences as ends of activity involves the regulation of individual behaviour and the objective spatio-temporal continuum of phenomena, objects and events. The individual's realization of such ends can also involve a further dimension of self-regulation, in that the development of these realms of value for their own sake involves some diminution of the time spent in satisfying animal drives. More than this, the pursuit of such value recontextualizes the meaning of the basic animal drives. There are options and alternatives in addition to basic animality; and it is the elaborating of these which extends the scope of human self-realization and gratification.

In stressing the necessary connections between self-consciousness, intrinsic value and the civilizing process I have two aims over and above rectifying an imbalance in Elias's position. The first is to establish that this process is not simply latent in *every* community of *Homo sapiens*, but has begun – however minimally – as an upshot of being self-conscious. The second aim has been to identify four constants in the human condition which, in concert, are the basis of self-consciousness. However, these constants are not static timeless 'essences'. They are determined by the relation between embodiment and its basic cognitive constitution, and by the way in which this relation is instantiated and developed in the course of history. By definition, we are self-conscious beings, but the structure and pattern of self-consciousness changes. The civilizing process just *is* the generation of these changes. It is self-consciousness considered in the dimension of its diachronic development.

III

At this point we reach what many would take to be the key issue. For if my approach is to be consistent, then whilst the civilizing process may be universal it must also be admitted that there are historical and geographical differences in the degree to which it has been realized. And this is where real controversy begins. What is our criterion of 'civilized' as opposed to 'barbaric'? We will recall that for Elias the term 'barbaric' has particular application, on the one hand, as a term which has been historically used by specific groups to distinguish themselves positively from those who are uncivilized and, on the other hand, as a term which describes those conditions of violence or poverty which disrupt or inhibit the civilizing process. The former usage is simply a fact about historical patterns of consciousness; the latter usage has an evaluative meaning, and it is this which I shall now address.

In the first instance it is best to express the relation between civilization and its opposite as a distinction between the more civilized and the less civilized. This distinction is warranted by virtue of the fact (already noted) that to be self-conscious is already to have embarked on the civilizing process. Given this, we

can articulate the distinction between the more and the less civilized in terms of both positive and negative criteria. The positive criteria might be sketched out under six basic categories – economic, social, legal, health-related, linguistic and specialized symbolic practices. All these categories are of positive significance insofar as they facilitate and/or embody the intrinsically valuable constitutive structures of self-consciousness.

In economic terms, a community becomes more civilized to the degree that it is able to diversify its patterns of production, its modes of distributing produce and its technological competences. In respect of production, for example, we might look for combinations of hunting/gathering and agrarianism in older communal forms, and systems of sharing and bartering. At the level of technology, we look for diversity of utensils and tools, and a capacity to refine techniques of production as exemplified in crop rotation, irrigation and fertilization. At higher levels of civilization, signs of development might include the mechanization of productive processes and a diversification of types of production and modes of exchange – including, in this last-mentioned category, trade with other communities. At higher levels of civilization still, we would find an expansion of leisure time, perhaps tied initially to dominant social classes, but gradually made available to all members of the community.

At the social level, all communities seem to make distinctions of role, most notably on a gender basis. In the civilizing process, the rigidity of assignments to such roles and the acceptance or rejection of them becomes more a question of individual choice, as does that of access to such roles. The legal dimension provides a key civilizing factor in the social domain, for it establishes a framework of mutually accepted authority whereby disputes can be resolved without the use of arbitrary physical violence. The civilizing process develops here when the authority in question is no longer that of the martially strongest, or mere custom or religious tradition, but is constituted through the voluntary and equal participation of all of a community's members. The process takes a still greater leap forward when the framework of legality is extended to include observance by different communities in respect of their relation with one another *as* communities and when *within* society laws are institutionalized in such a way as not to prescribe coercion against dissenting voices.

The factor of health-related practices is also a vital element in the civilizing process. If a community is to survive it must have some basic standards of hygiene and means of treating illness, disease and injury. Education concerning such factors and the continuing development of appropriate treatments are signs of the civilizing process, as are, at a higher level, preventive medicine and the creation of institutionalized health services available to all the members of a community – not just those who can afford to pay for them.

The fifth civilizing factor – language – is of special significance. In developing a distinctive vocabulary and grammar and in being able to invent or absorb new concepts, the identity of both individual and community is reinforced; possibilities of communication between people are diversified. At the same time, the development of a distinctive language carries its own special dangers, namely

that it will encourage insularity and, indeed, antagonism towards those who do not share it. This is why the peaceful co-existence of different languages – users within a society and a familiarity with or willingness to learn other languages – is so important as a counteraction to crude tribal prejudice.

In the categories discussed so far there is a common factor, namely that the positive criteria of civilization all involve a momentum towards increasing levels of diversification and tolerance. These mediate the realms of natural value and those values which are intrinsic to self-consciousness. In respect of the former, diversification and tolerance in a community's practices enable it to optimize its capacity for survival in the face of contingency. Any community – however stable and sufficient it may be – is always subject to the possibility of natural disaster and the encroachments of disease or destructive external factors. Self-regulation achieved through diversification and mutual tolerance in practical life allows for flexibility in coping with these contingencies. This is even more the case the larger a community grows in terms of population and territory. The greater the expansion, the more difficult it is to preserve the identity of the community by purely coercive means, and the more difficult it becomes to construct defences against external threats and other contingencies.

In respect of civilized values, diversification and mutual tolerance favour the development of conditions wherein people are able to develop the intrinsic values of self-consciousness as forms of practice for their own sake. And this brings me to the sixth category of positive criteria for civilization, namely specialized symbolic practices.

What I mean by specialized symbolic practices is twofold. On the one hand it is the linguistic articulation of distinctive forms of knowledge such as history, science, philosophy and literature, and on the other hand it is the development of systematic codes of non-linguistic symbolism such as mathematics, the visual arts and music. The distinctive forms of knowledge noted here are not, of course, rigidly defined by their linguistic or non-linguistic character. Mathematical symbolism, for example, has been deeply integrated within scientific practice, whilst the literary use of language gives it a kinship with the visual arts and music rather than with other linguistic articulations of knowledge such as history.

The root level of all symbolic practices is in mythical thought (as Ernst Cassirer, amongst others, has argued).[13] All communities at some stage in their existence seem to explain the relation between the individual, the community and the natural world in anthropomorphic terms, i.e. phenomena, forces, objects, events and animals are regarded as being in effect conscious agents. Such mythical thought is a powerful emblem of the civilizing process in its nascent stages, insofar as through it the individual seeks to explain the position of the self in a broader scheme of things.

Now mythical thought is not only diverse in itself; it has also proved capable of being differentiated and refined into other specialized symbolic practices of greater explanatory comprehensiveness and internal logical complexity. The development of monotheistic religions and (in a further gradual de-anthropomorphic turn) philosophy might be seen as examples of this. Likewise, the emergence of fact-

based narratives of community change rather than mythical ones serves as the basis of distinctively historical knowledge, and, again, the focusing of mythological thought in astrological practices facilitates the development of mathematical symbolism.

The final example of the differentiation and further articulation of myth which I shall briefly consider is in the arts. We might see their emergence as a specialist mode of symbolic practice as grounded in the expression of mythical relations through verbal ritual and dance, and through ornament, embellishment and the mimetic possibilities offered by shaping material and by placing or inscribing marks upon surfaces. All these idioms and media can be further developed through stylistic refinements and, more fundamentally, through the invention of new semantic–syntactic structures (such as linear perspective in pictorial representation) or kindred codes (such as scale-systems in music).

The various specialized symbolic practices just described are the purest expressions of those avenues of intrinsic value opened up by the constitutive factors in self-consciousness. By adapting him- or herself to a specialized use of language or other symbolic code, that embodied subject also regulates his or her existence in a specific mode of openness to the natural and/or social world. By developing the code further, such an embodied subject diversifies these possibilities and is thence able to comprehend the individual's and humanity's relation to the world in a progressively deeper way. This can, as we have seen, lead to a revaluation of all values, including even – in the case of absolute altruistic sacrifice or of suicide – the animal ones inherent in our instinct for survival.

Like the other positive criteria of civilization, the momentum to diversification and mutual tolerance also informs the specialized symbolic practices. In this case, diversification first of all involves mythic thought being differentiated into logically distinctive forms of knowledge, each of which admits of further refinement or (more precisely) *progressive articulation*. By this I mean a process of cumulative and sometimes erratic advancement where each form of knowledge is able to build on its previous stages so as to become more internally complex and detailed and more comprehensive in its explanatory and/or methodological scope. It should also be emphasized that this is not just a case of one stage of development superseding the previous ones. Forms of knowledge such as history, philosophy and the social sciences are often able to draw on earlier developments in their traditions in a way that rejuvenates contemporary strategies. And again, even in the sciences superseded theories do not subsist in the realm of history alone. The Newtonian system, for example, retains some practical utility and the methodological strategies of superseded systems can stimulate thinking in relation to present problems.

Related to this is the interesting fact that in many communities ancestor worship is common. This embodies not only a desire to obtain the intercession of ancestors in the present, but also an at least tacit recognition that what self-consciousness has become – or, better, achieved – at any one stage of its existence is only a moment made possible by what went before. It is, of course, also given its character by what it makes possible for future generations. This is

why the specialized symbolic practices are of such import in the civilizing process. They are the developing life of self-consciousness – a life which draws consciously on the past and aims consciously towards the future. They are a complex power of formative collective memory.

Now these positive criteria of civilization have only been provided in outline. But they at least provide a framework of working concepts which can be applied (and, indeed, refined) through the consideration of specific case histories. With similar intent I turn now to negative criteria – those features which might lead us to describe a community as being less civilized than another.

Four basic factors can be identified – cultural stasis, symbolic arrest, violent resolutions and barbarity. I shall now elaborate on these.

First is cultural stasis. I have already argued that diversification and toleration are factors which drive the civilizing process forward. Many communities, however, both in preceding history and in the present world, remain locked into patterns of life established thousands of years earlier. Their economic, social and general cultural life is rigid, and, in effect, such communities are imprisoned by the physical environment and material conditions of their existence. They are in no sense 'less' human; rather, they are prevented by circumstances from developing their potential, and are very much at the mercy of the vicissitudes of nature, the availability of resources and the depredations of aggression by other social groups.

In considering this criterion of the less civilized it is worth rehearsing the fashionable relativist position noted earlier. This view holds that it is not appropriate to describe a culturally static community as less civilized; rather, one must simply respect the dignity and worth of its different mode of existence. Now, as I pointed out earlier, if cultural difference is to be regarded as of worth in its own right, this presupposes the context of civilized values. Within such a context a static community can be recognized as locked into a mode of life which other communities experienced long ago and which they have developed beyond. This same perspective recognizes in addition, however, that the less civilized community has its own worth as a living exemplar of one of those modes of existence which self-consciousness has realized. Indeed, this mode of life – whatever its limitations – can also illuminate some of the experiences missed out on in more advanced civilizations. It thus takes on a critical contextual significance.

This critical significance is deepened when a community characterized by cultural stasis is made aware of alternative more civilized modes of existence but deliberately chooses to remain as it is. This is also true when within an advanced society a group chooses to opt out in favour of a more basic mode of living. In both cases the term 'less civilized' has to be carefully qualified because the communities in question have taken responsibility for their way of life. They have committed themselves to a mode of self-regulation which critically questions the scope of civilization and is, accordingly, a significant exemplification of the civilizing process.

When gestures of this sort are made in the contemporary world they are often in part a response to my second negative criterion – symbolic arrest. This is a

problem which affects advanced civilized societies in particular. Earlier on I noted Elias's point that animal drives are often displaced into the symbolic realm as behavioural displays which manifest the fact that the individual has transcended barbarity. Codes of manners and deportment and fashion are basic examples of this, but it encompasses any specific social role which expresses itself in highly regulated behaviour with concomitant ceremonies, regalia which create an emphatic and socially recognizable image of that role. This world of 'society' is geared towards the invention, consumption and exchange of symbolic displays. Such activity has its own intrinsic pleasure as a kind of production and commerce in signifying activity over and above direct practical communication.

However, it also has its negative dimension. This consists in the fact that symbolic display can become so much a source of pleasure in its own right that it acts as an illusory substitute for more basic life-processes. It does not merely displace them, but also conceals and substitutes them. The symbolic display thereby becomes too artificial, and prevents a society from adapting to or even recognizing significant changes at the more material level of its existence. The becoming of the individual is arrested at the symbolic level of his or her existence.

A good example of this is revealed in Laclos' novel *Les Liaisons dangereuses*. Here, real emotional and psychological relationships are used as a mere means in a game of duelling symbolic displays between the main protagonists – Valmont and Madame de Merteuil. In their context, social relationships are only real insofar as they can be manipulated via the destructive realization of animal drives dressed up as intricate strategies of seduction. Symbolic display here in effect denatures the natural foundation and function of social intercourse.

As I will show later, a particular mode of symbolic arrest is of decisive significance in the understanding of postmodernity. Before addressing that, however, I shall consider two further negative criteria. Their negativity derives substantially from their relation to the mutuality of self-consciousness. This factor is determined by the fact that personal identity is only possible insofar as it involves, at the same time, a capacity for empathic identification with the other. Consciousness of one's individual self and consciousness of that of others are bonded in a relationship of active reciprocal dependence. Belonging to a community from birth – being initiated into its forms of life – constitutes the key mediating factor in this developing reciprocity.

Now, of course, as self-conscious free agents, human beings can often find themselves in situations where the best course of action involves lying to or cheating their fellows or acting in coercive ways towards them. The justification of condemnation of such behaviour is, of course, a subject for moral debate. However, whatever moral principles are or are not at issue here, it is quite clear that certain kinds of such negative activity actively contradict the civilizing process.

Violent resolution is one such example. A community can justly be described as less civilized the more a resort to violence or the threat of it is accepted as a basis for resolving conflict – either internally or in its relations with other communities. Here there is a clear regression to animal drives which is at odds with the basic impulse of the civilizing process. Broadly speaking, the more individuals

relinquish the personal exercise of coercive power by investing it in an authority with communally recognized legality, the more the civilizing process is able to take hold. And, concomitantly, the more this process is enhanced, the more that authority and the legal framework are constituted through the free decisions of all – or at least the majority of – a community's members.

However, this is not unconditionally civilizing, for even in advanced communities authority and legality defined by a dominant group or even constituted through the free decisions of a majority can be used to coerce and suppress dissident voices or marginal or ethnic minorities. If these groups have committed themselves to the use of violence or have authoritarian aspirations there may be a case for coercion, but, if not, the operations of authority and legality in such a context can sometimes be regarded as an abuse of the civilizing process, insofar as they deny the oppressed groups the opportunity for self-development.

A less qualified aspect of the inhibiting of the civilizing process is that of aggression. This is a clear reversion to animal behaviour if it is used against a party who has not used or threatened violence against the protagonist. Matters become more complex, however, if the victim of aggression does present some manifest clear and present danger to the protagonist, even if this has not been articulated in threats or violence. Here the issue can only be clarified by close consideration of the particular case.

Finally, I shall consider the major threat to the civilizing process, namely *barbarity*. By this term I do not mean that 'other' in relation to which specific groups have historically defined their own civilized achievements; rather, I mean something of recurrent and objective significance. It comes in qualified and absolute forms as follows.

The qualified forms concern the killing, maiming and torturing of fellow human beings. To take another's life is to deal with conflict at a purely animal level, although complex and threatening circumstances may necessitate such an action – if it is sanctioned within a framework of legality. The case of maiming and torturing is much more problematic in this respect. In certain extreme circumstances – when all other alternatives have been tried and have failed – even a civilized society may countenance such measures if they can circumvent a dire threat to its very existence.

A related issue concerns those cases where such actions occur in a ritual context when a community feels they are warranted for sacred or practical purposes. It may even be the case that the victims willingly acquiesce precisely because they too believe in the worth of these purposes.

Now, in all these examples we have prima-facie cases of barbaric behaviour. The burden of argument otherwise must fall upon those who perpetrate or condone such actions. This said, it must also be emphasized that the more the civilizing process universalizes itself, i.e. becomes aware of its own structure and vectors of development and of those constitutive factors in self-consciousness which it is founded upon, the more precarious such defences become. In an advanced civilization which has substantially progressed beyond mythic thinking, alternative ways of living which do not include killing, maiming and torture can

be countenanced as viable possibilities. The achievement of such a context renders cruel practices barbaric in an unqualified way. However, the question of when a civilization has reached such an advanced stage is itself a question of interpretation.

These points aside, there are practices which are barbaric in an absolute sense and which no context of occurrence can qualify. A major example of this is when killing, torturing and maiming are carried out purely for the pleasure which they give to the protagonists. What makes these practices so heinous is not that they involve a simple regression to animality, but, rather, that animal aggression colonizes the sphere of self-consciousness. Such aggression is not displaced by symbolic display; it actually becomes the means and end of such display. The civilizing process implodes upon itself. The more such practices become endemic, the more civilization is replaced by barbarism.

There is another absolutely barbaric practice which forms the perfect context for these heinous activities. It is cultural regression on the large scale. By this I mean the way in which civilized communities sometimes return to mythical modes of self-understanding. This, in itself, would merely be a criterion of the less civilized (bearing in mind the qualifications noted earlier), but when the regression leads to ethnic groups or minorities within a society or to external communities being singled out for murder or coercion purely by virtue of their identity *as* a specific ethnic group, minority or community, then a state of absolute barbarity prevails. The victims here are not recognized as complex groups of individual human beings but, rather, as personifications of evil forces. This enables the protagonists to commit the most unspeakable acts with – from their own limited point of view – social and moral impunity. And whatever mythical evil the victim groups are taken to represent, this all too easily becomes a mere excuse for the enjoyment of coercion for its own sake.

Wide-scale cultural regression also provides a context (though by no means an exclusive one) for the final mode of absolute barbarity which I shall consider, namely slavery. To enslave another person is not to treat that person as a self-conscious being, but, rather, as a domestic animal or inanimate object of possession. This contradicts the nature of the civilizing process *per se*, no matter what short-term benefits might seem to accrue to those who practice it.

Conclusion

Having articulated and developed an account of why civilization is of intrinsic value, I shall finally test it against a single, pervasive and far-reaching problem. This can be called *the historical paradox of civilization*. This paradox consists in the fact that the development of civilization has almost always been by means of suppressing or enslaving alien or marginal peoples or social groups. In the modern world, indeed, this other aspect of the 'civilizing process' has reached barbaric proportions in events such as the Holocaust and the genocide committed on the Armenians. Given such vile features, how can civilization still be argued to possess intrinsic value? And even if it were argued that the aforementioned

horrors are exceptional and to be regarded as breakdowns of civilization, this would not explain much deeper levels of barbarity in the civilizing process. Consider, for example, the role of slavery in the development of the west. This hardly marks a breakdown of civilization, but is, rather, inseparably linked to the wealth and culture-creating activities of the west in specific epochs. It helps make them possible. And, again, the centralization of power and the rise of the modern state did not occur without considerable violence and oppression.

Given, therefore, that some of the most central and widespread achievements of civilization are intimately bound up with these adverse factors over sustained periods of time, it might seem hardly reasonable to insist on the civilizing process being intrinsically valuable. The historical paradox of civilization is, in axiological terms, civilization's undoing.

Fortunately, this putative objection can be soundly refuted on a number of grounds. They all stem from a decisive point made throughout this chapter, namely that the civilizing process is ongoing and is concerned with the development of self-consciousness as both facilitated and constrained by changing material and environmental circumstances. In particular, it is vital to emphasize that the process does not follow any inevitable historical pattern or issue in some definitive outcome. Given these emphases, the historical paradox of civilization can be dealt with as follows.

First, the intrinsic value of civilization would only be negated by associated evils if in some sense those evils were *necessarily* associated with it, i.e. the civilizing process could not operate without them. However, whatever empirical connections of this sort may have held, they did not hold by virtue of conceptual factors. As free agents, humans may misuse the civilizing process – indeed, massively so – but the process itself does not necessarily demand that it be should be misused. Indeed, there is an important analogy here, for it would be unintelligible to regard freedom as lacking intrinsic value because of the possibility of its misuse. Likewise with the civilizing process insofar as it is founded on cognitive competences which are presuppositions of self-consciousness (i.e. of the very ground of rational agency – an issue which I will return to in Chapter 8). Self-consciousness may be collectively misused, but this is an empirical effect of those who possess it rather than a property of self-consciousness itself.

A second (related) rebuttal of the historical paradox is as follows. The rejection of civilization's intrinsic value can only be made on the implicit assumption that the civilizing process has somehow come to an end. I have shown, however, that it has not, and that its fundamental character is the possibility of further development. This fact recontextualizes the paradox and, in so doing, vitiates it on the following grounds. Civilization has only been able to develop significantly since the end of the last Ice Age, a little over 10,000 years ago. It could, in principle, be continued for hundreds of thousands of years to come. This means that the civilizing task has scarcely begun. The terrible features which have accompanied its growth to date do not *have* to accompany it. There is scope for it to be developed in hugely positive directions. True, there may be future disasters, but equally there may be many different possibilities of progress.

The historical paradox of civilization arises as a serious issue only if – as in the cultural relativist perspective – one succumbs to a bitter, backwards-looking and reactionary orientation. Such an attitude seeks to define the present and future on the basis of the past alone. However, since by definition human beings are finite, free, rational embodied subjects, their comprehension and control of events is incomplete. This entails that the future which they can create for themselves is, on ontological grounds, open. They can take responsibility for the risks which this entails, or on the basis of the backwards-looking position just described pretend that the civilizing process does not have intrinsic value. I say 'pretend' here because the process's openness is conceptually grounded rather than some hopeful empirical projection. Given such openness, therefore, it follows that the evils of the past can be, in principle, overcome and compensated for. The intrinsic value of civilization is, accordingly, given further justification on the grounds of its open-ended possibilities.

There is a final, and ironic, issue which must now be considered. Earlier on in this chapter I noted how the idea of 'primitive' societies having their own distinctive worth etc. actually presupposes the intellectual standpoint of the civilizing process. One can take this further. The sceptical standpoint of cultural relativism – the idea that civilization has fundamentally evil aspects – is itself an almost classical aspect of the civilizing process. It is, indeed, unintelligible outside such a context. A culture of criticism and scrutiny is actually a distinctive feature, in particular, of the much-reviled 'Enlightenment project'. Hence, far from calling the civilizing process into radical question, the cultural relativist strategy – whilst being *deeply* unaware of its own significance in this respect – is actually an indirect affirmation of that process. It is a supermodern standpoint (in the sense indicated in the Introduction to this book) where western hegemony is questioned and discussed, and is able to open up the possibility of new and more *universally* progressive transformations.

But, as in all these issues, there is no *inevitable* outcome. If the cultural relativist standpoint persists in its fundamentally negative orientation, then all that remains is the idea of *difference* as a fetishized absolute. In a social world that consists only of racial, gender and class differences, of course, there exists only the possibility of a violent resolution to conflicts. If, however, one believes that conflict is best resolved through debate and argument, then the civilizing process has ample scope for continuation. We are thus led to a paradox within the historical paradox of civilization, namely that if one denies the intrinsic value of the civilizing process and insists on occupying a point outside it one aligns oneself with precisely those evils which are the basis of one's questioning of the process in the first place.

I have argued, then, that the intrinsic value of civilization is justified by reference to its development of cognitive factors which are the basis of self-consciousness. The openness of this development overcomes the putative historical paradox of the civilizing process.

2 From civilization to postmodernity
A context for refoundational philosophy

Introduction

In section i of this chapter, I will outline the possibilities which postmodern society presents for a practical resolution of the historical paradox of civilization. I will also consider the potential dangers which postmodern *symbolic arrest* holds for such a resolution. Section ii elaborates this theme, and in section iii I consider its most developed form – the *qualitative cyborg*. Finally, in section iv, I hold that if this danger is to be avoided our understanding of civilization must be critically informed by a refoundational philosophy.

I

David Harvey has noted that in the postmodern era economic modes of production have shifted away from the rigidly determined practices of the post-war period. Of the postmodern economy, Harvey notes:

> It rests on flexibility with respect to labour processes, labour markets, products and patterns of consumption. It is characterised by the emergence of entirely new sectors of production, new ways of providing financial services, new markets, and, above all, greatly intensified rates of commercial, technological, and organisational innovations.[1]

These radical innovations likewise engender a more globally integrated market. The ambiguities of this have been usefully summarized by Philip Cooke as follows:

> One of the most important changes in setting has been the emergence in the late modern period of an increasingly integrated global economy, dominated by the most advanced forms of capitalist production and exchange. This development could be thought to run counter to the…trend towards decentralisation. Yet it is not, because the global system has no centre. It is a decentred space of flows rather than a clearly hierarchical structured space of production.[2]

This global but decentred integration opens up a fascinating possibility. For here we have a potential resolution of the historical paradox of civilization. The reason for this is that in the postmodern era the macro-social dimension of the civilizing process has the potential to facilitate greater integration without the use of coercive force. And again, this potential is also complemented by the globalizing effects of innovation in the field of medical and information technologies. The existence of satellite television and the Internet, for example, enables social developments and interactions to be communicated to even the most remote parts of the world. The 'global village' metaphor is in this respect an apt one. We now live in an epoch where consciousness of humanity and its vicissitudes *as a species* is an idea which can be presented with sensory vividness rather than in merely abstract ideal terms. The self-regulation intrinsic to the civilizing process can accordingly be informed by a more intense universal orientation than has been possible before.

There is, of course, no guarantee that this universalized self-consciousness will be able to consolidate itself. On the one hand, the possibility of developing the appropriate kinds of correlated international institutions and administrative structures is a formidably difficult one, and, on the other hand, any globalizing dynamic will tend to occur alongside vehement – even violent – assertions of local identity (as is the case, for example, in the tragic late twentieth-century conflicts in the Balkans). This said, however, there is no intrinsic reason why these difficulties should not find some cumulatively satisfactory resolution. It is, as the popular idiom has it, 'all to play for'.

Given these possibilities and other undoubted advances made in relation to the other positive criteria of the civilizing process, it may seem that we are on the threshold of some golden age. Unfortunately, there is a further, truly formidable problem. We have already seen how, for Elias, symbolic display is rightly seen as a key factor in self-regulation. However, I have argued that, taken to an extreme, this can result in a negative factor *vis-à-vis* the civilizing process, namely *symbolic arrest* wherein communities and individuals are locked into transactions with symbols at the expense of and as a substitute for more basic life-processes. Indeed, as we shall see, in the contemporary world there are those who would deny that we can meaningfully talk of such processes independently of their symbolic modes of articulation.

Before considering this, let us look at the broad form of specifically postmodern symbolic arrest in more detail.

In its widest manifestations this takes the form of consumerism. Such a phenomenon has been a strong feature in the world socio-economic structure since the 1950s (and indeed before that in the USA). It is a form of social mentality which seeks gratification through the purchase of items and where this gratification derives as much, if not more, from the packaging and 'lifestyle' connotations of an item than from its practical utility. Consumerism – as opposed to the production and exchange of goods *per se* – is driven by the advertising industry and concomitant productive patterns of inbuilt obsolescence, i.e. artefacts made in such a way as to be used and disposed of quickly, so that the

consumer is driven towards the purchase of new ones. In this form of society social kudos pertains primarily, not to achievement in the specialized symbolic practices, but, rather, to the variety of brand-labelled goods which the individual has the financial resources to buy.

Consumerism is intricately bonded to a second factor in postmodern symbolic arrest, namely the global expansion of mass media and information technology. Whatever universalizing potential this may have, it comes at a great cultural price. In this respect, Neil Postman has observed:

> We are now a culture whose information, ideas and epistemology are given form by television, not the printed word. To be sure there are still readers and there are many books published, but the uses of print and reading are not the same as they once were; not even in schools, the last institutions where print was thought to be invincible…. Print is now merely a residual epistemology, and it will remain so, aided to some extent by the computer, and newspapers and magazines that are made to look like televisions screens.[3]

Postman makes an extremely damning analysis of the effects of television throughout all aspects of contemporary social existence. By its nature, television is a medium where compositional and editorial factors are to the fore. No matter how documentary its intent, the television programme is primarily constructed from different camera shots and edited tape sequences. This in itself makes the medium unsuited to the presentation of temporally sustained rational exposition and argument. Material of this kind has to be compressed into more editorially amenable units.

Television's internal destructiveness *vis-à-vis* the foregoing has been dramatically compounded by the colonizing power of one of its particular usages – in commercial advertising. Postman observes:

> The move away from the use of propositions in commercial advertising began at the end of the nineteenth century. But it was not until the 1950's that the television commercial made linguistic discourse obsolete as the basis for product decisions. By substituting images for claims, the pictorial commercial made emotional appeals, not tests of truth, the basis of consumer decisions. The distance between rationality and advertising is now so wide that it is difficult to remember that there once existed a connection between them.[4]

Indeed Postman continues:

> [T]he television commercial is not all about the character of products to be consumed. It is about the character of the consumers of products. Images of movie stars and famous athletes, of scenic lakes and macho fishing trips, of elegant dinners…these tell us nothing about the products being sold. But they tell everything about the fears, fancies and dreams of those who might

buy them. What the advertiser needs to know is not what is right about the product but what is wrong about the buyer.[5]

Now these observations, of course, illuminate the link between television and the symbolically arrested consumer sensibility noted earlier. However, Postman also emphasizes a much more far-reaching point, namely that the television commercial and related entertainment idioms have colonized the presentation of news, current affairs and politics. Not what is reported, but how it is reported, becomes the focus of meaning – its style, its 'cleverness' of presentation and, in the case of politics and politicians, 'image' and 'sound bite'. In additional (although Postman does not dwell on it much), more trivial pursuits such as sport are presented as if they were of the greatest existential import. The means to this are a sustained build-up to the sporting event through frenzied advertising in the weeks preceding it and then endless interviews and expert opinions etc. etc. just before and during the actual occurrence of the event. In the world of post-modern symbolic arrest, life-and-death world events and the world of sport assume equal entertainment value.

II

It is also notable how symbolic arrest has permeated the world of public services and utilities and even educational institutions. Within them develop what might be called a 'management culture', wherein services and processes are 'repackaged' and 'products' are promoted as if the relationships involved were purely commercial ones. The dimension of symbolic arrest here focuses on the way in which management culture seeks to promote 'efficiency' but does so only by interpreting it on the basis of models of social interaction and outcomes derived from cybernetics and the advertising industry. What results is not a more functionally efficient institution or service but, rather, one which is seen to *display* a well-organized management structure. In effect, the symbolic relations and internal dynamics of bureaucracy become ends in themselves. I shall discuss this phenomenon at length in relation to higher education in Part 4 of the present work.

Another zone of postmodern symbolic arrest which is worth considering is in the visual arts. Here there is some affinity with the management culture just discussed. In 1964, for example, Tom Wolfe's book *The Painted Word*[6] put a light-hearted case for interpreting much twentieth-century modernist art as dependent for its intelligibility upon accompanying bodies of theoretical discourse. Wolfe's reading is, in fact, not true of this art *per se*, but it is true of much conceptually based 'art' practice since the 1960s. Elsewhere[7] I have argued that 'meaning' in such works is largely determined by contemporary curatorial interests – the art object exists only as a vehicle for *talk* about art and its modes of social significance or otherwise. Its *raison d'être* is as a symbolic display, not of art, but of those conditions and institutions under which it is constituted by persons whose proper business is its management, criticism or historical interpretation.

The phenomenon of symbolic arrest has also characterized dominant contemporary strategies in the other specialized symbolic practices, most notably philosophy, literary theory and the social sciences. At the heart of this is a group of theoretical approaches known collectively as poststructuralism. Figures such as Derrida, Lacan, Barthes, Foucault and (to some extent) Baudrillard[8] emphasize that knowledge only occurs as an articulation within a *field* of signifying relations, and that this renders meaning, truth and subjectivity much more unstable and fluid notions than has hitherto been supposed. This attitude has become a general characteristic of much contemporary thought. In fact, Hans Bertens has suggested that something like it informs most recent attempts to comprehend the general nature of postmodernity. In his words:

> If there is a common denominator to all…postmodernisms, it is that of a crisis of representation: a deeply felt loss of faith in our ability to represent the real, in the widest sense. No matter whether they are aesthetic, epistemological, oral, or political in nature, the representations that we used to rely on can no longer be taken for granted.[9]

The most radical form of this scepticism is found in Derrida's philosophy. Derrida's basic position has been excellently summarized by Wolfgang Welsch as follows:

> Derrida proved that meaning is always due to the inscription in media, and that mediality does not first ensue subsequently and externally but is constitutive for meaning at the outset, that it has *productive* significance for processes of meaning. Meaning is not, as the metaphysical tradition had thought, 'tarnished' or faked through the materiality of the medium; rather without this connection there would be no meaning at all. The pure sign-free meaning which the tradition had dreamt of was a phantom. Today this is – thanks to media experience – the state of reflection in philosophy.[10]

Welsch's point in the last sentence here is an important one. The diverse modes of representation made possible by recent innovations in media and information technology are themselves an exemplification of Derrida's sign-based epistemology. They reveal the ways in which different media are constitutive of our ways of experiencing the world. Hence Welsch's general conclusion:

> [T]oday's philosophy considers complete worlds – be it the everyday world, the physical world, or a literary world – to be constructions and, to this extent, at least in part to be artefacts. Artistic or fictional feats, inhere in all worlds, starting with the fundamental schemata of perception, via modes of symbolisation, through to the forms of evaluation of objects. And it cannot be said that any of these procedures and criteria could be straightforwardly derived from a reality-in-itself. – All worlds are basically artificial worlds.[11]

Welsch's leap from the fact that signs necessarily mediate our experience of reality to the conclusion that they are constitutive of it in a radical sense is what I shall call *epistemological nihilism*. Such a viewpoint does not deny that there is a realm of being beyond signification, but it does deny that this realm can provide the conceptual foundations for distinguishing between forms of knowledge, or for the objective superiority of one conceptual frame over another.

Epistemological nihilism is, I would suggest, the inevitable outcome of all the varieties of poststructuralism. Indeed, the familiar idea of reality as a 'social construct' propagated in much social science and 'discourse theory' is itself a crude form of epistemological nihilism. I would argue further that such nihilisms exemplify postmodern symbolic arrest in its most dense and strangulating form. Reality is seen in the most basic terms, as an effect of varieties of symbolic artifice. Rather than achieving self-regulation through adapting to and articulating reality, self-consciousness is locked into the fantasy that symbolic display of one sort or another is a sufficient characterization of the real. In a sense this involves an unrecognized regression to a mythical mode of thought, insofar as symbol and reality are taken to be fused with one another.

Now it might be argued that the problem of symbolic arrest has been overstated here. Whatever else is the case about postmodern society, it represents a real diversification of life-choices which are open to the individual, and, in particular, it has allowed the voices of marginalized or repressed communities not only to obtain a hearing, but to become a part of a mainstream eclectic culture.

But again, whilst these are indeed positive factors, the dimension of symbolic arrest presents, nevertheless, the direst problems. The irony is that whilst the potential for great advance exists, this potential is being squandered and much worse. The squandering consists in the way that symbolic arrest actually works counter to its intended effects. In the health services, for example, the nursing profession still caters for patients, but the energies of experienced staff – which could be of *most* benefit to those who are in need of care – are diverted into useless administrative duties. These duties engender plans, flowcharts and other signifiers of efficiency, but this is efficiency only in a rhetorical sense. The figures 'cash out'. Budgets are balanced but responsibility for patient care is devolved on to the young and inexperienced. In practice, the patient loses out. The very functions which define the nursing profession are contradicted by the means of their supposedly more efficient realization.

This embodies a kind of law of symbolic arrest which pervades contemporary society. Broadly speaking, the more the term 'quality' is used as a rhetorical goal in relation to operational strategies in the public services, utilities and education, the more the image of efficient operation is conveyed and the less, correspondingly, are the actual benefits which accrue to the recipients. Admittedly, the systems still work, but *how* they work is a pale shadow of the ways in which they *could* and *should* work.

The danger is amplified in the context of information technology. In his book *The Metaphysics of Virtual Reality*, Michael Heim judiciously observes that

Business in America embraced computers under the magic rubric of *produc-tivity*. Yet company reports do not seem to get better after thirty drafts. Real economic productivity in the United States actually declined over the last decade, and so has the competitiveness of the US economy. Feel productive; push more paper.[12]

Of course information technology is an enormous boon in relation to all aspects of contemporary productive processes, but Heim's point is that it also engenders a futile tendency to produce information for its own sake, even in contexts where it is actually meant to promote efficiency. More generally, he notes:

Infomania erodes our capacity for significance. With a mind-set fixed on information, our attention span shortens. We collect fragments. We become mentally poorer in overall meaning. We get into the habit of clinging to knowledge bits and lose our feel for the wisdom behind the knowledge.[13]

On these terms, the new technology tends to engender an aimless and frag-mented pursuit of information for its own sake. The computer-user 'surfs the Internet' in the apotheosis of what Heidegger once characterized as empty 'curiosity'. This – like the wanderings of the *flâneur* – has its attractions, but not if carried to a point of obsessiveness. Such a point, if culturally generalized, takes us to the zone of absolute danger. Heim's book is actually illustrative of this in several respects. For example, whilst identifying the dangers of information technology obsession, his response to this is to advocate a quasi-mystical oriental counter-philosophy which, in effect, amounts to a kind of exotic Californian holiday which occasionally keeps one away from the computer. In terms of reality, however, Californian holidays are, at best, of limited duration. They do not amount to taking control of a situation – which is surely the response demanded here.

The real problem is that information technology (and variants – such as virtual reality) have, like the media and advertising industries, an intoxicating glamour whereby the individual focuses on and consumes the symbolic means rather than the functional ends which are involved. And, like the televisual image, information technology has its own adverse epistemological effect over and above the mere diminution of attention span. Heim describes it as follows:

The computer absorbs our language so we can squirt symbols at lightning speeds or scan the whole range of human thought with Boolean searches. Because the computer, not the student does the translating, [a] shift takes place subtly. The computer system slides us from a fierce awareness of things to the detached world of logical distance. By encoding language as data the computer already modifies the language we use into mathematized ASCII (American Standard Code of Information Interchange). We can then operate with the certitude of Boolean formulas. The logical distance we gain offers all the allure of control and power without the pain of having to translate back and forth from our everyday approach to the things we experience.[14]

On these terms, thought processes which follow the prompting of information technology have a reductive effect. The sensible particularity and complexity of the real is expressed abstractly as a logic of inclusion and exclusion *vis-à-vis* class membership. Reality does, of course, have this aspect, but symbolic expressions of it do no justice to such things as, for example, concrete patterns of human interaction. Applied beyond the appropriate context, the idioms of information technology function as symbolic displays which distort and conceal the realities which they are meant to articulate.

III

All the factors which I have described so far enmesh with one another. Postmodern existence both operates and is definable within a worldwide web of symbolic arrest. And in every web there is something nasty. In this case the something nasty is uniquely a product of the factors which constitute the web. It is a 'creature' of two converging aspects – one being an artificially induced mutation of self-consciousness and the other being a something 'other' than human being.

The former I shall call the *qualitative cyborg*. To work towards its understanding let us first define the cyborg as a human who has been implanted with genetically engineered tissue or micro-chip technology. In a quantitative sense this is not problematic. Interventions of this sort can enhance the body's capacity to resist illness and disease and can compensate for congenital deficiencies. However, let us suppose that these interventions are directed, not towards resisting or preventing adverse factors in bodily existence, but towards the transformation of cognitive structures.

There is a massive amount of contemporary writing which wriggles and writhes in ecstasy at this very prospect.[15] The idea is that if one can 'interface' with a virtual-reality cyberspace whenever one desires, then this will engender a liberation from the body and a projection into a realm of freedom and realizable fantasy. William Gibson's novel *Neuromancer* is frequently cited as an exemplar of what this might be like.

It is, however, important to distinguish between this essentially fantasy notion of the cyborg and the qualitative variety. All fantasy derives its potency and desirability from the matrix of physical embodiment. There can only be adventures in virtual cyberspace because of the patterns of loss and gain – the 'economy of desire' referred to in Chapter 1 – which characterize the being of embodied subjectivity. No matter how immersed in virtual cyberspace one might become, what is experienced there only has meaning by virtue of its reference back to the body and its mundane interactions. Remove that, and the conditions which render fantasy meaningful are removed. The significance of desire realized in a cyber-world may appear to be other than that of normal embodied existence, but it merely extends the customary economy of desire in an unrecognized form. And the real always returns. At some point the cybernaut is reluctantly summoned back to the domain of everydayness. He or she thus becomes something of a divided 'unhappy consciousness' in the Hegelian sense.

Now, it might be that the cybernaut may be able to strike some *modus vivendi* between the real and the virtual. But unless the nature of this relation and its components is subjected to searching critical scrutiny on the basis of an adequate epistemology, all that we have are fantasies of harmony. And one particularly foolish fantasy of this kind beckons to the cyber-addict. It is that of the total immersion scenario, where the addict chooses to be placed in a virtual system which brings about the delusion that what he or she is experiencing is real. The addict is able to exist continuously in this cyber-world though also being placed in a biomechanical support system which provides for nutrition, the discharge of waste and regular toning up of muscles and tissue. The film *The Matrix* is loosely prophetic of this.

Such a context radicalizes the dimension of unhappy consciousness noted earlier. For the cybernaut's existence is now absolutely dependent on a reality which – as a deluded subject – he or she has no volitional relation to. No matter what interactive cyber-relations evolve within the total immersion system, and no matter how reliable in principle the biomechanical support system is, both relations and support are absolutely dependent on contingencies. A super-virus, environmental disaster or even the malignant flick of a switch outside the system could destroy this cyber-world *in toto*. The individuals within the system would have no opportunity to prepare for such happenstances; neither would they be able to formulate responses to them.

The burgeoning literature of cyber-babble rarely reaches as far as these insights. Indeed, its preoccupation with cybernaut fantasies has meant that the real issue has scarcely been addressed. For the cyborgs just described do not embody a radical transformation of humanity, but, rather, a particularly stupid mode of self-indulgence. The cyber-augmentation of cognitive capacities involved here amounts to little more than a quantitative intensification of those patterns of desire and gratification which are defined by the condition of embodied subjectivity.

The qualitative cyborg is *very* different. This can be shown by developing a contrast. The embodied subject's remembrance of the past and its imaginative projection of experiential possibility involve the generation of imagery to satisfy linguistic descriptions. This generation is, however, at best piecemeal, fragmentary and highly creative. Indeed, it is precisely the incompleteness of such generation which necessitates narrative as the basis of the cohesion of the self. We know that the body exists continuously through space and time, but we can only comprehend this existence as a unity (i.e. become self-conscious) insofar as the continuum is marked out in terms of mutually significant episodes and events. This narrative structure depends as much on what we are unable to remember or project as it does on what we can actually realize. (I shall discuss this at great length in Chapters 5 and 7.)

Let us suppose, however, that through biomechanical implants or genetically engineered tissues some humans are able massively to augment their powers of recall and imaginative projection. Their mental engrams now admit of virtually full rather than schematic embodiment. A being of this kind can choose to, as it

were, switch off its present input of stimuli so as to replay past experiences or project possible ones with a sensory vividness that approximates immediate perception. For such an agent it would seem as if these experiences were actually occurring in the present.

In order for such a cyborg to function it would need some kind of cognitive bracketing-out mechanism whereby its virtual experiences were recognized as projections and not real stimuli from the present. This is necessary because if an agent could not distinguish between present, past and mere possibility its sense of self would be collapsed. This said, it may be that bracketing devices of the most enormous complexity could be developed. These would enable a controlled interface between both the present and past and possible experience which could draw simultaneously on all the senses *and* the subject's general experiential view-point. Hence, in recalling a past event we would not only project what we perceived but also something of those affective states and broader attitudes which informed that particular perceptual engagement. Similarly, in projecting future or counterfactual possibilities we would not only 'see' and 'hear' etc. a state of affairs, but would also extrapolate and project an image of how we might feel in that context and how our personal worldview might differ from its present incarnation.

A biotechnical project of this kind would probably, at the outset, have a purely quantitative orientation. It would seek merely to improve or augment human cognitive mechanisms. In the long term, however, it could easily produce a *qualitative* transformation. This is because the specifically human form of finitude is here radically changed. To be able both to recreate the past and to project alternative experiences with virtual exactness is to eliminate that dimension of incompleteness and lack which necessitates narrative as the basis of unity of the self. For the qualitative cyborg, nothing is lost and nothing much is gained in the passage of life. On the one hand, its past moments can live again in the present and, on the other hand, the attractions of the future are vitiated through the power to project alternative experiential possibilities at will and at any time. The emphasis in experience is thereby shifted away from narrative meaning towards mere continuity. Different things happen to the qualitative cyborg, but none of these things existentially outweighs any other. The past does not fade, and any future or counterfactual possibility that one cares to project can live, as it were, in advance of the future. Every experience has equality of intensity and value.

On these terms, then, mere augmentation of cognitive capacities can lead to a being whose finitude is qualitatively different from that of a human. Such a being has an immediate present, but to the degree that it can recall or project its experience it is not closely bound to that immediate present. In the case of the human being, in contrast, the immediate present forms the focal point of its sense of self. As it cannot recall the past or project alternative experiences with any completeness, it must link these selectively and evaluatively in a cumulative narrative which contextualizes its immediate present and makes it meaningful.

The qualitative cyborg has no need of such a narrative. Such self-consciousness as it starts with is compressed into a one-dimensional vector of activity – namely a

means/end rationality directed towards maximizing the possibilities of its own survival. The only avenues of intrinsic value which would be relevant to it are those symbolic specialized practices which have technological or practical use. Given the appropriate interface stations, one such cyborg would be able to communicate its own history *in toto* to another. There would be no problem of interpersonal communication since the very narrative factors which are the basis of personality are what the qualitative cyborg's cognitive augmentations serve to diminish. Language, empathic identification and imagination would be mechanized in the direction of informational interface alone. The aesthetic dimension of experience would disappear entirely. Such a being would only be self-conscious in a formal sense, i.e. it could identify itself as having occupied and being able to occupy spatio-temporal co-ordinates other than its immediate one, but these would not matter to it except in a quantitative sense. They would simply be units accumulated alongside others in the continuous flow of its existence.

Now a cyborg of this kind begins – in my scenario – as an implanted human whose cognitive augmentations push it unintentionally in this dehumanized direction. It is driven by animal instincts for survival and reproduction, and, given the elimination of narrative meaning, these are all that its cognitive powers can be directed towards. There would be nothing else for it. It follows, therefore, that such a being would gradually seek out and bond with others of the same kind for survival and reproductive purposes. Given the appropriate *in vitro* fertilization and nurturing technology, it is quite possible that these purposes could be realized. Humanity would have accidentally created a mutant species which would find its own creators at best incomprehensible and at worst of significance only insofar as they inhibited or could be put to use in the facilitation of cyborg survival. Not only would these beings be alien to the civilizing process, they could threaten its very existence.

The technological innovations which make the qualitative cyborg feasible are also of considerable concern in themselves, especially in relation to the massively accelerating growth of artificial neural networks and nanotechnology. It is possible, for example, that artificial intelligence will be created with a capacity to evolve autonomously towards levels of biological complexity. If such 'artilects' were able to engage with one another and engender their own 'forms of life' (in the Wittgensteinian sense), then the human species would find that it had, inadvertently, created a much more powerful rival to its own dominion of the earth. The potential for violence here would almost be beyond comprehension.

Qualitative cyborgs and artilects are not just science fiction; they are already visible on the technological horizon. We are making them emerge from the worldwide web of symbolic arrest. Unfortunately, it is the cosy science-fiction mentality of cyber-babble which inhibits an adequate awareness of the dangers which the qualitative cyborg and the artilect present. Science fiction – however horrible the possibilities it projects – is a human endeavour with outcomes controlled by its creators. The possibilities which I am describing are not. In the unpleasant unglamorous real world our capacity for controlled endings has been diminished. Things *much* worse than the possibilities which I have described may

happen. Unfortunately, because contemporary symbolic arrest is unable to distinguish between scientific fact and the comforts of science fiction it regresses to a level of mythic understanding which is of a particularly childish kind. Everything *has to* work out for the best in the end, so all that we need do in the meantime is to float through delicious cyber-space fantasies.

And so we are returned to the question of civilization and philosophy. If the postmodern world continues on its present symbolically arrested course it is quite conceivable that civilization will come to an end through the advent of an era of supermodernity where mechanized processes define the terms of existence or where biomachines extinguish or enslave the human species. The alternative is for philosophy to intervene. This does not entail a rejection of technological innovation. Rather, it involves a critical thinking-through of historical change in relation to these enduring epistemological and aesthetic factors, which are the basis of self-consciousness and the civilizing process. In this way one might hope to establish a critical philosophical standpoint which could help regulate – however minimally – the transition to what comes after postmodernism.

IV

Given, therefore, that so much is at stake, to what philosophical sources should we look in the formulation of such a project? There has certainly been no shortage of critics of postmodernity. However, in the case of Marxist critiques the alternatives which are on offer do not seem intellectually or existentially palatable.[16] Christopher Norris's critical work is extremely effective (especially in relation to Baudrillard), but does not (as yet) offer a systematic dialectical frame-work for thinking through contemporary culture and society in relation to constant elements in experience. Fredric Jameson's work – whilst greatly influential – lacks Norris's philosophical acumen and takes scarcely a step towards the requisite dialectical framework. Even bigger problems arise for those critics – such as Hal Foster – who wish to criticize certain aspects of postmodern capitalism and its socio-economic effects by using epistemological nihilism as a 'weapon'.[17] The difficulty is that – as I have shown – this idiom is itself a key factor within the all-pervasive symbolic arrest. Its effect is to deconstruct any systematic ethical or epistemological standpoint from which the dangers of symbolic arrest could be convincingly argued.

In this respect it is extraordinary how from figures such as Derrida, Foster, Welsch and Lyotard (and many others) there is a sustained plea for the value of justice, plurality, difference, the rights of women, minorities and hitherto marginalized sexual groups. This special pleading, along with all the other jargon of 'oppositionality', is just so much *hot air*. Why should difference, plurality, minority rights, etc. be worthy of respect? If we are epistemological nihilists, value-systems like cognitive frameworks are specific to the individual communities which 'construct' them. Any grand agonized pleas for valuing difference *per se* are no more than rhetorical gestures manifestly contradicted by the very epistemological standpoint which leads to their rhetorical articulation in the first place.

The theory of civilization sketched out in the first chapter of this book, in contrast, presents a basis for justifying the worth of social and personal difference. This is because it links the civilizing process to the development of those values which are intrinsic to constitutive factors in self-consciousness itself. Diversification and mutual tolerance are key elements in this development.

Now, whilst epistemological nihilism cannot do what my theory does, this is irrelevant to questions of general validity. It could be, for example, that epistemological nihilism is true, in which case my theory would be wrong and the justification of the worth of difference would be destroyed. Happily, this is not the case. Epistemological nihilism is deeply flawed – as I will show in relation to Derrida and Welsch in Chapter 9. The important thing, however, is not to rest on a purely negative critique. If, as I am arguing, epistemological factors are fundamental to an understanding of the civilizing process, then we need to develop an epistemology which does full justice to the fact that self-consciousness is a dynamic structure whose constant elements are refounded under different historical conditions. We need a refoundational philosophy which links object and subject, the internal structure of subjectivity and the realm of value together in a complex network of reciprocal relations.

I shall now consider where such a philosophy should be sought and what its relation to postmodernity might be. In terms of the first question, we must recall a central tenet of the refoundational strategy, namely that constant elements in experience are always articulated under historically specific circumstances. This means that their philosophical comprehension will take different forms at different times. In some epochs, such and such a constant will figure more centrally in experience than others, and philosophical discourse will reflect this accordingly. At other times, constants which hitherto only seemed of marginal importance will come to the fore in unexpected ways and become thereby much more accessible to philosophical understanding.

Ironically enough, postmodernism – in its very denial of constants – provides important evidence of this. Consider, for example, contemporary thought's obsession with signification. Signification is a necessary condition of any possible experience over and above mere animal consciousness, and the ubiquity of signs in contemporary consumer culture is a heightened expression of this necessity. Indeed, the current prevalence of epistemological nihilism has a similar disclosive significance *vis-à-vis* both the structure of signification itself and its more general ramifications. It serves, in particular (whatever its faults), to affirm the fact that meaning is not some simple correspondence between sign and referent, but gravitates around the sign's relation to other signs in a developing *field* of signifying relations. This insight is of vital importance in comprehending the dynamic complexity of the self – but only if it is correlated with an understanding of those constant reciprocal relations which stabilize the cognitive field and thereby give holistic cohesion to the self. (It is these stabilizing factors, of course, which epistemological nihilism fails to negotiate.)

A second important clue concerning constants in experience arises from the contemporary ubiquity of the image as a means of communication and under-

standing. This can function – as Postman's critique amply shows – as a factor in the decline of rational discursive knowledge. However, what if this *cultural emphasis* on the image were to be understood as merely that, i.e. as a one-sided historical exaggeration of an element which is a major feature of rational discursivity *per se*?

And postmodern culture also furnishes us with a further important clue in this very same direction. Much is made of the manic ephemerality of taste and value in recent times – all in all, the primacy of the *momentary*. But what if momentariness were only a historically specific exaggeration of something central both to the unity of the self and to questions of value?

Indeed, this can be taken further. Postmodern thought emphasizes the 'excentricity' of the subject. This is often taken to entail some major doubt about the unity of the self. If this is meant to eclipse the idea of a substantial self which endures timelessly or which is impermeable to historical transformation, then such scepticism is well founded and timely. If, however, it purports to cast doubt on the unity of the self in *any* significant sense, then it is – to say the least – self-contradictory. This reasoning might suggest, therefore, that we need to learn from such scepticism, so as to interpret the unity of the self as a constant, but one which is labile and founded on the image, momentariness and, ultimately, *narrative* structure. Rather than function as a mere negative discourse, in other words, postmodern scepticism may indirectly point towards a theory of the self which transcends 'essentialism' without relapsing into relativism.

Now if these clues are correct, postmodernism's epistemological nihilism is radically flawed but also instructive. The very features which seem to diminish the constancy of knowledge are historically specific intensifications of some of its key aspects. This opens up a significant opportunity, for it allows philosophical analysis to focus on constants in experience which were actually hitherto misunderstood or foolishly neglected. Despite itself, postmodern thought points towards *a continuing task of articulation*. It emphasizes factors which *must* be addressed. Hence we can draw a vital intellectual point, namely that *one cannot simply reject postmodernism*. Like every historical epoch, it is a part of reality. This means that one must learn from it and carry whatever it offers into the future. Such a carrying-forward involves clarification, and thence *transformation*. Postmodernism's clues not only favour, but also advance the case for historically mediated constants.

Given this claim, the question arises, of course, of what philosophical positions enable it to be justified. And in this respect a refoundational approach has an interesting feature. It is not tied to any single philosophical school or thinker.

This is because any significant philosophical work will offer some way or other of identifying constants in experience. The thing is to select sources which *also* illuminate one's present situation through their particular way of articulating the more enduring factors. In the present case, this means a philosophy which can locate us in relation to the clues noted above and which can develop them on the basis of a systematic notion of reciprocal relations, thus enabling the articulation of self-consciousness as *a process of realization*.

This project could usefully draw on the Hegelian tradition, or a totally rethought historical materialism. There is, however, an even more directly relevant method which itself cuts across some customary methodological boundaries. It can be called *analytic hermeneutics*. The first term in this title signifies analytic philosophy's intention to clarify those constants which are logically necessary conditions for objective knowledge and self-consciousness. The second term indicates that this will not issue in some exhaustive and fixed philosophical system, but is, rather, an ongoing process of clarification, critique and reformulation – all in all a sustained interpretative task.

What makes analytic hermeneutics more than the sum of its two parts, however, is the possibility of *progressive articulation*. This means that through its dialogue with tradition and its own historically specific context of experience, transcendental hermeneutics seeks to establish the truth of self-consciousness on the same basis as the civilizing process itself, i.e. as a cumulative process advancing – however erratically – to higher stages. Our criterion of 'higher', in this context, is the ability to identify constants and their reciprocal relations with one another, continuously to differentiate them internally and to reassess the nature of the whole in the light of this. Just as importantly, it involves a tracing of the implications of this process in relation to the problems of the present and in relation to the present's implications for it.

If such an analytic momentum can be historically sustained, each distinct phase of development can be, in logical terms, more consistent and more comprehensive in explanatory and methodological power than the preceding phases. Since, however, one of the main effects of historical existence is the forgetting of the past, the emphasis of philosophical analysis in any one period may – for contemporary cultural reasons – focus on one group of constants and forget or neglect others which have been previously illuminated. This is why an analytic hermeneutical approach does not seek a definitive resolution to philosophical problems. Changing historical circumstances disclose new aspects to familiar categories, as well as concealing others. Analytic hermeneutics, accordingly, involves a constant reinterpretation of the past in relation to the present, and the acknowledgement that the only complete framework of philosophical truth is that of progressive articulation as the possibility of *a continuous open-ended process of gradual cumulative advance*.

As noted earlier, this approach cuts across some familiar boundaries in philosophy. In its most general orientation it is heavily indebted to analytic philosophy's techniques of conceptual analysis. It also draws on Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutics[18] and, in its emphasis on embodiment as the finite subject's mode of inhering in the world, on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology.[19] There is also a further approach which is of the *most decisive* significance for analytic hermeneutics. This is Ernst Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms.[20]

Cassirer's work intersects, in varying degrees, with all the aforementioned approaches. In particular, it serves both to extend and to complement Merleau-Ponty's corporeal phenomenology. Cassirer also has considerable contemporary

relevance through the importance which he assigns to such things as signification as a necessary feature of experience, meaning determined by its position in a field of relations, and self-consciousness as a process of progressively articulated realization. It is this process – the Hegelian dimension of Cassirer's thought – which especially needs to be articulated.

In Parts II and III of this book, therefore, I shall develop a refoundational philosophy based on analytic hermeneutics in the sense just described. My approach will emphasize factors which are constitutive of objective knowledge and the unity of the self, and which are the basis of those intrinsic values which are realized through the civilizing *process*. By emphasizing these epistemological factors, I will seek to undermine the primacy of symbolic arrest. I will show that, whilst signification necessarily mediates our knowledge of the real, this does not mean that what is *ultimate* is merely the 'play' of the signifier. My more specific strategy is as follows.

I will first upgrade Cassirer's general epistemology in Chapter 3 and will then *radically* extend it, by explaining, in Chapter 4, the relation between imagination and objective knowledge and addressing, in Chapter 5, the significance of the momentary in the holistic cohesion of the self. These three chapters will, of course, 'cash out' those very clues (noted earlier) which postmodernism provides for constants in experience. In Chapter 6, I will extend this approach further, by analysing the limits of knowledge as such. This will involve a characterization of what reality must be taken to be, independently of its being perceived. The analysis will show that even that which exceeds signification can be meaningfully articulated.

In Part III of the book, I will then – in Chapter 7 – offer a theory of moral value based on ideas broached in previous chapters. In Chapter 8, I will use all these same ideas to show why the terrible events of 11 September 2001 do indeed constitute an attack on civilized values as such.

Finally, in Part IV, I shall utilize refoundational philosophy as a critique of influential aspects of postmodern thought. Chapter 9 refutes Derrida's and Welsch's epistemological nihilisms. Chapter 10 considers recent approaches to psychoanalysis, whilst Chapter 11 criticizes Bourdieu's sociological reduction of the field of cultural production. In Chapter 12, recent attacks on knowledge by unthinking approaches to higher education will be illuminated, and in my conclusion I will point out a way forward – in philosophical and cultural terms – based on all the preceding arguments.

Part II

Questions of knowledge

3   Refoundational knowledge

Cassirer's epistemology

Introduction

Cassirer's well-known emphasis on cultural and historical issues is one which invites commentators to look at his theory of symbolic forms itself in a primarily cultural and historical context. On these terms, it is easily seen as one rather sophisticated manifestation of a tendency whose time has long since gone – namely neo-Kantianism of the Marburg School. This historical reading has been reinforced by the fact that Cassirer scholarship has tended to focus either on the broad sweep of the theory as a whole[1] or on its application to specific cultural fields. His basic epistemological standpoint has received less than adequate attention.[2] The lack of such attentiveness means that now – at a time when 'big' philosophical systems are no longer fashionable – Cassirer himself is simply unfashionable. There is no established interpretative base which would allow us to see him as anything other than an old-fashioned neo-Kantian with grandiose aspirations.

However, it is one thing to use Kant's ideas and another thing to be a mere neo-Kantian. It will be my contention in this chapter that Cassirer makes some decisive breaks with Kant, and makes significant and enormously viable modifications to the Kantian ideas which he does adopt. There is an even more significant Hegelian dimension of his thought which also needs to be activated. The upshot of these strategies is a philosophy which – even if Cassirer himself did not fully realize it – might be called *corporeal phenomenology*. More than this, it is an approach which can be incorporated as a key element in the refoundational philosophical strategy which I have outlined in the previous chapters.

To show this, in sections i and ii I shall offer a general overview of Cassirer's account of the relation between object and subject of experience and the key role played by (what I shall call) the *principle of reciprocity*. Differences from and similarities to Kant will be noted, and particular emphasis will be given to the resolution of ambiguities in Cassirer's position. In section iii, important details of the object–subject relation will be filled in, on the basis of the decisive mediating role which Cassirer assigns to *symbolic form*. It will be argued that this term allows Cassirer substantially and viably to rearticulate Kant's approach to the correlation of object and subject of experience. In section iv I will review Cassirer's general position, giving particular scrutiny to the way in which he fails to follow

the phenomenological logic of his own approach through to its proper conclusion. However, I will then rectify this error, and in making Cassirer's theory self-consistent will be able to characterize it as a continuously viable form of corporeal phenomenology.

I

Kant's and Cassirer's philosophies have one major point in common, namely that the form of human experience – the objective structure of the world – is contributed by the organizational activity of consciousness itself. Consciousness 'synthesizes' – connects together – appearances and composes them into objects by systematically relating them to other appearances or possibilities of appearance. In order to do this it must operate with fundamental concepts or 'categories'.

For Kant, these form a complete rigid system (derivable from the traditional forms of logical judgement, in conjunction with Newtonian mechanics). Cassirer, in contrast, adopts a more flexible approach. He too operates with fundamental concepts – notably space, time, causality, number, magnitude and thing/property – but rarely terms them 'categories'. Indeed, whilst Cassirer's 'categories' *partially* overlap with Kant's framework and the significance assigned to it, they are capable of being instantiated in different ways, under different intellectual and historical conditions (a fact which I will return to, at length, as this study progresses). Cassirer's reticence concerning the term 'category', in other words, is, at least in part, indicative of important philosophical differences from Kant. However, since there is also some significant kinship as well, I shall continue, for expository convenience, to talk of Cassirer's 'categories'.

Given this very general outline, I shall now address (in much more depth) Cassirer's account of the objective level of experience. Let us commence with what he regards as the structural core of consciousness's unifying activity. In relation to this we are told:

> On close scrutiny perception is a process of selection and differentiation which consciousness applies to the chaotic mass of 'impressions'. Out of the mass of impressions which pour in on consciousness in any given moment of time certain traits must be retained as recurrent and 'typical' as opposed to others which are merely accidental and transient; certain factors must be stressed and others excluded as non-essential.[3]

There are two important points involved here. First, the process of selection and discrimination means that in the recognition of an item present in perception its immediate characteristics are not registered 'raw'; rather, they are always related to some greater whole – be it a class, a kind, a series, a universal or the notion of a thing *per se* – of which they are particular parts or elements. The item's phenomenal and dispositional properties are grouped together in such a way that the character of form in this greater whole is represented in each of its individual components.

The second important point is that this relation is a reciprocal one. Consciousness can only see the whole inscribed in the individual parts insofar as it is also capable of seeing the whole as a function of its individual parts. Each act of consciousness, in other words, traverses or is traversable in two directions. On the one hand, it concentrates, selects and groups together; on the other hand, it analyses, resolves, differentiates and disassembles.

This capacity to see the general form inscribed in the individual and vice versa is for Cassirer as essential structure in *any* act of consciousness. I shall henceforth term it the *principle of reciprocity*. It is an operational principle through which those fundamental categories noted earlier are applied. Let us now consider this in greater detail.

First Cassirer remarks that,

> If we think a particular cross section of consciousness, we can apprehend it, not by dwelling exclusively in this cross section, but only by going beyond it into the various related directions by means of definite spatial, temporal, or qualitative ordering functions. Only because in this way we can ascertain in the actual content of consciousness something that is not, in the given something that is not given – does there exist for us that unity which on the one hand we designate as the objective unity of consciousness and on the other as the objective unity of the object.[4]

On these terms Cassirer regards the object as constituted through the intersection of a specific manifold of externally originated matter and a framework of categorial rules which are applied to it. These enable interconnections to be made between the object's past and possible appearances, its particular identity, its amenability (or otherwise) to interactions with other objects, and its general position within the spatio-temporal continuum.

It is important to note that, as well as involving the categories and empirical concepts, this latent schema centres on the productive imagination. For Kant, this notion concerns our ability to represent in quasi-sensory terms (i.e. generate an image of) that which is not immediately present in perception.[5] D.P. Verene has suggested[6] that Cassirer has no theory of imagination, but it is clear from a number of references that Cassirer basically follows Kant's position. In the next chapter I will provide a detailed version of such a theory, but in advance of that here is a schematic outline.

Kant's theory of imagination is of extreme complexity and invokes special interpretative issues which are beyond the scope of this study. However, his theory hinges on a simple transcendental point (already noted in Chapter 1). To learn the meaning of signs or concepts qua signs or concepts or to be able to ascribe experiences to oneself entails a *trans-ostensive horizon*. In respect of signs and concepts, for example, individual instances of these notions can only be learnt and applied as signs and concepts insofar as we can comprehend the fact that they have application to individuals, times and places in addition to those given in immediate perception. Likewise, one could have no sense of self unless

one was able to project oneself as having occupied and being able to occupy times and places other than the present.

Now, it might seem that it is through language that we are able to represent things, states of affairs and states of ourselves which are not immediately given in perception. However, the learning of linguistic signs itself involves a capacity for following rules, and this entails an awareness of what it would be like for rules to apply (or not apply) across a range of different times and places. The acquisition of language, in other words, does not explain our ability to utilize a trans-ostensive horizon; rather, it presupposes such a horizon.

This, of course, brings us to the transcendental function of imagination, for it is only through our ability to generate images that a trans-ostensive horizon is made possible. Imagination involves the projection of items and states of affairs which are other than, or which are hidden in, the field of immediate perception. It is able to extend that field in quasi-sensory terms. It is this capacity – in conjunction with the learning of linguistic terms on an ostensive basis – which enables us to learn the *trans-ostensive* scope of such terms. Imagination enables us to project *what it is like* for linguistic terms to be applied in contexts other than the given perceptual one. And this is a reciprocal relationship, for as the subject becomes able to make complex linguistic descriptions and positing of fact, he or she can direct the projective power of imagination with correspondingly more complexity.

This account does not entail that the productive imagination must be continuously employed throughout our cognitive activity. Given some phenomenal item or state of affairs we can *simply* recognize that it satisfies a concept or has hidden aspects without having to project the concept's other applications, or the item's or state of affair's hidden aspects. This said, however, we could not employ the concept or have full knowledge of the item or state of affairs unless we could – if called upon – imaginatively project what the concept's other applications or the item's or state of affair's hidden aspects might be like.

Given these considerations, it is appropriate to describe the imagination's relation to the perceptual field in terms of a *latent schema*. This is a space of relations and possibilities of appearance which are inscribed in the perceptual field but which are not immediately given. Through direction by the categories, the imagination is able to project some of these relations and possibilities in schematic form, as cognitive circumstances demand.

Now, it is also important to note that this schema will be given different directional emphases on the basis of the subject's particular cognitive orientation at any one moment. If, for example, one is investigating the appearance of a particular flower, one will characterize it and judge it in the context of other flowers, i.e. the particular will be determined by its relation to specific genus or specific forms. There are, of course, an infinite number of other ways in which the latent schema can be drawn upon in different *empirical* contexts. But whilst a given individual item might or might not be reciprocal with such and such an empirical concept, it must *always* be relatable to one or other of those categories which organize the latent schema as a whole – and thence to the structure of objectivity.

II

It is now time to consider the categories in greater detail. Let us consider first our perception of something as an individual *spatial* item. Cassirer states:

> We intuit spatial *configurations* only by combining into *one* idea complete groups of sensory perception which mutually displace one another in immediate sensory experience, and on the other hand by diffusing this unity through the diversity of its particular components. It is only in this interplay of concentration and analysis that spatial consciousness is constructed. Form then appears as potential motion, while motion appears as potential form.[7]

In these remarks Cassirer applies his key insight *vis-à-vis* the basic structure of consciousness, namely that it constructs the object through the reciprocal possibility of bringing together and dispersing. In the foregoing quotation, however, he is also emphasizing that in applying the category of space to an item, this twofold aspect also involves *temporal* ordering in terms of simultaneity and successiveness. Again, consider the following points:

> In every element that we posit as spatial, our consciousness posits an infinite number of potential *directions* and only the sum of these directions constitutes the whole of our spatial intuition. The spatial 'picture' that we possess of a particular empirical object, a house, for example, takes form only when we amplify a particular, relatively limited perspective view in this sense; employing the partial perspective only as a starting point and stimulus, we construct from it a highly complex totality of spatial relations.[8]

In this example a view of the house is given simultaneously – in the present moment – but what makes this partial perspective into a 'house' is the way in which the spatial form of the whole and, indeed, its potential position within the totality of spatial relations inform and tacitly fill out the partial perspective. The latent schema involved here implies temporal successiveness since the different aspects of the house and its broader positioning can only appear with *changes* of position. This is why, in the quotation before last, Cassirer notes that form appears as potential motion and motion appears as potential form. The object is only known in its spatial entirety when its different aspects are perceived from different positions, and therefore through successive moments. Reciprocally, a temporally successive series of appearances or viewpoints can only be understood as manifestations of the same object insofar as they can be grasped simultaneously.

A similar reciprocity applies in relation to the idea of space as a systematic whole. The unity of this system is not simply the whole itself, but, rather, a principle of co-ordination between the parts and the totality. On the one hand such a unity can be viewed as a function of all individual spatial relations, enumerated successively, but on the other hand these elements only have their distinctive individual character and location by simultaneously containing implicit reference

to the system as a whole. The category of space, in other words, is a *functional* one. It is an operational principle for relating individual instances to the idea of a greater totality and vice versa.

Now, in the literature on Cassirer[9] emphasis is usually placed on how he follows other neo-Kantians (notably Herman Cohen) in treating space and time as functional unities. However, there are much deeper implications here. For in treating space and time as principles of unity – as categories – Cassirer is not only attempting to think these concepts in the light of post-Kantian mathematics and physics; he is also making a decisive break with a foundational principle of Kant's Critical Philosophy, namely the absolute *ideality* of space and time. In Kant, space and time are 'forms of intuition', that is to say *receptive* conditions in consciousness. They are not properties of things, as they are in themselves independent of these conditions. For Cassirer, in contrast, while we necessarily use categories of spatial and temporal *unity* this carries no implication that what we so unify is not itself spatial and temporal in some primordial sense. Similar considerations hold in relation to causal unity.[10]

Cassirer, unfortunately, does not emphasize these facts. The reason why is that, for him, experience is *always* conceptually structured. To think of the world as it might be independent of experience is to risk falling into an irrational vitalism or the metaphysical notion of an unknowable ground. For Cassirer, such viewpoints utterly distort the significance of the conceptual dimension. This said, however, the dominant trajectories of Cassirer's arguments are ones which emphasize the *emergence* of conceptual structure from the embodied subject's active inherence *in* the world. Indeed, he observes that without 'an isolation of the body as a material substratum there can be no close…definition in terms of conscious awareness, no "being-for-itself"'.[11]

The cognitive significance which Cassirer assigns to the body here and elsewhere is not found in Kant. It is a position which entails that space and time are not simply imposed upon the given, but are, instead, primordial characteristics of a mind-independent world (a factor which I will analyse in Chapter 6). Insofar as such characteristics are ideal, it is not as transcendental modes of receptivity, but as demands for specific forms of conceptual activity which the physical world places upon the embodied subject.

It is unfortunate that Cassirer and his interpreters have not given more emphasis to the primordial mind-independent realm. It plays a vital *implicit* role in his overall philosophical position. That Cassirer does not develop the point creates a major problem (which I shall address in section iii of this chapter) and a significant ambiguity, which I shall address now.

The ambiguity is this. Cassirer is committed to the existence of a priori constants in human experience, but does not clarify the nature of their claim to a priori status. Indeed, this ambiguity is underlined by the fact that, whereas for Kant the categorial framework is static and given, for Cassirer it is something which admits of historical development and refinement. But if this is the case, how can we talk of a priori constants? Fortunately the ambiguity here can easily be resolved. To show this we must now bring that mind-independent primordial

dimension noted above into play. This will require a development of the full implications of Cassirer's position in a way that he himself does not attempt.

First, to reiterate, Cassirer's position implies that we are, as finite beings, immersed in a realm of spatio-temporal, interacting heterogeneous elements. Hence, whilst in Kant space, time and causality are frameworks which we *impose on* independently originated material, in Cassirer they are also aspects of this independent material itself. This means that it is we who must adapt our cognitive strategies to the primordial spatial, temporal and causal manifold. From this two key inferences can be made. On the one hand, by virtue of our inherence in the pre-existent physical realm we must use categories of spatial, temporal and causal *unity* in order to make our experience of it both intelligible and consistent. These categories are therefore binding on us in an existential a priori sense. In the absence of their employment there could be no self-conscious experience of a rule-governed objective world. On the other hand, since these categories are principles of adaptation to the demands of mind-independent factors there is no guarantee that *individual* types of spatial, temporal and causal unity which we employ can themselves be characterized as a priori. The use of these general categories *per se* is necessary, but the forms which they take in practice is much more open. We will adapt and refine them on the basis of different existential circumstances.

On these terms then, for Cassirer space, time and causality are, as principles of functional unity per se, a priori in a very general existential sense. Now as well as failing to make this explicit, Cassirer also fails to elaborate the relation between these *first-order* categories and a dimension of *second-order* principles. This is reflected in an uncertainty amongst Cassirer's commentators as to exactly what his most fundamental concepts are. There is general agreement that he regards space, time and causality as fundamental, but he may also regard number, magnitude and thing/property in these terms.[12] The ambiguity here is, in one sense, both understandable and acceptable, for number and the other prospective second-order categories pertain to the symbolic *means* whereby the first-order categories are unified. And since (as noted a little earlier) these forms of unity are adapted and refined in relation to changing existential circumstances, it would allow that the symbolic means of their articulation is likewise subject to variation. Hence, whilst some second-order symbolic categories *per se* are generally necessary in order to articulate the first-order level, the question of which particular second-order principles are demanded is a function of stages and contexts in the development of self-consciousness.

Without underlining the fact, therefore, Cassirer is using two different orders of categories. Both are a priori in the sense that we have to use them in some shape or form; but what that shape or form is is determined by more specific circumstances. I shall return to this question in more detail in the next section. Before that, however, this outline of Cassirer's overall epistemological standpoint must be completed by an exposition of his approach to the subject of experience.

As a starting point it is worth recalling his claim that the unity of the object is linked to the objective unity of the subject. In this Cassirer is, perhaps, at his closest to Kant. Again, however, his treatment of the relation is rather scattered

and schematic,[13] and in what follows I shall try to concentrate it in a brief but satisfactory synopsis.

First, a latent schema (of the sort described earlier) arises through the application of a category or categories to a manifold and serves to establish the manifold as an object. However, something else is required in order for the schema to be formed. We need, in addition, capacities for the retention, recall and projection of sensations and relations – capacities which Cassirer (and, indeed, Kant) identify with imagination in its purest 'productive' form. And this leads to the key point. *Consciousness can only apply its categories to externally originated material insofar as, through so doing, it also applies them to itself, i.e. to its own capacities for retention, recall and projection.* By applying the categories to its own imaginative powers, consciousness is able to integrate all its acts and perceptions within a unified and understood framework of past, present and future. It becomes thereby *self-conscious*. This is far more than some happy side-effect, for the latent schema which arises in applying the categories to phenomena demands such a unified self as its reference point. An item cannot be related to its past and possible positions and appearances – and thus constituted as an object – unless there is a subject which can comprehend such positioning and appearances. But a subject cannot comprehend in this way unless he or she can articulate his or her own past of possible positioning. This means that the subject's powers of imagination must be unified by the same principles which are applied to the object.

In the broadest terms, then, Cassirer holds that when consciousness unifies a manifold of external material through applying categories it does so only insofar as, *through the very same act*, it also unifies itself. The objective unities of the world and of the self are directly and reciprocally correlated. One cannot have the one without having the other.

This ontological reciprocity of object and subject of experience is first systematically argued in the 'Transcendental Deduction' and 'Schematism' sections of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. Now Cassirer clearly accepts Kant's account of ontological reciprocity as a *general thesis*, i.e. that object and subject are necessarily correlated through some categorial framework. However, he differs from Kant on what the contents and broader significance of this framework amount to. Of decisive importance here is the fact that (as we have seen) Cassirer breaks with the key Kantian thesis of the absolute ideality of space, time and causality. *Once this break is made, the finitude of the human subject is radicalized.* Object and subject of experience are not correlated through a rigid framework of timeless constants; rather, the correlation is achieved and articulated through an individual's and a culture's historical development. The constants involved here have a general a priori status, but are only given a specific content through the particular modes of their historical instantiation. This means that the correlation of object and subject of experience can only be justified in the most general terms on transcendental (i.e. fundamentally logical or conceptual) grounds. The 'Deduction' of the specific categories involved in this correlation requires in addition a careful phenomenological analysis of their empirical and historical development and functions. This is what the philosophy of symbolic forms endeavours to provide.

Cassirer himself avowedly aligns this strategy with Hegel's conception of 'phenomenology' rather than with 'the modern sense' of the term. As Cassirer puts it, the philosophy of symbolic forms 'aspires to provide the individual with a ladder which will lead from the primary configurations found in the world of the immediate consciousness to the world of pure knowledge'.[14] However, whilst Cassirer's thought thus shares a directional momentum and, indeed, a striving for comprehensiveness with Hegel's phenomenology, there is a massive asymmetry between the two. For Hegel, in the final analysis thought is constitutive of its objects – reality is *absolutely* ideal. In Cassirer it is not. There is that primordial core of spatial, temporal and causal being, which both demands and is amenable to progressive articulation by thought, but which cannot be exhaustively characterized by such articulation.[15] Hence, whereas in Hegel absolute knowledge can be definitively attained, in Cassirer's system knowledge – no matter how comprehensive – always admits of further refinement and differentiation. Our inherence as finite beings in a world that is more than thought demands that our cognitive frameworks are constantly reconfigured and adapted. Given this, we might take it as preliminary justification for reading Cassirer's phenomenology as an existential one. I shall consider this more fully in section iii of this chapter. First, however, we must address that which is at the heart of the different forms of self-consciousness, namely the symbolic function itself.

III

First, if (as Cassirer notes) we can only characterize something as an object by reference to the relation between its immediately given aspects, its past and possible appearances, and general form, *then the notion of an object necessarily entails a symbolic aspect*. And this is precisely Cassirer's major point of emphasis. The capacity to see the form of the whole inscribed in an individual and vice versa is a kind of 'natural' symbolism'.[16] The individual aspect or part always functions as the sign of some more general form which gives the individual a determinate meaning. Cassirer remarks:

> Only when we succeed, as it were, in compressing a total phenomenon into one of its factors, in concentrating it symbolically, in 'having' it in a state of 'pregnance' in the particular factor – only then do we raise it out of the stream of temporal change…. Everything that we call the identity of concepts and significations, or the constancy of things and attributes, is rooted in this fundamental act of finding-again. This is a common function which makes possible on the one hand language and on the other hand the specific articulation of the intuitive world.[17]

The point is, then, that the unity of objective world and subjective experience is a function of this symbolic reciprocal relation. Through it, the primordial spatio-temporal and causal manifold and the basic activity of consciousness are co-ordinated with one another. For Cassirer, indeed, the more

symbolically articulated experience becomes, the richer and more complete is our objective grasp of the world. Of decisive significance in this respect is the acquisition of language and other formal symbolic systems such as mathematics. For, through these, the signifying function is progressively liberated from the *direct* presence of those elements referred to in specific signifying relations. We are able to posit items, kinds, series and relations *in the abstract*. In this way, our sense of both world and self is brought to a reflective standpoint. Knowledge attains a more objective and universal level.

Now, by affirming the centrality of signification in the reciprocity of object and subject of experience Cassirer goes far beyond Kant. Indeed, it is this emphasis, in conjunction with his unwillingness to accept the absolute ideality of space, time and causality, which set him free from the rigidity of Kant's treatment of categories. Consider, for example, causality. In Kant, this category has a necessary function in the unity of experience but is construed in substantial terms on the model of Newtonian mechanics. In Cassirer also, causality is a necessary principle of ordering experience. But, for him, the category of causal unity which individual causal relations represent is a purely functional ideal. Its content consists of all the different logical frameworks in relation to which causal connections can be described or explained. It is a principle which can find articulation in many symbolic codes, or in distinctive alternative ways of using a specific symbolic code. In certain cultural or historical contexts, for example, causality may be articulated in fundamentally magical terms or on the basis of divine intervention. In others, natural causality may be understood on the model of human agency, but in still others in purely mechanistic terms. Within a further context we might want to argue that the causality involved in producing, say, a work of art should be distinguished from that which is involved in more practically oriented artifice. The category of causality, in other words, is not given once and for all. Rather, it is a constant which can be refined and differentiated according to the different symbolic or notational codes in which it is expressed, or on the basis of different ways of using some specific code.

This is also true of the other categories. For example, Cassirer declares that

> we can interpret certain spatial forms, certain complexes of lines and figures, in one case as an artistic ornament and in another as a geometric figure, so endowing one and the same material and entirely different meanings. The spatial unity which we build on aesthetic vision and creation, in painting, sculpture and architecture, belongs to an entirely different sphere from the spatial unity which is represented in geometrical theorems and axioms. In the one case, we have the modality of the logical-geometric concept, in the other the modality of the artistic imagination. In the one case, space is conceived as an aggregate of mutually independent relations, as a system of 'causes' and 'consequences'; in the other it is conceived as a whole whose particular factors are dynamically interlocked, a perceptual, emotional unity.[18]

Here, in other words, forms which are subject to the category of space can have their spatiality articulated in different ways according to the different symbolic frameworks involved.

Given all these points, we are now in a position to define Cassirer's notion of symbolic form itself. *Symbolic form is the capacity to relate particular objects or relations (or kinds of object and relation) to symbolic systems so as to progressively articulate the most general structural characteristics of the objects and relations in question.* The basic act of consciousness – where (guided by categorial rules) an individual item is reciprocally related to a more general form – is an act whose scope can be refined and rendered more complex, on the basis of increased sophistication in the creation and application of symbolic codes.

This approach not only makes the Kantian approach more complete and flexible, but does so by collapsing one of Kant's key architectonic dualities, namely the distinctions between *constitutive* and *regulative* principles. Constitutive principles are those which pertain to the necessary preconditions of any possible experience – to the very nature of its *thatness*. Regulative principles, in contrast, pertain to the guidance of various modes of conduct or understanding, such as morality, religion and scientific investigation. They embody absolute standards or unconditionally complete systems of relations which, whilst being in practice unattainable, are posited as ideal goals in order to guide or stimulate the relevant endeavours. They involve seeing or judging the particular within an ideal total framework. For the most part, Kant keeps constitutive and regulative principles distinct from one another.[19] This is not the case with Cassirer. Indeed, by construing the categories in functional terms – as ideal principles which, through symbolic articulation, guide and develop objective understanding towards ever more complete generality – he overcomes the distinction between constitutive and regulative principles. Basic categorial concepts are assigned both a constitutive and regulative role. The key importance of this is that it enables the most fundamental and universal structures of human experience to be invested with a historical reality. They are not wholly timeless abstract notions, but operational constants whose essence is to be instantiated, mediated and developed under specific historical circumstances. The notion of symbolic form, in other words, is *universal epistemology historicized*.

Given this relation between objectivity and the symbolic dimension, we must now consider the implications which symbolic form has in relation to the unity of subjectivity. In this respect, Cassirer's following remarks on the topic of memory are useful:

> [A]ll apparent 'reproduction' presupposes an original and autonomous act of consciousness. The reproducibility of the content is itself bound up with the production of a sign for it…. By the mere fact that it no longer takes this content as something simply present, but confronts it in imagination as something past and not yet vanished, consciousness, by its changed relation to the content, gives to both itself and the content a changed ideal meaning.[20]

Here Cassirer is broaching a number of complex related points. In reading an item or relation in symbolic terms, or in creating a symbol for it, consciousness stabilizes both the object and its own sense of self. It affirms the continuity and identity of both these individual elements. On the one hand, the symbolic aspect of the object allows it or its perspectives to be characterized as re-encounterable features which extend beyond any one moment of present perception. On the other hand, the very act of investing an item with a symbolic function makes it an active element within the subject's personal history. Once past, a former content does not exist as some faded copy. Rather, its reproducibility is based on the fact that it was and is *made* meaningful through its position within consciousness's own organizational acts of symbolic articulation. It is known as 'that which was once present in that particular manner but which has now gone in the past'.

And this characterization, of course, is part of a continuing process. How one reads the present content of consciousness is informed by all the constantly accumulating moments which have gone before it and one's anticipation's of the future. Indeed, even one's recall of the past has its content directed and shaped by current interests and orientations. In its articulation of the present, therefore, consciousness not only relates it to a latent schema of objective possibility, but also relates it to and, indeed, augments the developing schema of its own total personal history. (I shall explore this in much greater depth in Chapter 5.)

The advantage of this approach is that it both refines and deepens those Kantian ideas in which it has its origins and makes them much more viable. In Kant's account of the unity of self-consciousness[21] and, in particular, those transcendental syntheses of imagination which are central to it, we have a crude framework for articulating (let us call it) the *holistic potency* of experience. By this I mean the way that the character and significance of a particular experience are both determined by and serve to determine (i.e. are reciprocal with) the developing character of the whole.

Now, whilst Kant himself does not elaborate his formal conditions of the unity of the self in this direction, Cassirer (as we have just seen) *does*. In so doing, he is able to delineate something of the existential and historical depth factor in subjective experience. This is not only valuable in itself; it is actually demanded by Kant's own position. For without a role for holistic potency, those rules concerning the apprehension, reproduction and comprehension of appearances which are involved in transcendental syntheses of imagination appear impossibly crude and mechanical. One could put it like this: a self-conscious being must have something like the bare cognitive and imaginative capacities which Kant describes, but he or she must also have some criteria of co-ordination and selectivity in terms of how they are applied as rules in the particular case.

This is a point with both conceptual and more general empirical ramifications. In relation to the former, for example, it must be noted that in order to follow a rule – as opposed to being determined mechanistically – one must have general criteria for distinguishing between correct and incorrect ways of following it. One must also have criteria for determining the appropriateness of its application in this specific context. This means that the context itself must be

situated in relation to the interplay of objective considerations and one's own personal interests and history. Hence, as soon as we deal with the following of rules – a factor essential to Kant's (and indeed any) understanding of self-consciousness – we are led to complex symbolic relations. Particular rules are only intelligible insofar as they exemplify and are contextualizable within much more general forms of practice and evaluation. They must, in other words, embody that symbolic reciprocity between the individual and general form which Cassirer identifies as the basic act of consciousness.

Now given the necessity of this symbolic function in relation to self-consciousness, we might be tempted to imagine that if we can devise a theory of meaning for language, this will entirely accommodate the symbolic aspect, and possibly do a great deal of other useful philosophical work besides. However, this raises the question of the empirical – or, better, *genetic* – significance of Cassirer's approach. For neither language nor self-consciousness simply spring into being with a ready-made and definitive logical structure. They *evolve* in both phylogenetic and ontogenetic terms. And (in the case of self-consciousness at least) this raises the further question of at what stage *vis-à-vis* the phylogenetic and ontogenetic self-consciousness is definitively attained.

The issues involved here are, of course, massively complex. There is, however, one useful point which might be made – namely that there is a definite stage in a child's life when it is able to ascribe experiences to others. The child recognizes that it is one amongst a greater whole of thinking feeling beings, that there are others who experience the world on the same general terms that it does. Here, consciousness attains a level of reflective awareness. Its hitherto private vectors are seen as the particular manifestation of a more general form of being. Consciousness here becomes self-conscious precisely because there is now a reference point wherein it can define itself qua individual, through a complex reciprocity with the more general form. What all these points show is that by thinking of the unity of the self in terms of the philosophy of symbolic form Cassirer offers us a strategy which enables us to, as it were, keep a handle on conceptual and genetic issues simultaneously.

To summarize, then: for Cassirer, symbolic form is the basis of both our knowledge of the objective world and the unity of self-consciousness. The capacity to see a general form in reciprocal relation with a particular is the structural basis of both factors. This principle of reciprocity is, in effect, the ultimate symbolic relation which can be progressively refined and differentiated, so as to deepen and/or generalize both our comprehension of the objective world and our sense of self. It is these frameworks of refinement and differentiation – symbolic codes and their different usages – which constitute symbolic form in its most general sense.

IV

I shall now offer a more general evaluation of Cassirer's theory. First, as we have seen at length, Cassirer de-substantializes the metaphysical rigidity of the

Kantian categories and offers a way of rethinking them as functional constants in experience, instantiated in different ways, under different intellectual and historical circumstances. This functional emphasis is of key significance, for it offers a way of relating universal cognitive structures not just to general historical conditions, but also to that of concrete embodied existence.

In this respect, it is notable how Cassirer himself pays close attention to genetic and empirical psychological factors, especially in relation to the acquisition of language and the problem of concept-formation. However (as I read him), this momentum of phenomenological analysis is actually arrested at the final hurdle. For in relation to that basic reciprocity of the individual and general form which informs all consciousness he claims that

> this pregnance can be reduced neither to merely reproductive processes nor to mediated intellectual processes – it must ultimately be recognised as an independent and autonomous determination, without which neither an object nor a subject, neither a unity of the thing nor a unity of the self would be given to us.[22]

But what, it must be asked, are our criteria of 'independent and autonomous determination' here; what are its conditions of origination? In effect, Cassirer presents the principle of reciprocity as unanalysable in further empirical terms. This leaves 'symbolic pregnance' – the principle of reciprocity – as an inexplicable brute meaningfulness which is the condition of having a world, but about which nothing more can be said.

This, however, is not acceptable; for, whilst there may be some irreducible level of Being which is the condition of all thought, it cannot be characterized as meaningfulness *per se*. To be meaningful presupposes a form of life – a context of needs and orientations – which itself bespeaks an *already achieved* organization of consciousness. Things, in other words, become or are made meaningful as functions of more basic factors. However, whilst Cassirer fails to take explicitly the final step towards such factors,[23] the entire impetus of his arguments in *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* pushes in this very direction. Indeed, by taking the final step on Cassirer's behalf, a further loose end in his position can be satisfactorily tied up.

To see why this is so, we must turn again to the distinction which I drew in section i between first-order and second-order Cassirean categories. The former – unities of space, time and causality – reflect the fact that as finite beings we inhabit a realm which is spatial and temporal, and filled out by interactions between heterogeneous elements. Our inherence in this zone means that if we are to survive we must find ways of organizing these three aspects, in respect of both their individual internal structures and their mutual interrelations. The means for doing this are provided by the second-order categories – number, thing/property and magnitude. For these are the basis of those different symbolic codes (and different uses thereof) which enable spatial, temporal and causal relations to be articulated in a law-like way.

Now this *logical* distinction between two orders of categories is one which is, of course, subsumed within the concreteness of ordinary unanalysed cognitive activity (and this is probably why Cassirer himself does not underline their logical distinctiveness). However, by keeping the distinction firmly in view we can analyse the principle of reciprocity in relation to a more basic non-metaphysical factor, in a way which also preserves a sense of its 'autonomy'. The reasoning here is as follows.

First, given that we need the first-order categories because of our inherence in a realm of spatio-temporal causal heterogeneity, and given also that they require symbolic articulation through second-order categories, the mediating role played by the principle of reciprocity must – if the principle is to be more than a meta-physical postulate – have, as it were, *a foot in both camps*. It must be essentially bound up with our inherence in the primordial world *and* our ability symbolically to articulate this inherence. Consider now the following passage from Cassirer:

> The origins of number carry us back to a realm in which language does not yet seem to have attained its autonomy. Phonetic language and gesture have not yet separated, but are still closely entwined. The meaning of the enumerative act can only be grasped with an appropriate bodily movement, a specific gesture of counting. Consequently, the sphere of numbers and the enumerable does not extend beyond the sphere of these movements. At this stage, the number appears far more as a manual concept than as an intellectual one.[24]

Cassirer is here tracing the origin of number to the unity of the body's own activity – the individual gesture which is meaningful in relation to the whole of the body's achieved repertoire of activity. We are thus led to the decisive point. *It is through the body* that we inhere in a realm that demands the articulation of space, time and causality; and it is through the body's achieved co-ordination with this realm that such symbolic articulation is attained.

The principle of reciprocity is thus a function of the body's most general unity. For if we can see the part in terms of the whole and vice versa it is because – before this principle can be generalized or formulated with any explicitness – it has evolved as a mode of behaviour, i.e. a learnt competence whereby the infant gradually co-ordinates its sensory-motor activities as a unified field. The criteria of unity here are twofold. On the one hand, the child learns the function of the individual parts of its body in relation to the whole; and, on the other hand, the character and limits of its being as an individual are defined and learnt by its relation to that encompassing heterogeneous continuum in which it inheres. The integration of both these factors is simultaneously the articulation of a meaningful world of stable perceptions and things. As Cassirer notes, 'perception as such signifies, intends, and "says" something – and language merely takes up this first significatory function to carry it in all directions, towards realisation and completion'.[25]

On these terms, then, the principle of reciprocity *evolves* from a gradually achieved co-ordination of body and world. The categorial concepts and

symbolic forms involve this principle being gradually diversified and generalized, as the embodied subject acquires language and other modes of symbolic expression. It must be emphasized that to construe the principle on this basis detracts not one iota from its 'independence' and 'autonomy'. We might justifiably regard any organic unity as independent in a logical sense to the degree that the whole is more than the sum of the parts. In the case of animal life-forms, indeed, this independence is more than a merely logical characterization, in that the achieved unity of the body involves an advanced degree of mobility and adaptiveness in relation to stimuli. Such factors allow a creature to choose in a rudimentary way, between different patterns of response. With the acquisition of language and symbolic codes, this capacity is massively augmented through its correlation with the development of self-awareness. This capacity explicitly to posit the inhabiting of different times and places means that the rational animal achieves a *systematic* autonomy. It is only then that the principle of reciprocity exists in a fully developed form.

Now by developing Cassirer's position in this way, its affinity with Merleau-Ponty's should have become apparent. In the work of the latter, the body's achieved co-ordination of its own unity with that of the perceptual field as a whole is the basis of all cognitive activity. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty often draws on Cassirer in his complex substantiations of this thesis.[26] Hence one might say that the real significance of Cassirer is not so much as a neo-Kantian, but rather as a corporeal phenomenologist who anticipates much in Merleau-Ponty. Like Kant, he holds that the structure of object and subject of experience are correlated on the basis of a common categorial framework, but he diverges massively from Kant in terms of how this framework should be characterized and analysed.

The fact that Cassirer has been stuck with the neo-Kantian label to his disadvantage is a reflection of a number of factors. One of these is his own insistence (and, I think, overestimation) of his debt to Kant; another is his failure to take the final step *vis-à-vis* the principle of reciprocity (discussed above). Most important of all, however, is his displacement from the German philosophical context to exile in Britain, Sweden and the USA. Had Cassirer not been so displaced, it is likely that his work would have been discussed in a context where its true significance as a transition to corporeal phenomenology would have been given its due. By this, I do not mean simply recognized as an antecedent of a certain kind of philosophizing; I also mean taken up, clarified and debated in the proper context. Only in this way would the full potential of Cassirer's work have been realized. As it is, the significance of his contribution has received scant acknowledgement. To end this discussion, therefore, I shall *very* briefly indicate one important issue of contemporary concern to which Cassirer's work could make an important contribution, and will then consider other issues at much greater length in later chapters.

First, the brief issue: post-Wittgensteinian analytic philosophy has been obsessively concerned with the possibility of finding a comprehensive theory of truth or meaning for language. However, any such theory assumes epistemic preconditions. Davidson, for example, remarks:

> Why must our language – any language – incorporate or depend upon a largely correct, shared view of how things are? First, consider why those who can understand one another's speech must share a view of the world, whether or not that view is correct. The reason is that we damage the intelligibility of our reading of the utterances of others when our method of reading puts others into what we take to be broad error. We can make sense of differences all right, but only against a background of shared belief. What is shared does not in general call for comment; it is too dull, trite, or familiar to stand notice. But without a vast common ground, there is no place for disputants to have their quarrel.[27]

For Davidson, the 'shared' 'vast common ground' here consists of a basic body of beliefs which must be assumed to be held true by all language users. However, if this anti-relativistic view is to have epistemic as well as logical bite it must be backed up by an account of how it is even *possible* for beliefs to be shared and held true. At the very least, this commits us to some theory concerning the relation between language and the *following of rules*, and, if it is to be really searching, to a tie-in between this and cognitive competences which are basic to all humans.

The weakness of Davidson's position (and many other analytic approaches to issues of meaning and truth) is the lack of such a deep epistemic grounding. This, however, is exactly what (as I showed in the previous section) Cassirer provides. In particular, the principle of reciprocity links basic cognitive competences not only to the genesis and development of language and other symbolic forms, but also to the unity of self-consciousness itself. Indeed, by moving in this direction we actually engage with issues which not only are far from 'dull', 'trite' and 'familiar', but bring about an interface between conceptual matters and empirical psychology.

Now a second area of relevance: it will be recalled that I have suggested some affinities between Cassirer and Merleau-Ponty. There is at least one *major* difference of emphasis. The basic trajectory of Merleau-Ponty's work (and the more so in his later writings) is to move from the real of intellectual and cultural forms back to their origins in the primordial reciprocity of body and world. The trajectory of Cassirer's work (bearing in mind my 'completion' of the final step) is to move in the opposite direction – from the origins of self-consciousness and signification to its more diverse and generalized symbolic articulations. In this emphasis Cassirer significantly anticipates aspects of poststructuralist thought. However, whereas poststructuralists tend to use theories of signification to dispute the possibility of stable frameworks of meaning in perception and consciousness, Cassirer enables signification to play a more philosophically positive role.

Cassirer's insights here therefore 'cash out' the significance of postmodernism's 'clue' concerning the centrality of signification. Earlier in this chapter I also indicated how Cassirer rightly foregrounds the significance of imagination – a further 'clue' from postmodernism – but without developing it. I will now undertake this development in Chapter 4.

4 Imagination and objective knowledge

Introduction

The term 'imagination' is used in various senses.[1] Central amongst them is that of our capacity to generate mental representations with quasi-sensible qualities that resemble some of the phenomenal features of those items or states of affairs which they are representations of. This usage is of the utmost philosophical significance, since it has a claim to be of *transcendental* status, i.e. a necessary condition of the possibility of objective knowledge.

As noted in the previous chapter, a claim of this kind receives its most sustained exposition and defence in the course of the two versions of the 'Transcendental Deduction' and the 'Schematism' section of Kant's first *Critique*. Everything here gravitates around Kant's insight that imagination is the power to represent that which is not immediately present to perception.[2] This insight has the most profound ramifications in relation to our knowledge of an objective world. They have not been fully developed in the subsequent philosophical literature.[3] One major reason for this is that the transcendental function and scope of imagination has tended to be tied too closely to specific problems in Kant exegesis.[4] Another difficulty is that Kant himself offers very little analysis of those psychological and ontological features of imagination which enable it to perform its transcendental function.

In this chapter I want to overcome these difficulties by looking in directions indicated by Kant and by following up some of his insights, but in a theoretical context far beyond that of Kant exegesis. This strategy will take a somewhat unorthodox form. It will, for example, explore the necessary role of imagination in providing the conditions whereby humans acquire and apply concepts. It will also cross the divide between analytic and phenomenological philosophy, drawing on insights from such disparate figures as Gareth Evans, Merleau-Ponty and Jean-Paul Sartre.

My more specific strategy is as follows. In section i, I will identify several necessary cognitive features of our knowledge of an objective world, arguing that what is distinctive to human concept acquisition and employment (i.e. the basis of objective knowledge) is a *trans-ostensive horizon* (on the lines indicated in previous chapters). It will further be argued that this horizon is only possible through the power of imagination. In section ii I will then investigate the psycho-

logical aspect of this power and the way in which it extends the body's operational vectors so as to constitute the trans-ostensive horizon. Finally, in section iii, I will analyse in more detail those six ontological aspects of the image itself which make the transcendental function possible. In conjunction, my three parts will establish why imagination is a necessary precondition for knowledge of an objective world, and what it is that enables it to fulfil this role.

I

Whatever else is presupposed by our knowledge of an objective world, at least three interweaving basic levels of cognitive competence are necessary in order for such a world to be intelligible qua objective. These are:

1   The capacity to subsume and discriminate between phenomena, in relation to concepts.
2   Some comprehension of the way in which material objects, relations and events link together in a *unified* spatio-temporal realm of causal interactions.
3   The comprehension that this unified spatio-temporal order of phenomena exists independently of one's perception of it.

In effect, the relation between these levels consists in a broad transition from the most rudimentary knowledge of an objective world (level 1) to that of knowledge of the world *as* objective (levels 2 and 3). I shall now consider some of the ramifications of this transition.

First, human concept-application has what (in previous chapters) I termed *trans-ostensive* range. On the one hand, such judgements can be made in the absence of their objects. One might, for example, realize that the neighbours' dog is actually an odd shade of brown, purely on the basis of memory. On the other hand, to employ concepts in the fullest sense entails some awareness of their extensional scope, i.e. the fact that any concept can be applied to instances other than those immediately given and in times and places other than the immediate present and its spatial environs. Such awareness is a logical precondition of generality in human concept-application.

There is a corollary to this *vis-à-vis* the objects of such judgements. Particular material objects are phenomenal wholes which are describable in terms of many different aspects. To form a sense of the whole which sustains these different aspects (i.e. the object's *phenomenal* unity) entails an acquaintance with it from diverse points of view and through various moments in time. It hinges, in other words, on trans-ostensive considerations, insofar as (under normal circumstances) there is no single perceptual viewpoint which will, in itself, comprehend the total phenomenal aspects of a three-dimensional item simultaneously.

Let us now consider how the trans-ostensive dimension becomes known as a *unified* field of objective knowledge.

At first sight this might seem to be a case of learning such appropriate abstract notions as space, time, causality, reality and negation, etc. However, before a child

can learn such concepts and their mutual *theoretical* implications it has already learnt to negotiate the world in *practical* objective terms. Is there any criterion of this practical cognitive competence? I would say that there is. The transition from trans-ostensive awareness to generality does not come ready made. A child learns the extensional scope of concepts and the unity of phenomenal wholes through gradual perceptual exploration and co-ordination of its body in relation to physical phenomena. However, Gareth Evans has drawn attention to what he calls the 'generality constraint'. It offers a criterion of 'structuredness' in thought which is based on the intersection of several cognitive competences. The following remarks by Evans introduce some of the key factors which are involved:

> It is a feature of the thought-content *that John is happy* that to grasp it requires distinguishable skills. In particular, it requires possession of the concept of happiness – knowledge of what it is for a person to be happy; and that is not something tied to this or that person's happiness. There simply could not be a person who could entertain the thought that John is happy and the thought that Harry is friendly, but who could not entertain – who was conceptually debarred from entertaining – the thought that John is friendly or the thought that Harry is happy.[5]

Evans also identifies a factor which applies in the recognition of an object's phenomenal unity, in that if a subject has the conceptual resources for entertaining the thought that *a* is *F*, then he or she must also have the ability to recognize that *a* is *C* or that *a* is *G*, i.e. that a phenomenal unity is one which encompasses many different possible aspects.

In the most general terms, then, Evans holds that a 'structured' thought of the form *a* is *F* should be seen as lying at the intersection of two series of thoughts: on the one hand, 'the series of thoughts that *a* is *F*, that *b* is *F*, that *c* is *F*…, and, on the other hand, the series of thoughts that *a* is *F*, that *a* is *H*…'.[6]

The significance of this 'generality constraint' (although Evans does not develop it in these terms) is that it loosely marks the achievement of *knowledge of the world as objective* rather than as that piecemeal sense of individual objects and concepts which characterize the intelligence of a child just beginning its initiation into language. The trans-ostensive spaces of the concept's extensional scope and the object's phenomenal unity are brought into practical alignment with one another. The child acquires and learns to operate with a practical sense of the general orderly *fit* between concepts and objects.

This formalization of the trans-ostensive dimension of human cognition is also closely correlated with level 3 of our knowledge of an objective world – namely the recognition that that world exists independently of individual perceptions of it. Again, Evans is useful in characterizing what is involved here. He tells us:

> The capacity to think of oneself as located in space, and tracing a continuous path through it, is necessarily involved in the capacity to conceive the

phenomena one encounters as independent of one's perception of them – to conceive the world as something one 'comes across'. It follows that the capacity for at least some primitive self-ascriptions – self-ascriptions of position, orientation, and change of position and orientation – and, hence, the conception of oneself as one object amongst others, occupying one place amongst others, are interdependent with thought about the objective world itself.[7]

Now, in my preceding arguments I have emphasized the importance of the trans-ostensive dimension in forming the relation of concept and phenomenal object. The worth of Evans's eloquent passage is the way in which it foregrounds the importance of this dimension in relation to the one who applies concepts, namely the embodied self. In order to characterize the world as existing independently of perception one must be able to chart one's course through it – with reference to both one's past positions and possible future ones. The trans-ostensive dimension of the object–concept relation is directly correlated with a similar dimension in the self. To be aware of past, present and possible positions of the embodied self is to become conscious of a world whose aspects one 'comes across' and, at the same time, to become conscious of the self insofar as it negotiates its own distinctive spatio-temporal route through this mind-independent world.[8]

In describing these three levels of basic cognitive competence one should not regard the relation between them as one of rigid separation. Level 1 becomes functional as soon as a child gets some trans-ostensive purchase in its recognitional acts, and, with the development of this, levels 2 and 3 are realized to the degree that the trans-ostensive dimension becomes fully developed. It should be emphasized once more that this is more of a practical accomplishment than a theoretical one. A mastery of the generality constraint, for example, is manifest primarily in behavioural terms through consistency in the way in which a child judges object–concept relations and communicates them to others. Similar considerations hold *vis-à-vis* recognizing the world's independence of perception. The child learns this in terms of active exploration of its environment and other persons and, in particular, through the ways in which such explorations are resisted, modified and stopped by these factors.

Given the necessity of the trans-ostensive horizon in relation to the three basic levels of knowledge of the objective world, the decisive question arises as to how such a horizon is possible.

At first sight, the answer may seem straightforward. Through initiation into language, ostensively based recognitional acts connect up with one another to form a network of concepts – including trans-ostensive ones – which is more than the sum of its individual units. On these terms, recognitional acts get a trans-ostensive purchase and become concepts by virtue of their linguistic relation to a field containing an infinite number of other such acts.

This identification of trans-ostensive purchase with initiation into language will not do, however. The reason for this is that *initiation into language actually*

presupposes a trans-ostensive cognitive capacity which is not itself linguistic. There are two aspects to this. First, in the A version of the 'Transcendental Deduction' Kant insists that

> experience as such necessarily presupposes the reproducibility of appearances. When I seek to draw a line in thought, or to think of the time from one noon to another…obviously the various manifold representations that are involved must be apprehended by me in thought one after the other. But if I were always to drop out of thought the preceding representations (the first parts of the line, the antecedent parts of the time period…) and did not reproduce them whilst advancing to those that follow, a complete representation would never be obtained: none of the above-mentioned thoughts, not even the purest and most elementary representations of space and time could arise.[9]

Kant's points here concern the way in which a self-moving sentient life-form must be able to attend to changes in its environment over a period of time. It must be oriented to time and space as horizons of actual and potential activity. This means that it must have some cognitive capacity whereby the immediately given can be invested with meaning by virtue of its relation to the immediate past and the anticipated future. Such a capacity must, accordingly, involve the retrieval or projection of sensible appearances. The generation of such imagery gives an element of quasi-perceptual trans-ostensive continuity between present, past and future. This need not (contra Kant) involve the retention of past perceptions as a constant occurring flow of images. Rather, one can give it a dispositional interpretation. On these terms, acts of perceptual attention can be sustained within a trans-ostensive horizon only if the cognitive subject is able, in imagination, to retrieve or project aspects of his or her past or possible perceptual positions at will, or in response to immediate stimuli.

My argument, then, is that perceptual attention presupposes the capacity for imagination. The acquisition of language, as it were, frees up this capacity and renders it fully volitional. One can imagine what one wants, and where and when one wants to. If, however, imagination was not already in play as a trans-ostensive extension of the immediately given – if we did not have some basic attentive orientation – the idea of learning would be unintelligible.

This leads to the second problem facing the link between the trans-ostensive and initiation into language. To learn even the crudest sign (let alone sophisticated concepts) entails the capacity to follow rules, and, again, such rule-following is unintelligible without reference to trans-ostensive considerations. Now, if this trans-ostensive dimension was itself explained as a special kind of rule-following we would be led into an infinite regress of rules explaining rules. This can only be avoided if we take some non-linguistic competence as the grounds of our trans-ostensive orientation. Imagination is, of course, the only available candidate for this. It has an isomorphic/mimetic relation to the items or states of affairs which it represents, and this gives it enormous utility and flexi-

bility in the cognitive context. Through the generation of imagery as an insepa-rable correlate of perception and concept, it becomes possible to conceive of both objects and the self as able to occupy times and places other than the present, and, through this, to become aware of the present *as* the present. In the most general terms, imagination allows the subject to represent *what it might be like* for him or her or other objects to be elsewhere in space and/or time. This allows a degree of quasi-perceptual continuity between the ostensively given and the trans-ostensive.

Having therefore established the transcendental significance of imagination in the most general terms, it is now incumbent on me to identify those more specific features which enable it to fulfil its transcendental function.

II

There are two major aspects to the transcendental imagination. The first is fundamentally psychological, namely its *productive* aspect. To make full sense of this one must follow the general Kantian emphasis on imagination as a formative power. This, however, should not simply be taken to mean mental spontaneity alone. Rather, it is that aspect of mental activity which is closest to our inherence in the world as specifically *embodied* beings. It is, as it were, *mental activity in corporeal form*.

If this characterization is correct, one might best explore it on the basis of our immediate relation to the perceptual field.[10] Here our engagement with the world centres on a unified sensory-motor orientation. In our intentional relation to objects or states of our own being some sensory factors will be more to the fore than others, but our cognitive orientation is not one of perception and sensation plus subsumptive and discriminative activity. It is, rather, a unity with different vectors of emphasis, which encompasses all these factors.

This is important because our initial learning of the unity of objects and physical states of affairs is more than merely recognitional. The child learns through practical exploration the way in which a whole is implied by its parts or aspects but is nevertheless more than just the sum of these parts or aspects. By learning what can or cannot be done to the object, or what kind of physical conjunctions it can or cannot be brought into with other objects, the child learns the whole/part or aspect relation as a kind of general style of being. The term 'style' is warranted here, because the unity of physical objecthood not only denotes a distinctive ontological mode of world occupancy but also necessitates a specific range of responses on the part of the embodied subject in order to deal with it in cognitive and practical terms.

Now, the process which I am describing here is not one which explicitly sepa-rates negotiations of the particular from negotiations of the general. As an infant enacts its countless little individual explorations of the physical environment, these accumulate in a whole which is more than the sum of its episodic parts. It consists, in fact, of a progressively unified co-ordination and control of sensory-motor activities in relation to the demands of the physical environment. Within

this behavioural whole some individual episodes may stick in memory, but, by and large, the achieved correlation of bodily unity and world is a competence which is exercised without further reference to its origins. The individual explorations and episodes coalesce in the subject's general ability to adapt itself to the salient vectors of time, three-dimensional space, causality and multi-sensory phenomenal objects and configurations. Through this, the subject simultaneously comprehends both individual and general patterns of phenomenal unity.

Given this analysis, I would suggest that imagination not be seen as a combination or blending of faded phenomenal impressions. Perception is a mutual adaptation of subject and object, and imagination should be understood, therefore, as a special case of this. What makes it a special case is that the mode of adaptation involved is fundamentally *mimetic*.

This dimension is, of course, of vital significance in learning processes at the behavioural level. And if my foregoing account of perception is correct we should see imagination as the power of mimicking its salient phenomenal vectors in quasi-sensory mental terms. We cannot recall all the countless traces of rooms, dogs, showers of rain, etc. which we have perceived, but we do know what these *are like*. This means that we can generate images or image-sequences which embody quasi-sensory properties that are generally isomorphic with those things or kinds of thing which they are images of. The imagination expresses – or, better, continues – that comprehension of individual and general patterns of phenomenal unity which are first understood in practical terms through the body's modes of adapting itself to them.

The psychology of imagination presented here should not be understood as something separate from perception and higher cognitive processes. In fact, it could be said to be at the heart of both. In immediate perception at the animal level, for example, it may be that the flow of perception is occasionally broken by the emergence of images which are stimulated by some new development in the field. The images might serve to heighten a creature's wariness or to enhance its stalking capacities or whatever.

Likewise in infants. The emergence of images may at first be fragmentary, in the sense of being closely tied to the experience of specific stimuli. However, as the infant's sensory-motor field becomes more co-ordinated it may be that the generation of imagery becomes more systematic, enabling it to negotiate those aspects of objects, states of affairs or locations which are kindred to ones which it has encountered before but which are hidden from its immediate perceptual viewpoint. If the infant can represent those non-immediate aspects in terms of what they might be like, then it has the perceptual wherewithal to grasp the unity of the encompassing whole. In one sense, reaching out and turning an object is a way of doing this, but if one can form an image of the object under some of its different aspects, then its phenomenal unity has been fully *appropriated*. Imagination – even at the infant stage – extends the scope of the body's operational vectors by allowing non-immediate quasi-perceptual viewpoints to augment those which are available upon the immediately given. It opens up the trans-ostensive dimension.

To understand the full ramifications of this in relation to higher cognitive processes I shall now focus on some straightforward but surprisingly overlooked ontological features of mental imagery.

III

Jean-Paul Sartre has noted that

> Every consciousness posits its object, but each does so in its own way. Perception, for instance, posits its object as existing. The image also includes an act of belief, or a positing action. This act can assume four forms and no more: it can posit the object as non-existent, or as absent, or as existing elsewhere; it can also neutralize itself, that is, not posit its object as existing. Two of these acts are negations: the fourth corresponds to a suspension or neutralization of the position. The third, which is positive, assumes an implicit negation of the actual and present existence of the object.[11]

In this passage Sartre is actually describing something of the trans-ostensive scope of the image. But he characterizes this scope very much on the basis of those beliefs which sustain the appropriate modes of image-generation. This means, in effect, a relation to how the images are to be *used* by the linguistically competent agent. There is, however, a more fundamental level which describes the ontology of the mental image *per se*, and it is this level which *allows* the image to be used for trans-ostensive reference on the basis of the beliefs noted by Sartre.

As it happens, the third of Sartre's points at least pushes us in broadly the right direction, in that it notes the fact that images can be generated in a way which does not *affirm* the existence of that which they are images of. They are existentially neutral. They *simply* represent a certain kind of *possible* phenomenal item or state of affairs (or, at the very least, a possible phenomenal *appearance*).

Now, whilst images can be *used* so as to affirm the possibility of specific phenomenal configurations, there is also a sense in which this feature is constitutive of the very notion of an image *irrespective of its intended usages*. In the most basic ontological terms, an image just *is* the representation of a recognizable kind of possible phenomenal item or state of affairs. Our criterion of possibility here is that of appearance – a specific way of being present to the senses, whether or not its object actually exists.

Given this definition, let us consider some of the more detailed features which are logically embedded in it:

1   Since the mental image *is* an image, the phenomenal configuration which it represents is not a part of the immediate perceptual field. It projects, rather, a *notional elsewhere*, i.e. a possible part of the space–time continuum which is not currently accessible to direct perceptual inspection. (This is true even when what we are imagining does impinge on the immediate perceptual

field. For example, one might imagine what lies behind the wall in front of us by visualizing that state of affairs. In this case, whilst the image is temporally co-existent with the immediate perception, its imagined content is not. For the view which it presents is one which would require us to change our position in order to access directly its perceptual equivalent (i.e. to see what is actually behind the wall). In such cases, therefore, the image's space and/or time presents a notional alternative to the present.

2   Since by definition an image must be of a recognizable kind of phenomenal configuration, its notional elsewhere must represent some mode of space and/or time occupancy which – however loosely – characterizes the way in which configurations of that kind are able to exist. It must have at least some *objective* veracity (however limited).

3   As a corollary to this, since the image presents a phenomenal configuration, this is qua phenomenal, something which is necessarily accessible to a possible percipient. The percipient in question here can be, in principle, any sentient being, including, of course, the person who is projecting the image. The image's notional elsewhere encompasses, in other words, subject as well as object reference.

4   Qua image, the represented configuration is presented as a particular instance of its kind, and not merely in abstract terms. However, qua image it is merely a represented rather than a real particular. This means that, at a constitutive level, it has the appearance of particularity, without being necessarily tied to any specific individual. In ontological terms, what is fundamental is that before, say, being an image of Tony Blair or Mr Pickwick, or whatever, the image is 'of' a man with such and such characteristics which is intended, through these characteristics, to secure reference to a specific individual. The image, *per se*, in other words, represents its object with a combination of both particularity and generality. Individual reference is a function *of* this relation, determined by specific contexts of use.

5   Whilst we can and do imagine phenomenal configurations on the basis of some salient aspect, our capacity to imagine the configuration is not tied to any one aspect. We can, in principle, view its possible aspects in sequence and from any angle, and in any order which we choose. The only restriction on this is when the configuration which we are imagining is an event – or has an event-component. In such a case, if the image is to be *of* the event and not just a jumbled sequence of happenstances it must – like perception – unfold in a specific temporal order. This said, however, even here one can imagine the event in terms of an indefinite number of possible perceptual viewpoints of it. This lability of the image manifests both the palpable being of the objects and events which we imagine (i.e. their phenomenal diversity and richness of aspects) and also the mobility of the perceiving subject. For, in relation to this latter point, if we can imagine phenomenal configurations so freely it is because we know what it is like physically and perceptually to explore them on the basis of our embodied inherence in the world. At the level of mental activity, the freedom of imagination offers a

direct exemplification of the body's mobile relation to things in the corpo-real world.

6   Finally, since the image is the product of a formative cognitive power it can be said to have metamorphic significance. In imagining any phenomenal configuration it is possible to change its aspects or to project those aspects as being the properties of a different configuration. The metamorphic possibil-ities here are, of course, endless. This may lead to a mere play of imagination, but that is not the key point. What is of substance is the fact that the imagination can endlessly vary, not only the phenomenal aspects which it posits, but how these are assigned to bearers.

Now, it is vital to emphasize that, in concert, these points simply describe what the exercise of imagination involves. Irrespective of the beliefs or intentions which direct such exercise, imagination as such has the general character described by these six points. In the broadest terms, points 1, 2, 3 and 4 set out features intrinsic to the image itself, whilst points 5 and 6 describe aspects of that formative psychological power which generates the image.

The structures described by points 1–6 in concert have extreme cognitive potency. It will be recalled that in section i of this chapter I described three basic levels of cognitive competence involved in knowledge of an objective world and the way in which the exercise of such competences necessitates comprehension of a trans-ostensive horizon of relations. In section ii, I outlined the way in which imagination understood as a formative power should be seen as a continu-ation of the body's practical exploration of the physical world. In particular, I traced the way in which this process involves a mutual adaptation of subject and object wherein particular and general patterns of phenomenal unity are not distinguished from one another. This allows the subject to project the hidden aspects of things or locations, thus introducing the trans-ostensive dimension into its immediate perceptual dealings with the world.

The sixfold structure described in this section illuminates those features of the image which are profoundly complementary to the development of trans-ostensive awareness, and thence to knowledge of an objective world. Of decisive significance here is the connection with language. Suppose, for example, that a child is taught the word 'dog' by having immediately present canines pointed out to him or her on different occasions. It is vital to remember that the child's cognitive engagement here is not merely recognitional. The child surveys and explores the dogs which it encounters from different angles and viewpoints, and perhaps by touching and smelling as well as seeing. Through each individual exploration it is able (in the way described in section ii) to form an image of phenomenal unity – of, as it were, doghood – just as through countless individual exercises it is able to develop such physical compe-tences as walking, standing still or tying a shoelace.

Now, if the word 'dog' is learnt in this context it means that from the begin-ning it is already connecting up with the trans-ostensive horizon. In this respect, we will recall that the image qua image presents its phenomenal configuration as

an elsewhere which is characterized by both objective features and accessibility to a subject, by its combination of particularity and generality, and by its lability and metamorphic significance. If, accordingly, the image is now connected to the word 'dog' as well as to perceived canines, this allows those trans-ostensive factors which are implicated in the image to find a medium where their trans-ostensive significance can be expressed. The term 'dog' applied to both percept and image not only emphasizes their shared logical object, but also – since the word can be used without the percept being present – allows the image to function as a progenitor of conceptual meaning in its own right. On hearing the word, for example, a child might say 'bow-wow' or stick its tongue out and utter canine panting noises. A response on these lines indicates that the child can recognize what a dog is, and, more significantly, that it has formed an image of *general* canine behavioural traits. This latter point provides evidence that the child is beginning to understand 'dog' as a term which ranges across different individuals, times and places. It has acquired some bare rudiments of 'dog' as a concept.

I am arguing, then, that the trans-ostensive fecundity of the image qua image is given direction through the acquisition of the most rudimentary language, and, reciprocally, enables linguistic terms to function as concepts in a very basic way. Perhaps the decisive 'next stage' in this process is the acquisition of trans-ostensive concepts themselves. The learning of sophisticated notions such as 'before', 'after', 'how', ' then', 'here', 'there', 'elsewhere', etc. requires (one assumes) that a network of ostensively learnt terms and concepts is already in place. However, my point is that these more basic terms are already, as it were, trans-ostensively charged and waiting to be activated simply by virtue of the nature of the image and its formative power. As a child acquires a greater wealth of linguistic terms and grammatical rules it articulates this trans-ostensive charge and makes the horizon explicit.

This making explicit involves primarily the acquisition of a sense of consistency and unity between networks of ostensive and trans-ostensive concepts and, as a corollary of this, a sense of the world as an order of being which exists independently of us. In respect of these things, points 5 and 6 in the sixfold structure outlined earlier are of special significance. Point 6, we will recall, notes the metamorphic significance of imagination's productive power. Given an imagined phenomenal configuration, we can vary or switch its aspects at will, or vary the kind of thing which is the bearer of the aspects. The playful aspect of this is epistemologically useful in that it leads us to try out different possibilities of connecting and disconnecting phenomena, an endeavour which invites us – challenges us even – to test out imaginative metamorphoses against the constraints of reality itself. In this way we can enjoy an enhanced understanding of how the world coheres as a unity.

We will also recall that point 5 concerns the way in which the richness and diversity of phenomenal aspects emerge in correlation with the mobility of the embodied subject, and that the productive power of imagination allows this to be expressed at the level of mental activity. By means of imagination (directed by

descriptions and factual knowledge) we can trace both our past and possible routes through the spatio-temporal continuum. This not only reinforces our sense of the world's rich independent existence (as something we 'come across'), but also allows us to comprehend ourselves as occupying different experiential positions in relation to this existence (i.e. our having of a personal history).

Conclusions

To summarize this chapter, I began by arguing that imagination has a transcendental significance insofar as it is the basis of that trans-ostensive horizon which is presupposed by the three basic levels of cognitive competence. I then showed the particular psychological and ontological features of imagination which enabled this transcendental function. These are, respectively, its productive aspect – which continues the basic body/world interaction at the mental level – and the sixfold structure, which describes those trans-ostensive factors which are implicated in the image and the power to generate it *per se*. These transcendentally significant features are energized into knowledge of an objective world through their interactions with both perception and language acquisition. We now have, accordingly, a philosophically complete account of the general relation between imagination and the possibility of objective knowledge.

In this chapter, then, I have provided what Cassirer does not – namely a developed theory of the imagination. This not only is consistent with Cassirer's position, but also shows why the image is a constant feature in human experience. In showing this, I have also, in effect, 'cashed out' the reasons why the postmodern emphasis on the image does not refute the foundational basis of knowledge. Whatever its exaggerated significance in contemporary culture, the image is more than an ephemeral mode of communication. It is a constant which is necessarily involved in thought *per se*. And what is true of the image is also true of another supposed antithetical feature to the stability of knowledge – namely momentariness. It is to this topic I now turn.

5   The cohesion of the self
Moment, image and narrative

Introduction

Our experience of the present – over and above its manic character in post-modern culture – has long puzzled philosophers from many different traditions.[1] On the one hand the present serves to join past and future and on the other hand it serves to separate them. A related puzzle concerns how the experiential present might be characterized in positive terms. For whilst the object of such experience can be described as that which is not past or future, we surely need some further account of what the present is in itself. Or is it the case that individually present, past and future can be sufficiently defined as negations of one another?

Such a negative definition might get us by in very broad metaphysical terms but it will not do in relation to personal identity. In such a context the having of an experiential present is, at the very least, that which separates the living from the dead. It must therefore in some sense be the focus of personal identity. Yet at the same time the experiential present's boundaries are always elusive, and in the course of a life they involve an unaccountable succession of states which are multifarious to an unfathomable degree. How, then, can one reconcile the unifying function of the present's role (as a focus for personal identity) with these potentially disruptive aspects?

I would suggest that the relation between these two aspects of the present is in fact an entirely complementary one. It is, indeed, the very basis of what might be called *the cohesion of the self*. In order to show this, I will offer a positive characterization of the experiential present by focusing on one of its decisive aspects – the psychologically singular Moment (a term which will be explained in due course). Section i will briefly consider the appropriateness of the term 'Moment' in preference to other, putatively synonymous, terms for the experiential present. In section ii I shall then offer a detailed phenomenology of the psychologically singular Moment, and in section iii I will deploy this phenomenology so as to understand the singular Moment's role as an organizing factor in the *holistic* field of experience. Particular emphasis will be given to its relation to remembering and imagination. Section iv will link all the aforementioned factors together. It will be argued that the cohesion of the self is a narrative structure with the holis-

tically significant, psychologically singular Moment at its core. In my conclusion I will argue further that this structure has a profoundly aesthetic character.

I

The term 'present' is used with different emphases. Often, for example, we employ it in a regional sense – meaning, say, the time we live in as opposed to other epochs, or else the current phase in our own personal history. On other occasions, however, we use it more precisely in order to indicate the immediate zone of intersection between past and future. To emphasize this more specific usage we use appropriate qualifying terms such as 'the present moment', 'the present instant', 'the present few seconds' or, simply, 'now'.

To privilege one of these qualifying terms over the others might seem at best stipulative and at worst bizarre. However, it is useful to recall that in Nietzsche's *Also Sprach Zarathustra* the pseudonymous hero of the work encounters a gate called 'Moment'.[2] Leading to it on one side is a trail extending back into the infinite past, and leading out of it on the other side is a path into the infinite future. Nietzsche's emphasis on Moment (rather than, say, the 'Now' or the 'Instant') and, indeed, his metaphor of the gate both embody points of philosophical substance. I shall address the point of emphasis now and the metaphor later on.

First, terms such as 'Now' or 'Instant' are ones which pertain primarily to mere *points* of occurrence in a temporal continuum. Insofar as they characterize the zone of interface between past and future, they do so in a somewhat neutral way. In this respect, one must remember that the interface in question is not simply a point, but one which serves *to connect and separate* past and future. In human terms, this connective function is far from neutral, and the term Moment is far more apposite in relation to what is involved. This is, indeed, reflected in ordinary usage. For example, we talk with felicity of our past, present and future moments, but rather more awkwardly of past, present and future 'Nows' and 'Instants'.

These points can be developed further, for it is clear that, whilst we can and do employ the term 'Moment' in a general sense to signify very short periods of time, it is also a term which carries quite specific connotations. The most important of these is *sentient ambience*. 'Moment' connotes the transitory aspects of the cognitive and practical activities of creatures, rather than those of inanimate items or events. Of course, one can talk of such items or events in terms of their momentary duration, but even this locution carries strong overtones of sentient ambience. It suggests a period of transient duration perceived by a sentient being, rather than a state of transient duration *per se*.

Now, through their location in the horizon of time every Momentary gesture or linguistic act is, in the most literal sense, singular and unique. Once a Moment has happened, it is gone forever – something has been *lost*. This, of course, is also true of all specific Nows and Instants, but we do not think of them as significantly singular or unique, because they are used primarily in describing the general structure of time, rather than time in relation to an existential content. With the Moment, in contrast, connotations of content are both important and

specific. Putting it succinctly, the Moment connotes the *human experience of time*. I shall now consider its phenomenology in detail.

II

First, in describing the human experience of time we may well use the term 'Moment' in a general sense, in order to signify a mere transient perception or mental state *per se*. However, there is also a philosophically more significant usage. It centres on *the holistic core of experience*. All individual perceptions or psychological states in a person's experience are actively related to a field of other such perceptions and states (a topic which I will return to). On some occasions this active relation is *extremely* potent. The holistic interaction between elements in the field is one which can give certain elements a strong individual psychological emphasis. Through their contrast with commonplace elements or their connection with beliefs and values which are important to us, they are experienced in psychological terms as *singular occurrences* – as individual moments of experience (positive or negative). It is important to emphasize the psychological status of this singularity, because in logical terms the experience can involve a plurality of events, mental states and bodily gestures.

It might reasonably be asked why this should be described as a *Moment* of experience, rather than an *experience per se*? The answer is twofold. First, 'experience' is a very general descriptive term which might be applied to any individual cognitive act or conscious state of a person. But what I am describing is a singular *occurrence*, where experience has the character of a *felt* psychological event. It is experience whose temporal specificity is to the fore. This leads directly to my second, closely related, point. A Moment of experience in the sense used here is more than *just* an experience. It is felt to be striking, interesting or important. It is an occurrence whose singular character is determined by its relation to our personal history, and which then takes an active place in the ongoing narrative of this history as 'a Moment in my life'.

Before clarifying these points further (and offering a more formal definition of the philosophically interesting notion of the Moment) I will consider some examples. My purpose in so doing will be to reveal the Moment's two major structural varieties. The first involves a relation to a tacit or background field of reference. Consider, for example, savouring the taste of a good wine. Here the transition from first impact on the taste buds to enjoyment of the finish may occupy us for a good few seconds; it may be accompanied by a number of different bodily gestures. However, this plural manifold is experienced as a unity. In psychological terms, we are caught up in a single sustained Moment of savouring.

It should be emphasized that this is a psychological as well as physiological response. For the taste engrosses us by virtue of the way it favourably defines itself in relation to our other experiences of wine. Such experiences provide a tacit background field from which the singularity of the current moment of tasting can emerge. A similar psychological unity can be experienced under more complex circumstances. Suppose, for example, one opens a door to find old friends waiting

outside. One greets them, embraces them and exchanges further appropriate salutations. Now, in objective terms, this occurrence may be analysable into several events. However, by virtue of the significance of our friends' arrival in relation to a broader background of who and what we value and care about, these events are experienced psychologically in singular terms. They are a Moment of welcome.

This leads us to the second and philosophically interesting sense of Moment. It arises from the direct relation between an item or event and its immediate perceptual context. If an owl calls out in the deathly still of a moonlit night, this context helps define the Moment of the call. We hear or see many individual sights, or sounds or other stimuli in the course of the day, without noticing them except in the most general terms. But if the properties of such a stimulus are in some way amplified or isolated through their relation to an immediate context, then this can make us aware of the stimulus as the basis of a singular encounter.

This relation between the Moment and its immediate context finds its most striking manifestation in the reporting of both personal and collective historical narratives. We talk of such things, for example, as 'decisive' Moments in a life or a historical epoch. What is meant by 'Moments' here, of course, is not simply temporal points where actions or sequences of action are formally inaugurated or brought to resolution, but also the broader existential significance which flows in and out of these singular occurrences. It is, of course, hugely telling that ordinary usage so favours 'the momentous' as an adjective in this context. The term signifies at once the importance of Moments of resolute decision and the large-scale consequences that can arise from these. It indicates the *potential drama* of the past's interface with the future.

Now, in making these points I am not simply reiterating how ordinary usage favours the Moment over other terms such as the Now or the Instant. I am also showing what such a favouring warrants. For humans, the zone of interface between past and future is holistically complex. Our inhabiting of it is not a point in a continuum; rather, it is horizonal. In a present Moment of engagement with the world, we position ourselves in the perceptual field by drawing on past experience (explicitly or otherwise), and are oriented by our sense of the future still to come. Even more significantly, our engagement is also situated within a space of counterfactual possibility. We might note, for example, how our individual moments are sometimes contextualized by a sense of all those things which might have been or which we fondly posit as future possibilities – even though in practical terms they are unlikely ever to come about.

Given this analysis, we can now define the philosophically interesting notion of the Moment in more general terms. It is a psychologically singular occurrence of short duration which happens when objects, relations, events and mental states (or complex combinations of these) are not simply recognized in bare descriptive terms, but, rather, characterized in *active relation* to one's personal history. In principle, of course, anything which we experience must have something of this character. In practice, however, most of our cognitive activity forms an unremarked-upon continuum – a psychologically undifferentiated flow of humdrum exchanges with the world. These exchanges are incorporated into the

developing whole of our personal history, but they do not figure *overtly* in it. It is only when some occurrence is intense, striking or of import in relation to our beliefs and values that it engages more active attention. The duration of its occurrence or enactment is *felt*. Our attention may be brief – as with the owl's call – or extend over a number of seconds (as in those cases when we are wrestling with an important personal decision).

What is decisive here is how markedly our attention is engaged. If it is loose or interrupted, one Moment may merge into another as we shift our bodily or intentional orientation. Whatever the case, these perceptual or introspective acts are now individually marked out. *Their status as singular psychological occurrences thus renders them amenable to recollection in a way that the anonymous elements in our ordinary continuum of cognitive activity are not.* They constitute individual links which, in concert, connect with one another and with the developing whole of experience so as to form the narrative of a life.

Hence, if we did not have a temporal term with connotations of psychological singularity which served to distinguish it from more neutral characterizations of short episodic attention spans *we would have to invent one*. We need such a term in order to make sense of the – as it were – psychological grammar of the self. Fortunately, as we have seen, we do have such a term – the Moment.

Nietzsche was therefore wise in the naming of Zarathustra's gate. Indeed, from the points made above we can also begin to see why a spatial metaphor such as the gate is itself so apt. It should be obvious, for example, that in our experience of the Moment spatial features not only are rarely separated from temporal ones, but can indeed be the focus of the experience. Indeed, the real significance of Nietzsche's metaphor actually runs deeper still. For (whether he himself realized it or not) the gate is not only the Moment but also *that which conditions it*. As finite beings we are located in time, but the time which matters most to us is that which is bound up with our own personal history. The body is vital here. In its present orientation towards the perceptual field, the perceptual subject draws on its *own* horizon of past experiences and possible future or counterfactual ones.

This 'drawing-upon', however, is highly selective and manifests, indeed, a personal style.[3] The subject focuses on those aspects of the horizon which are relevant to its current position, projects and sense of self, but, equally importantly, it *excludes* those which are not relevant. If, indeed, access to a subject's present perceptual position were not regulated in this way, no significant cognitive activity would be possible. Our perceptual capacities would be swamped by a flood of arbitrary recollections of the past and undirected imaginings of the future. Through the body, these two objective vectors of time are connected and separated through the narrative unity of a personal life history. The body sets out a field of meanings in relation to which the individual Moment of experience can be defined.

III

There are a number of important points to gather from the account so far. First, as we have seen, the Moment only emerges through the individual body's selec-

tive stylized organization of the space–time continuum. It is conditioned by its position within a field comprised by the body's present location, its physical capacities and a sense of its own personal history. However, whilst the Moment is necessarily a function of this field, it is not reducible to it. The body can orient itself towards the flow of causally related items and events; it can modify them, but it cannot fix them absolutely in place. If it could, experience as we know it would come to a stop.

This means, therefore, that experience is reconfigured anew in each Moment of perception. The encounter with a new set of immediate stimuli modifies the whole of a personal history. Indeed, even if we encounter a familiar set of stimuli, our relationship to it is – however slightly – a new one. This is because since our previous encounters with it we have accumulated further moments of perception. We have become different people with a more developed interpretative viewpoint. The familiar stimuli can now mean something slightly different. They have a different *style*.

These points indicate, then, that whilst the Moment is a function of a field of meaning, it has a relative autonomy. It is indeed through its own distinctive stylistic texture or vertical fabric that it is able to play an active role in the developing narrative of the self. Perhaps the most striking feature of the Moment is its *achieved* character, i.e. the fact that it emerges and attains a relative autonomy through the body's active organization of the perceptual field and the horizon of time.

The complexity of these origins, however, brings a corresponding problem. It concerns the comprehension of the Moment. Occasionally in the flow of experience, one is simultaneously aware of what and how we are experiencing something, even as we experience it. In terms of such simultaneous comprehension, however, the Moment is especially problematic given its transitory nature. Indeed, even as we attempt to comprehend the passing moment our very reflection upon it might be seen as a disruption of its singular character – as, in effect, the inauguration of a new Moment.

Such attempts to comprehend experiences simultaneous with their transaction are, of course, very much the exception rather than the rule. Under normal circumstances, experiences are only individuated, described and comprehended *after* they have occurred. This is especially the case with comprehending the Moment. However, it is a task fraught with difficulty. To show this, I shall employ two sets of distinctions – on the one hand between the singularity of the objective event and that of the momentary experience of it, and on the other hand between recalling and remembering these modes of singular happenstance.

First, let us address an example noted earlier, namely the call of an owl in the silence of the moonlit night. The singularity of this as an objective event consists in the fact that it occurred and endured at and through a determinate and continuous succession of points in the space–time continuum. Even if we do not actually know these specific co-ordinates, we at least know (by virtue of its status as an event which did happen) that it must occupy such an exact location. The singularity of the Moment, however, is more complex, as an act of hearing it is

just as much an objective event as the sound heard, but as a Moment of hearing it involves a specific psychological aspect as well.

Let us now consider the distinction between recalling and remembering these two kinds of singularity. In making this distinction, I am indicating two logically separate functions of memory. To *recall* something is simply to posit it as a fact – be it something which one just knows or something which actually happened in our lives. In the present case, recalling the objective event and recalling that of its Moment of perception are not essentially different. One simply recounts the fact that the event happened, and that one witnessed it in a psychologically specific way.

To *remember* these singularities, in contrast, is something more complex, for by 'remember' I mean the attempt to recover an event in the past by projecting it as an image or sequence of imagery. One tries to see it or hear it, or whatever, as it appeared to us at the time. There is, of course, an old-fashioned notion of remembering in this sense which understands it to be a case of retrieving faded and inert sensory impressions. This is false. Remembering is much more creative. Given a factual description of something which happened in the past, we generate – through imagination – an image or sequence of imagery which is as consistent as possible with the description of the past event.

On this basis it might seem that there is little difference between remembering an objective event and remembering the moment of its perception. This is because remembering in the sense just described involves, in both cases, projecting an image of the past event as it appeared to us at the time. However, there is a difference. For in remembering the objective event *per se* the generated imagery serves as a *means* of emphasizing the fact that it happened, rather than as an affirmation of the fact that we witnessed it. Remembering in this context means, in effect, augmenting our recall of a fact by making it more vivid. The generated imagery needs to be consistent with the fact, but no more than this. To remember the Moment of the event's perception, in contrast, is much more complex. For here we are not simply positing a past occurrence or augmenting its recall, but are, rather, trying to reconstruct its singularity in the context of our present personal experience. We seek to evoke its psychological resonance, to recapture what was distinctive about the event's happening *for us*.

This, however, is where problems begin. What is required here is imagery which is not only consistent with the event, but also conveys the perceptual and introspective ambience which informed and defined our perception of it. However, since the time when we experienced the owl's call in the night the ambience which informed it has gone and the whole of our experience has developed further. In generating an image to satisfy a description of that which was witnessed in the past, what emerges is, at best, schematic and incomplete. Indeed, its character will be substantially determined by the standpoint of the present Moment. For it is usually on the basis of present interests that we seek to remember our past. This means that the imagery which we use in remembering has the style of what we are now rather than that of the past Moment itself. A partial exception to this consists in those acts of remembering which simply

occur by chance – obtruding upon some current pattern of thought or perception. (Proust's famous description of a flood of childhood memories evoked by the taste of a madeleine cake is a good example of this.) However, as soon as our remembering is *volitionally* directed, this more spontaneous evocation of the past is once more subjected to the demands of the present.

My major point is, then, that the holistic complexity of the Moment presents problems for acts of volitional remembering. We cannot recapture the Moment as it was; rather, we remodel it with imagery generated from the standpoint of the present. As our experience changes, so too do the terms in which we remember our past Moments. Their uniqueness can only be realized in partial and second-hand terms.

A further problem related to the foregoing one also needs to be elaborated. My example of the owl call in the night is a simple Moment – where the event and our perception of it are perfectly congruent. However, most of our Moments are not simply correlated with a single objective event. They can involve multiple events, complex spatial locations, numbers of people or things, and sequences of bodily gesture. This not only makes it difficult to generate imagery which can wholly satisfy our descriptions of the Moment; it also makes it difficult to individuate Moments themselves. Even in addressing experience from the immediate past, for example, it is often hard to decide where the Moment ends and another begins. As a Moment moves further into the past the problem tends to become correspondingly greater. Matters are also complicated by the fact that, whilst our sense of Moments 'fades' with the passing of time, they do not do so in a uniform way. Distance from the present may bring in issues of repression, or wishing to cling to the past, as well as mere forgetting.

These points explain why *our remembering of Moments is primarily symbolic*. We know in general descriptive terms the narrative of our personal history. But when it comes to individuating specific key Moments our sense of their pattern of occurrence breaks down. We might know, for example, that we arrived for the interview at 10.50 a.m. on such and such a date. We know that we spoke to the porter before entering the interview room. The interview began with a presentation and every member of the panel asked a question. All these facts we can recall, but what we cannot *remember* is the exact passage of Moments which they embody. In this situation, therefore, we remember by reference to symbolic Moments. During the interview, for example, one member of the panel asked an interesting question about the sublime. One could therefore construct a sequence of images based on what one remembers of his appearance, how he *might* have put his question, and how he *might* have accompanied it with certain facial expressions and bodily gestures.

Now this remembered Moment of questioning has the character of a *possibility* which is consistent with a description of facts. There are, however, other ways in which the described situation could be remembered. Some of them may have the character of a single Moment; others may involve a sequence of Momentary impressions. It may be that when the question was originally asked one attended to it as a singular Moment in the course of the interview. But it

could also be that one was actually so tense at the time that all the questions merged into one, psychologically speaking, undifferentiated flow. In this latter case it could mean that the remembered Moment was consistent with the facts but not with our original experience of them. And this is the point. The flow of Moments in an individual's history cannot – with the exception of simple cases such as the owl's call – be definitely resolved into clearly defined components. What one does in remembering, therefore, is to project imagery which is consistent with the known facts. Any singular complex Moment which is thus remembered will be, in effect, one amongst other possible projections which could also satisfy the facts. It refers to the past through a mode of symbolic rather than strictly factual denotation.

Now, of course, these points may seem odd, for earlier on I argued that what defines the Moment is its psychological singularity – a factor which makes it amenable to memory in a way that mundane perceptions are not. However, in the foregoing points I have suggested that in remembering, the Moment actually proves elusive. Is this not, therefore, a contradiction? The answer is no. In any personal history there is a potentially infinite number of facts concerning the things which happened to us. We cannot recall all of them. In order to emerge from memory, a fact must be practically relevant to our current projects or else have some general significance.

It is this latter point which is pertinent here. Facts about our past can emerge precisely because they figured in Moments of experience. It is this connection which draws our present attention to them, which declares them as worth remembering. We may not know the exact contours of the Moments in which these facts were originally embodied, but in remembering we can at least generate imagery which will assign a momentary character which is consistent with them. Actually (as we shall see a little further on) the gap between the symbolic Moment and the original is of decisive significance in the narrative of the self.

I have, then, proposed the following major line of argument. A Moment is a singular occurrence of relatively short duration in a person's experience. Its singularity is defined in psychological terms – as something which strikes us or matters to us in a way determined by its position in the ongoing narrative of our lives. It is an element which connects and divides our personal past and future in an existential as well as temporal way. In structural terms it is holistically complex. On the one hand, it is a function of the embodied subject's position in relation to the perceptual field and a personal horizon of past and future. On the other hand, it is also relatively autonomous. It has its own distinctive texture and fabric which add something new to the developing whole of the embodied subject's experience. All in all, it is achieved as a result of the body's positioning in relation to space and time.

The Moment's holistic complexity, however, makes it systematically elusive. It is transient and bound up with perceptually and psychologically intricate contexts of occurrence. In memory, it can be recalled as a fact which happened, but to remember it in deeper terms presents difficulties. These extend both to

the generation of imagery which will satisfy our descriptions of it and, indeed, to the individuation of its specific past instances. To remember a complex Moment is, in effect, to project a sequence of imagery offering one possible realization of it which is consistent with the facts.

IV

Having established my basic theory, I shall now consider some of its broader ramifications in relation to the cohesion of the self. In this respect, let us address a basic phenomenon. All our perceptions and experiences – be they Moments or anonymous elements in the cognitive continuum – inform the body's orientation towards the world. Furthermore, the body can draw upon this stock of experience without having to be simultaneously aware of the fact that it *is* doing so. Such 'habit memory' (as Bergson terms it[4]) gives unity and continuity to the body's activity and basic cognitive functions. We can, for example, walk down a street, greet people, read a newspaper, etc. without having to think how to do these things. Habit memory makes for efficient interchanges with the world. Our linguistic competences both grow out of and massively refine this mode of memory, opening up a complex space of behavioural and social possibilities.

Now what I am describing here constitutes the lower-level *cohesion of consciousness*. Habit memory in its most basic form is something which humans share with animals. If, therefore, we are to look for the cohesion of *self-consciousness* we must address something which humans and animals do not share. This centres on the Moment and the notion of narrative. It is clear, for example, that only a self-conscious being can experience the Moment in its holistic sense. Animals may, on occasion, enjoy moments of enhanced relish in devouring food, triumphing over rivals or resting in a comfortable habitat. They may also recognize one another (and, indeed, humans) with affection. In such cases, their response to a particular stimulus is given an enhanced character through its position in relation to a field of previous encounters with such stimuli. However, the animal does not possess a language. This means that it cannot recognize these responses *as* specific Moments in its experience. Neither, of course, can it recall or remember them (in the senses described in section ii). At best, the animal's enhanced moments of response are absorbed in its equivalent of habit memory.

It might be thought that what is at issue here is simply the fact that humans have language and animals do not. In a very general sense this is true. Language is a logical precondition of the possibility of self-consciousness. If, however, we are addressing the *cohesion* of self-consciousness, then what concerns us is *how* language functions in this context. What factors does it relate and articulate; what structures does it *enable*? It is in this respect that narrative structure[5] and the function of the Moment prove decisive. A narrative is, in the most general terms, a body or unified set of descriptions. The unity in question here is actually its function – which is to articulate a pattern or meaning which is embodied in and enacted through different series of events. If this is to be 'narrative' in a distinctive sense – as opposed to a mere synonym for 'unified body of descriptions' –

then the patterns or meaning in question will be ones that pertain to the actions and/or experiences of sentient creatures.

We tend to think of narratives as fictions, but of course they do not have to be. There are true stories, one of the most interesting forms of which is personal history itself. It might seem as if we could recount the passage of our lives in terms of a mere succession of facts about what we did and what happened to us. However, as we saw in sections ii and iii of this chapter, in order to act and perceive we must relate to our past and the realm of possibility in highly selective terms. We interpret them; we leave things out; we exaggerate small things and diminish large ones. In this matter we have little choice. For our access to the past or positings of the possible involve either linguistic description alone or imagination directed by such descriptions. No human action or experience, however, can be exhaustively characterized by a single description. Even the most stable and fixed phenomenal items and states have different aspects and are encountered under many different perceptual conditions. They are thus amenable to alternative descriptions, a factor which is also mediated by the linguistic prowess of the one who is doing the describing.

In those cases where descriptions direct the imagination a further dimension of ambiguity enters in. For images are schematic and fragmentary, and (as we saw in section iii) realizable in different ways even in relation to the same description.

The upshot of all this is that even bare descriptions or imaginings of fact admit of alternative characterizations. This is also true, of course, in respect of how we relate descriptions or imaginings of fact to one another and to broader networks of belief. All our descriptive, imaginative and discursive activity is essentially selective. The criterion of selection is determined by many factors. Chief among these is relevance to our current position in life and the things we value. On the basis of these we map out a route or series of connected routes through both our past and the realms of futural and counterfactual possibility. The purpose of this mapping is to enable these elements to converge on the present, and thus make it intelligible as a stage in the ongoing unity of a particular life history. Self-consciousness coheres, accordingly, as a narrative structure.

It must be reiterated that a narrative in this sense is *not* a mere fiction. Elements of self-deception may enter into it, and there are many different ways in which we can project narratives, but in this latter case they are not arbitrary. True, our present position in life and the routes leading in and out of it have many different aspects and can therefore engender many different narratives. One might, for example, consider the passage of one's life in relation to the search for and active pursuit of a career; or in relation to one's role as a member of a family; or in terms of one's dealings with the opposite sex. Most of the time, of course, our narrative will be shifting and complex, involving elements of all three possibilities, and many other factors besides. Some of these may even conflict in psychological terms as our life moves on. Such conflicts can then come to figure as a focus of narratives in themselves. The key point is, however, that, no matter how diverse the narratives in terms of which we make sense of our lives, *they must be logically consistent with one another*. (If this were not the case

chronic schizophrenia would be the norm.) The cohesion of self-consciousness, therefore, is constituted by a general narrative structure which is a function of the logical consistency of its component sub-narratives.

Given such an analysis, it is clear that this general narrative structure derives from the *openness* of both descriptions and imaginings of fact, i.e. their capacity to be characterized in different ways. It also necessarily involves a second factor. We might call it the *impulse* towards the cohesion of the self. To illustrate what is involved here, let us consider the example of what I shall call the 'pseudo-experiential' computer. It has been programmed to describe visual stimuli (in conjunction with a voice synthesizer) in such a way as to be able to report what it 'sees' in relation to a temporal horizon. These reports are issued both randomly and through prompting by the user. For example, when asked the computer says, '10 p.m. on 11 July. Red triangles in motion against white background.' The computer is also programmed so as to be able to replay specific past moments from its viewing experience at random intervals. It can also negotiate basic modal and probability factors on the basis of the temporally charted visual data in its memory bank. Hence: 'At 4 p.m. on 14 January last year, was not (but could have been) presented with a pink cube against a yellow ground', or 'At 5.30 p.m. on 1 September, likely to see white background crossed by orange circles'. Not only can the computer posit their possibilities; it can also project them by synthesizing the appropriate forms from those in its data bank.

The interest of this example consists in the fact that such a computer not only is possible, but also formally satisfies one key necessary condition of the possibility of self-consciousness. It can, in a crude sense, ascribe 'experiences' to itself in relation to a horizon of past, present, future and counterfactual possibility. What is especially instructive about this is its contrast with human self-consciousness. For the computer, everything which it sees is of equal value. Its present seeing is just one moment in a continuum of other such moments. They may be different from one another, but this difference is merely formal. There is no reason for it to prefer seeing one configuration rather than another. It should also be noticed that the computer has no reason to value its present over its past 'seeings', since it can replay those moments exactly *as* they were seen in the past. In terms of the computer's modal and probability functions, matters are just the same. It can anticipate what might occur and it can project alternative configurations to the ones which it did actually 'see'. But, again, it has no reasons to be fulfilled or disappointed by these projections because it can realize them exactly as if they had been amongst those configurations which were presented to it.

This computer, then, has a formal unity of the sort presupposed by the possibility of self-consciousness, but it is *not* self-conscious. The reason why is that it is too crudely perfect. Its visual 'sights' are discrete, well defined, exactly projectable and thence retrievable. Its moments of seeing form a differentiated continuum, but one wherein no elements can outweigh any other. The computer has no reason to be self-conscious. A human being has. It is more than an animal. The animal enjoys moments or episodes of gratification, but it has no sense of these *as* Moments or episodes of gratification. A human being does. It is

an embodied *subject* precisely because, as well as enjoying the occurrence of such states, it can, through language and imagination, recall and anticipate them with some degree of pleasure. Concomitant with this, it can also enjoy the means which allow these states of gratification to be effectively realized. These capacities cannot be separated from one another. Neither can they be separated from the key *catalytic* factor, namely that in the struggle for life some Moments have more value than others. They are holistic points of felt recognition, loss, frustration, satiation and fulfilment. And they are not (like the computer's data) perfectly retrievable in memory or imagination.

In relation to mundane moments this does not matter. We accumulate them, and they are silently absorbed into that habit memory whose function I outlined earlier. Psychologically singular holistic Moments, however, are ones which stand out through their contrast with others. In attempting to retrieve them or project them in imagination, we cannot attain a complete comprehension. This is due not only to the alternative characterizations of description and imagination which I have already described, but, even more fundamentally, to their contextual complexity.

The point arises, however, as to why we should even want to retrieve or project such Moments. The answer is twofold: on the one hand, their psychological singularity enables them to mark out key experiences of practical significance in the struggle for life; and, on the other, they provide, in effect, a criterion of life itself.

This latter point is of extreme importance. It might be thought that if our personal history is marked out and organized on the basis of some times in our lives being more valuable or significant than others, then the only terms required in order to bring this about are dates, times, places, events, episodes and phases. However, these terms are not enough. If we wish to remember the most important events, episodes and phases in our lives, we look not to dates, times and places, but, rather, to Moments of experience. The events, episodes and phases in question are not mere continua of experience or points therein. They are functions of specific key and interconnected Moments of inauguration, effort, struggle, control and fulfilment. To remember such episodes etc. or to imagine them just *is* to project some pivotal Moment or Moments. They are the high points – the things which made or could make that time worthwhile, the things, indeed, which are the very texture of a human life.

The Moment, then, is of ultimate significance in relation to what I shall call the cohesion of self-consciousness in its *external* aspect. This is comprised of those elements and relations which, in concert, form the narrative structure of the self. There is also a much more elusive *internal* aspect. This involves the *means* whereby a person remembers or projects elements in the aforementioned narrative structure. To clarify it, let us begin with some questions.

First, whilst in experiential terms our life is not a continuum, in formal temporal terms it is. In the passage from birth to death there are no gaps. However, our memories of the past and projections of the future are enormously selective and schematic. In relation to the past, for example, there are whole tracts of time about which we know facts but which are not amenable to

memory – either because of their distance in time or for other psychological reasons. These tracts can, of course, be reconfigured. As our experience changes, certain regions of the past become clearer in memory whilst others recede into opacity. Given this instability, therefore, why are there no severe psychological disruptions of, or gaps in, experience; why are there no blind spots; why is it so *persistently* continuous?

One answer, of course, derives from a point already noted in passing. Even if we have forgotten the past, we still know facts about it. If something occurred in our past, we know that it must have some determinate experiential content. By piecing together odd facts – such as where we were, what age we were and who was around at the time – we can at least posit some kind of context wherein the forgotten experiences were transacted. This is, however, to say the least, meagre. Let us therefore consider the following example.

I believe that some time on the morning of 14 September 1956 I began to eat my breakfast. I cannot even recall the fact of this happening, let alone the details, yet there are good reasons to believe that I did have some such experience. Now, if one believes that one had a specific experience in the past one can also imagine (however creatively) what it was like to have the experience. In the present case, I see myself as a small child, looking at a bowl of Shreddies and hearing the sound of a tram passing along the road outside. This is an extreme example of what, in section iii of this chapter, I called a symbolic Moment. It is an image of the past which is consistent with a specific fact – but this fact could have been imaginatively realized in ways other than the one just specified.

This example raises an immediate question, namely why should this be considered to be an image of a *Moment* rather than, say, *just* an inconsequential image of myself starting to eat breakfast. This latter characterization seems more immediately appropriate, since the eating of breakfast at the age of three is *surely* one of those anonymous elements in the continuum of our everyday activities rather than a psychologically singular occurrence. (There could, of course, be conditions where the eating of breakfast at the age of three might have this singular character, but they are not provided for in the bare fact which this image is intended to realize.)

To answer the question we must attend to the nature of imagery in a specific temporal context. To imagine an experience from one's past (as opposed to simply positing its having happened) means projecting it *as if* one were experiencing it. Even if this is an utterly anonymous mundane experience, the image transforms it. True, the image is schematic and fragmentary by nature, but it still defines some key phenomenal contours of its object. In virtual terms, it isolates the experience from the continuum of which it was a part and invests it with a distinctive character. This distinctiveness is further – even emphatically – defined by the fact that the image is now 'framed' by the 'surround' of the present standpoint in relation to which it is being projected. All in all, the experience is necessarily presented *as if* it were psychologically singular – as if it were a holistic Moment.

This example is instructive in many respects. In the first place, it illuminates why, under normal circumstances, there are no radical psychological gaps in the

continuity of our personal history. Forgotten times are not only charted by piecing together facts; they can also be populated *at will* with imagined Moments of the sort just described. This may seem a trivial fact. It is not; for, through such imaginings, the past lives in terms which are not only intelligible to the present but *controlled* by it. This imaginative dimension is a massive homogenizing power *vis-à-vis* the developing whole of the individual's experience.

It should be emphasized how the function of the image in this context is, in a sense, redemptive. By nature, the Moment is transient. In remembering, however, it becomes subject to the will. This is because such acts of remembering are things which we can choose to do. By doing them the Moment is made volitionally recurrent. The fact that it now recurs in a context other than its original one means that its relative autonomy (discussed in section iii) also becomes much more manifest. We can *dwell* on its original fabric and character. This, of course, carries a temptation – namely to *idealize* the Moment. To idealize means to make something appear better than it is, was or is likely to be. Through idealizing the Moment in these terms we misinterpret the past and, indeed, the future and counterfactual possibility. However, there is also an extremely positive aspect to this, in that, through our idealization, the past, future and counterfactual possibilities are rendered highly attractive.

What I am describing here is a more developed case of that gap between the remembered Moment and its original occurrence which I discussed at the end of section ii. I shall now develop its crucial general ramifications.

First, in remembering a Moment the past is imaginatively *remodelled* in the present. This means that it is shaped on the basis of our current interests and abilities. And here is the vital point. The elusiveness of past Moments has its own motivational force. They do not lurk as inert and faded impressions waiting to be mechanically reinserted into the present. Rather, they must be *created* again. The creative activity involved here does not proceed *ex nihilo*; it is guided by consistency with linguistic descriptions of fact. In some cases – such as the 1956 breakfast example – the remembered Moment is entirely symbolic, in that we cannot even recall the fact of its occurrence, let alone its details. In such cases, imagination has great creative freedom in how it projects the Moment.

Most of our rememberings, however, are not like this. As well as recalling the fact of their occurrence, we can also recall details of their phenomenal context – if not their exact momentary character. In these cases the demands of consistency with such features place greater constraints on how imagination realizes its image. Even here, however, there is a significant dimension of freedom. This is because even the most exact descriptions of our past Moments can be imaginatively realized in different ways. Consistency with the description opens up a space of possibilities.

On these terms, then, our past is not a closed book. There are many practical reasons why we need to remember, but what I have just described is a motive to remember which is intrinsic to the act itself. Our past is interesting, because in remembering its Moments we exercise our imagination with varying degrees of creative freedom. The past is, in other words, both a challenge and a fulfilment.

More than this, it is something which, through remembering, actually *lives* in the present and fulfils its needs. In this way, our sense of life energizes the past through the present.

It should also be strongly emphasized how well this analysis encompasses our anticipations of the future and positings of counterfactual possibility. These acts can be purely descriptive. But they can also take the form of imaginative projections. In this latter case, the projected image must be consistent with the description of a possible experience. It must, accordingly, be rendered as if it were a possible Moment. An image of this kind singles the Moment out from its surround in futural or counterfactual possibility and makes it live in the experiential field of the present. Because, indeed, its 'surround' is *only* possibility, the imagination is able to project the image with very little descriptive constraint. Its creative freedom is much enhanced. Just as our remembering of the past is intrinsically rewarding, so too, therefore, is our projection of the future and the counterfactual dimension.

We have, then, the following situation overall. The cohesion of the self takes the form of a narrative structure. In its external aspect, this structure is ultimately analysable in terms of significant Moments of experience and their relation both to other such Moments (including futural and counterfactual) and, indeed, to more mundane experiences. The internal aspect consists of the means whereby these elements are made real for the present. This involves the intrinsically rewarding activity of remembering past Moments, and projecting possible futural or counterfactual ones.

Some appropriate conclusions can now be drawn. In this respect, we will recall that the pseudo-experiential computer's 'experience' is a mere continuum where no moment outweighs any other. This means that, whilst it satisfies the key formal condition of the possibility of self-consciousness, it has no impulse to realize this possibility. If, in contrast, our experience is centred on holistic Moments, there is such an impulse. Some parts of our experience are valued more than others, and the means whereby past and possible Moments are realized in the present is itself intrinsically rewarding.

Now, like other creatures, humans have basic biological drives (to survive and procreate) and also that low-level unity of consciousness which centres on habit memory. However, it is only insofar as these unities are integrated within a coherent horizon of past, future and counterfactual possibility that one can be a self-conscious being. Narrative structure – with the Moment at its core – is the means of this integration. It provides the impulse to make the temporal horizon's constitutive dimensions meaningful in relation to one another. In human experience, therefore, narrative structure and temporal horizon are mutually dependent. The character and linkage of Moments, their distance from, proximity to, and relevance in the present all serve to map out the contours of this horizon – just as, reciprocally, the horizon enables them to emerge and be individually characterized. This is the basis of the *cohesion of the self*.

If this analysis is correct, it implies a fascinating conclusion, namely that the self is fundamentally an *aesthetic* structure. It is to this issue that I finally turn.

Conclusion

First, a relatively simple point. Human beings have the capacity to enjoy relations of unity and diversity in the way phenomenal configurations are manifest to the senses. This is not the same as, say, liking one colour in preference to another, or the pleasure of anticipating whether a configuration is a good example of its kind. For to enjoy relations of unity and diversity in such a configuration is to enjoy the different ways in which its unity might be understood. And this means that such enjoyment can be had for its own sake. It is a disinterested mode of pleasure.

This disinterested appreciation is what most commentators would describe as aesthetic. There may be disagreements as to its philosophical scope and significance, but if anything warrants the term 'aesthetic', this mode of appreciation does.

Now, of all theorists of the aesthetic, it is Kant who best articulates its fundamentals. In the *Critique of Judgement*, he not only sets out the basic logical characteristics of the pure aesthetic judgement, but also provides crucial insights concerning its ontological explanation. This explanation hinges on the relation between the 'faculties' of understanding and imagination. It is, of course, customary to sneer at eighteenth-century faculty psychology. However, what Kant means by understanding and imagination has an objective significance which exceeds mere faculty psychology.

Put simply, the understanding and the imagination are two separate but mutually dependent cognitive capacities without which no experience would be possible. Understanding, for example, is our ability to comprehend items or relations – to subsume them under, or connect them by, concepts. Imagination (as I argued at length in Chapter 4) is the capacity to generate and link mental imagery, either by associational means, or, more fundamentally, so as to satisfy concepts or descriptions. For example, we cannot attend to a present object of perception unless we are also able to recall or remember our previous moments of attention and to anticipate future ones. To unify a phenomenal manifold (i.e. apply concepts) requires that such unification takes place in a coherent horizon of past, present and future. Imagination is the means whereby this horizon is projected.

To see how these capacities are engaged in the pure aesthetic judgement, we might consider the following examples. One perceives a bunch of yellow and purple-pink flowers in a glass. The flowers are supported by full green leaves, stalks and tendrils, with other flowers still in bud. To comprehend this configuration as a unity in conceptual terms is straightforward. We simply describe it as an arrangement of flowers in a glass. There are other ways in which it might be verbally described, but these are not aesthetically relevant.

The focus of our aesthetic interest rather is the *way* in which this particular phenomenal configuration coheres as a phenomenal particular.

To comprehend this unity involves not only direct perceptual acquaintance with it, but also sustained exploration. We may note, for example, the colour of the petals in relation to their shape and texture, and the way in which they are

defined against the green of the leaves and their reflection in the water and glass. We may attend to the balance of the top masses in relation to the strong verticals of the stems, perhaps tracing in these the elements of a visual rhythm which could be continued in imagination or which could be transformed by rearranging the flowers. With a further shift of viewing position, indeed, the phenomenal manifold reconfigures and yields still more avenues for perceptual exploration.

To comprehend the bunch of flowers as an aesthetic unity therefore involves selective perceptual characterization, because in viewing the configuration we do not attend to every tiny detail. What is involved, rather, are alternating synopses wherein visually striking or dominant aspects are grouped in relation both to one another overall and in relation to regional unities and sub-unities of form. The aesthetic unity of the configuration as a whole is a function of the perceptual consistency of these synopses with one another.

Now, as this example makes clear, aesthetic experience centres on the relation between understanding and imagination. Indeed, their basic complementarity is much enhanced. In attempting to understand the different possibilities of unity which a configuration presents, we must attend to, recall and anticipate its aspects as they unfold in perceptual exploration; reciprocally, their heightened imaginative activity stimulates our attentiveness to the nature and pattern of the configuration's unity. The more our sense of the unity of the whole is enriched, the more we are tempted to search out those sub-unities and details from which it emerges.

The pure aesthetic judgement, then, involves the enhanced interaction of two cognitive capacities which are fundamental to self-consciousness. Such judgements, indeed, have a much deeper significance in relation to self-consciousness than even Kant imagined. This significance has both an external and an internal aspect, which I shall now consider in turn.

The external aspect hinges on the fact that the pure aesthetic judgement just described is itself a continuation of a more basic form of aesthetic *activity*. Consider, for example, the behaviour of an infant. Much of its activity will be geared towards satisfying basic biological needs or obtaining recognition from others. However, it also enjoys play, and, more importantly, explores and re-arranges its environment for the sheer pleasure of it. Through this explorative activity and guidance from adults it is able gradually to co-ordinate its bodily movements and – in tandem with its acquisition of language – learn such notions as unity, plurality, totality, reality, negation and limitation. These are not, of course, learnt as concepts *per se* until later on in its development. Rather, they are learnt initially as characteristics of the physical world which have to be negotiated in the course of its perceptual explorations.

The point I am making, then, is that crude aesthetic activity is an integral part of the child's co-ordination of its body with the objective world. It also has, simultaneously, an internal function, in facilitating the cohesion of the self. For in co-ordinating its body with the world, the child learns a basic framework of constants, possibilities and impossibilities, which through articulation in language

is able to organize its powers of understanding and imagination. Specifically, it can form a sense of itself as a person with a history, not only by remembering things which it has done, but also by identifying with other people – either directly or through play or hearing stories. It only becomes aware of itself as a person insofar as it can selectively inhabit other personalities through imagination. This switching to and fro between possible narratives allows it to focus and refine what is distinctive about its own personality. The narrative of self originates, in other words, in a playful rather than a rigid correlation of understanding and imagination. It has an aesthetic character.

The aesthetic dimension also characterizes adult experience. If one asks the question 'who and what am I?', the answer does not consist in a name and a few descriptions of our present position in life. We are dealing, rather, with a complex play of aspects. These may focus on our present and past social roles; our friendships; our relation to a family or community; our religious beliefs; and biological issues. This involves selective interpretation of our past and our anticipations of futural or counterfactual possibility. There are, of course, willingly chosen monotonous or ascetic lifestyles, but even these involve something of a playful narrative of self-understanding. The ascetic's withdrawal from life, for example, is only made real insofar as it is defined, felt or reaffirmed against a background of imagined involvement in life. Indeed, no matter how uniform the pattern of life may be, its narrative organization around the holistic Moment invests it with an aesthetic quality. This is because, as I showed earlier, the basic cognitive acts of remembering and imaginative projection are selective, creative and highly stylized.

However, even allowing for this, it might be pointed out that such a narrative of the self surely lacks the disinterested character which is a definitive feature of aesthetic engagement. Indeed, surely it has just the opposite significance. Our sense of self and its rootedness in the practical sphere of things we do, believe and value is literally the basis of interested activity! This is true; but the whole of our existence is more than the sum of its practical parts. Even if we set ourselves some practical life-goal such an obtaining a specific career position, our reasons for doing this, and what we do when we attain it, are far from unilinear. For a finite being all projects have a provisional nature; and when they are realized the process of reflection upon them has a complex character. A clear logical path to what we have achieved is a pleasant thing to reflect upon, but the pleasure is defined not only by the achievement, but by the space of 'messy' attainment or even failure which might also have been the outcomes under different circumstances. And if our life-goals are complex, this play between what has been achieved, what might have happened and what could happen in the future becomes all the more accentuated.

Now, there are creatures whose immersion in the world is wholly practical. Their cognitive activity gravitates wholly around immediate perception and that mode of habit memory discussed earlier. Human beings, however, can recall and remember the past, and project the future and counterfactual possibilities. This activity has practical utility, but even when it is so directed it already has a

surplus. In primitive humans this is manifest in a pleasure in social roles and in the formulation of rite and ritual. Such developments have, of course, a practical and evolutionary significance. But why should they have this? Why should they promote cohesion of the social whole? Why should they be thought to be practically efficacious? I would suggest that it is because they have their own internal momentum; they are enjoyable for their own sakes. The development of a reflective standpoint – an explicit sense of self – is reciprocally correlated with such a pleasure in being and doing for its own sake. Habit memory grows into self-consciousness when practical activity engenders an aesthetic dimension. This happens when the interplay between factors bound up with practical considerations becomes intrinsically pleasurable in its own right. The holistic dimension becomes an *overt* player; a continuum of animal sensations is gradually transformed into a life of human experience.

The point is, then, that whilst the narrative of the self is inseparably bound up with practical issues it exceeds these. To comprehend who and what we are is not just a case of having specific beliefs and desires or of being able to affirm that 'I think' or imagine. It involves, rather, the understanding and imagination interacting in a freer and more creative way than is required in order to recognize that 'such and such' is the case. Individual ascriptions of self-consciousness are only made possible by virtue of their reciprocal relation with the pleasurable interplay of the developing totality. To be self-conscious entails that we must be able to stand apart from the immediate practical involvements of life. The aesthetic pleasure involved here provides a motive for adopting such a reflective standpoint. It is grounded in practical interests, but insofar as it is not sufficiently analysable in these terms it can be characterized as relatively disinterested in character.

From this analysis it should be clear that the narrative of the self has *some* structural affinity with the pure aesthetic judgement. One might say that the latter continues and externalizes the aesthetic momentum of the former and, reciprocally, feeds back and modifies it. Through the narrative of the self we attain an internal cohesion of self-belonging; through the pure aesthetic judgement we find a cohesion and belonging with the external world. The pure aesthetic judgement refines and, in a sense, purifies our aesthetic involvement, insofar as its mode of disinterestedness is absolute rather than relative.

The narrative of the self also has affinities with two other modes of the aesthetic. As an aesthetic structure which is in part volitionally constructed and directed, it is profoundly implicated in the origins of art. For immediate purposes, however, it is more important to consider its other structural affinity – namely with the sublime. Again, Kant is instructive here. He holds that when faced by a vast or mighty phenomenon – no matter how perceptually or physically overwhelming it may be – we can encompass it in thought or resist its threat in moral terms. Hence, it is not the phenomenon itself which is sublime, but rather our own rational being – our existence as *persons*.

Now, as I have shown elsewhere, Kant's account is problematic.[6] However, his linking of sublimity to the self offers us an important philosophical clue. To follow

it up, we must go far beyond him. Specifically, we must consider sublimity's confrontation between perception and/or imagination and object as something analogous to the structure of self-consciousness itself. What makes this analogy viable is the relation between self-narrative and the uncountable number of Moments which it defines and gives contour to. Matters are rendered even more complex here by the fact that every individual Moment involves a qualitative reconfiguration of experience as a developing whole. The overwhelming complexity of this is, literally, unimaginable. However, we can encompass it – through the narrative of the self. The free co-operation of understanding and imagination which is involved here is a creative and selective *containment of excess*. The whole of experience is made sense of, even though we cannot individually comprehend all the parts which constitute this overwhelming totality.

On these terms, then, the narrative of the self is the positive component of what can best be described as *experiential sublime*. This can be distinguished from the sublime response to nature in two ways: first, the obvious fact that the experiential and natural sublime address, respectively, two wholly different kinds of objects; and, second (and more interestingly), the fact that the narrative of the self does not merely comprehend an overwhelming totality in rational terms, but does so, rather, by means of a creative synopsis of it. The understanding and imagination co-operate freely so as to articulate the excess of Moments as a narrative. They bring about a selective cohesion of aspects, the pattern of consistency between which constitutes the overall narrative of the self.

Given this analysis, the aesthetic richness of the self as structure is manifest. It evolves with reciprocally correlated internal and external aspects. Our responses to beautiful, sublime and artistic phenomena in the external world develop in co-ordination with the narrative of the self and help overcome the more alien qualities of that world. The human mode of being-in-the-world is aesthetic in a global sense.

This complex aesthetic structure has some important moral and political consequences which I shall now investigate. First, all the most important secular moral theories rest – either explicitly or implicitly – on the claim that there is something intrinsically valuable about persons and their states of being. In moral terms, they are worthy of respect; in political terms, they should be afforded basic human rights. What sustains these ascriptions is the fact that there is something special about free self-conscious beings. They can direct their own actions and take responsibility for them. Their capacity for pleasure and suffering is distinct from other animals precisely because it is informed by a sense of responsibility and alternative possible outcomes to the actions which it has taken or has refrained from taking. The magnitude of what human beings do and feel qualitatively exceeds that of all other known life-forms.

Now consider the notion of a 'person'. We understand the term in both its moral and more general sense. But how should we characterize it so as fully to convey its worthiness of respect? To describe persons as free, self-conscious and individually unique goes some way towards this, but we need more. We need a mode of comprehension which both makes these descriptions more concrete and provides some kind of affective impulse – an incentive – to treat persons with respect.

Contemporary epistemology does not help us much here. Even if it avoids reductionist talk of brain states etc., its discourse of intentional states, propositional attitudes, beliefs, dispositions and the like is one which tends to dehumanize its 'object'. This is true even of thinkers, such as Donald Davidson, who have tried, albeit in parsimonious linguistic terms, to give the holistic dimension its due. Commonsense views of the self are not much better, for these centre primarily on the notion of a present which is continuous with the past and which is leading to a future. Continuity, however, does not adequately represent the holistic dimension of experience.

Suppose, however, that we construe the self in terms of the holistic Moment. This, as we have seen, is at the very centre of that narrative structure which gives cohesion to the self. Our sense of this narrative is at its most vivid in relation to the experiential sublime. Construing the self under this aesthetic aspect is to engage with it as a most extraordinary phenomenon. The self is the pattern which emerges from a stunning profusion of Moments uncountable even within the confines of the single human lifespan. These individual Moments, indeed, each bear the imprint of the entirety of the past, and futural and counterfactual possibilities. They accumulate not as a mere process of quantitative addition, but, rather, as a unified structure of qualitative growth.

If, therefore, we can engage with the self in terms of the experiential sublime, we have a powerful incentive to respect other persons. Indeed, in the absence of this aesthetic sense of self, one could say that the person lacking it was not a fully formed moral agent. He or she might know the appropriate concepts and how to apply them, but this would be merely a routine observation of the formalities of morality. Without a sense of the experiential sublime, there is no authentic moral commitment, for, without it, one does not know what is ultimately at stake in respect for persons.

Now, it might be objected that what I am describing here is not a moral incentive for respecting persons at all. It is merely an aesthetic response – and a dangerous one at that. On the one hand, it aestheticizes, i.e. presents personality *as if* it were an aesthetic structure when in fact it is not; and, on the other hand (and even worse), it is actually a *disincentive* to moral judgement. For how can we assign praise and blame as one must in moral matters when dealing with such extraordinary creatures as human beings. Would not everything that they did be simply ... *sublime*?

There are a number of responses to these points. First, in relating the narrative of the self to the holistic Moment and the experiential sublime, I have been engaged in a descriptive and analytic task. Its purpose has been to show what happens if the notion of the Moment is given its proper philosophical due. What does happen is that we must understand it correctly. Hence, my description of the self as an aesthetic structure is not an aestheticization; it is a literal truth about the basis of the self's cohesion.

This knowledge does not inhibit our capacity to assign praise and blame in moral matters. For it is not only the other person who is sublime, but also ourselves. We meet as equals by virtue of our common finite embodied nature.

We can judge, and be judged, accordingly. There are, of course, those people who positively accept what life has to offer, and who follow routine and prejudice without question. Here the narrative of the self is diminished in the direction of a mere continuum of experience. The path of such continuity may be freely chosen, but it treats the narrative of the self and, indeed, freedom as if they were passive factors, or ones which require only minimal activation.

I have argued, then, that narrative structure and the holistic Moment enable the self to be characterized as an aesthetic structure in a way that also carries important moral implications. The argument also has a more general signifi-cance, in that a key character of postmodern experience – its transience and momentariness – has been analysed and developed so as to reveal its necessary role in any form of experience whatsoever. The analysis has also had the further advantage of explaining the unity of the self in a way which transcends both essentialist and poststructuralist 'death of the subject' distortions of the issue.

In this and the two preceding chapters, then, I have provided the basis of a refoundational epistemology which clarifies the correlation of objective knowl-edge and the structure of subjectivity. In order to complete this epistemology, it is now necessary to clarify the scope of knowledge in relation to reality as it exists independently of the mind. This will not only fill up a decisive gap in Cassirer's philosophy (discussed in Chapter 3), but will also set the scene for some major points to be argued in Chapters 8 and 10. It will also take us further in relation to the ultimate problem of symbolic arrest. One of the reasons why this intoxica-tion with the power of signs *per se* is *so* pervasive is because it is fondly supposed that there is absolutely nothing which can be said about reality as it exists inde-pendently of signifying processes. Actually – and however paradoxical it may at first sight seem – there is a great deal which can be said on this issue. It is to this saying that I now turn.

6 The limits of objective knowledge

What mind-independent reality must be

Introduction

There were times in the universe's past when no self-conscious beings existed, and there may be times in its future when all such beings have ceased to be. There are also unimaginably vast areas of the universe in its present form where no self-conscious creatures exist. Yet in all these cases one presumes that reality itself continues to exist despite there being no creatures to perceive it. And, of course, even where there are self-conscious beings we presume that reality persists even when it is not being perceived by them.

The question arises, therefore, as to *what* it is that continues to exist whether or not experiential perspectives are taken upon it. Can its ontology be characterized without reference to such perspectives? All in all, what, in the most general terms, should *mind-independent reality* (or MIR, as I shall henceforth call it) be taken to be?

R.C.S. Walker has usefully summarized a widely held conception of the problem of MIR as follows:

> Nothing can be said about the world as it is 'in itself', independently of any standpoint; the only function of such talk is to express the fact that these various standpoints are all standpoints on the same world.[1]

On these terms it might seem that the attempt to characterize what MIR must be is scarcely intelligible. We may have good reason for believing in the notion of a mind-independent reality by virtue of the fact that cognition must have objects other than itself, but we have no criteria for describing what such a reality must be, independent of those epistemological *conditions* under which we are constrained to perceive it or to think about it.

This worry, however, would only be warranted if we were rigidly neo-Kantian idealists committed to what I shall call the *exclusive* view of space, time and causality. Such a view holds that space and time are experiential modes of receptivity alone, and that causality (along with other categorical concepts) is an exclusively experiential mode of understanding. These modes characterize structural features of human experience, rather than properties of the world as it is

'in itself'. Of this latter 'noumenal' realm we have no entitlement to say anything over and above that, somehow, it is the origin of that which cognition gives structure to.

A theory of MIR, however, is not necessarily saddled with such unwelcome noumenal baggage. One can (as I showed in relation to Cassirer) formulate a conception of space, time and causality which is an *inclusive* one. Such a formulation is, indeed, fundamental to human experience insofar as we are manifestly elements *within* a reality which is itself spatial, temporal and causal (a claim which will be explored at more length in section iii of this chapter). As *embodied* subjects we occupy specific positions within a continuum of spatially extended items, temporal succession and causal interactions. The mind does not view this realm from, as it were, the outside. It is both immanent to and emergent from it. The former term is applicable insofar as mental activity is temporally locatable, is linked to the states of a space-occupying being, and is both subject to and the producer of causal changes in the world. The term 'emergent' is warranted insofar as mind does not come into being *ex nihilo*; it is a product of evolutionary processes and (although the exact character of this is controversial) is dependent upon spatio-temporal and causally connected physical states.

I shall call these immanent and emergent relations, collectively, the *Continuity Principle*. It is the shared characteristics embodied in this principle – the physical continuity between the objective world and MIR – which (as will be shown in due course) is fundamental to the characterization of what MIR must be.

Therefore, given the Continuity Principle, we must now consider and reject one superficially promising approach to MIR which it opens up. This centres on one of the most important achievements of modern philosophy, namely the distinction between primary and secondary properties.[2] Gareth Evans has suggested that

> properties constitutive of the idea of material substance as *space-occupying* stuff should be acknowledged to be primary. These include properties of bodies immediately consequential upon the idea of space-occupation – position, shape, size, motion; properties applicable to a body in virtue of the primary properties of its spatial parts; and properties definable when these properties are combined with the idea of force (e.g. mass, weight, and hardness).[3]

Properties such as these seem a good starting point for characterizing MIR, since as features of space-occupying stuff they appear to exist independently of there being sentient beings to perceive them. (Secondary properties, in contrast, only exist insofar as there are sentient beings to realize them, through being causally affected in the appropriate way, by the appropriate kinds of primary property.)

Unfortunately, primary properties will not do as a first step in characterizing MIR. The notion of space-occupying stuff *is* fundamental (as I shall show later), but we must question the sense in which – as Evans has it – primary properties are 'immediately consequential upon the idea of space-occupation'. For whilst it is indeed the case that the notion of primary properties presupposes that of

space-occupancy, the conditions of space-occupancy *per se* are not sufficiently analysable in terms of primary properties.

The example of shape is instructive here. We can describe some spatial items as having an objective shape. This objective shape is not simply 'given' in some timeless Platonic space. It is, rather, a function of the item's distinctive spatial properties *correlated* with a range of cognitive and motor abilities which are distinctive to specific kinds of observer. As the item or observer changes position in relation to the other, the item's perceptible aspects vary in systematic co-ordination with these changes. With different kinds of sentient beings the variations of aspect will be systematizable in different ways. If, for example, there existed a huge self-conscious life-form embodied in such a manner that it could see the front, side and end elevations of a spatial item without having to change position, then its conception of shape would be very different from the human conception. But neither conception would be false. They would be equally valid correlates of the relationship between the intrinsic nature of the space-occupying stuff of the item and the mode of space-occupancy exemplified by the physical and cognitive constitution of the sentient being in question.

These considerations clearly show that the primary property of shape will not figure in a logically tenable characterization of MIR. If we eliminate the specific conditions of observation we eliminate one of the elements which constitutes that *correlative unity* which we call 'shape'. Whatever remains is not shape *per se* but space-occupying stuff which appears in a certain way to sentient beings with appropriate ranges of cognitive and motor skills. Shape in general is best described as an effect produced in sentient beings by what I shall term *primary masses*.

Similar considerations hold (with varying degrees of complexity) to the other material-body-describing properties. They embody primary masses represented under observer-specific conditions. If, however, we are seeking to analyze MIR, it follows that our fundamental orientation should be towards the primary masses themselves rather than towards their mediated, observer-specific form.

These points should be taken as a provisional indication of why primary properties are of extremely restricted scope in relation to characterizing what MIR must be. They will be supplemented by further arguments as my discussion progresses.

Given these problems, it is worth looking in another philosophical direction for a valid characterization of what MIR must be. The approach I will take is a further development not only of Cassirer's position but also of a position suggested by John McDowell's[4] and Hilary Putnam's[5] work. It holds that the objective world can be defined as *reality made intelligible through a horizon of rational connections*. Such a world embodies a mediated relation to the real. If, accordingly, we wish to characterize MIR as it is in itself, it will not be through identifying it with the objective world as such, but rather through interrogating the function of rational connections in the constitution of such a world.

I can, accordingly, now outline my substantive strategy for the rest of this demanding chapter. In section i, I will outline a complex and controversial

Eliminative Strategy. This argues that past and future and all modal properties with the exception of necessity have application only in our experience of an objective world, and, accordingly, cannot be used to characterize MIR. The rest of my chapter will deploy the Continuity Principle and Eliminative Strategy in turn so as to offer, in section ii, a general theory of what (in the broadest terms) MIR must be, and then to consider, in the conclusion, some of its broader philosophical implications.

I

Having considered the broad basis of the Continuity Principle in my introduction, we must now proceed with great caution. In relation to 'human objectivity' Thomas Nagel has remarked that

> there may be aspects of reality beyond its reach because they are altogether beyond our capacity to form conceptions of the world. What there is, and what we, in virtue of our nature, can think about are different things, and the latter may be smaller than the former.[6]

Nagel's remarks are apt. There may be much about MIR which is utterly incomprehensible from a human standpoint. We may, indeed, choose to *speculate* on how such a reality might be or, as Nagel himself does (in a limited way), to countenance the possibility of modes of non-human self-consciousness which are able to comprehend much more than we can. All sorts of baroque speculations as to what is ultimate and how it might be comprehended are possible.

My approach, however, will be methodologically austere. It will seek only to establish what on conceptual grounds must at least be the case about MIR. This does not, of course, mean how such a reality could be imagined to be (for that would import the perspectives of sentient beings into the picture). Rather, it will seek to characterize what remains – given both the Continuity Principle and the elimination of the mind's role in objectifying reality – after the conjunction of these two factors. The remainder will be that which we are entitled, on logical grounds, to describe as MIR. It will be what such a reality must *at least* be.

I will now address, therefore, the complex and controversial task of eliminating the mind's objectifying role. This Eliminative Strategy will focus on what might be described as the *horizon of objectivity*. The structure of this horizon is enormously complex, but is constituted by factors which determine the phenomenal manifold's temporal and modal intelligibility. These factors are: past, present, future, possibility, contingency, necessity and counterfactuality.

To see the significance of these horizonal factors, it is again worth using some remarks by Gareth Evans as a point of departure. He says:

> The capacity to think of oneself as located in space, and tracing a continuous path through it, is necessarily involved in the capacity to conceive the phenomena one encounters as independent of one's perception of them –

to conceive the world as something one 'comes across'. It follows that the capacity for at least some primitive self-ascriptions – self-ascriptions of position, orientation, and change of position and orientation – and, hence, the conception of oneself as one object among others, occupying one place among others, are interdependent with thought about the objective world itself.[7]

We might cash out Evans's general point here in more detail as follows. In order to have experience of an objective world and be able to ascribe experiences to oneself in the fullest sense it is presupposed that:

1 One can conceive individual material bodies (including, of course, oneself qua embodied subject) as having occupied or being able to occupy times and places other than the ones presently occupied.
2 One must know that no such material body can occupy two different places and times simultaneously.
3 One must know that no material body can move from one time and place to another time and place except through a *continuous* traversal of space and time. (Material bodies do not materialize at different points in the spatio-temporal continuum by magic or acts of will. They must *move* through it.)
4 One must know that it is not possible to occupy just any time and place, even through continuous movement. The range of time and space-occupying positions available to a material body is restricted, not only by the nature of time and space, but also by the physical constitution of the body in question.

Cashed out in this way, it is clear that the reciprocal dependence of knowledge of the objective world and self-ascription of experience is deeply involved with the horizon of objectivity. The points outlined above exemplify temporal and modal conditions which make correlated knowledge of an objective world of material bodies and the self-ascription of experiences possible. The correlation of object and subject of experience may involve other factors in order to be given a full definition, but the horizon of objectivity is at least a necessary condition of the relation.

Now, of course, knowledge of points 1, 2, 3 and 4 does not often (save in philosophical or scientific discourse) figure explicitly in how we talk and think about the objective world. But it must figure at least tacitly. One would not be wholly rational if, somehow, piecemeal knowledge about these points had not been acquired. In fact, tacit knowledge of this sort is most likely acquired in an extremely practical way – simply by being initiated into language, and by one having to physically negotiate a world of material bodies among which is numbered oneself qua embodied subject. The horizon of objectivity, indeed, is most concretely manifest in the form of *appearance*. In our experience of an objective world material bodies are not simply passively registered or 'given' as sense-data, but, rather, appear, i.e. are encountered aspectually in systematic

co-ordination with possible changes of position and state *vis-à-vis* both the perceiver and that which is perceived. A material body forms a coherent and identifiable range of sensible aspects, which are amenable to being perceived from certain positions but not others, which are amenable to being manipulated and analysed in certain ways but not others, and which are also amenable to some forms of interaction with other material bodies, but not just *any* form of interaction. This horizon of belief concerning objective possibilities and constraints informs all our cognition of material bodies.

Likewise with objective states of affairs. Consider, for example, one's perception of a room in which one is currently situated. The disposition of items in the room reflects both past decisions and current preoccupations but could have been organized differently – subject, of course, to how the physical nature of the relevant items allows them to be disposed. To walk around the room and to pick up and find a certain page in a book at the other side of the room requires a specific range of physical and cognitive exertions, which one does not expect to be interrupted by, say, the book dematerializing and rematerializing at different points in the room simultaneously. Neither does one expect the room not to be there when one returns after being absent from it for a few minutes.

On these terms, when we experience material bodies and states of affairs it is as appearance. To appear – as opposed to being merely given – is to be manifestly positioned or positionable within the horizon of objectivity. This horizon is a unified framework of presumptions and expectations concerning the relation between both a configuration and an observer's present state and the past, future and modal characteristics of both. In a present appearance the horizon is itself *immanently* present. It inheres as a general cognitive principle of temporal and modal intelligibility for the observer.

We now reach the decisive question. The foregoing analyses show how the horizon of objectivity is directly implicated in having knowledge of an objective world. But can this world be characterized as objective *independently* of the conditions which enable us to have such knowledge of it? If so, then the characterization of MIR presents no problem. Material bodies and causal events must exist in just the way experience describes them.

However, MIR cannot be characterized as more or less equivalent to our objective world. My earlier worries about the scope of primary properties, and, in particular, the fact that the unity of material-body-describing properties is a *correlation* between primary masses and a specific kind of sentient being's cognitive and motor skills, already serve to provisionally undermine such a position. For if we eliminate one of the partners in this correlated unity (as the notion of MIR demands), then what remains is different from the primary property as experienced.

This provisional worry can now be supplemented by another important argument. In MIR, by definition, there can be no appearances, since the elimination of reference to the cognitive powers of sentient beings also eliminates the notion of subjective perspective, which is an intrinsic feature of appearance. But if appearance is eliminated, where does that leave the horizon of objectivity? The

answer is nowhere, for it must be eliminated too. Such a horizon is not intelligible as a horizon except in relation to sentient beings who possess appropriate powers of cognitive retention, attention and anticipation. If a material configuration is objectively significant it is because, as an appearance, it is manifestly positioned or positionable in relation to temporal and modal factors which (whilst being functionally present) serve to locate immediate appearance in a context of possible appearances which are not immediately present. This horizonal positioning in relation to what is not immediately present demands the mental powers of retention etc. just noted. But, if the existence of MIR is to be characterized independently of experiential viewpoints, then the horizon of objectivity must likewise be eliminated.

It is important to be clear about the scope of this point. For whilst the horizon is eliminated, it does not follow that all the individual factors which comprise it are also eliminated. Most, however, are. Let us begin with the casualties.

These are possibility and the related terms contingency and counterfactuality. Such notions are eliminable from MIR by virtue of their conceptual dependence on the predictive and interpretative standpoints of sentient beings. Now, it might seem that, if in MIR there were physical processes which could issue in several outcomes or which involved elements of randomness or even existence generated *ex nihilo*, or there were states which could have been brought into being by causal routes other than the ones which did bring them about, then possibility and its modally cognate terms must be characteristics of MIR. (In this respect, of course, it is also notable that contemporary quantum theory makes use of several of these assumptions.)

However, this framework of assumptions is primarily a function of the restrictedness of a sentient being's powers of prediction and comprehension *vis-à-vis* the exact outcomes, origins or implications of actual physical events. If, for example, the outcome of some sub-atomic process is described as a random effect, this is not because the process qua physical has randomness as an ontological property, but because in the present state of scientific knowledge it is not possible to predict its exact effects. The concept of randomness (or, for that matter, *chance*) in our descriptions of physical processes pertains more to the conditions of description than to what is described. This is also the case in relation to the postulate of elements of matter coming into existence *ex nihilo*. To suppose otherwise, to regard randomness or existence generated *ex nihilo* as ontological properties is, in the former case, to conflate physical processes with organic ones (where a given stimulus can occasion a range of responses) and, in the latter case, to introduce an element of *magic* into physical processes. In methodological terms such postulates can be justified, but only if we treat them *as if* they were ontological properties. This would mean that their positing serves as a kind of holding operation until the theory which necessitates their postulation can be further refined so as to describe even more fundamental physical processes which would render such assumptions otiose.

Now against this it might be claimed that I have not offered a fair picture of the quantum world-picture. Bohr's so-called Copenhagen Interpretation, for

example, holds that elements of uncertainty or indeterminacy in a quantum-system are inherent properties rather than functions of the incompleteness of our knowledge. To suppose otherwise is to posit the existence of 'hidden variables' in addition to descriptions of wave-function. But the work of John Bell and Alain Aspect has cast considerable doubt on the possibility of such 'hidden variables'.[8] As Lawrence Sklar puts it:

> [T]he Bell Theorem results seem to indicate…that no understanding of quantum mechanics as a statistical theory superimposed on an underlying local hidden-variable theory is plausible.[9]

Sklar's characterization here is actually very illuminating, for it implies that what is at issue in Bell and Aspect's work is the question of the *theoretical compatibility* of quantum theory and hidden variables. Clearly, they are not compatible. However, we must ask whether this should be regarded as anything *more* than a theoretical incompatibility. If it is indeed more than this, then it would mean that the indeterminist structures described by quantum theory are apt descriptions of the properties of reality itself.

This latter possibility, however, dwells very uneasily alongside one of the most fundamental tenets of quantum theory, namely that measurement collapses the wave-function. This would suggest that what quantum theory describes is how reality must *appear* under certain kinds of experimental (and thence *experiential*) conditions – conditions which causally intervene on the reality being described. But if this is the case we need clear criteria whereby the indeterminacy in quantum predications can be assigned to reality itself rather than to these specific conditions. The incompatibility between quantum theory and local hidden variables is not decisive in this respect. For even if we take it as evidence for the former point it offers no clarification of what the latter causal intervention involves. In the absence of such clarification there remains systematic uncertainty even *within* the quantum framework as to whether quantum theory really does describe reality *per se* or whether it describes effects arising specifically from the interaction between MIR and self-conscious finite creatures.

The second interpretation here is the more philosophically viable and, from the scientist's point of view, the more courageous one. It involves giving up on, as it were, absolutist aspirations. This involves no loss of scientific credibility. Indeed, if anything it defines the scope of quantum endeavours in much clearer terms. If we wish to describe the objective world of appearance (i.e. the field of relations defined by the interaction of self-conscious finite beings and MIR) in the most complete terms, then at the present time quantum theory is the best we have. Local hidden variables will play no role in this. However, whilst quantum theory thus enables us to describe and control objective reality in key respects, it can offer no more than this. The specific experimental conditions which quantum theory sets up are physical macro-interventions which embody the strategies of self-conscious – that is to say *free* – beings. A free creature is necessarily finite. This means that its cognitive grasp upon the world is always

incomplete. The quantum world-picture's posited uncertainties are, I would suggest, functions of this incompleteness. Within quantum theory uncertainty is not eliminable, but this only tells us about the nature of the objective world considered under a specific theoretical perspective. It is conceivable that in the future some other paradigmatic theory of a wholly deterministic character will supersede quantum theory. This will be a more apt description of objective reality, but even so it will not be a sufficient one. There would still be room for a further theory which might be even more comprehensive in explanatory terms, but which was so only through reintroducing some elements of uncertainty into its predictive framework.

The point is, then, that science cannot justify the existence of contingency or possibility as properties of MIR. All it can offer are progressively more systematic articulations of objective reality. We are thus returned to my original claim, namely that the space of alternative possibilities is unintelligible *except* as a function of the limited predictive viewpoints of free self-conscious finite beings. It is a feature of the objective world, but is eliminable from MIR.

The notions of specifically *logical* possibility and counterfactuality require a different analysis, but are likewise eliminable from MIR. One might, for example, talk of a logically possible state of affairs. This means no more than a fact, or series of facts, whose actualization would be in some identifiable respect or respects consistent with objective reality's general patterns of being. A counterfactual is a more specific case of this. It is something which is not actualized but could have been actualized, had events in the past taken a different course. In either case here, the possibility in question is conceptually dependent on what a sentient being is able to project. Since the experiential viewpoints of such beings cannot be used to characterize MIR, it follows that this space of projection is also eliminated.

Possibility and its cognate terms, then, are in no sense properties of MIR. The only positive modal factor which does have application is necessity. Given the Continuity Principle, MIR must exist, and, since it exists, its specific mode of being must – in ontological terms – be necessary. By 'necessary' here I do not, of course, mean that it *has* to exist. Rather, given the fact of its existence, events in MIR *per se* do not allow of alternative outcomes. This is because the space of alternative outcomes – embodied in possibility and contingency, etc. – have (as we have just seen) no application in MIR. There is only brute physicality. What happens happens inevitably. It is only with the evolution of sentient and, most notably, self-conscious beings that indeterminacy is introduced into the universe.

Now, against this it might be objected that if possibility etc. must be eliminated from our characterization of MIR, then so must necessity. This is because necessity is interdefinable with possibility, i.e. 'necessarily *p*' can be defined as 'not possibly not *p*' and 'possibly *p*' can be defined as 'not necessarily *p*', respectively. Indeed, if something is necessarily the case, then this must also entail that it is possibly the case.

This objection however, is not justified. The reason why is that it confuses ontological necessity with logical necessity. Consider, for example, the logical

constants – 'if, then', 'and', 'or' and 'it is not the case that' (i.e. negation). These notions do not in themselves describe ontological characteristics of MIR, but are, rather, terms involved in the positing of those objective logical relationships which are emergent from such characteristics.

The case of negation is particularly instructive here. Later on I will show how MIR must be presumed to consist of ontologically heterogeneous features – a fact which in itself might seem to incorporate negation into MIR's ontology insofar as heterogeneity can be defined as a complex of elements which are *not* individually identical with one another. If, therefore, negation must feature in the basic definition of heterogeneity, we must regard it as a legitimate ontological characteristic of MIR.

Such a claim, however, reduces ontology to secondary logical relationships. One might define 'heterogeneity' in terms of what it entails, but the term is intelligible without reference to such entailments. One can sufficiently characterize a complex as heterogeneous simply by listing its component elements and their properties. Negation, in contrast, is not intelligible except as a secondary function of relations between heterogeneous items. In order for negation to be posited there must be a network of positive ontological characteristics *already in place*. The dimension of logical entailment and relations is parasitic upon this. In thinking about what heterogeneity entails, negation and the other logical constants are involved, but the fact that such concepts can be used to project a space of alternative possibilities around MIR's actuality is surely determined by the prior stable heterogeneous ontology of MIR itself. If we follow the Eliminative Strategy in strict terms, the logical constants have no place in characterizing what MIR must be. Judgements such as 'necessity entails possibility' have application within the horizon of objectivity, but in terms of MIR we have only an actuality with no logical space for alternative outcomes. This is why its occurrent configurations must be regarded as ontologically necessary.

We must now address the temporal dimension of the horizon of objectivity, namely past, present and future. These factors must figure in MIR (as I shall show in section ii). This said, it is important to determine their conditions of occurrence in such a reality. These conditions cannot be horizonal. In any present appearance of an objective configuration, past and future are immanently manifest as elements of a functional principle which positions the configuration in relation to time and modality in general. However, there can be no appearances in MIR since, as we have seen, appearance is conceptually connected to the existence of sentient beings with appropriate powers of retention, attention and anticipation. This means that insofar as past and future figure in MIR it is in literal terms, rather than immanent ones. Specifically, the past will be characterizable *only* as that which formerly existed, and the future *only* as that which does not yet exist.

Now, of course these literal senses of past and future also function in our experience of an objective world. Even here, however, our understanding of time has a profoundly horizonal emphasis. To show this, and to assess its significance, it will be necessary to make a few observations on the psychology of time-experience.

First, our thoughts about past and future are not arbitrary.[10] In addressing them we always do so from the perspective of interests, beliefs and projects which characterize our present situation in life. We relate ourselves to past and future so as to clarify and develop our present interests in complex ways. More significant still, because the past and future of an objective world consisted or will consist of sensible appearances, our present thinking about them will often involve images (a factor whose significance I described at length in Chapter 4). The capacity for imagination allows us to generate mental states with a quasi-sensory content which is akin to objective appearance. This carries an interesting implication. For if the past and future consisted or will consist of objective appearances, then for any descriptively identified past or future state of affairs it should be possible to generate an image or image-sequence which satisfies that description. The imagery will probably bear little resemblance to the way such past or future states of affairs actually appeared or will appear to an appropriately situated observer. But this is not the point. If the imagery is at least consistent with the description of specific past or future states, then it allows past and future to exist immanently as projected virtual appearance in a sentient being's present experience. More than this, because the imagery is volitionally generated by such a being, it enables that being, in a sense, to inhabit and possess the past and future. We cannot control the passage of time, but if we negotiate it in *these* terms the alien character of time's inexorability is, to some degree, psychologically alleviated.

It should be emphasized that these points are rather more than a few edifying observations on the psychology of time-experience. They indicate just why it is that the literal interpretation of past and future – whilst perfectly intelligible – is so hard to live with. For a being who experiences time horizontally, the notion of past and future as *only*, respectively, that which formerly existed and that which does not yet exist is a truth so abstract that it is scarcely possible to think of reality's relation to time exclusively in these terms. *And this is why the characterization of what MIR must be is such a formidable problem.* Even if, as in the present discussion, one subscribes to an inclusive view of space, time and causality, it is profoundly difficult to think of reality apart from the past and future's immanent imaginative role in the present. A reality without this immanent temporal dimension is literally unimaginable. Yet this is precisely what MIR must be.

Before addressing the characterization of MIR in detail it is worth considering some scientific and philosophical objections to the literal interpretation of time.

A first objection is that, by virtue of the Special Theory of Relativity, it makes no sense to talk of past, present and future in absolute terms, because what counts as past, present and future will be a function of an observer's position within a specific space–time frame. Of course, it is possible to posit a co-ordinate time whereby the elapse of time measured by a clock in one such frame is taken as reference point for the elapse of time in all other such frames. This will mean that if event *x* marks the present in – let us call it – the master frame, then in the secondary frames there will be events which are synchronous with *x*. However, such synchronous events in these other frames may not – as *x* does – mark a

present event. It could be that what *x* is synchronous with is an event which occurred in the past or which will occur in the future of the secondary frames.

This objection is easily dealt with. To affirm the literal interpretation of time does not entail any commitment to past, present and future holding in absolute terms *vis-à-vis* the objective world. More specifically, it does not require that the notion of the present should be simultaneous across all space–time frames. All that is required is that the distinction between past, present and future holds in the literal sense *vis-à-vis* such frames considered individually. This said, it may be that MIR's mode of spatio-temporality has claim to absolute metaphysical status. I will consider this issue in my conclusion.

A rather more serious objection based on an interpretation of Relativity Theory can also be broached. Einstein, for example, believed in a 'block' conception of time – or 'timescape', as it is more popularly known – where all events in the temporal series are, as it were, laid out alongside one another tenselessly. On these terms, the *flow* of time from past to future, in particular the notion of the presentness of the Now, should at best be seen as functions of a finite subject's limited perspective on the timescape. (It should, however, be emphasized that the notion of a timescape does not itself rule out the possibility of time having a direction based on thermodynamic processes, but such asymmetry need not involve a flow from past to future via the present. It could simply be articulated in terms of 'earlier' or 'later than' with respect to position in the series.)[11]

The timescape, however, is a problematic notion. Late in life even Einstein himself remarked to Carnap that there is 'something essential about the now' but that its articulation is to be found 'just outside the realm of science'.[12] Einstein's points here are justified on two grounds. The first concerns the implications of infinite extent. In the timescape temporal events are taken as forming a complete series, but this presupposes the notion of the universe being, as it were, closed at either end by the Big Bang and the Big Crunch, respectively. Now, in some interpretations of the Big Bang time comes into existence with this cosmological event and if we understood the Big Crunch as marking the end of time – or at least the inauguration of a reversal leading time back to its origins – we night make some sense of the timescape as a completely given series.

However, whilst the notion of the Big Bang *per se* is now a well-established option, the Big Crunch and its temporal implications are not. Indeed, the notion of time coming into existence with the Big Bang is itself highly contentious. (Ilya Prigogine, for example, emphatically rejects it.[13]) This leaves open the possibility that a closed universe may not mark the beginning and end of time, but is, rather, a vast but finite cosmological episode within a time series of indefinite parameters. If this is the case, or if alternatively we subscribe to the notion of an open universe (which, according to Penrose at least, the evidence 'slightly favours'),[14] then the temporal series must be regarded as infinitely extendable. An infinitely extendable series of this sort, however, is not compatible with the notion of all temporal events being given as a complete series. For in relation to any putative event marking the beginning or end of the series, respectively, we must posit an additional preceding or succeeding term ad infinitum. The time series can never be given complete.

There is also a further severe problem accruing to the timescape. Whilst we might form some vague notional comprehension of the series as a whole, its ontology, qua temporal, demands that its individual terms come into existence *successively*. But, if this is so, a boundary point between events already realized and events yet to come is logically presupposed. This carries two implications: first, that the notion of a Now – the boundary point in question – must be presumed to exist; and, second, that beyond this boundary point there is a realm of the not-yet-existent (i.e. the future). Without the Now and the future as not-yet-existent, the notion of a specifically temporal series is not intelligible – unless we are prepared to countenance the notion of temporality without successiveness, which is a contradiction in terms.

Now, whilst these scientific alternatives to the literal theory of time are not valid, it may be that some philosophical alternatives are. For example, J.M.E. McTaggart[15] and, more recently, David Mellor have sought to interpret time in terms other than the past/present/future trichotomy (McTaggart's *A* series). The basis of their scepticism is the fact that, as Mellor puts it:

> Past, present and future tenses are mutually incompatible properties of things and events. But because they are forever changing, everything has to have them all. Everything occupies every *A* series location, from the remotest future, through the present, to the remotest past. But nothing can really have incompatible properties, so nothing in reality has tenses. The *A* series is a myth.[16]

Even the argument that this incompatibility is vitiated by virtue of the properties not holding simultaneously itself involves a vicious regress through its necessary use of tensed terms.

However, this approach rather too easily identifies the application of tenses with the possession of properties. *Tense as property is merely how time appears when viewed horizontally.* Interpreted literally, past and future are non-existent, and that which is non-existent cannot, in any sense, be either a bearer of properties or a property in itself. To talk of an event being in the past or future is to talk of times of its non-existence rather than its possession of pastness or futurity as properties.

The question arises, however, as to how we are to differentiate past and future. Each has an individual sense which serves to distinguish one from the other and both from non-existence in its most general senses. In particular, the fact of past events has an objective necessity which the fact of future events does not. In relation to MIR, however, both past and future events have equal necessity insofar as, for reasons noted earlier, the space of alternative outcomes is eliminable. What distinguishes past from future (and from non-existence in the most general sense) is their respective status as causal antecedents and consequents in relation to occurrent states. They are modes of non-existence whose character is defined *exclusively* by their causal relation to that which is occurrent.

Having therefore defended the literal interpretation of time, I shall now combine the Eliminative Strategy – of which it is a key part – with the Continuity Principle. This will enable us to characterize what MIR must be.

II

First, a formal definition of the theory. In the most general terms, MIR is (i) a spatially extended realm, which is (ii) subject to temporal succession and which consists (iii) of qualitatively heterogeneous primary masses in (iv) pan-directional states of causal interaction.

I shall consider each of the elements in this definition in turn. First, spatial extension: since MIR is continuous with the objective world (as well as being capable of existing independently of it), we must assume that, like the objective world, it too is spatially extended. Such an assumption is also compelling on broader philosophical grounds. The very notion of reality is only intelligible by virtue of its logical connection to the idea of, in Evans's parlance, 'space-occupying stuff'. Even if, with Nagel, we admit the possible reality of things that (by virtue of our physical and cognitive constitution) are unimaginable or inconceivable, they must at least be characterizable in terms of space-occupying stuff. If this were not the case, 'unimaginable' or 'inconceivable' in this context would be no more than synonyms for 'unintelligible'. Space-occupancy is the major logical condition for any characterizations of reality – even if, in all other respects, the reality in question is inconceivable or unimaginable.

Of course, Strawson once (famously) considered the existence of a 'no-space' world of purely auditory phenomena.[17] This, however, was done in order to see what negative conceptual lessons might be learnt from such an exercise of imagination. Indeed, if thought through, the very notion of auditory phenomena is itself only explicable as a function of the causal interaction of space-occupying particles and their effects on appropriately constituted sentient beings. One can imagine all sorts of pseudo-possible worlds, but if they do not involve those primary masses which are intrinsic to the notion of space-occupancy they are purely imaginary. They get, as it were, no ontological purchase.

This leads conveniently to the second element in the general theory of MIR, namely that it is subject to temporal succession. Again, this assumption is based on the continuity which exists between objective reality and MIR, and, again, the assumption is made compelling on broader philosophical grounds. In this case, however, the grounds do not involve any conceptual connection between the notion of reality *per se* and temporal succession, for there is no such connection to be made. Temporal succession cannot exist independently of space-occupying stuff, but such space-occupying stuff can exist independently of temporal succession. Consider, for example, a universe that consisted only of the same kind of elementary particles (i.e. simple substances with no heterogeneous content whatsoever). If these particles were of equal mass equidistant from one another, and in a state of absolute rest, then such a universe would be timeless in the most literal sense. To talk of these particles enduring through time would not be appropriate, since endurance only gets an ontological purchase by virtue of its correlation with transience, i.e. the possibility of things changing state or position.

Again, it might be thought that the spatial distance between two such particles entails the notion of temporal succession, insofar as such a distance is at least notionally traversable, and, in its potential for such motion, is thereby in prin-

ciple describable in terms of temporal succession. This possibility is, however, ruled out by virtue of the fact that in such a universe there are, by definition, no entities to realize such a notional possibility of traversal. If time is to be real, it must be by virtue of actual relations between space-occupying elements and not simply notional ones.

This possible universe is instructive in a further number of respects, two of which I will allude to now, and others of which I shall consider a little further on. The first significant moral (already more or less drawn) is that we must view time as a function of space-occupancy. The notion of a universe with temporal succession but no spatial occupants is unintelligible. And, if within a universe containing spatial items its occupants were not subject to changes of nature or position or both, there would be no immediately apparent criteria which could allow us to describe temporal succession as a property of such a universe.

The second important moral is that a universe of this sort is an *absolutely* mind-independent reality (or AMIR, for short). There is no logical possibility of such a timeless universe engendering and sustaining the existence of mind. One might, of course, *imagine* strange, inexplicable forms of mind as a function of static homogeneous particles, but what one can imagine and what is logically possible are by no means synonymous. A logical possibility is so only insofar as it has some consistency with what is actual in the objective world. Mind conceived as a function of static homogeneous particles, however, is utterly inconsistent with any intelligible notion of mind.

I am arguing, then, that what the Continuity Principle requires us to assume – namely that MIR's states are temporally successive – is also justified on broader philosophical grounds. There can be reality without time, but such reality cannot sustain the possibility of mind. And whilst mind is, in principle, logically eliminable from the characterization of MIR, that reality must, by virtue of the Continuity Principle, be at least amenable to allowing the genesis and sustenance of mind. MIR, therefore, must be temporal.

This said, I have also argued that time should be seen as a function of changes of state and position amongst space-occupying contents. Not just any changes of state and position, however, will adequately describe MIR's spatiotemporal character. We are led, therefore, to point (iii) in our theory – qualitatively heterogeneous primary masses. Since the objective world numbers quantifiable and sortable material particulars amongst its fundamental occupants, we must assume that MIR itself must at least be amenable to such particularization. It must have heterogeneous composition.

Again, this assumption is also made compelling by broader philosophical considerations. It is in this context that our possible universe proves instructive in a third way. In order for motion to be admitted in such a universe one might reformulate it as a world consisting of elementary particles of unequal mass. This inequality creates the possibility of variable force and, in consequence, motion amongst the particles. It introduces an element of heterogeneity into an otherwise static and homogeneous universe.

However, a universe of exclusively *quantitative* heterogeneity is an AMIR. The elements in such a universe can change their position, but not their nature. As simple substances, they cannot decay or break under causal impact with other particles. They are, in temporal terms, non-finite. They cannot change into something qualitatively different. In such a world there would be a unified spatio-temporal framework of re-identifiable material particulars – the kind of formal condition presupposed by self-consciousness – but without qualitative heterogeneity amongst the space-occupying particulars, the emergence of self-consciousness or, indeed, any form of sentient life is not a logical possibility. Such a universe offers no ontological framework wherein an intelligible basis for the emergence and sustenance of mind could be posited.

At this point, a query might be raised. The warranted presumption of MIR's qualitative heterogeneity is basically a function of the Continuity Principle. But given this continuity, why does the theory of MIR only characterize heterogeneous primary masses in dispositional terms, i.e. as that which is 'particularizable'? Are we not in fact entitled to go all the way here and say that MIR must be a realm of qualitatively heterogeneous particulars? Indeed, if we can go this far are we not, in effect, committed to the view that what MIR must be is precisely what experience represents the world to be – a realm of re-identifiable, quantifiable, sortable, material particulars? And if *this* is the case, all that MIR ultimately amounts to is the objective world.

The suspicion which prompts this query is justified, but only in a limited sense. As a realm of qualitatively heterogeneous masses MIR must contain particularity. But the question is, in what sense? Objective experience represents such particularity fundamentally in terms of material bodies describable by primary properties ('basic particulars', in the Strawsonian sense). In my introduction to this chapter and section i, however, I argued that primary properties which describe material bodies have only a correlative unity – which is a function of the relation between such a body's primary mass and the cognitive and motor skills of particular kinds of sentient beings. These skills, however, cannot be used in the characterization of the nature of MIR in itself. If, therefore, we are to look for particulars in such a reality, it will be amongst those properties which define the conditions of space-occupancy and the heterogeneous primary masses which fulfil such conditions of occupancy.

The upshot of this might be a notion of heterogeneous zones of particularity, but will not amount to those particulars which are fundamental to the objective world. Most crucially, the distinction between micro and macro is collapsed. Consider the notion of mass. In objective terms, if an item has a determinate mass it can be measured. However, the size of the item thus measured is relative to both the unit of measure and the relation between this unit and the cognitive and physical structure of the kind of creature which performs the operation. The sofa, for example, is one size for a human, another size for an ant, and another size still for a life-form of gigantic stature in relation to a human being. Again, what is a sub-atomic particle for us might be a macro form of huge proportions in relation to any life-form which was capable of existing at that

level. However, whilst the size of a mass is relative to the units and principle of measurement, its status as a determinate mass is not. *The very fact that it is amenable to being measured in different rule-governed ways suggests that there is a stable and determinate primary mass which is a systematic correlate of all these different macro and micro levels of measurement and experience.* Masses of this primary kind are the space-occupying stuff of MIR. They are ontologically fundamental.

Now again, whilst qualitative heterogeneity must characterize MIR's primary masses, it can only do so given a specific ontological context. In this respect let us suppose that our original possible universe of static, equidistant, elementary particles of equal mass is changed in just one respect. The particles now consist of different varieties. This change would give the universe a qualitatively heterogeneous character, but in all other aspects it would remain the same, i.e. fundamentally static. A universe of this sort is an AMIR. It has, as it were, the minimal ingredients for the evolution of mind, but no further ontological means of realizing this possibility.

Suppose, however, that inequality of mass is also introduced as a property of this universe. We would then have variable force, motion and, as a result, causal interaction[18] between the heterogeneous elements. Given this character, the emergence and continuity of mind does become a logical possibility. Causal interactions between space-occupying, qualitatively heterogeneous items form, as it were, the ontological minimum kit for a world capable of generating and sustaining mind. One could not coherently conceive of a mind-evolving world in any other terms. We thus arrive at point (iv) in the theory of MIR – pandirectional states of causal interaction. The Continuity Principle leads us to assume that since the objective world forms a causal nexus MIR too must be characterizable in causal terms. This assumption is made compelling by what the preceding example has revealed, namely that the possibility of mind is conceptually dependent on causal interactions amongst qualitatively heterogeneous primary masses. However, whilst the Continuity Principle has so far born the brunt of the General Theory, the Eliminative Strategy must now take the strain. We must show how the causal states of MIR are to be characterized without reference to subjective viewpoints.

Let us first consider causality in the objective world. In such a world the activity of sentient beings provides a directional orientation. Some aspects of the world, but not all, are the foci of such a being's activity by virtue of their physical proximity, or their adaptability to the being's particular range of cognitive and motor skills, and to its specific biological and social needs. In the case of self-conscious beings, these factors themselves are situated within the horizon of objectivity. They are negotiated within a specific framework of understanding, which gives direction to the experience of space and time by providing a fundamental principle of order wherein places and times which are not immediately present can be comprehended and brought to bear upon the being's present orientation towards the world.

This directional basis of objective experience is generally manifest in relation to causality through the distinction between cause and condition. In order, say, to

make a journey from Kozarje to Podsmreka, one must first decide to do so and then enact the appropriate physical exertions which constitute the act of walking. In the course of the journey one may have to stop in order to let a car go by. One may also have to lift a caterpillar from the road in order to prevent it from being killed by a passing vehicle.

All these factors constitute a complex directional network of immediate causal activity and responses to causal relations and possibilities. However, in order for such activity to be inaugurated and enacted, all sorts of broader conditions must hold. One must, for example, be located in Kozarje to start with; one must be the kind of being with a physical constitution which allows one to traverse the kind of distance involved; one must be able to envisage and respond to potential dangers on the journey; one must be subject to the force of gravity; etc., etc., etc.

Now these conditions form, in the broader scheme of things, an unimaginably complex nexus of causal relations. They have a palpable if circuitous bearing on the causal activity which we inaugurate, and on those causal relations and possibilities which we recognize and, if appropriate, respond to. However, we do not in ordinary experience deal with this unimaginably complex nexus *as* a causal nexus. We are content, rather, to think of it *just* as a framework of conditions which informs those causal relations which do immediately engage us. One reason for our contentment in this respect is that the complexity of this nexus is simply beyond a finite being's powers of comprehension. The more significant reason is that it is not directly relevant. The causal relations which we take cognizance of are those which have an immediate bearing on our directional orientation within the world and which we can (to some degree) *choose* whether or not to negotiate.

In MIR, however, this directional orientation is eliminable. Insofar as the distinction between cause and condition holds, it will be in terms of spatio-temporal proximity. That is to say, the nearer an event is in space and time to another event, the more grounds there will be for describing the former as a cause, the latter as its effect. Conversely, the further away the first event is, the more grounds there are for seeing it as a condition of (or as not causally related at all in any quantifiable sense to) the second event. In the absence of directional orientation, the general distinction between cause and condition is, therefore, to say the least, a loose one. At a regional level (in spatio-temporal terms) the distinction breaks down altogether. Consider, for example, a simple objective relation where *A* causes *B* to occur. It might be represented as shown in Figure 6.1. In Figure 6.1 the arrows denote a complex of other causal relations which figure as conditions of *A* and *B*'s causal interaction at both macro and micro levels. The parallel lines signify the fact that *A* and *B* are experientially demarcated from these conditions by the directional context of their interaction. If, as the theory of MIR demands, this context is removed – as in Figure 6.2 – what were in objective terms causal conditions are now recognizable as active players in the interaction. The *A–B* relation emerges in a complex function of pan-directional causal interactions.
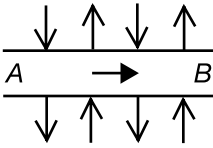
Figure 6.1 Objective causal directedness

Figure 6.2 Causal directedness

Given the complexity of even the simplest causal relation, it is clear that the nature of causality as such in MIR will represent just as formidable problems of unimaginability as does the literal interpretation of time. And matters get even more complicated when it comes to criteria of the *duration* of MIR's causal interactions.

In this respect, it is worth considering that our objective measurements of time take as units such things as seconds, minutes and hours, etc., and these are arrived at through a correlation of our cognitive and sensory-motor skills and limitations and the behaviour of material bodies – most notably solar, lunar and stellar cycles. Other sentient beings with a similar physical and cognitive constitution might arrive at different units of measure, but not dramatically different ones. An intelligent being with a radically different constitution, in contrast (for example one which moved and acted much more rapidly than humans), might have proportionately more accelerated units of temporal measurement. A single moment of human experiential time would, for it, be of correspondingly longer duration.

On these terms, a moment of experiential or, better, macro-time has a conventional element but is fundamentally natural in the sense of resulting from an adaptation between a sentient creature and changes which occur in a broader context of macro-bodies, which form the creature's environment, habitat or, all in all, world.

For self-conscious beings who are able to analyse the structure of matter, there is also another level of causal time to be considered. In describing the atomic and sub-atomic levels, for example, notions of seconds, hours and minutes, etc. are of limited utility. We must operate with a kind of micro-time, abstracted from its macro counterpart (this is the realism of milliseconds and fractions thereof).

Now, as I argued earlier in relation to material bodies, the fact that such bodies are amenable to being measured in different rule-governed ways suggests that there are stable and determinate primary masses with which all these different macro and micro levels of measurement and experience are systematically correlated. It would follow, therefore, that matters lie similarly *vis-à-vis* causal time in MIR. Since MIR is subject to temporal succession as a function of changes of state and/or position amongst primary masses, it will have its own mode of present temporal moments or, better, *primary durational phases*. These phases are what humans articulate in terms of macro- and micro-time, and are capable of being measured in other ways by other possible life-forms. None of these creaturely modes of measurement adequately describe MIR's primary durational phases, but the fact that such modes are possible at all means that

they have some consistency with MIR's phases. MIR's temporality has, accordingly, a determinateness of its own which transcends the objective micro/macro distinction and which has as its correlates all the different ways in which that distinction can exist. Whilst this mode of causal temporality is unimaginable, it is, in conceptual terms, both intelligible and transcendentally justified.

III

In this chapter, then, I have argued that MIR is to be characterized as a spatial and temporally extended realm of heterogeneous primary masses whose pandirectional causal interactions exemplify a distinctive temporal mode of primary durational phasing. Such a reality is unimaginable but is clearly intelligible.

The achievement of this characterization is made possible by the Continuity Principle (i.e. the fact that, whatever else it is, MIR must be ontologically amenable to the emergence of mind) and the Eliminative Strategy (centring on the removal of the horizon of objectivity as a mode of ontological characterization). The major argument which cuts across these two main vectors is the fact that the macro/micro distinction is transcended by MIR. This means that the more specific structure of MIR cannot be articulated definitively by any sentient being insofar as it will appear differently on the basis of, and relative to, the cognitive and physical constitution of the species of sentient being in question.

Now, it is important to emphasize that the physical sciences are by no means exempted from this relativity. Scientific thought proceeds essentially through the formulation of laws based on mathematical quantification. Its basic quanta and procedures for applying them internalize (in the way described in relation to time at the end of section ii) the cognitive perspectives of a specific sentient species. This does not mean that the constructions of science have validity only in relation to a particular species' modes of classifying the world. For if they facilitate the prediction and control of events this is sufficient evidence that their correlation with MIR is more complete than constructions which do not achieve such results.

This said, however, it is important to emphasize the *relative* validity of this correlation. For any existing *descriptive theoretical framework* there is a potentially more comprehensive one waiting to be achieved (either by our own species or by another). And whilst the physical sciences aim at comprehensiveness and finality as a methodological goal, their living dynamic is one which understands that what is posited as ultimate by today's projects will be found to be derivative by tomorrow's.

There is also a further problem for scientific thought. In the preceding paragraph I have emphasized the term 'descriptive theoretical framework' precisely because this is what the most general quantitative extrapolations of the physical sciences provide. One might at first sight imagine that a new set of equations can 'explain' *why* an established set of equations holds true. But what scientific hypothesis actually aims at is the formulation of laws which trace or correlate given effects with more basic causes or statistical regularities. Our descriptions of

objective reality are thereby deepened, and our capacity to predict and control it is enhanced. Nothing, however, is ultimately 'explained'.

The problem here is that in order to provide *ultimate* explanations one must transcend merely descriptive theoretical frameworks. And it is this transcendence which justifies metaphysical approaches of the kind taken in this chapter. The characterization of MIR offered here is, indeed, very general, but it is one which is able to explain what it is that limits and conditions objective reality. It also opens up some other interesting issues – such as the further logical clarification of MIR's primary masses and durational phases. Perhaps the most interesting issue of all, however, is worth sketching out in a little more detail, as a finale to this paper. It consists of the following.

Earlier I was concerned to emphasize the fact that what happens in MIR does so with (ontological) necessity. The real consists only of the actual and of inevitable outcomes. With the evolution of sentience and mind, however, we find the emergence of an order of reality which allows for alternative outcomes. The real takes on the character of an objective world.

Given this connection, a startling metaphysical conclusion follows. Far from being a chance epiphenomenon linked to the random emergence of particular physical circumstances, *the evolution of mind has the character of ontological necessity*. For, given that in MIR there are no alternative outcomes, it follows that the emergence of mind is inevitable. We are not here by chance, but neither are we here by design. In the logical space between these two facts lies a profound onto-logical relation. For a theory of what MIR must be is only projectable within a horizon of objective knowledge. MIR itself has no memory of its past states or knowledge of its future ones. Such states can be described as real from an objec-tive standpoint, but if that standpoint is eliminated such states do not figure directly in MIR's occurrent configurations. These configurations have, rather, the character of (as it were) a blind ever-transforming present.

Given this, one might argue that the emergence of mind allows MIR's general character to be *realized* through the constitution of a horizon of objec-tivity. Through objective experience, MIR's occurrent configurations are situated in a context of non-immediate temporal and modal factors. This means that the structure of MIR's general reality not only is comprehended, but also becomes a causally potent force in its own right. Sentient beings engage in activities which are informed by a sense of past and future, and it is this which enables MIR's general character to determine its occurrent configurations. The objective order of facts is therefore a kind of ontological *completion* of MIR.

If this theory is correct, it suggests that whilst reality is comprised of two logi-cally distinct factors – MIR and the objective world – their inseparable complementary is such as to form an ontological unity of the closest kind. This unity has important implications for our understanding of the civilizing process. In this respect it is important to emphasize how, through human agency, MIR receives ontological completion. This means that, as well as having intrinsic value, the civilizing process has a deep metaphysical significance. The process just is human agency in its socially and historically most developed form. It is,

thereby, reality comprehending and completing itself through cultural creation and memory.

The great importance of this is in the context of finite self-consciousness's need to find meaning in terms of its relation to reality as a whole. If an account of this relation is to be provided on a wholly secular basis, then the fusion of intrinsic value and metaphysical significance described above will be a vital starting point. This is a task which I will undertake in detail elsewhere. However, having returned via sustained epistemological analysis to problems of value, I shall now consider the analysis's implications for virtue ethics, and for the ethical and metaphysical dimension of attacks upon civilization.

Part III

Questions of ethics

7 Narrative and self-consciousness

A basis for virtue ethics

Introduction

In his classic work *After Virtue*, Alasdair MacIntyre drew attention to the significance of narrative as a twofold factor in relation to the unity of the self.[1] On the one hand, a person does not achieve self-comprehension as a mere continuum of personal experiences, but in terms of a story on narrative of his or her life. On the other hand, no individual can exist without having a relation to some social context or other. Our sense of who and what we are is in part defined by our sense of belonging to, or alienation from, communities into which we have been initiated and/or within which we currently exist. Our personal identity thus relates also to a collective narrative.

For MacIntyre, this connection between narrative and the unity of the self can be shown to be a conceptual one. In the broadest terms, it is only through being identifiable in relation to long- or short-term narratives (concerning intentions and their outcomes) that a person's actions become intelligible. Significantly, MacIntyre takes this further, by arguing that what constitutes the 'good' for a person is that which will allow his or her narrative unity to be 'best'[2] lived out and brought to completion. The nature of the general good will be that which all these 'best' modes of living have in common.

This move from a narrative theory of the self[3] to virtue ethics is, of course, an extremely complex one, but it is not one which MacIntyre has much elaborated upon in his subsequent writings. Indeed, left as it is, it has a rather incomplete general dynamic which moves from criteria necessary for the interpretation of action to virtue as a goal of personal life. But if this strategy is to have real philosophical 'bite' it needs to be developed in at least two further directions. First, we need to clarify the way in which narrative is conceptually involved at the level of introspective self-knowledge (and this requires a detailed phenomenological analysis). Second, we need to show how this involves virtue as a goal in terms of other-regarding as well as personal activity.

In this chapter I shall attempt to provide these analyses by developing ideas from all the preceding chapters. Section i will reiterate some of the necessary conditions of self-consciousness, and the highly selective cognitive orientation – gravitating around the present – which these involve. Section ii will argue that what unifies these necessary conditions is a temporal horizon organized in terms

of narrative structure – a structure which allows the present to be shaped by our comprehension of past, future and counterfactual possibility. It will be argued further that the self conceived on these fundamentally temporal terms is not just some useful evolutionary appendage which allows us to search out the means for satisfying natural needs with great efficiency. It changes the condition of existence in such a way that the creation of narrative meaning becomes itself a need and an end of living. It is that which defines the specifically human form of being.

Finally, in section iii, it will be argued that in order to realize itself in these narrative terms, the self-conscious agent must respect certain ethical criteria concerning interchange with other humans. It is only in this way that one's own narrative and those of other people can be developed to the full. Virtue ethics thereby receives refoundational justification.

I

If a creature is to be described as self-conscious it must necessarily possess at least three basic cognitive competences. The first is the ability to comprehend itself as having existed or being able to exist at times and places other than those defined by the immediate present (one has a past and a future). Related to this is the ability to recognize that one occupies different times and places by virtue of being one physical body in a realm of other such bodies – whose existence is independent of our own existence. The third competence is the awareness that some of these bodies have – like ourselves – the capacity to recognize themselves *as* physical beings who are able to occupy different positions in time and space. To be aware of oneself as an individual one must be able to comprehend one's similarities with and differences from other such beings.

The way in which these competences are exercised is highly schematic. As finite embodied beings, our cognitive grasp upon both the world and our own experience is very restricted.[4] In relation to the immediate perceptual field, for example, that field is mapped out primarily in terms of features which are most accessible to the body. Our attention will tend to be more focused on things nearer to us – but not, of course, on their small details. Such things as shape and overall colour, rather than texture, are what immediately engage us insofar as they are features which enable us to recognize and/or physically manipulate objects with ease.

As we saw in Chapter 5, this selective dimension is even more pronounced in relation to our inner life, i.e. our memories of the past or our projections of the future and of counterfactuals (i.e. the space of things which might have happened, but did not). What goes into memory from perception is – as we have just seen – already highly selective and schematized. This selective aspect is further emphasized by factors inherent to the exercise of memory itself. The first is the fact that in recalling things which happened to us in the past we do not simply retrieve, as it were, self-contained faded pictures of former situations which we were in. Rather, the exercise of memory is schematic and fragmentary

and involves the generation of images which satisfy, or are consistent with, our descriptive or factual knowledge of past experience.

And this leads directly to a second dimension of selectivity which is inherent in the exercise of memory. Our recall of the past is always based on our present interests. What we remember is guided by factual knowledge, but the memory images which are generated so as to realize such knowledge will be much shaped by our present interests and what it is that *we want to find* through this interrogation of the past. Likewise, our recollection of the facts themselves can be heavily biased – indeed distorted – by the present concerns which have prompted our recollection.

Similar considerations hold in relation to our projections of future or counterfactual possibilities, and even to our imaginings of those states of affairs which are part of our temporal present but which are not immediately accessible to perception. How we project them is determined by our particular avenue of current practical concern, our various expectations and a host of other factors. Indeed, in the case of imaginings of the future (and, to a lesser extent, counterfactual possibility) the element of selectivity amounts to veritably creative proportions insofar as how the future will map out has not yet been determined. Its openness presents the imagination with all sorts of possibilities.

The selective dimension also figures centrally in terms of our knowledge of other persons. As I noted earlier, a person cannot become aware of him- or herself as either an individual or a person except insofar as he or she at the same time comprehends that there are others who inhabit time and space in very much the same terms. Comprehension of this sort involves not only the recognition of 'person' as a distinctive kind of creature, but also the ability to know *what it is like* to have a cognitive, affective and emotional existence other than one's own. This capacity for *empathic* identification is, however, restricted and selective. By definition, no body – including that of a person – can simultaneously occupy the exact same co-ordinates in space and time as those occupied by another body. This means that whatever personal and social environments we may share with another person we will never see and feel the world exactly as he or she sees and feels it. Our empathic identification with such a person will always be partial and selective – factors which are amplified by the fact (already noted) that the activity of imagination is itself selective and fragmented by nature.

Given these elements in self-consciousness and the constraints upon cognition, the question arises as to how these factors cohere with one another. What is it that allows the self to exist as, and to comprehend itself as, a unity that extends across different points in the space–time continuum?

II

The answer is that the unity of the self (as I showed in Chapter 5) is possible only as a *narrative* structure. In the most general terms, this involves a complex relation between events, situations and episodes in a life, and factors inherent in the human experience of time as such. I shall now consider these in turn.

First, the notion of a narrative itself. If events, situations and episodes are to form a narrative, then this surely entails that they are connected in two ways: they must have some sort of causal connectedness (however opaque this may be); and, in concert, they form the beginning, continuation and resolution of this connectedness, or in their connectedness they can be identified as elements within the beginning, continuation or resolution of some broader narrative.

This said, these criteria (whilst necessary) are by no means sufficient conditions for defining narrative structure. The reason for this is that purely physical processes – such as the breaking of a wave upon a seashore can also be described in such terms. But we would surely not want to describe this as a narrative – unless (and this is the decisive factor) we were relating it to some sentient observer's experience of the seashore. What is at issue in this key qualification is the fact that descriptions of physical processes and the actions and experiences of sentient beings (and their relationships with one another) have a crucial difference. The former involve the purely mechanistic workings of uniformly instantiated laws of nature and thence highly predictable outcomes, whilst the deeds of sentient creatures (and, in particular, human beings) involve elements of selectiveness and directedness and also have a major element of unpredictability in terms of their outcomes. Until a sequence of human behaviour is complete there is always some uncertainty concerning how matters will transpire – the more so, indeed, in rough proportion to the number of different individuals involved. And when the sequence is complete there can always be some ambiguity as to the interpretation of what actually happened.

Given, therefore, this contrast between purely physical processes and the activities of sentient creatures, we need a special term to demarcate the former from the latter. This, I would suggest, is the significance of the term 'narrative' (and kindred notions such as 'story') in ordinary usage. They signify patterns of beginnings, continuation and resolution that are sustained by selective conscious agency, and whose causal connectedness involves elements of uncertainty in a way that purely physical processes do not.

The question now arises as to why the unity or cohesion of the self must be regarded as such a narrative structure. For whilst we might agree that the appearance of one's actions to others over a period of time should be regarded as a narrative, this does not entail that we should likewise take the introspective unity of our own self to be such a structure.

There are however, compelling justifications for such a claim. First, I have already emphasized on several occasions the selective nature of our knowledge of both world and self. If this selective character was not operative we would have no distinct objects of perception, or, indeed, objects of any other form of consciousness either, because we would be overwhelmed by the sheer immensity of the perceptual field and our experiential past. By definition, perception and thought are processes which include some factors and exclude others. They are also, of course, themselves excluded by some features of the world insofar as those features are too vast or complex, or whatever, to be comprehended. Our cognitive orientation must therefore of necessity be selective. We are, accord-

ingly, not in total control. This means that, at the very least, we must in temporal terms divide our cognitive orientation into beginnings, continuations and resolutions, in terms of our past experience and also – in infinitely more complex ways – in terms of possible future and counterfactual experiences. There is also a further dimension of narrative structure involved in self-consciousness by virtue of the fact that there are two elements of uncertainty *vis-à-vis* both the actuality of the past and the possibility of future and counterfactual states of affairs. In terms of the past, our selective orientation means that great portions of it remain forgotten and have an uncertain significance in relation to our present standpoint. The other element of uncertainty is itself a direct function of our present standpoint. For if how we recall the past is shaped by present interests, this (as I noted earlier) means that how we comprehend it and interpret its significance varies as we move through time.

This latter element of uncertainty also characterizes our experience of the future and counterfactuality. As we change, and occupy new presents, a corresponding change occurs in our projections of the future and the realm of what might have been. And, of course, since by definition the future and counterfactual possibility have not yet occurred and will not occur (respectively) in relation to the present, their second dimension of uncertainty is all the more radical.

Given these considerations, it is clear that the present moment of consciousness's relation to past, future and counterfactuality – i.e. that temporal *horizon* (as I shall call it) which enables consciousness of self – is that of a continuing narrative. For a self-conscious being, the character of its present is defined not only by its immediate relation to the perceptual field, but equally by the way in which this relation is informed by a current conception of the past and the future, and by possible counterfactual conceptions. The human agent exists in a present that is the expression of an ongoing story. Its temporal horizon is that of a narrative whose meaning changes – perhaps subtly, perhaps radically – on the basis of new circumstances.

The emotional weighting of events, episodes and (as it were) subplots within the narrative of one's life is also shaped by other factors bound up with the human experience of objective time. If, for example, something has gone into the past, it tends, by and large, not to be as valued as something which remains in the present or which is a reliable future possibility. And the further into the past it goes, the less valuable it will tend to become – as we gradually lose sight of its efficacy in the shaping of present circumstances. There is a loose parallel here with the future. The less certain we are that a thing will happen, or the more distant it is in the future, the less value we assign to it in determining our present courses of action. This, of course, is especially the case in terms of possibilities which do not seem to be realizable within the (probable) duration of our lifetime.

How elements within the narrative of a life are weighted is affected, then, by questions of temporal proximity. In general terms, the further away they are from the present, the less significant they will tend to seem. This, it should be emphasized, is only a tendency. Elements from one's distant past or in the distant future can sometimes outweigh more proximal ones if, say (in respect of the

former), they had a traumatic character, or if one has children who might be affected by the future events.

Similar general considerations pertain to spatial proximity. If something is spatially near, it is of characteristically more significance than something which is spatially far away. There is, however, a decisive contrast between temporal and spatial distance in relation to the weighting of one's narrative of life. Once an event or situation has gone into the past it has gone forever and cannot be recovered. A spatially distant situation, however, is not irretrievable by virtue of spatial distance *per se*. The key factor in terms of such distance is how much time it would take to make contact with the desirable spatial situation, and whether the attainment of it would make the expenditure of that amount of time worthwhile. The traversal of any spatial distance has significant temporal implications, but the passage from one moment in time to another carries no spatial import. It is time which is the most decisive factor in weighting the narrative of life, as well as in providing the horizon of present, past, future and counterfactuality which that narrative renders as the unity of a self-conscious being.

We now reach a major transitional point. The evolution of self-consciousness is, of course, a great boon in terms of procuring the means to satisfy our most basic needs in relation to food, shelter, reproduction and the general furtherance of our animal life. It might also be seen as extremely propitious in the stimulation of social bonding and the enhanced security consequent thereon. In the most general terms, self-consciousness is a factor which enables the species which possesses it to cope admirably with the vicissitudes and contingencies of the practical struggle for life.

However (as I argued in Chapter 1), self-consciousness is much more than some useful evolutionary appendage. For if we view it in adequate evolutionary terms it appears, not as an appendage or property in addition to our animal being, but as a mutation into something different. On these terms we might see self-consciousness as not only facilitating the struggle for survival and propagation, but changing the meaning of what it is to survive and propagate. To illustrate, whereas an animal without self-consciousness exists almost exclusively in relation to immediate stimuli in the perceptual field, a self-conscious being inhabits a *trans-ostensive* present, i.e. one which is always tacitly informed by and which constantly and explicitly considers itself in relation to past, future and counterfactual possibility. Through powers of language and imagination it is, as it were, both here and elsewhere (both spatially and temporally) at once. This means that it can countenance alternatives to its present position in life. Indeed, in order to act it has to find orientation in the way its past and present are causally connected to its future possibilities and ways in which things might have been. And whilst this orientation enables it to deal with the unexpected, it also opens up new possibilities in terms of how the agent's life might be conducted. The furtherance of a self-conscious being's life necessarily involves issues of meaning and accountability – of purpose and explanation – as well as the satisfaction of more basic animal needs.

On these terms, narrative structure is not merely some property of self-consciousness but, rather, the basic mode of its existence – the way in which it

inhabits and finds security in a trans-ostensive present. In order to exist it must become, and what it is to become – over and above enduring through time – is to create and unify its own narrative on the basis of those circumstances which it makes for itself and those in which it finds itself (whether it chooses them or not).

It is vital to emphasize that this narrative creation is an open-ended process. By the age of about five years a child has usually mastered what kind of thing a person is. But the construction of a narrative continues throughout life, and terminates only with death. One might, of course, find a path through life that does not appear to involve any large-scale narrative revisions, but there is always the possibility that something new might turn up. And this, of course, often happens whether one likes it or not. The element of uncertainty means that any narrative is always open to revision in the passage of time. This openness is part of the definition of self-consciousness.

Therefore, given this conception of the self as an open narrative, I shall now consider some of the decisive ethical consequences which follow on from it.

III

Let us commence by reiterating one of the three basic conditions of self-consciousness, namely that one can only become aware of being an individual self insofar as this is learnt in correlation with a more general understanding of what is involved in being a person. Such an understanding requires in part the capacity to achieve empathic identification with how other individuals perceive and feel.

This capacity is substantially learnt through initiation into language and, in tandem with this, initiation into the social world of the family and beyond. One both learns and goes on to create the narrative of the self through immersion in those complex social and cultural narratives which define the time, place and society in which one exists. This relation is a reciprocal one. As one forms one's narrative in relation to social values, so those values are modified – be it through one's direct influence on another person's narratives or through a much more indirect influence on the community in general.

The narrative of a life, to put it in the simplest terms, involves learning from others and then going beyond this, and others learning from one and then going beyond that. There is, however, a problem of communication, for – as we saw earlier – the way in which we see the world cannot (by virtue of our being distinct embodied selves) be exactly congruent with the way in which others see it. Even someone whom we may have known intimately for years always has his or her secret recesses. And given the fact that the vast majority of people who we interact with are far from intimately known to us, the incongruence of narrative viewpoints is all the more emphatic.

The question arises, therefore, as to how it is possible to facilitate the conditions whereby the incongruence of narratives can become a positive thing – leading to narrative development rather than to mere hostility and conflict. An important answer to this question has been provided by Elias in his analysis of that most familiar of forms of social interchange – the conversation. He informs us that

> The special feature of this kind of process…is that in its course each of the partners forms ideas that were not there before or pursues further ideas already present. But the direction and order followed by this formation and transformation of ideas are not explained solely by one partner or the other but by the relationship between the two. And precisely the fact that people change in relation to one another and through the relation to each other, that they are continuously shaping and reshaping themselves in relation to each other, is characteristic of the phenomenon of social interweaving in general.[5]

Elias is perhaps a little over-optimistic in his characterization of 'social interweaving' in the last sentence here. This is because, whilst the reciprocity of narratives which he describes as a feature of conversational structure is here presented as an open one, this is, of course, by no means universally the case with conversations. Such exchanges can, for example, often be evasive, manipulative and intimidatory, i.e. have, as it were, the form but not the content of a conversation.

However, Elias's (let us call it) *ideal* of the conversation is nevertheless instructive because it illuminates how incongruent narratives can, through dialogical exchange, mutually advance one another. This mutual advancement is what the achievement of self-consciousness – the development of a life-narrative – is ideally about. The notion of the *ideal* in this context is an eminently realizable one. In order to become, one must learn from others, but one cannot know fully what is available from the other unless one is open to what they wish to say and willing to allow them to express themselves freely and without intimidation. Likewise, in order for one to achieve the fullest expression of one's narrative position and for the addressee to get the most from it, he or she must be equally open to one's point of view. This open reciprocity is essential in order for error, illusion and delusion to come to the surface and be unmasked. If we or our addressee do not wish to be open and, as it were, shrink back into our own narratives as they stand, we cheat one another of possibilities of both development and mutual recognition.

This open reciprocity is also made particularly compelling by a factor remarked upon in section ii, namely the irreversibility of time. When one hurts or otherwise wrongs another it is sometimes possible to make amends for this. But because this cannot be buried and remains a part of that person's narrative it retains something of its original character, however much it might be recontextualized by the subsequent making of amends. It goes without saying, of course, that when the wrong involves the taking of a life, then no amends can be made which will truly recompense that victim. One must therefore be especially attentive in one's openness to the other's narrative in order that the irreversibility of time does not irrevocably maim, constrict or destroy one's interchange with it.

There is, quite literally, a moral to be drawn from all these considerations. Self-consciousness's narrative structure is what might be described as a *constitutive end* of the human condition, in that it both defines us and is something which is

realized through our choices and activities in relation to broader social and environmental settings. The decisive element in the realization of this end is the reciprocity of our own narrative and those of others. It is through the negotiation of the incongruence of narratives involved here that we come to continuously create ourselves. If, therefore, we are to keep this reciprocity open and robust so that the constitutive end of self-consciousness is fully realized, then it must take the form of an *ethical* reciprocity. This means that our exchanges with others should be informed by virtues such as justice, honesty, tolerance, patience, tact, courage, firmness, compassion and, simultaneously, self-belief and self-restraint. These are not just virtues which happen to be empirically conducive to people getting on with one another; they are ethical criteria which are universally necessary if we are to sustain and enhance that which defines our humanity, namely the narrative structure of self-consciousness. If one does not maximize the conditions of free exchange by means of these virtues, then the continuing narrative of self and society will constrict, distort and come to exist only in a formal sense. It will be denied its essentially dynamic character as something whose very nature is to develop.

A critic might claim that this conclusion has been reached rather too hurriedly, and that the narrative structure of self-consciousness has no conceptual relation with any of the aforementioned virtues either individually or collectively. It may be, for example, that civilization will collapse and society will be shattered into a chaos of warring individuals and factions. But whilst this might mean that the virtues did not count for much in such a context, it would not mean that the narrative of individual and collective existence was also diminished. Indeed, life might become in one sense rather more exciting precisely because of the overthrow of moral constraints. And, of course, even some of the most evil figures in history have deeply interesting personal narratives.

Against this, however, I must insist on the fact that, for a living self-conscious being, narrative identity is by nature developmental. The kind of unvirtuous social context described in the foregoing objection marks a general qualitative regression in terms of both personal and collective narratives. For if the basis of social dynamics is power and force, this means that in the struggle for life some personal narratives are (as it were) trampled on by others. Indeed, whatever recognition accrues to the victor from the vanquished is – at best – based on fear rather than on respect for the victor's life-narrative. And where there is fear there is resentment, and where there is resentment there is usually a willingness to strike back with force when an opportune moment presents itself.

The unvirtuous social condition is, therefore, not only a regression to more primitive ways of making sense of personal and collective identity; it is also (in a sense) contradictory, in that where a narrative is constructed fundamentally through the exercise of force and power it will be recognized in terms of fear rather than respect, or with envy rather than empathy. These responses may amount to acknowledgement of an aggressor's or a cheat's personal narrative, but they do not amount to an acceptance of that person *as a person*, i.e. to genuine recognition. And if there are those who admire tyrants or 'lovable'

rogues and liars, they must ask themselves whether they are admiring the narratives of persons *per se* or those narratives which happen to resonate with aspects of their *own* particular interests and aspirations. This is not a case of recognizing a narrative but, rather, of appropriating fragments of it for one's own ends. Without the mediation of some element of virtue, narrative structure therefore can be neither developed nor fully recognized. Virtues are part of the full definition of personal and collective narratives at the developmental level.

When all this has been said and done, of course, if a person still wants to lie and cheat and to resolve differences by intimidation or violence, then one cannot wave the wand of rationality and turn him or her into a virtuous person. But one can say that they are having a negative effect (to lesser or greater degrees according to specific circumstances) on that which makes them individually human and which simultaneously bonds them in a positive way to other human beings. We are, accordingly, entitled to judge that they ought to be doing otherwise.

Conclusions

In this chapter, then, I have further developed one of this book's most basic points – namely that to be self-conscious is to occupy a trans-ostensive present, i.e. one shaped in complex ways by its relation to past, future and counterfactual possibility. This temporal horizon is organized as a unity by means of narrative structure – a structure which gravitates around elements of uncertainty and which accordingly necessitates continuing development. In order that this development should be sustained and enhanced, the reciprocity of narratives involved in social interchanges must be of a fundamentally ethical character. The narrative concept of self is, accordingly, a viable general basis for virtue ethics.

Having developed a narrative theory of the self as a basis for virtue ethics, I shall now extend my general position much further by applying it in relation to those attacks upon civilization which have formed such a horrifying part of the postmodern epoch.

8 Attacks upon civilization
Some ethical and metaphysical issues

Introduction

The atrocities committed in New York on 11 September 2001 have been widely described as an attack upon civilization. Some commentators, indeed, have read them as anticipations of a coming struggle between western and Islamic civilization. In addressing these issues, section i of this chapter will reiterate my general theory of civilization and will connect it conceptually to freedom in both a metaphysical and ethical sense.

Section ii goes on to analyse the ways in which under certain historical circumstances the ethical and metaphysical dimensions of freedom can be experienced as oppressive, thus leading to an acceptance of strategies which are characteristic of mythic forms of thinking. This involves a reversal of the civilizing process.

In section iii this reversal is linked to religious fundamentalism in general and, in particular, its Islamic form. Further arguments are developed which identify the quite specific ways in which this variety of fundamentalism is destructive to the metaphysical and ethical basis of the civilizing process.

On the basis of these arguments, it is concluded that the outrages of September 11 2001 should be regarded not as a conflict between western and Islamic civilizations, but as an attack on the civilizing process as such.

I

It is customary to think of 'civilization' as a generic classificatory term abstracted from those disparate forms of social and cultural life which are the substance of individual civilizations. And if we think in these terms, two further implications may seem to follow. The first is that the substance of individual civilizations is primarily based on difference, and the second, that the criteria of such difference must be fundamentally historical in a backwards-looking sense – insofar as socio-cultural difference is primarily meaningful on the basis of institutions and products already made.

Now it is perfectly reasonable to consider civilization in terms of these related aspects, but they offer at best a limited means of analysis. The reason why is that

they avoid the question of how civilization is itself possible as a historical phenomenon – a question which raises both conceptual and phylogenetic issues. If we address the question in these terms, we are reoriented to civilization, not as an effect of difference amongst already established socio-cultural products and institutions, but as an ongoing *process*.

To think in these terms is to see civilization as an immanent principle which finds expression and development through its different forms, rather than as a mere generic abstraction from different civilizations empirically given. This means that in describing something as an attack on civilization we are not talking about mere conflicts between different dominant branches of it, but, rather, of something which is *destructive to the civilizing process itself*. And it is in these terms that we must contextualize the atrocities of 11 September 2001.

The most recent and powerful theory of civilization as process is, of course, that of Norbert Elias. We will recall from earlier chapters that, for him, the civilizing process in its most basic sense involves the pursuit of social existence '[w]ithout fulfilment of the elementary needs of one person or group of people being achieved at the cost of another person or group'.[1] This basic dynamic focuses on 'self-regulation', i.e. not only the controlling of animal impulses but also the ability to resolve disagreement on the basis of negotiation or mediation rather than force.

Now (as we also saw earlier) Elias's characterization of the civilizing process has a negative orientation, in that it is primarily founded on self-restraint. If his approach is to be comprehensive, therefore, it must be developed so as to encompass positive criteria. To further determine these criteria, it is necessary to further develop our approach to a vital question asked in Chapter 1, namely how is self-regulation possible?

The answer to this centres on the nature of freedom. If a creature is to regulate its behaviour it must have different options for response when presented with stimuli. As we have also seen in earlier chapters, the most developed form of this competence involves being able to countenance possible outcomes of interaction with stimuli and, more significant still, the projection of possible stimuli (and possible interactions with them) other than those which are given in or allowed by the present perceptual field. A creature able to posit such alternative heres and nows and their possible perceptual content is one which can track its own continuity in correlation with the physical stability and causal orderliness of things and events. Such a creature's identity involves complex narrative knowledge of both a self and a world on the basis of systematic patterns of reciprocal modification between both. This means that the scope of such a being's choices has a metaphysical character insofar as they range (in a connected way) over networks of possibility far beyond the bare stimuli of the immediate present.

Of central importance in these narrative networks is the ability to project circumstances as they might appear to, or be experienced by, another person. Even though one can never – qua embodied finite subject – be exactly congruent with another's experience, one can at least imagine what it is like to be another

person. This means, of course, that as well as being able to anticipate the outcomes of one's actions one can also project the concrete ways in which they might affect the experiential circumstances of one's fellows.

These complex factors qualitatively transform both the scope of agency and its intrinsic significance. For if an agent can act on the basis of projected outcomes and can feel the way in which they might affect others, then he or she can be held responsible for such acts. Self-consciousness is, accordingly, directly correlated with freedom in both a metaphysical and an ethical sense.

It is vital to emphasize that this correlation is necessarily a dynamic one. By definition, a finite embodied subject is one which must constantly adapt itself to transformations in the perceptual field (a point which I will return to). However, this does not mean that the subject merely changes. Insofar as he or she can project both what happened in the past and the possible outcomes of actions, the subject's experience has a developing narrative structure. Its readings of present stimuli are contextualized by experience, and (as such experience accumulates and diversifies) the subject's capacity to negotiate stimuli and comprehend its own nature is correspondingly deepened. Self-consciousness *grows*. And what is true of the individual person is also true of the community's identity qua community. In this respect it is crucial to emphasize the reciprocity of individual and group identity. The community is determined by the past and present activities of the individuals who comprise it, but such individuals can only attain awareness of their own personal identity through initiation into social existence.

This initiation gravitates primarily around the learning of, or initiation into, language, social mores, institutions and other modes of symbolic articulation – such as literature, historical narrative, dance and visual art. Initiation into these and other symbolic idioms and notions is not only constitutive of self-consciousness as a basic phenomenon, but also indefinitely extendable. Both the individual and the community can improve their powers of control and comprehension through the *progressive articulation* or advancement of those symbolic forms which they have already developed. Such progressive articulation involves these forms undergoing both internal diversification and extension in terms of their general scope, so as to achieve more explanatory power or to open up new avenues for creative development. This brings a corresponding expansion to the general scope of freedom. For the more an agent's actions are informed by a critical context which facilitates knowledge concerning their origins, possible outcomes and broader implications, the greater, in principle, is that agent's autonomy.

In this respect, we might consider the development of justice. This is surely a notion whose theory and supporting institutions have developed over long periods of time. Its origins may lie in the family and tribal group, where institutional or empathic bonds engender a sense of fairness and self-restraint in terms of how the means of subsistence are distributed. As a social group enlarges, this factor may become a more general basis for fair give and take in the arena of communal life, and eventually be codified as an imperative with application to all humanity. As even greater enlargements of social interaction occur, differences of content in conceptions of justice will become manifest. These may well issue in violent

contest between social groups – which is, of course, why 'justice' *per se* is of little use as a basis for characterizing the civilizing process. However, it is also possible through critical debate to further articulate the notion and, through this articulation, not only to tolerate difference, but to welcome it as the basis for more developed critical autonomy. Justice understood as a respect for difference facilitates more informed choice, and greater possibilities, for human agency.

My basic argument, then, holds that self-consciousness is correlated with freedom – both in the metaphysical sense of our capacity to project alternative possibilities to the present situation and in the ethical sense of being able to take on responsibility for one's conduct towards others. At the heart of both is the development of complex modes of symbolic articulation. And it is in the development and ramifications of how such symbolic forms are applied that we can make a first, provisional link to the idea of a civilizing process. For it is through their development that the scope of freedom is expanded and self-consciousness grows.

At this point, however, three objections might be raised. The first is that, whilst self-consciousness may be conceptually connected to freedom in the senses just described, this is a logical rather than developmental relation. It is, for example, possible that a society might exist where there are individuals who are fully self-conscious in the sense of being able to ascribe experiences to themselves, but where neither the society nor the individuals in it develop in any significant way over and above physical processes of reproduction and ageing. If this counter-example is a logical possibility, then it is difficult to see how a link between the development of self-consciousness and the civilizing process can be made on conceptual grounds.

The second objection extends this worry even further. For even if self-consciousness could be shown to be necessarily linked to some developmental process, there is no intrinsic reason why this should be identified with the civilizing process *per se*. In order for 'civilization' to have any distinctive meaning (over and above being a mere synonym for culture) a normative element is surely involved. Hence, in order to connect the development of self-consciousness and the civilizing process we need grounds whereby we can identify a clear and warrantable normative factor built into their relationship.

These worries can be dealt with by a common line of argument. In relation to the logically possible society which is absolutely static, it can be said that such a possibility is counterintuitive in the extreme. However, of more decisive import is a kind of counter counter-example. For whilst a wholly static community is a bizarre empirical possibility, the idea of one which is *necessarily* static is a logical impossibility. Even the unlikely community which happens to be static and is projected to remain so is still conceptually connected to the possibility of change.

The reason for this is that the notion of a finite, embodied, self-conscious being is unintelligible without such a possibility. This returns us to the metaphysical sense of freedom. The present can never exist – either for the individual or for the community – as a mere given. Its character is determined by its dynamic relation to a past which grows larger from moment to moment, and to a reconfiguring sense of both what might be and what might *have been*. This complex

situation is rendered even more unstable by the contingencies of changing immediate circumstances in both physical and personal terms. However stable things may have been previously, the explosive possibility of change is a condition of our existence both as free agents and as organic life-forms which must be able to adapt to possible changes of circumstance in order to survive. To be human is of necessity to interpret, and to interpret is, conceptually, to be open to different possibilities of knowledge and action, irrespective of whether these possibilities are realized or not.

This inherent openness is a first step in establishing a conceptual connection between self-consciousness and the civilizing process. It also has significant further implications of a normative sort. For if the possibility of change is (in part) constitutive of the human condition, another of its constitutive aspects – our capacity for rational comprehension – exerts a powerful demand upon how we negotiate it. An individual or community cannot deal with unexpected change or, indeed, explore its own potential without the invention of a variety of symbolic idioms and technology. Environmental circumstances may, of course, render such development empirically impossible. But if one wishes adequately to negotiate change, such a demand retains its normative force as *a rational imperative*. As physical and historical circumstances transform, so must the symbolic, institutional and technological means whereby such transformations can be adapted to. We need a name for these historical developments, and, of course, common usage provides one – namely civilization. The civilizing process is more than the mode of self-regulation discussed by Elias. It is *self-consciousness developing in the dimension of diachronic history*.

If this theory is correct, all human communities – through the having of language, myths, customs and technology (however crude) have embarked upon the civilizing process. Some have developed this more than others, and in this context it is possible to talk of cumulative progress in the sense of 'progressive articulation' noted earlier.

Before moving on to the next major stage in my argument, there is an issue which must be decisively clarified. It concerns the relation between metaphysical and ethical freedom in the context of the civilizing process. I have just argued that the expansion of a culture's symbolic forms and choices is a rational imperative. But, if that is so, is it not in direct conflict with the ethical dimension insofar as such expansion often involves imperialist aggression and slavery? Indeed, might not the instigation of these and kindred forms of social repression actually be seen as perversely imperative in their own right, insofar as they involve the 'improvement' of backward or static cultures?

Now, my position holds that metaphysical freedom and its maximization are definitive features of the civilizing process. And whilst they are often in conflict with ethical concerns, this does not give them any philosophical entitlement to override such concerns. Metaphysical freedom is a condition of the possibility of ethical freedom, but whether (and to what degree) this latter possibility is realized or not is a function of different historical circumstances. That said, ethical principles represent the highest possibility of self-regulation to the degree that they

encourage universal toleration of difference, fair dealing and the non-violent resolution of disagreement. One might see them as the decisive element in the maximization of freedom *in the very broadest sense*. They are a normative ideal of social development against which a society's other achievements must ultimately be judged.

Hence, whilst the forms of social oppression noted earlier may advance the civilizing process in social and economic terms, they nevertheless antagonize that which is its highest possibility. However great the achievements of imperialist and authoritarian cultures, they will always be indictable in relation to an ideal which is immanent to the very process of which they are a part. They will be 'found out' by that process as it progressively articulates its notions of justice towards a more universal form. Indeed, it may be that iniquities perpetrated in the past facilitate – through analysis, debate and acceptance of responsibility for them – the conditions for a more universal ethical order. At the very least, the recognition of them as iniquities means that the progressive articulation of civilization is now understood as comprising far more than just economic, social and technological expansion. And this in itself counts as a hugely significant advance.

My position can, of course, be qualified and developed in much greater detail. For present purposes, however, I will emphasize only that the progressive advancement of symbolic forms and freedom at the heart of the civilizing process has no inevitability in its development. There was no logical necessity that such a process would advance beyond the most rudimentary stages; there is no necessity that it should continue further; and there is no guarantee that it will not regress or collapse. In fact, it is this last pair of possibilities which leads directly to the problem of attacks upon civilization.

II

The analysis so far has clarified the nature of the civilizing process. It is self-consciousness in the dimension of diachronic history. The question arises, therefore, as to what is destructive to this process. The simple answer, of course, is that which destroys peoples and cultures on a large scale – and (over and above natural disasters) this means, of course, human agents who destroy other such agents because of what they take them to be.

Now it is sometimes possible to justify killing on a large scale in terms of community self-defence, and every such case must be assessed on its own merits. However, there is one factor whose occurrence in the context of such horrendous events will tend to vitiate any significant claim of 'self-defence'. This is because of a characteristic theoretical means which is often used to justify such atrocities.

It involves a regression to *mythical agency* (or 'mythic regression', as I shall henceforth term it). Mythic thinking is probably the earliest mode in which human beings comprehended their own nature in relation to the natural world. Such thinking interprets the relations between natural items, events and phenomena on the model of human and animal character traits, relations and

artifice. In particular, good and evil are interpreted as properties of natural forms and forces, rather than being understood as expressions of human character alone. The world is interpreted, thereby, as an arena of forces acting on the basis of magic.

Now mythic thinking is of the most profound importance in the genesis of many symbolic forms such as religion, history and storytelling. However, in comparison with these subsequent articulations, mythic thinking is conceptually crude, just as such articulations are themselves conceptually crude in relation to those new symbolic forms which develop out of them. This said, we must now recall both the metaphysical and ethical aspects of freedom as the civilizing process develops. In its metaphysical character, freedom takes on the form of critical autonomy by drawing on many different levels of possibility when making its decisions. And as these decisions become more well informed there is a correspondingly greater pressure for the individual to take ethical responsibility for them.

However, in times of war, socio-economic or general cultural crisis the metaphysical aspect of freedom can appear primarily as something which is overwhelming or confusing, whilst the ethical aspect can take the form of an unbearable burden of responsibility. In these circumstances it is all too easy to regress into mythical thinking insofar as such thinking provides simple and familiar solutions to problems.

The most catastrophic example in human history of such mythic regression is that of the Nazi tyranny. Here the socio-economic disasters of Weimar Germany were answered by an appeal to a mythologized past and that mythology's colonization of the technoscientific present. Now whilst there are remnants of mythic thinking in many aspects of human experience, for a community to undergo wholesale regression to it is counter-civilizing in the extreme.

However, mythic regression is not the worst of the present example. If at the level of individual behaviour one were to talk of the barbaric it would surely be in those cases where people are murdered or tortured for the sake of it, or for purposes of conquest or revenge, and where there is no context for the claim of self-defence to be reasonably made. Such actions involve the wilful destruction of that factor (human life) which is the very heart of the civilizing process. They are therefore at least individually symbolic of the destruction of that process. And if they are carried out at a group or community level the destruction goes far beyond the symbolic, and the further it goes in terms of mass oppression and murder, the greater its destructive and thence barbaric effects.

In those cases where such effects are brought about by mythic regression (as in the case of Nazism) we attain a point of absolute barbarity. Here the murderous destruction of the civilizing process is given ideological ratification by mythic thinking. This barbarous expansion is further exacerbated by that mode of thinking's ability to find easy personifications of evil in transpersonal phenomena such as specific ethnic groups or nations. The destruction of such 'forces' has, indeed, the appearance of wisdom and the highest virtue in mythic schemes of thought.

Now it must be emphasized that not all mythic regressions are, thereby, barbaric, and (especially if they avoid violence) a case might be made for some of them having at least a benign if not a progressive significance. 'New Age' beliefs and some cognate Green politics, for example, might be seen as a quite studied and rational response to the dangers of global capitalism and its effects. And, related to this, it may be that those branches of civilization which have not advanced beyond rudimentary stages might choose – when presented with examples of more developed forms – to reject any changes to their present way of life. In such a case the community involved would in one sense be developing the civilizing process by taking responsibility for their existence on the basis of informed decision and would not, therefore, be involved in mere mythic regression.

This qualification aside, we must now address the relation between the atrocities of 11 September and mythic regression of the barbaric kind.

III

It is first important to consider the role of the three great monotheistic religions – Christianity, Islam and Judaism – in relation to the civilizing process. Their major achievement is in advancing beyond the mythic worldview. For, in their terms, whilst the natural order is a production of cosmic artifice, the artificer is, in a key respect, placed on the outside of that which is created, and is interpreted as a single cosmic principle rather than a pantheon of (literally) supernatural forces. This means that nature can now be investigated as a rational embodiment and complex illumination of this principle. No matter how profoundly humanity is within nature, it is also *more* than nature. Nature becomes an object for analysis, as well as a factor involved in the existence of those beings that conduct the analysis.

Now, the belief in a monotheistic deity is implicated in many scientific, philosophical, social and artistic advances. However, such religious beliefs have long since ceased to play any significant role in the development of the civilizing process. They are at best a source of inspiration for individuals and a vague means of social cohesion, and at worst a legitimization of reactionary politics and social institutions and practices.

Every religion, of course, has its zealots, and the metaphysical and ethical complexity of freedom in a globalized context is especially fecund in breeding such zealots. There is a twofold relation of reaction involved here. On the one hand, the problem of freedom can be experienced as a terrible confusion to which simple and straightforward – and therefore strong – responses are required; on the other hand, the complexity of contemporary freedom is often felt as a challenge to those established patterns of belief and social existence which have survived into recent times.

Fundamentalist beliefs respond to both these factors. Christian, Islamic and Jewish extremists all espouse rhetorics of purity and a 'return' to the literal interpretation of their respective holy texts. The problems of the world are attributed, not to the complexity of human agency *per se*, but to the distortion of

such agency by the actions of the devil. These workings of the devil are, in turn, easily personified in terms of conspiracies perpetrated by various institutions, nations or ethnic groups.

This regression is in direct contradiction to the civilizing process's historical character. The basis of that character is progressive articulation, whereby cultural change – however falteringly and with whatever reversals – becomes a process of general advance. Mythic regression in general tends to emphasize the opposite dynamic to this by means of false idealizations of the past. In fundamentalism this idealization reaches a manic intensity. Such doctrines – as we have seen – look back to the time of divine intervention of a direct sort, as recorded in the appropriate sacred text, or to a time when the text in question was a source of literal truth, with correspondingly exact social observances derived from it. The accretions of history since that holy time, and in particular the modern world of material and sensual values, are at best condemned, and at worst loathed with fanatical hatred.

This not only denies the civilizing process through its dismissal of modernity, but is, indeed, a crude metaphysical rejection of history itself. On logical grounds, history cannot be reversed; the human subject cannot, literally, return to a bygone era. He or she may construct a likeness of some imagined past in the context of the present, but since it is created on the basis of that present it will be indelibly marked, not only by what the subject wishes to include, but – more significantly – also by what it wishes to exclude. The latter dimension will always be present in memory as a disruptive alternative to the fundamentalist's yearning for purity. In order to combat it, therefore, such an agent would have to destroy all historical records and troublesome opposition; he or she would have to engineer some means of mass cultural amnesia (to include, of course, himself or herself, in order to avoid temptation).[2]

In effect, this means that the logical development of the fundamentalist rhetoric of 'return' is the erasure of history itself, and, in consequence, a massive metaphysical restriction of free human agency *per se*. Such agency is simplified and reduced to the most abject conformity to fantasies of Divine law. This abrogation of freedom is not only a degradation of the civilizing process, but is, indeed, an action which puts the civilizing process into reverse through its willingness to enforce mythic regression through murderous force.

In this respect, however, we must note some decisive contrasts. The scope for potential barbarity is not evenly distributed across the fundamentalisms. The Christian mode, for example (and despite its occasional tie in with neo-Nazi terrorists), finds it difficult both to personify its evil Other and to justify the notion of a holy war on the basis of a text (the *New Testament*) whose *raison d'être* is centred upon love, forgiveness and repentance. Jewish fundamentalism's notion of a holy war is restricted by different considerations. Insofar as it focuses on the restoration of Israel to its Biblical lands, the scope of its aggression is, in geographical terms, much more focused.

Islamic fundamentalism's opportunities for barbarity are much less restricted than either of these. Like Christianity, its evangelical scope is universal, but, as

with Judaism, it has a set of holy sites and a language – Arabic – which are intrinsic to the practice of being a Muslim. This offers it an easy personification of evil in the form of those Infidels who impinge most strongly upon the Arab world. The Infidels in question are, of course, Israel and the USA. The very fact that the USA is the most globally powerful nation of all adds extra venom to the Islamic fundamentalist hatred of it. The US becomes an object of envy, pseudo-righteous indignation and rage.

Now it can scarcely be denied that Israeli policy in Palestine and US activity in the Middle East has been of a provocative and at times wicked kind. In such a context, violent resistance to occupying military forces may well be justified. What cannot be justified is the interpretation of Israel's and the USA's selfish pursuit of national interests as an attack on Islam, with the corresponding extension of violence to encompass non-military personnel. This 'holy war' would be pushing the notion of legitimate 'self-defence' beyond all intelligibility. Any room for debate on this issue is rendered less than academic by the familiar means by which this 'holy war' is often conducted, namely indiscriminate mass murder carried out by a suicidal agent.

Again, it is true that mass murder of this kind has been carried out by other varieties of religious fundamentalism. But the Islamic version is, in contemporary terms, the most virulent and barbaric.

Its indiscriminate murders might find a putative theoretical justification through reference to the self-defence of Islam and the authority of the Koran. This would open up three basic possibilities:

1   The death of innocent parties is an unfortunate thing, but, as in all warfare, the problem of collateral damage is overcome by the greater good which is at issue – in this case the survival and expansion of the Ummah.
2   The Koran sanctions holy wars.
3   As it happens, the vast majority of victims in the suicide bombings are ones who have not heeded the Call, and who are complicit with the enemies of Islam.

None of these points – individually or collectively – is a valid defence of the attack on civilization constituted by the 11 September atrocities and other suicide bombings. In fact, they are problematic even in their own narrow fundamentalist terms – a fact which (as I will show in a few moments) exacerbates their barbarity. But let us first consider their shortcomings in turn.

First, the idea of the deaths of innocents being justified in terms of the furtherance of the interests of Islam is empirically false. The worldwide revulsion occasioned by events such as those of 11 September has, if anything, consolidated the agency of the Infidels whom it is meant to destroy, and, as an unfortunate side-effect, has besmirched the reputation of Islam *per se*. It has also led to the ongoing destruction of the parties who were active or directly complicit in its perpetration. And what is more ironic is that this destruction has, in large part, been the work of other Muslims.

The second point, concerning the authority of the Koran for religiously justi-fied suicide, actually tends to undermine the fundamental authority of the Koran as such. For whilst that text may authorize holy war, it forbids suicide. At the very least this means that the Koran is only intelligible in interpretative terms – rather than the literal ones which the fundamentalists advocate; at worst, it means that the Koran is inconsistent, which, one presumes, no devout Muslim could accept.

The third point is more complex. Its complexities can best be illuminated by what I shall call the *paradox of the ideological assassin*. This centres on the fact that – given the contingency of existential happenstances – the one murdered might (if left alone) be a person who would actually embrace the cause and further it much more than the effects of the assassination would. Now, of course, there are some situations where – for ethnic reasons – this possibility would be unlikely to a point zero. A Nazi sparing a Jew (or vice versa) on such grounds would be a clear example of this. However, Islam cannot be subject to this exemption as it is not, in any direct terms, a racist religion. And, in that case, the paradox really begins to 'bite'. In the case of Islamic ideological assassination there is always the possi-bility that the one murdered would become not only a good Muslim, but also one who also furthered the interests of Islam much more than his or her murder would achieve. Indeed, the statistical unlikelihood of this outcome makes its bare possibility all the more miraculous and a worthy object of faith for the Believer.

There is also a second theological factor which gives this paradox extra bite in the case of Islamic and other forms of fundamentalism. For when mass murder is carried out in the name of a specific deity the protagonists become, in effect, blasphemous against their own deity. The protagonists assume not only knowl-edge of the will of God, but also the *certainty* of 'positive' results which only the deity could know. In their confidence as to such outcomes they invest themselves – blasphemously – with the omniscience of the one who, supposedly, they are the servants of.

And there is a further and much deeper theological problem on top of this. For if the Koran is the 'word' of Allah one must surely expect that its meanings carry depth and resonance which reach far beyond mere literal historical reportage and a fund of simple imperatives. The Faithful are finite beings who – as I argued in section i – are necessarily connected to the possibility of change. This means that they are creators of history. It follows, therefore, that the doctrine which guides them should (if it is authentic) be capable of inspiring change and development, rather than forever demanding what can never happen, namely the putting of history into reverse.

All these problems are symptomatic of Islamic (and indeed all) fundamen-talism's inherent antipathy to the civilizing process. Its vision is, in metaphysical terms, a denial of human historicality where interpretation is of decisive import. If, indeed, fundamentalist doctrine is wedded to murderous force, it is also, in ethical terms, absolutely barbarous. The fundamentalist mass-murderers of 11 September attacked, not only America and the west, but the civilizing process as a universal phenomenon.

Conclusion

In the light of the foregoing arguments, it is clear that lessons need to be learnt by both Islam and the west. For the former, it must be recognized that recent events should mark the death throes of an exclusivist and literalist Islamic fundamentalism which loathes Infidels, and whose sense of thwarted cultural superiority breeds only intense *ressentiment*. Its rhetoric of revenge ends in death and humiliation. Such an outcome is almost inevitable since in order to defeat postmodern civilization fundamentalism must adopt the technoscientific means of mass destruction which that civilization has developed. In so doing, it embraces powers which those whom it wishes to destroy are much more accomplished in the application of.

The challenge to Islam, therefore, is to reaffirm its own richness and diversity, and to think of jihad in terms other than physical warfare. This requires not reactionary rage but, rather, a confidence in the power of Islam as rational persuasion. And such a confidence must be positively grounded on a belief in the Koran as an interpretative matrix for evolving historical agency.

The conceptual lessons to be learnt by the west are more complex. They centre on a terrible hiatus. Finite rational beings *need* some account of the significance of their form of existence in relation to the universe or reality *per se*. Such an explanation was traditionally provided by religion, but amongst the driving intellectual forces of civilization the religious dimension is – rightly – now regarded as dubious. But what has been formulated in its place? Scientific approaches offer 'explanations' that can do nothing more than offer progressively more complete descriptions of the physical processes which result in the existence of self-conscious beings. They cannot, however, explain *why* such a network of processes and outcomes should occur. Philosophers in the analytic and poststructuralist traditions are equally unsatisfactory. Indeed, both seem to take a quiet pride in affirming the unanswerability of ultimate questions concerning the 'why' of Being and of the human reality.

In the absence of a robust answer to this question, regressive religious – and especially fundamentalist – 'solutions' will fly into the vacuum. It may be that there is no way of even beginning to answer the big questions. However, there is no need to end on such a negative note. In this book I have expounded a refoundational philosophy which – in its senses of civilization as progressive articulation and (as I argued at the end of Chapter 6) the necessity of the emergence of mind – takes us to the threshold of answers. At the very least it provides us with a centre (as opposed to postmodern negativity) for intellectual advance.

On this positive note, I shall now, in the final part of my book, utilize the refoundational standpoint so as to criticize and reconfigure some key postmodern approaches to philosophy and culture.

Part IV

Critique

9   Against epistemological nihilism

Contra Derrida, contra Welsch

Introduction

The first step in my critical application of refoundational philosophy is in relation to epistemological nihilism. Section i of this chapter will outline Derrida's extreme position. It will then be shown how – contra Derrida – the emergence of meaning as a function of the field of signifiers does not radically destabilize either meaning or more general categorial frameworks. The reason why is that signification – as Derrida admits – depends on the *iterability* of signs. Iterability – as I will go on to show – presupposes precisely that principle of reciprocity which is the basis of refoundational philosophy.

In section ii, I will consider Wolfgang Welsch's attempts to defend reason from postmodern scepticism. It will be shown that Welsch's strategy, in effect, simply remakes reason in the image of Nietzschean perspectivalism. However – in a broad parallel to my treatment of Derrida – I will then show how the characteristics in terms of which Welsch describes reason are ones whose very possibility presupposes a refoundational philosophical position.

By criticizing these two thinkers, it will be shown more generally how a refoundational philosophy can justify both the notion of a stable ontology and procedures for comprehending that ontology.

I

A first point to note is that the principle of reciprocity formulated by Cassirer significantly anticipates and sidesteps some problems in the central thrust of Derrida's thinking. It holds that no item is present or meaningful in an unmediated way. The identification of such an item requires that consciousness relates it reciprocally to a greater whole – be it a class, a kind or a much more general system. And again, if such general terms are to be fully understood it will be in relation to complex interlocking frameworks of even greater generality. Now consider the following passage from Derrida:

> Essentially and lawfully, every concept is inscribed in a chain or in a system within which it refers to the other, to other concepts, by means of the systematic play of differences. Such a play, *différance*, is thus no longer simply

a concept, but rather the possibility of conceptuality, of a conceptual process and system in general.[1]

What Derrida is talking about here is the way in which specific concepts (and indeed signs in general) are only meaningful insofar as they differ from and are defined by their systematic relation to traces of other concepts which are not immediately present, and insofar as the specific concept's intelligibility is not tied to the immediate presence of that which it is a concept *of*. Consider also the following remark:

> It is because of *différance* that the movement of signification is possible only if each so-called 'present' element, each element appearing on the scene of presence, is related to something other than itself, thereby keeping within itself the mark of the past element, and already letting itself be vitiated by the mark of its relation to the future element.[2]

We have, of course, already encountered similar points in Cassirer's account of the unity of subjectivity. What is present to consciousness is so only by virtue of its situatedness in relation to past experience and anticipations of the future. Derrida, however, locates this situatedness in the context of *différance* and, indeed, makes *différance* the precondition of subjectivity. For example, in following up Saussure's claim that language cannot be reduced to a 'function' of the speaking subject, he observes that

> This implies that the subject (in its identity with itself, or eventually in its consciousness of its identity with itself, its self-consciousness) is inscribed in language, is a 'function' of language, becomes a *speaking* subject only by making its speech conform…to the system of rules of language as a system of differences, or at the very least by conforming to the general law of *différance*.[3]

Now viewing the self in these terms as an 'effect' of *différance*[4] is unwarrantably to privilege the latter. A Cassirer-type approach, in contrast, would have us think of the subject/language relation as a case of reciprocity. A human being only becomes self-conscious insofar as it articulates itself in linguistic terms, but reciprocally the coming to be and existence of language are functions of the phylogenetic and ontogenetic growth towards self-consciousness. Language only has its structure of *différance* insofar as its laws are evolved through the organization of the imagination's productive powers in the context of embodied consciousness's inherence in a realm of spatial and temporal heterogeneity.

These points might simply be taken as a plea for Derrida's position to be supplemented by Cassirer's account of the evolution of symbolic codes. However, there are much deeper issues at stake here pertaining to the status of presence.

In this respect, for example, consider the way Derrida develops his points concerning the constitution of the present:

> An interval must separate the present from what it is not in order for the present to be itself, but this interval that constitutes it as present must, by the same token, divide the present in and of itself, thereby dividing, along with the present, everything that is thought on the basis of the present, that is, in our metaphysical language, every being, and singular substance or the subject. In constituting itself, in dividing itself dynamically, this interval is what might be called *spacing*, the becoming-space of time or the becoming-time of space (*temporalisation*).[5]

But what is the referent of the separating, dividing, spacing, temporalizing *activity* described in this passage? This very question is greeted with suspicion by Derrida:

> In effect, if we accepted the form of the question, in its meaning and its syntax 'what is?' 'who is it that?', we would have to conclude that *différance* has been derived, has happened, is to be mastered and governed on the basis of the point of a present being.[6]

Derrida further supposes that if the being in question here is consciousness, this is tantamount to affirming the primacy of a metaphysical notion of 'self-presence'. As he puts it:

> The privilege granted to consciousness…signifies the privilege granted to the present; and even if one describes the transcendental temporality of consciousness, and at the depth at which Husserl does so, one grants to the 'living present' the power of synthesising traces, and of incessantly reassembling them.
>   This privilege is the ether of metaphysics, the element of our thought that is caught in the language of metaphysics.[7]

Now, to understand what is at stake in these remarks it is important to clarify the relation between consciousness, presence and self-identity. First, it is unlikely that anyone – including Derrida – would deny the fact that the term 'consciousness' is unintelligible without the notion of an intentional object, i.e. consciousness necessarily involves consciousness *of* some item. This means that we can interpret presence in a logical sense, as that – be it a sensible item, an idea, or whatever – which is the object of consciousness at any given moment. Some positions – such as Husserl's[8] – however, involve much more than this basic meaning. On these terms, the presence of an item to consciousness exemplifies the activity of a constitutive transcendental ego. In being synthesized or constructed, the item is made directly present to consciousness and consciousness is made directly present to itself, as joint effects of this constituting power. It is this which, for Derrida, is metaphysical. However, the notion of *self-identity* can be articulated in terms of the logical sense of presence, without recourse to metaphysical abstractions such as the transcendental ego.

The cases of Kant and Cassirer are pertinent here. For Kant, 'the "I think" must accompany all my representations'.[9] This means that, given a state of consciousness (embodying directedness towards presence), it must be possible to characterize this as one of *my* states. Our criterion of self-identity, in other words, is not constituted by self-presence in some direct mode; it is, rather, a function of the *relation* between particular states and our *capacity* to relate them to a whole.

This is where Cassirer becomes important. For him the relation of the particular content of consciousness to the whole is a reciprocal and symbolic one. It draws upon powers of imagination, and the capacity to articulate and unify these through symbolic codes. This enables a present item to be simultaneously situated in relation to objective reason and the personal history of the subject. Self-identity is thence a function of the complex reciprocal interactions of all these factors.

Now, as we saw in Chapter 3, Cassirer himself does not follow the logic of his own arguments through to their conclusion. He takes the principle of reciprocity itself to be an original and irreducible act of consciousness. However, as I also showed, this unwarranted metaphysical postulate can be dispensed with by analysing it in terms of the body's simultaneous synthesis of its own unity and that of the surrounding heterogeneous continuum. The principle of reciprocity, indeed, should be seen as an amplification of this movement into the formation of language and other symbolic systems, wherein the correlation of self-consciousness and objective world is achieved. Self-identity, accordingly, is rendered even more complex. It can be affirmed in specific moments of explicit awareness, but this is not a case of simple presence-to-self. Rather, such moments are *achieved*. This means that the sense of self-identity which they embody is not only a function of massively complex factors, but also one which changes as the subject recalculates its relation to the world on the basis of altered circumstances.

Given this developed version of Cassirer, we can make the following general points. Derrida sees subjectivity as a function of *différance* and assumes that any alternative approach will amount to a metaphysics of self-presence. However, whilst *différance* is necessarily implicated in the symbolic dimension of subjectivity, it is dependent on consciousness's imaginative powers, organized in response to the demands of embodied inherence in a spatial, temporal, heterogeneous context. This means that presence in its logical sense is the factor whose articulation brings about the correlation of *différance* with consciousness's retentive and projective capacities. Hence, the *decisive* significance of a Cassirer-type approach is that it allows *différance* to be given its philosophical due, whilst at the same time giving presence its proper and *positive* logical characterization as a necessary mediating element in the correlation of objective and subjective unity. The articulation of presence is made possible by an item's relation to an enormously complex system of symbolic relations and imaginative powers, but reciprocally this system in its origins and functions is *geared towards the achievement of such articulated presence*. Derrida's approach, unfortunately, utterly represses and distorts this positive dimension – the domain of the body.

However, the repressed tends to return. Having, therefore, considered the positive role of presence in relation to self-identity, let us now consider it at a level where even Derrida allows it some significance – namely as a condition of *iterability*. In relation to this, Derrida remarks as follows:

> A written sign, in the usual sense of the words, is…a mark which remains, which is not exhausted in the present of its inscription, and which can give rise to an iteration both in the presence of and beyond the presence of the empirically determined subject, who, in a given context, has emitted or produced it.[10]

Derrida generalizes this approach in relation to spoken language also, and in so doing is able to indicate the formal structure of iterability *per se*:

> First condition for it to function: its situation as concerns a certain code;…let us say that a certain self-identity of this element (mark, sign, etc.) must permit its recognition and repetition. Across empirical variations of tone, of voice, etc., eventually of a certain accent, for example, one must be able to recognise the identity… of a signifying form.[11]

Indeed, 'this unity of the signifying form is constituted only by its iterability, by the possibility of being represented in the absence not only of its referent, which goes without saying, but of determined signified or current intention of signification'.[12]

On these terms, then, the iterability of a sign is its capacity to be recognized and repeated crossed different contexts of use. This involves independence from both the presence of its referent and the particular intentions which inform individual cases of its use. (For example, the phrase 'the cat sat on the mat' does not require the presence of cat sitting on the mat in order to be meaningful, and, again, the intentions governing specific articulation of the phrase will vary according to the different contexts of its employment.)

The importance of iterability is its function within *différance*. As Derrida puts it:

> The possibility of repeating; and therefore of identifying, marks is implied in every code, making of it a communicable, transmittable, decipherable grid that is iterable for a third party, and thus for any possible user in general.[13]

The iterability of signs, in other words, is a necessary condition of systematicity and conceptuality, and, in conjunction with difference, is a sufficient characterization of *différance*. Now it is interesting that in his early formulation of *différance* the 'defer' aspect is couched in negative terms as absence of the referent or as the function of traces. Here, however, Derrida is forced into at least the beginnings of a more positive characterization. The deferral which creates signification is a function of the sign's repeatable, identifiable, *iterable* aspect – an

aspect wherein it can be used independently of the presence of its referent or any individual case of communicative intention.

Characteristically, Derrida represses this positive dimension by using it for fundamentally negative ends. His intention is to subvert the supposed primacy of intention and context of use in guaranteeing the sign's capacity to transmit a fixed meaning. According to him, the structure of iteration means that 'the intention which animates utterance will never be completely present in itself and its content. The iteration which structures it a priori introduces an essential dehiscence and demarcation'.[14] This strategy has many complex ramifications, which are not central to the present study. What *are* central are Derrida's criteria of the 'a priori' structuring function just cited. This amounts to a clarification of the repeatability and identity of signs. We know that difference is a necessary condition of this, insofar as we could not assign a role or identity to either a specific sign or a specific rule if it were not different in some respect from other signs or rules. But clearly this is not sufficient. We need also criteria of positive characterization.

These criteria come down to issues of material presence and the following of rules. In relation to the former, the sign must have a determinacy which enables it to be recognized across different contexts of use. This involves fundamentally a physical configuration present to sight, sound or touch which remains constant qua configuration in relation to its different media of expression, and in relation to stylistic inflections and variations determined by the particular user or context of use. The signs must have a core of *phenomenal sameness* – an identity which is more than the sum of all the differential relations which help 'define' its partic- ular character. Another factor is also involved. For if the sign is to be recognizable and iterable amongst a community of sign-users, this presupposes a likeness of cognitive competences amongst community members. *They* must be so constituted as to be able to recognize the sign through its own characteristics and its place within the signifying system as a whole.

These points link up to the second criterion of iterability. It consists in a shared capacity amongst the community of sign-users to follow rules concerning how the sign is to be connected to other signs within the system. Now, to follow a rule in the most general sense is to regulate one's volitional activity so as to realize a specific end. One adapts to the possibilities of a unified causal frame- work of actions, events and possible outcomes. This organizational drive operates within two primary vectors. Derrida himself notes – in a remark from earlier on – that the present is only constituted insofar as an 'interval' separates it from past and future states. Hence:

> In constituting itself in dividing itself dynamically, this interval is what might
> be called *spacing*, the becoming-space of time or the becoming-time of space
> (*temporalisation*).[15]

Interestingly, Derrida relates these only to the differ and defer aspects of *différance*, respectively. However, any relating of one sign to another so as to artic-

ulate an iterable signifying sequence *actively* involves spacing and temporaliza-tion. Given this, we can restate the notion of *différance* in a fuller and more telling form than that offered by Derrida. First, a sign can only function insofar as it is inscribed in a system of spatialized and temporalized differences. These are *logical preconditions* of signification. However, such a system is itself only possible if signs are iterable. To be iterable a sign must be a determinate phenomenal configuration which can be linked to other such configurations on the basis of rules. To follow a rule in the most general sense is to adapt one's volitional activity to a unified spatio-temporal and causal framework of anticipated events and outcomes. This is the *material actuality* of all acts of signification. The many specific uses of signification consist in the contextualization of the iterability dimension.

Derrida regards the notion of *différance* as a 'soliciting' – in the sense of 'to make tremble in entirety'[16] – of our customary metaphysical language of presence and beings, etc. However, through his notion of iterability he is committed to a unified spatio-temporal and causal framework of re-encounterable, re-identifiable material particulars. This cannot be 'deconstructed'. The differ and defer vectors of *différance* are logical conditions of signification, but they are not direct players in the ontology of its execution. Derrida, however, treats them as if they were – as if they were factors which, in some sense, render the present ontologically unstable. (I shall return to this point in a few moments.)

Now it is interesting that in relation to both iterability and the difference/deferral coupling Derrida is necessarily operating with unities of space, time and causality – which I have termed Cassirer's first-order categories. He may also be committed to the use of the second-order categories as well (namely thing/attribute, number and magnitude). Given this, it is possible to see presence in relation to self-identity and signification as embodying a legitimate *ontology*, rather than a metaphysics of presence. The reason for this is that, since these cate-gories necessarily presuppose self-identity and signification, neither of the two terms here are simply present. Rather, they are achieved, not as mere 'effects', but as *accomplishments* of a pervasive reciprocity of factors which originates in the body's synthesis of its own unity in relation to that of the perceptual field.

This principle of reciprocity also enables us to think through the relation of presence to difference and deferral. Presence is only recognizable insofar as we can link a given item to a hierarchy of traces, but reciprocally there is only such a system of traces insofar as there is given presence for them to situate. Presence is the focus of the relation, but neither element is possible without the other. What makes this into a stable rather than an unstable ontology is both the afore-mentioned focus *and the reciprocity* of the relation itself. The principle of reciprocity is intrinsic to all acts of consciousness; it is a continuously active structural principle. In the final analysis, however, its very pervasiveness means that neither it nor the terms it relates can be fixed in some absolute once-and-for-all form. They are present – but in a provisional, constantly transforming fashion. The principle of reciprocity justifies presence in a functional rather than a metaphysical way.

Given this analysis, it is clear that a Cassirer-type approach can do justice to the dynamic role of signification, but not at the cost of calling the basic ontology of phenomenal relations and the unity of the self into question. What emerges are constant elements in the human condition arising from embodiment, which are symbolically expressed in different ways under different historical and cultural conditions.

The stabilizing function of the principle of reciprocity also functions not only in the realm of ontology, but also in that of reason. To show this I shall now engage with Wolfgang Welsch's inadequate attempts to defend reason from post-modern scepticism.

II

Welsch argues that

> Modern philosophy – in its hermeneutic just as in its analytic versions – speaks of a multitude of worlds. This is a consequence of the fact that a direct, an interpretation-free, access to reality doesn't exist. And this is not just because such access is denied to us, but because the seemingly self-evident idea of an interpretation-free access to reality is in truth contradictory in itself and untenable.[17]

The justification of this claim consists in the fact that

> Whoever advocates this thesis of a world-in-itself does something other than they believe. They believe they are talking about a world independent of interpretation. But they obviously give this world a certain rendering at the same time – in the very sense of its transcendence over all interpretations. They thus make anything but an interpretation-free statement.[18]

Welsch's points here do not involve denying the existence of a reality independent of interpretative standpoints. Rather, they emphasize that there is no uniquely privileged standpoint which can reveal this reality in definitive terms. A finite subject's viewpoint is always partial. It is an interpretation.

This partiality can be read in both negative and positive terms. Negatively it can seem to point in the direction of a cognitive relativism where a multiplicity of perspectives upon the world is all that we have. Such perspectives represent different kinds of class, race or gender positions, but do not differ in terms of truth in any objective cognitive sense.

The positive significance of the partiality of viewpoints concerns their correlation with reason. In this respect, Welsch makes a distinction between rationality and reason. The former is the province of our cognition of objects and/or relations. It concerns the rules and criteria which define different kinds of cognitive orientation towards the world. Reason reflects on the relationships between such modes of rationality. Welsch characterizes it thus:

> As a capacity of reflection – and unlimited reflection – reason is in posses-
> sion of some properties – but of logical properties alone. Reason is the
> holder of logic operators such as the principle of contradiction, elementary
> categories like identity and difference, singularity, multiplicity and totality,
> constancy and change, cause and effect, ground and consequence, confor-
> mity and contradiction, potentiality and necessity, unity, particularity,
> coherence, and so on. No operation of reflection can be carried out
> without having these concepts at one's disposal and employing some of
> them.[19]

On the basis of these logical means, reason regulates rational procedures and the
relations between them. As Welsch puts it:

> In its analysis of the forms of rationality reason aims at the most complete
> comprehension of their relations. Striving for totality, it tries to find out how
> things are related together…[However, the] connections and relations
> discovered between rational types might well reach far, but ultimately the
> quasi-systems which come into view through this will turn out to be disputed
> by other orderings and quasi-systems. And between these a synthetic assess-
> ment will no longer be possible because the frameworks common to the
> connectible forms prove to be irreconcilable with one another – no super-
> system of various quasi-systems is conceivable.[20]

Reason, in other words, is a dynamic connective activity which by bringing
bodies of knowledge into provisional alignment is able to illuminate them. This
does not issue in ultimate knowledge because reason is purely *a capacity to make
connections*. The elements of knowledge which it connects are constructed from
the partial viewpoints noted earlier.

It is in relation to such viewpoints that the all-important transitional (or, as
Welsch styles it, 'transversal') significance of reason emerges. These transitions

> are effected between the various forms of rationality which reason takes into
> consideration (the forms of rationality being, so to speak, the matter upon
> which reason exerts its activity in the first place). Secondly, these transitional
> activities (which can have the form of comparison, opposition, reciprocal
> interpretation, consequential analysis, etc.) are effected along the lines of
> logical operators, with these serving as guidelines and tools for this analysis.
> Reason uses viewpoints like identity and difference, foundation and conse-
> quence, particularity and universality in order to figure out the proper
> relation between the forms of rationality concerned. Inventive skills, too, are
> implied in these processes: you have to find out what the promising view-
> points might be.[21]

Given reason's transversal character, Welsch sees this as having positive signifi-
cance – as a creative corrective to absolutist pretensions, and as a means of

improving individual viewpoints by, for example, testing them in terms of consistency or by comparison with other viewpoints. In this context Welsch remarks as follows:

> Let us assume one wants to defend a position, and let us assume that one doesn't want to do so under all circumstances and possible conceivable positions but with respect to a specific situation – for example, human rights with respect to the present state of the world.
>
> Following the demands of reason, one will give a precise account of the situation as well as of the position, and frankly and extensively consider all potential objections to one's own situation and determination of the position.[22]

Now, for Welsch, a strategy of this kind can lead one to realize that one's view is well-founded:

> It is then reasonably justified to advocate this position. It's just that one should be aware of, and admit to, the limits of its distinction: its situation and temporal limits. One would, for example, not claim to have discovered the only reasonable solution to the problem forever – under whatever situations and circumstances; one would hardly claim that in a thousand years from now humankind will still best stick to this solution. But such limitations do not minimise the validity of the solution for the situation it was deliberately designed for (and in practical matters solutions always have to be designed for specific situations.[23]

In Welsch's terms, then, it is the transversal structures of reason which give us orientation in a world of partial viewpoints. This orientation is not an Archimedean point, but neither is it an empty postmodernist relativism. For Welsch's substantive claim is that reason in its transversal dimension can make the plurality of partial viewpoints into a positive factor for individual ones. By testing and exploring in relation to other points of view and mind-sets, the individual viewpoint is strengthened and can claim viability in relation to those specific historical and cultural circumstances in which it functions. In a sense, the very fact that the nature of reason precludes some absolute all-encompassing framework of truth means that we should look towards the improvement of our specific interpretations with all the more care and attentiveness.

There are, however, considerable problems with Welsch's position. In Chapter 3 I noted how Cassirer (like Merleau-Ponty) is drawn towards a connection between cognitive and rational functions and the human mode of embodiment. There is, in fact, a powerful remark by Merleau-Ponty which points us in the precise direction of Welsch's problems. It holds that 'it is no mere coincidence that the rational being is also the one who holds himself upright or has a thumb which can be brought opposite to the fingers; the same manner of existing is evident in both aspects'.[24] One must also bear in mind in relation to this a key

point from Chapter 3, namely that the principle of reciprocity – the very foundation of higher cognitive processes – is a direct expression of the body's inherence in and reflexive physical relation with the world. The principle is a mediating element (along with productive imagination) in the relation between rationality and physical embodiment.

This intertwining of rationality and the ontology of corporeality has adverse implications for Welsch's general position. It suggests that, whilst the fluid transversal procedures of reason do not yield ultimate all-embracing explanations, their very operation presupposes a describable and inescapable ontological framework. This means that at least some of our philosophical interpretations of the world can lay claim to being more than *just* interpretation.

Against this, Welsch might rehearse his distinction between rationality and reason:

> Rational reflection (or first order reflection) refers to objects; reason's reflection, however, is a second order reflection which refers either to the procedures of rationality or to the procedures proper to reason.[25]

On these terms, the ontological constraints noted above have application in relation to rationality as a mode of orientation towards objects, but not to reason as a second-order reflection on issues of method. At that level, it negotiates relations between modes of relatedness to the real but is not itself such a mode.

This possible rejoinder, however, will not do. Consider, for example, some of the 'logical operators' which Welsch identifies with the procedures of reason. These include the principle of contradiction, identity and difference, singularity, multiplicity, potentiality, unity and necessity. One assumes that Welsch does not take these to be innate quasi-Kantian categories imposed on passive data of sensation. But if this is so we need criteria of how these logical operators can be learnt and applied correctly. At the very least, the following of such rules demands that the cognizing subject inheres in a stable spatio-temporal continuum of causally interacting material particulars and persons. If reason is to be possible – even as a second-order sorting activity – its own principles must be in some general structural conformity with the world. We can only reason on the basis of what the world will allow.

In this respect it is worth pressing Welsch further on the positive significance of reason's transversal aspect. This consists of moving from one viewpoint to another so as to test the scope and limitations or strength of one's position. But how do we know these limitations, or whatever? If reason decides between such positions, it does not do so by, as it were, sticking the logical operators on them like badges. Rather, the viewpoint is related to other viewpoints and relevant aspects of the objective world. It is constrained by the relation between such viewpoints and the world. Such a relation is what allows the logical operators to be formulated and applied correctly. It provides criteria which make rational connections intelligible.

At the heart of Welsch's problem here is the fact that the distinction between rationality and reason is much less clear than he takes it to be. The transversals

of reason just described are not simple movements from one viewpoint to another. Rather, they are attempts to articulate an individual interpretation's character by relating it to a more general whole composed of other viewpoints and sets of relationships with the objective world. This is, of course, an exemplification of that same principle of reciprocity which is the basis of our object-directed perceptual/conceptual cognition. Reason may be second-order reflection, but qua reflection it also embodies the same principle which sustains first-order reflection. Welsch's notions of rationality and reason are, in fact, different functions of the same basic cognitive structure.

This close kinship should hardly surprise us, for amongst Welsch's logical operators are such notions as cause and effect, and constancy and change. The fact that Welsch regards these as 'logical operators' is bizarre to say the least. They are clearly metaphysical and ontological concepts, and, as such, factors which link reason very closely to the objective aspect of the world, i.e. to that dimension of rationality which Welsch tries to distinguish from reason.

Welsch's big problem then is this: he wants to defend reason from postmodern scepticism, and by emphasizing reason's transversal aspect he thinks he has achieved such a defence. The defence holds that reason has no constitutive principles of its own, but, rather, negotiates between other viewpoints and forms of knowledge so as to improve a given standpoint. This guarantees that we will refine our knowledge but not aspire to absolute or unconditional truth.

However, as I have shown, Welsch's notion of transversal reason presupposes a framework of corporeal ontology insofar as without it none of Welsch's so-called 'logical operators' would be possible. Indeed, the transversal motions of reason are (like the embodied subject's general perceptual and cognitive life) embodiments of the principle of reciprocity. Reason is not some neutral sorting and discriminating procedure, but is, rather, a direct expression of those reciprocal relationships which are the basis of our knowledge of both the world and the self. This means that if reason or, indeed, any interpretative viewpoint is informed by an explicit knowledge of these conditions it is not *just* one position or viewpoint amongst others. It expresses an objective truth.

Now, as I argued earlier, the identification of functional constants in experience does not close off enquiry; rather, it opens it up. It offers us the guideline of fundamental concepts, but ones whose internal symbolic character varies under different historical conditions. Welsch's own theory is a case in point. He identifies some constant features of reason but chooses to emphasize only its fluid transversal aspect. By so doing he gives a distinctively *postmodern* inflection to the notion. In particular, he shows how the transversal aspect can lead the rational agent to an open-minded and rigorous exploration of possible viewpoints. This is an important achievement. For it shows both how knowledge might be advanced at an individual level and how – through the consideration of multiple viewpoints – this might encourage an ethical accommodation of the rights of others.

However, it is vital to ensure that this emphasis is referred back to the fundamental element of constancy in reason – namely its embodiment of the principle of reciprocity. The reason for this is that, as Welsch's view stands, it turns history

into mere change. The transition from one historical standpoint to another brings only *different* strategies for and resolutions to life's problems. The horizon of history is interpreted only as blind change. If, however, we situate Welsch's emphasis on the improving transversal aspect of reason in relation to the principle of reciprocity, a rather different significance to history emerges. In testing one's viewpoint against others there is also a more general dimension involved, which incorporates one's position in relation to a narrative of culture, nation and epoch. All these factors mediate one's decisions, just as those decisions in turn inform (however slightly) the life of the surrounding culture.

This means that the field of transversal reason should be characterized *in terms of narrative accumulation and continuity*, with the possibility of logical progression – of deeper articulation – in relation to functional constants in experience. The relation between the constant and its historical variations enables it to exist in a more developed way. Welsch's theory – despite itself – instantiates this thesis insofar as it illuminates (in a way that was not possible in previous ages) the transversal aspect of reason.

In this chapter, then, I have tried to apply the refoundational philosophy outlined in Parts I and II of my book. Specifically, I have shown that both Derrida's and Welsch's positions presuppose the principle of reciprocity, and that if thought through in relation to that position they lose their destructive nihilistic edge.

I shall now continue this critical approach through an assimilation of that mainstay of poststructuralist thought, namely signification.

10 From rock music to deep signification

Lacan with Žižek

Introduction

In critically approaching the notion of signification it is useful to address Lacan. My more specific avenue of approach will be via one of Lacan's most important contemporary interpreters – Slavoi Žižek. In particular, I will be concerned to develop Žižek's use of Lacan as set out in a paper entitled 'The Enlightenment in Laibach'.[1] In this piece Žižek seeks to understand the philosophical significance of the influential Slovene rock band Laibach. Laibach, along with the painters' collective 'Irwin' and other artistic groups, are members of the *Neue Slowenische Kunst* (NSK) movement, which draws on the symbols and display mechanisms of cultures and totalitarian regimes which colonized Slovenia in the twentieth century. Žižek's use of Lacan in analysing Laibach/NSK's cultural activity enables him to identify a level of signification which, as I will argue, is of more universal significance.

In this chapter, therefore, I shall proceed as follows. Section i will present an analysis of Lacan's overall theoretical position and the way in which Žižek employs it in relation to Laibach. In section ii, I will offer a critical reinterpretation of Lacan and Žižek which focuses on the significance of '*sinthome*'. Specifically, I will show the way in which this deep level of signifying activity finds concrete expression in the phenomenon of art *per se* and the way in which it illuminates the counter-civilizing phenomenon of symbolic arrest (which I discussed earlier in this book). Finally, it will also be suggested that the 'rendering of the real' which sinthome involves is of strategic contemporary philosophical interest.

I

Whilst Lacan sees himself as a psychoanalyst in the Freudian tradition, his relationship to this tradition is substantially a revisionist one. Of decisive importance in this respect are his notions of the 'mirror-stage', and the acquisition and function of language. In early infancy the child's awareness is essentially scattered. Whatever consciousness it has is a chaotic function of the gratifications which it receives from different zones and orifices of the body.

However, sometime after the age of about six months the child encounters its own image in objects which are able to mirror its appearances. The mirror-image follows patterns of symmetry and fixed variation, which for the child suggest a unity of self and bodily co-ordination which is *in fact* not achieved until its motor capacities are much more mature and integrated. The mirror allows the child to project an imaginary unity of self. This projection of a 'specular ego' proves to be a decisive trait in relation to all modes of human awareness. We project fantasies of unity and completeness on to situations and phenomena which do not have such unity.

The reason why our relation to the world lacks this imaginary dimension of unity, is bound up with our status as linguistic subjects. According to Lacan, as well as identifying with its specular ego the child has an absolute need to receive unconditional love and recognition from its mother. It identifies itself with the supreme object of the mother's desire, namely the phallus.

However, the gratification of this identification/desire, cannot be realized. Indeed, the figure of the father threatens castration as a penalty. Despite all this, the child is able to achieve some compensation by displacing its desire on to items which it can make present or absent at will. In this way it achieves an imaginary control of the mother. Language – with its foundations in differential relations of presence and absence (i.e. the fact that its units can only signify insofar as their presence is defined against a background of similar items which are *not* present) – is the best articulation of this.

Language is able to express this relation to the mother because its foundation in presence/absence follows characteristics of the object of the mother's desire, namely the phallus. This object is manifest and external but (seemingly) detach-able; it can appear as erect or as flaccid; its specific modes of presence are, in other words, simultaneously inscribed with the possibility of absence. It thus embodies the relation which is the foundation of linguisticality. In fact, Lacan regards it as the *master* signifier, which represents the field of signification as a whole.

Now, the acquisition of language not only allows the child an imaginary control of the mother's desire, but also (insofar as it has the authority of a pre-given framework into which the child is initiated) enables the child to identify with the 'Name of the Father'. On these terms, in other words, the Oedipal drama is not simply the basis of neurosis in adult life; it is a foundation of the child's entry into the symbolic order of social relations and institutions of which language itself is the supreme expression. It constitutes and stabilizes the self.

However, there are several important points to note here. First, the processes described above are, in essence, unconscious ones. The child is not explicitly aware of the needs and desires which propel it into language. Second, the compensation which it receives through this initiation are radically transient and incomplete, but, despite this, are nevertheless insistent and recurrent.

In this respect, we will recall that the child's acquisition of language – its use of signifiers – expresses (through its evocation of the phallus) a demand for absolute love and recognition from the mother. However, the mother cannot satisfy this

demand, and it is displaced into linguistic life generally, as an unconscious demand for recognition from the Other. This non-adequation between need and demand – which Lacan terms 'Desire' – is endlessly perpetuated in all our linguistic transactions. Indeed, we become what we are through the demand for recognition from the Other, which is implicitly involved in every expression of language.

Our address to the Other is constitutive for our own self. Whatever specific objects we desire, whatever goals we formulate, whatever projects we initiate, these are given intelligibility by their meaning in relation to the overall field of other language-users. The Other – and indeed the 'big' Other of the field of Otherness in general – is the unconscious determinant of all conscious life. However, whilst – in the grips of the imaginary – we proceed as if our address to the Other will be adequately reciprocated – it *cannot* be. For the Other is just as split and divided as ourselves, and is unable to reciprocate our demands in any unconditional sense. It returns our demands (as Lacan puts it) in an inverse form.

The upshot of all this is that whilst the symbolic order (of language and its derivatives) enables us to articulate Otherness – be it of other people, language or the world in general – it is shot through with transience and instability. The self is ex-centric. It involves a ceaseless generation of meaning within an overall field which it cannot control. Because we are beings whose consciousness is characterized by language, we are always 'on the way' to semantic and existential destinations, which shift even as we seem to arrive there. As soon as one set of desires is realized, a new set has taken its place, and so on, and so on. We are haunted by lack, insofar as the object of desire can only be defined and appropriated against a shifting broader framework of desires in the field of Otherness, which (as noted earlier) cannot itself be fully defined and appropriated.

To this complex relation between desired object and that unattainable framework of presences and absences which make it possible, Lacan gives the technical term '*objet petit a*'. It is a kind of constant remnant or surplus which both conditions and is left over in any act of linguistic communication.

From this it will be gathered that the life of everyday consciousness is a ceaseless dialectic between the symbolic order, which both determines and disrupts, and the imaginary, which involves fantasies of total realization. The symbolic gives consciousness a fragile transient order, whilst the imaginary seeks to totalize this order. As Žižek observes, 'fantasy designates the subject's "impossible" relation to *a* [i.e. *objet petit a*] the object-cause of its desire'.[2] Indeed, 'it is precisely the role of fantasy to give the co-ordinate of the subject's desire, to specify its object, to locate the position the subject assumes in it'.[3] In Lacanian terms, it is the task of psychoanalysis to give the subject access to a mode of speech where signification will once more become fluid and will resist the distorting totalizations of the imaginary and its fantasies.

There is one other feature of Lacan's overall position which must be noted. That which the symbolic and imaginary dimensions of consciousness give organization to is the 'real'. In Lacanian terms, the real is an elusive concept. We do not have any *direct* experience of it *in itself*; however, it shows through the symbolic framework at certain extreme or privileged moments. An example of

the former is in psychotic delusion, where voices seem to come 'from nowhere'. Here, signifiers have broken loose from their usual metonymic and metaphoric chains and linkage, and evoke purely imaginary presences. In this breakdown of linguistic authority the law-like ('Name of the Father') character of language appears as an external alien power. Here the real – that which exceeds linguistically – shows through in a traumatic form. There are also less traumatic manifestations. One of these is a kind of 'autistic' enjoyment taken in signification for its own sake (the so-called 'sinthome' of Lacan's later work). (I will return to this in some detail later on.)

Given this lengthy summary of Lacan, we are now in a position to elucidate Žižek's argument in 'The Enlightenment in Laibach'.

Žižek begins by considering the relation between the rational autonomy of the human subject and the exercise of this autonomy in the systematic following of rules. (For Kant, freedom in its rational sense consists in our capacity to act in accordance with our 'own idea of laws'.)

Now, in Enlightenment culture and its continuing legacy the relation between autonomy and its systematic and habitual exercise is not fully thought through. In his earlier works, Žižek sees this as an issue of particular concern, given the rise of totalitarian ideologies. In these ideologies the dimension of habitual obedience to law seems actively to suppress the autonomy which it is meant to articulate. Autonomy is transferred into mere autonomism; and it is the senselessness of this autonomism which is revealed by Laibach's performances.

Žižek's more recent analysis of Laibach takes a different approach – derived from the later work of Lacan. His main argument, indeed, centres on Lacan's discussion of the hysteric. Here (in Lacanian terms) communication is not that of the master addressing or representing him- or herself to the Other; rather, it is a form of discourse which seeks out an explanation. For the hysteric is divided between, on the one hand, his or her self-understanding at the symbolic level and, on the other hand, a complex of putatively inexplicable symptoms in his or her behaviour. What, asks the hysteric of the analyst, is the relation between these two aspects of my being? The origins of this problem lie in the hysteric's inability to achieve self-recognition as object.

The discourse of the analyst is paradoxical, insofar as he or she is, in effect, asked to occupy a place akin to the *objet petit a*, i.e. to identify with (and thence be able to explain) the conditions which exceed but sustain the hysteric's symptoms. In a particularly difficult section of his argument, Žižek goes on to clarify the analyst's position here by linking it to a major point where Lacan sees the Real as breaking through the communicative network.

One aspect of this concerns signification itself. In his later work Lacan holds that a key feature of signifiers is, as it were, their capacity to float. Signifiers are real material objects which, through location in specific linguistic contents, achieve specific sorts of meaning. However, their capacity to be used in this way – our sheer ability to play with or fix them – is the source of a distinctive real enjoyment which is not socially mediated. In the final analysis, in other words, language-use embodies a dimension of enjoyment which is not simply a function

of the address to the Other. It is a part of the subject's – the One's pre-signifying or pre-discursive – being. (This enjoyment, of course, is, for the most part, thereafter assimilated in the discursive chain, fixed by the field of otherness.)

Žižek links this distinctive mode of enjoyment to Lacan's analysis of the symptom. For Lacan, a hysterical symptom is one where symbolic communication is suspended. The hysteric cannot explain his or her symptoms. Their meaning is hidden or enciphered. It is an address to the Other, but one in which the subject fails to achieve self-recognition. It is the analyst's role to receive and interpret this address, thus reviving the communicative chain. Despite success in this, however, the symptoms persist. Why is this?

Lacan's answer is that persistence is due to the subject enjoying his or her symptoms. The discourse of the analyst deals with this through interpretations which focus on contrasting juxtapositions of symptoms and fantasy. These two phenomena have different traits. In having symptoms explained, the subject finds pleasure in both the explanation and discussions of it. On the other hand, whilst giving ourselves up to fantasy and reverie gives great enjoyment we are loath to explain them or offer them up to the interpretation of others. The analyst leads us from an interpretation of symptoms to an unmasking of what is ultimately at stake in the fantasies embedded in them. The subject is thus able to 'exceed' the fantasy, and to be distanced from it.

The persistence of the symptom after this process is due to its embodiment of the 'sinthome'. Žižek explains this term of Lacanian art as 'the symptom in the dimension of enjoyment-of-the-real; the symptom as uninterpretable, as the direct condensation of a certain one – signifier of an external differential chain, with the object-of-the-enjoyment'.[4]

Here our enjoyment is in the symptom *per se*, rather than in the fantasies which pertain to it. The subject does not seek an interpretation of the symptoms – a deciphering of them. He or she enjoys the sheer capacity of engaging in meaningful behaviour – for manipulating signifiers. This private enjoyment is an affirmation of the Real in positive terms. Rather than give up in the face of signification in all its complexity, we celebrate its generative power by identifying with one of its contingent and opaque manifestations. We thus express the *one* – the self on its way to the Other, rather than the self as constituted by the Other.

This enjoyment in exercising the capacity to signify *per se* is not just one pleasure amongst others; it is a positive affirmation which is the condition of sanity itself. For if we could not take pleasure in the capacity to signify – to make floating signifiers determinate (in whatever sense) – we would lose the basis of our systematic hold on the world. Enjoyment through the sinthome, in other words, is the ultimate expression and guarantor of consistency in human experience.

Given all this, the identification of the analysand with his or her symptoms is the final stage of the discourse of the analyst. It is paradoxical. For, rather than issue in some state of general existential enlightenment concerning his or her specific relation to the world (i.e. an identification with the fantasy), the analyst leads the analysand to what is, in effect, an affirmation of his or her urge to deploy meaning, the urge *to be* in its most primal sense.

It is this Lacanian strategy which defines Žižek's approach to Laibach. Laibach adopt the aesthetic trappings (or, rather, aestheticize the symptoms) of numerous different aspects of totalitarian and nationalist behaviour. Their performances mix up the symptoms in a way which decontextualizes their original authoritarian matrix. Rather than present a performance addressed to the Other's powers of interpretation and fantasy, they engage in a spectacle based on a scattering of the automatic symptoms of authoritarian behaviour.

Now, in some cases, an identification with the symptoms is a kind of guilt reversion into madness. Using his characteristic strategy of reference to mass culture, Žižek illustrates this by the examples of a Ruth Rendell story and a Donald Duck cartoon. In these works, the protagonists undergo a trauma which leads to behaviour – mimicking a specific alien force – which is symptomatic of guilt. In Lacanian terms this is a case of 'acting out'. Such actions are an attempt to give symbolic expression to a meaning that is so traumatic as to resist overt symbolic articulation. The ciphered meaning of the symptoms is a reproach to the Other, wherein the subject is able to expiate his or her guilt.

This must be contrasted with the 'passage to act', which, rather than involving an address to the Other (i.e. a symbolic act), actually involves a withdrawal from the signifying network. Laibach instantiate this passage to act. For by dislocating the symptoms of authoritarian behaviour they enable us to identify with those symptoms regarded as *sinthome*, i.e. as an expression of the sheer power to signify in a rule-governed way. In this manner the social bond which fixed the signifier in an authoritarian context is radically subverted. This is not a revelation of truth in the sense of correspondence with an object. Rather, it is an evocation of that Real power – enjoyment of the signifier – which lies at the heart of subjectivity itself.

Without remarking upon it, Žižek thus returns us to his starting point in relation to the Enlightenment. For the exercise and articulation of rational autonomy through the systematic following of rules embodies a deep-seated enjoyment of the act of signification as its condition. This is what Laibach's subversion of mere automatist rule-following points us towards.

II

Žižek's utilization of Lacan in relation to Laibach is of great interest – both in itself and in more general terms. To show this, however, demands a critical engagement with both thinkers. I shall now address this task.

First, Lacan himself. In terms of philosophical truth his relationship to Freud is of purely methodological significance insofar as Freud's psychoanalytic project is, in conceptual terms, profoundly flawed. In this respect, Lacan's use of the Freudian fairytale of the Oedipus complex is particularly ill advised. For it attributes recognitional capacities to the pre-linguistic child (such as seeing the phallus as the object of the mother's desire) which are the product of *advanced* linguistic experience. Matters are made even more incoherent, of course, by the fact that Lacan actually seeks to explain the child's initiation into language itself in terms of the Oedipus complex.

Now if the Freudian myths are extracted from Lacan, it might seem at first sight that little remains. Certainly, such notions as Lacan's technical sense of Desire and the privileging of the phallus must be abandoned. The one key quasi-Freudian idea which can remain is that of the unconscious *per se*. This idea retains its significance precisely because Lacan uses it differently from Freud, by relating it to insights drawn from Saussure and Hegel. These insights are (respectively) the notion of language and meaning having a differential structure, and the idea of the self as constituted by reference to the desire of the Other. This yields the following overall picture of the relation between subject and world.

Initiation into the symbolic order of language enables the subject to articulate its relation to the world and other people – Otherness in the broadest sense. This articulation, however, cannot be absolutely fixed. The symbolic order – of language and social bonding – is a differential structure *into* which the subject is inserted. This means that it is the Other which fundamentally determines the meaning and content of communication, in a field of continuous semantic generation. Meaning is not simply a correspondence between the subject's private space and some clearly definable and self-countered state of affairs. Whatever one thinks or desires is determined by relations to the shifting and complex field of Otherness (things, meaning and desire, in a global sense). There is always more to our consciousness of self and Other than can be articulated in any act of communication

This field of Otherness in relation to which the individual achieves self-definition is fundamentally an unconscious matrix. Our capacity for the imaginary, in particular, serves to affirm this. The imaginary covers over the complex differential structures of our relation to Otherness by colonizing them with fantasies of total comprehension and self-containment. We imagine that the self is simply a unity which signifies directly to other unities and which sets clearly definable and realizable goals for itself. It is the task of analysis to break the rigidity of this artificial framework with a use of language which can evoke something of the complexity and contingency of our inherence in the Other.

Viewed in these non-Freudian terms, Lacan's strategies and concepts now appear in a more viable philosophical form – as a radical existentialization of Hegel. In particular, the Real now appears in its true role – as the sheer excess and contingency of being, upon which language allows us a hold, but only a partial and precarious one. In fact, this is the key advance of Lacan over Hegel. He gives contingency its due as a decisive and constitutive element in the conditioning and organization of human experience.

Given this restatement of Lacan, the vital significance of Žižek's Laibach paper can be seen to lie in the emphasis which he rightly assigns to the sinthome – that form or 'symptom' which manifests our enjoyment of the capacity to use signifiers. This notion has a supreme philosophical significance, for it suggests that the very capacity to order the world in terms of relations (i.e. the urge to unify, to follow rules) has a necessary connection with pleasure. Neither Lacan nor Žižek develop this beyond the level of a brute affirmation of the self in a real mode. However, the sinthome can be developed much further in terms of both its general and particular significance.

To see why this is so, let us first consider the use which Žižek makes of it in relation to the notion of the symptom. Clearly, Žižek understands symptoms in a much broader sense than that of hysterical behaviour as such. He treats symptoms as manifestations of automatist behaviour, i.e. habitual rule-following whose origins and structure are forgotten or unquestioned or both. (This, of course, is a perfect characterization of the regimentation of behaviour in totalitarian or authoritarian societies.) Now in the spectacle presented by Laibach (and indeed other NSK manifestations, such as the Irwin group's visual imagery) automatist symptoms are no longer fixed in the social bonds of an authoritarian society. Rather, they are, as it were, brought into collision with one another. We are thus able to identify with them for their own sake, as sinthome – a mute expression of the enjoyment of signification itself.

However, what Žižek does not explicitly address is the nature of the relation which holds between identifying with symptoms and identifying with the symptoms through *spectacle*. One presumes, for example, that one can find one's own sinthome through the acceptance of behavioural traits which make one what one is, or (by proxy) through identifying with similar traits in others. But surely this is not the same experience as identifying with a *representation* of symptoms, as is found, for example, in the performances and artefacts of NSK.

Interestingly, Žižek himself points us in the right direction for dealing with this general issue. In *Looking Awry*, Žižek suggests how some formal cinematic devices suspend external reality. In David Lynch's *Elephant Man*, for example, we find 'a series of shots that are, from the standpoint of realistic narration, totally redundant and incomprehensible i.e. the sole function of which is to visualise the pulse of the real'.[5] Indeed, these shots are the basis of the film's 'poetic beauty'. Given this, we might justifiably extend Žižek's insights in the following way.

In the field of artistic production, many representations simply function as vehicles of fantasy addressed to the Other. However, when a work is stylistically original in respect of some innovation in relation to customary treatments of form and/or content, our reception of it is altered. In such cases, we enjoy the artist's style – his or her way of articulating the significatory possibilities of the medium.

Now, in the foregoing example Žižek himself links formal devices which have a realistic narrative function to a visualization of the 'pulse of the real'. However, this visualization (understanding the term in a broad metaphorical sense) is also achieved when artistic form as such arrests us in the way just described. For we attend to and explore the interplay of form and content *for their own sake*. Our capacities for – in Kantian terms – understanding and imagination are brought into heightened reciprocity.

What makes this so important is that it is the co-operation of these capacities which are the necessary conditions of our ability to communicate – to engage in signifying activity. Now, in the crudest forms of aesthetic enjoyment this cognitive exploration focuses on the relation between parts and whole in a formal configuration *per se*. However, in the artwork matters are different. Here we know that the configuration was created by a fellow human being. This means that it

was produced by contingent activity, i.e. which could have gone in other directions than those which it actually did. Hence, the parts of an artwork are moments of contingency when the signifying process reaches a certain stage, in transit to another stage. It is crucial to note, however, that from the viewpoint of the end product these concomitant moments are now necessary. Change any of them, and the identity of the whole is changed. Here, the artist's symptoms – his or her stylistic traits – are read in terms of their capacity to generate specific meaning from contingency. Our aesthetic enjoyment of the artistic whole, in other words, is (over and above more complex levels of significance) an enjoyment of the capacity to signify – to make the floating signifier determinate. *Art itself, in other words, is an embodiment of sinthome.*

On these terms, then, Žižek's discussion of Laibach is itself symptomatic of a more general significance for the sinthome. The aesthetic experience of art (or at least one of its aspects) returns us to the self in its fundamental reality. The reason this link has not been fully developed by Žižek (or indeed Lacan himself) is because the aesthetic functions as an object of discourse in the symbolic domain. It can be cultivated, and is thence assimilated within the social bond. However, even in this respect Žižek and Lacan suggest indirectly how the aesthetic might have a privileged status.

The reason for this is Žižek's notion of the 'rendering of the real'. This develops a tendency in Lacan's later work to affirm the continuity of signification with the real. In respect of this, Žižek suggests that

> The ambiguity of the Lacanian real is not merely a non-symbolised kernel that makes a sudden appearance in the form of traumatic 'returns'. The real is at the same time contained in the very symbolic form: the real is *immediately rendered* by this form.[6]

Now whilst Žižek himself develops this in some odd directions, it relates more immediately to points which I made earlier concerning art. There is a whole culture of discourse based on the production and reception of art. Aesthetic concerns – as opposed to purely private interests and pleasures – can be tested, developed and revised on the basis of critical exchange and argument. However, in the final analysis all this is empty talk unless it constantly returns to and gravitates around direct perceptual intercourse with the artwork itself. We cannot seriously consider critical verdicts which are based on only second-hand acquaintance with the objects of the verdicts. The aesthetic experience of art is rooted in the concrete particular, for it focuses on the specific way in which the artist – through the process of production – fixes signifiers and produces meaning.

The symptoms embodied in the work show this surge into meaning in the stylistic totality of their phenomenal fabric. What this amounts to is that the irreducible sensible particularity of the artwork not only is a sinthome with which we can identify, but also exemplifies and discloses *the rendering of the real itself*. All human artifice and activity has this significance, but only art fulfils it. For the whole culture of the production and appreciation of art is in effect a discourse

which returns to our pleasure in the generation of meaning as its *raison d'être*. In art, the sinthome retains its affirmatory status, but in an inter-subjective mode as a constant rebirth of the symbolic order.

On the basis of this analysis we are now also in a position to illuminate the counter-civilizing phenomenon of symbolic arrest. In the Introduction to this book I described it as the way in which signifying practices which are meant to present or articulate desirable ends and activities can function as substitutes for those factors. The individual becomes locked into activity of a symbolic kind, which in effect misrepresents its relation to basic life-processes and possibilities.

The Lacanian notion of sinthome goes a long way towards explaining how this symbolic arrest is possible. The intrinsic self-fulfilment of signification is, as we have seen, usually absorbed into forms of practical activity. In art, however, it finds a more overt expression. Now when a civilization reaches a stage of advanced productive and distributive competence, with mass communication media and more leisure time available to the individual, the sensibility of consumerism emerges. In order to sell and distribute products, companies must not simply tell the consumer about the utility of what is on offer but package it (in the broadest sense) in an attractive way, so that the consumer 'buys into' the symbolic display of presentation more than into the actual utility of the product. And, again, in the field of public services and utilities and that of information technology, with its accompanying cyber-babble, the consumer is presented with public relations displays of efficient management and empty flows of information (respectively), which function as ends in themselves rather than satisfiers of practical needs or providers of critical information.

These negative aspects of symbolic arrest are ignored insofar as the production and consumption of symbolic display embody sinthome. Consumerism and cognate activities offer easily accessible avenues of signification, where the surge into meaning can be enjoyed even more intensely insofar as it appears to burst through the constraints of practical life. Sinthome's intrinsic pleasure here amounts to an image of liberation in a bad sense. As a basic energy of self-consciousness it can indeed be a liberating image of itself – when embodied in artworks which allow it to be clearly recognized in its own right. But in other life-contexts its emergence from these only serves to distort or conceal factors which – if not adequately negotiated – can lead to the nightmare supermodernity described earlier in this book. This means that whilst the enjoyment of sinthome has intrinsic value it needs to be carefully contextualized and regulated in relation to other forms of value.

Conclusion

I come now to a much broader conclusion. There are, I think, much better philosophical models than Lacan's for articulating the general nature of our embodied relation to the world. (The refoundational approach developed in Parts I and II of the book is, hopefully, an example of this.) However, the contemporary strategic merit of Lacan's thought – if stripped of its Freudian

baggage – is that it gives a proper due to the role of signification, contingency and Otherness in human experience.

Of particular importance here is the Lacanian notion of the real. For if (as I argued in earlier chapters) the principle of reciprocity is a decisive philosophical factor, then this involves a commitment to something like the Lacanian real. Qua finite beings, our hold on the world is not absolute: there is always *more* to be seen, said or done; the symbolic chain can never fix things exactly in place. There is an excess which grounds all experience, but which cannot be experienced *in itself*. This, of course, is the mind-independent reality characterized in Chapter 6. However, whilst this reality cannot be directly experienced, the rendering of the Lacanian real is an effective expression of it. Mind-independent reality is a trans-experiential constant which, through Lacan's notion, finds contemporary articulation. In the midst of the postmodern plethora of mass-media images and information, the Lacanian real can make us mindful of the fact that all this 'input' is no more than a rendering. However blurred the distinction between reality and simulacra may appear, simulacra are strategies of signification called forth by that which exceeds signification. Lacan's real is a *supreme* acknowledgement of this. Again, it shows how that which is more than signification can nevertheless be rationally articulated.

Having assimilated the notion of signification within refoundational philosophy, I shall now undertake a similar task in relation to the notion of the *field of meaning* in its cultural form.

11 Sociological imperialism and the field of cultural production
A critique of Bourdieu[1]

Introduction

Many recent thinkers have linked cultural production to the notion of a field, but by far the most rigorous and systematic of these is the late Pierre Bourdieu. His massive book *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*[2] is a work which attempts to connect – both empirically and theoretically – the notion of standards of taste with specific class positions. This Marxist orientation also informs Bourdieu's more recent writing and, in particular, his influential book *The Field of Cultural Production*.[3] It is in this work that the field/cultural production linkage receives its most persuasive presentation.

However, arguments can appear to be persuasive without actually having the effect of persuading one. This, I will argue, is the case with Bourdieu. Like so many contemporary theorists, he reduces the field of cultural production to class attitudes which inform the conditions under which the field is historically 'constructed'.

To illuminate the nature of this unjustifiable reduction, in section i of the present chapter I shall expound Bourdieu's basic theoretical position, and I will then go on, in section ii, to offer a refoundational critique of it.

I

The central theme in Bourdieu's thought is that of the 'field', i.e. the arena of objective social relations, within which human agency is shaped and enacted. Whilst this field in its global sense is one of power relations, it is internally differentiated into a variety of overlapping fields such as those of economics, politics, culture and education. Each has a relative autonomy – its own rules and patterns of thought and production – and has a structure which at any one moment in time is determined by the specific relation which participants in the field have with one another, and with activity in other fields and with the overall power structure.

Now whilst the arena of human endeavour is thus a complex overlap of different sets of configurations, there are sets of analogies and homologies between them and the overarching power structure, which enable the extrapolation of objective laws concerning the structure and transformations of any given

field. Bourdieu's most impressive discussion in this respect focuses on the field of culture. I shall now offer a detailed analysis of his arguments.

First, Bourdieu observes that

> The field…owes its structure *per se* to the opposition between the *field of restricted production* as a system producing cultural goods (and the instruments for appropriating these goods) objectively destined for a public of producers of cultural goods, and the field of large-scale cultural production, specifically organised with a view to the production of cultural goods for non-producers of cultural goods, 'the public at large'.[4]

Indeed,

> In contrast to the field of large-scale cultural production which submits to the laws of competition for the conquest of the largest possible market, the field of restricted production tends to develop its own criteria for the evaluation of its products, thus achieving the truly cultural recognition accorded by the peer group whose members are both privileged clients and competitors.[5]

Whereas, therefore, the large-scale field of cultural production is oriented towards the generation of profit in a straightforward economic sense, the 'restricted' field of high culture is oriented primarily towards the accumulation of 'symbolic capital', i.e. recognition, kudos and celebrity status, amongst peer groups of producers and consumers.

Before considering the characteristics of high culture in more detail, it is worth attending to Bourdieu's account of the structure of the cultural field in general. In relation to this we are told that

> The literary or artistic field is a *field of forces*, but it is also a *field of struggles* tending to transform or conserve this field of forces. The network of objective relations between positions subtends and orients the strategies of the different positions implemented in their struggle to defend or improve these positions (i.e. position-taking), strategies which depend for their force and form on the position each agent occupies in the power relations.[6]

The individual agent, then, only functions as an individual insofar as he or she takes up a position within the field and, in so doing, projects (implicitly or explicitly) a space of alternative possible or impossible positions. The action of such an agent – when effective – displaces the current pattern of forces within the field and brings about a realignment. Such positioning

> receives its distinctive *value*, from its negative relationship with the co-existing position-takings to which it is objectively related and which determine it by delimiting it. It follows from this…that a position-taking changes, even when the position remains identical, whenever there is a

change in the universe of options that are simultaneously offered for producers and consumers to choose from.[7]

Now, of course, every agent thus located within the field has a personal set of dispositions, beliefs and strategies – a 'habitus', as Bourdieu styles it – which informs his or her position-taking. This subjective aspect, however, is not simply a private phenomenon. It is shaped by initiation into the practices and institutions operative in the field, and by the relation of these to the individual's social and educational background. Given all these points, Bourdieu declares that

> Consequently, we can declare that there is no cultural position-taking that cannot be submitted to a *double interpretation*: it can be related on the one hand, to the universe of cultural position-taking constituent of the specifically cultural field; on the other hand, it can be interpreted as a consciously or unconsciously oriented strategy elaborated in relation to the field of allied or hostile positions.[8]

The question now arises as to what energizes the cultural field in general. Bourdieu's broad answer is the striving for 'legitimacy'. The first form of legitimacy is that symbolic capital which is conferred upon producers through 'consideration' by peer groups of other producers and consumers, and which is the predominant ethos of the 'art for art's sake' tendency. The second form is the symbolic and economic capital which arises through recognition by establishment institutions such as academies, and which thence corresponds to bourgeois tastes. And, finally, there is the 'popular' legitimacy which arises through consecration by a 'mass audience'.

Let us now consider in more detail the first of these modes of legitimacy. It hinges on the position between bourgeois and popular taste. Bourdieu accounts for it in the following terms:

> [T]he privileged members of bourgeois society replace the difference between two cultures, historic products of social conditions, by the essential difference between two natures, a naturally cultivated nature and a naturally natural nature. Thus, the sacralisation of culture and art fulfils a vital function by contributing to the consecration of the social order: to enable educated people to believe in barbarism and persuade the barbarians…of their own barbarity.[9]

This serves

> to conceal the social conditions which render possible not only culture as a second nature in which society recognises human excellence or 'good form' as the 'realisation' in a habitus of the aesthetics of the ruling classes, but also the legitimised dominance…of a particular definition of culture.[10]

Bourdieu's point here is that the aesthetic attitude theorists of the eighteenth century – most notably Kant – draw a distinction between, on the one hand, the 'coarse' pleasures of the senses and practical enjoyments of everyday life and, on the other hand, a disinterested contemplative pleasure whose pursuit is the natural mark of a civilized and cultivated sensibility. This latter, *aesthetic* pleasure – the prerogative of the sensitive few – is thereafter a constitutive element in the construction of social identity. A capacity to enjoy the arts and scholarship in a disinterested way is a decisive mark of distinction. It sets 'me' apart from the herd, and in so doing appears to confer a 'natural' legitimacy on the most fundamental class divisions in society.

In relation to art, in particular, the ideology of taste consolidates itself in an aesthetic disposition, which is the decisive determinant of subsequent production in the 'restricted field' of high culture. Participants in the field, in their striving for 'disinterested' creation, gradually make that field more and more into an arena where production is undertaken and consumed *for its own sake*. Hence:

> It follows…that the principles of differentiation regarded as most legitimate by an autonomous field are those which most completely express the specificity of a determinate type of practice. In the field of art, for example, stylistic and technical principles tend to become the privileged subject of debate among producers (or their interpreters). Apart from laying bare the desire to exclude those artists suspected of submitting to external demands, the affirmation of the primacy of form over function, of the mode of representation over the object of representation, is the most specific expression of the field's claim to produce and impose the principles of a properly cultural legitimacy.[11]

On these terms, the formalist emphasis in art is a testament of autonomy and legitimacy. The pure artist – uncorrupted by mercenary or purely narrative impulses – accrues symbolic capital through his or her disinterested activity. The growth of artistic modernism consists, in effect, of the gradual acceleration of this tendency in the direction of, as it were, *manic differentiation*. Consider, for example, the following passage:

> To 'make one's name'…means making one's mark, achieving recognition (in both senses) of one's *difference* from other producers, especially the most consecrated of them, at the same time, it means *creating a new position* beyond the positions presently occupied, ahead of them, in the *avant-garde*. To introduce difference is to produce time. Hence, the importance, in this struggle for life and survival, of the *distinctive marks*, which, at best aim to identify what are often the most superficial and visible properties of a set of works or producers.[12]

Difference, in the field of art, in other words, is temporally oriented towards the historical. In classic periods of creativity, inherited styles are refined to a point

where they exhaust their possibilities. In 'periods of rupture', the artist lives not by appropriating a past in terms of his or her own present, but by being, through the innovation of new forms (i.e. classics of the future), ahead of the present. In this latter case, however, matters are extremely complex. As Bourdieu puts it:

> Paradoxically in those fields which are the site of a *permanent revolution*, the avant-garde producers are determined by the past even in their innovations which aim to go beyond it, and which are inscribed, as in the original matrix, in the space of the possible, which is immanent in the field itself. What happens in the field is more and more dependent on the specific history of the field, and more and more independent of external history.[13]

This is the real basis of autonomy in the field of high culture. It is a function of the urge to differentiate the individual on the basis of disinterested, purely artistic motives. This means that the marks of distinction whereby differentiation is achieved become progressively more oriented towards the history of the field itself. The relative autonomy of high culture, in other words, is not guaranteed at the outset by some natural aesthetic disposition. Rather, the assumption of such a disposition kick-starts a complex process of social interactions which in their historical unfolding gradually close in upon themselves.

II

Having therefore delineated the main direction of argument in Bourdieu's analysis of the cultural field, the time has now come to evaluate it. Bourdieu's own assessment of its positive significance focuses on the fact that it subjects formalist approaches to culture to a radical critique, but without falling into the crude reductionism which has characterized much Marxist thought. This is a judicious assessment. However, Bourdieu replaces economic-political reductionism with a kind of sociological imperialism which is every bit as problematic *vis-à-vis* its object.

His method is a 'genetic structuralism' (or, as he sometimes calls it, a 'genetic sociology'). Its aims are succinctly set out as follows:

> Science can attempt to bring representations and instruments of thought – all of which lay claim to universality, with unequal chances of success – back to the social conditions of their production and of their use, in other words, back to the historical structure of the field in which they are engendered and within which they operate.[14]

Now it is clear from this (and many rather dismissive comments scattered throughout his works) that Bourdieu regards philosophy as one such socially constructed discourse. However, his own approach is one which simply displaces the foundational epistemological claims (usually associated with philosophy) to the field of sociology in Bourdieu's grand style.

And at least he has the courage of his convictions. Throughout *The Field of Cultural Production* the author busily sets about the formulation of laws derived from 'objective' relations and homologies between different structures in the field of cultural production. According to him, 'historicizing' them means not only (as one might think) relativizing them by recalling that 'they have meaning solely through reference to a determined state of the field of struggle':

> [I]t also means restoring to them necessity by removing them from indeterminacy (which stems from a false externalisation) in order to bring them back to the social conditions of their genesis…. Far from leading to a historicist relativism, the historicisation of the forms of thought which we apply to the historical object, and which may be the product of that object, offers the only real chance of escaping history, if ever so small.[15]

On these terms, only a genetic approach can offer the hope of objective truth whereby 'Science' (meaning sociology in the grand style) can justify a claim to universality. Note how Bourdieu cautiously characterizes this as 'the only real chance of escaping history, if ever so small'. His caution is entirely warranted, for he offers no justification whatsoever as to why sociology in the grand style should have a privileged *modus operandi* which enables it to at least aspire to universality. Indeed, it is profoundly significant in this respect that as well as using terms such as 'objectivity', 'laws', etc. Bourdieu is so committed to rigour, consistency and 'necessity'. But what is so special about these terms? Are they not mere historically specific social constructions as well?

The answer is no. As I have argued throughout this work, they reflect a fundamental layer of constants and cohesion in the embodied subject's relation to the world which make consciousness of self and world possible. For without a categorial framework of such constants there would be no sense of personal history, nor for that matter any other kind of history. Now Bourdieu seems to assume that one is committed either to some form of genetic historicist sociology – whose objective framework of operation is simply taken as given – or to a flawed and ahistorical universalism. There is, however, another possibility; namely that, whilst the very fact of self-consciousness entails constants in experience, these are mediated and given different emphases according to different historical circumstances. The history of philosophy is a telling instance of this.

At first sight, of course, the diversity of this history, with its competing viewpoints and schools, might seem to favour a Bourdieu-type reading. However, let us briefly consider the distinction between universal and particular. All major philosophers have had to have some position in this issue; and, whilst there are many different accounts of the relation between the two elements, the fact of their inherence in our normal cognitive contact with the world is inescapable. Correlated with the universal–particular distinction is the role of subsumption and discrimination as cognitive competences. Some philosophers may see these as functions of the soul; others may see them as inexplicable functions of the coming together of ideas and impressions. Such patterns of explanation could

doubtless be related to broader patterns of social experience current at their time of generation. However, the very fact that such bodies of explanation are *recurrently demanded* indicates that the capacities to subsume and discriminate are constants in the self-consciousness of embodied subjects.

Bourdieu, then, assumes without justification the universalist credentials of sociology in the grand style. By so doing, he overlooks an approach addressing the mediation of constants which would actually make his strategy more consistent and viable. This worry is not *simply* general. For Bourdieu's inability adequately to ground the relation between constants and their mediation exerts a profoundly distorting effect on our understanding of his specific object of interest – namely the field of cultural production itself.

With these general points in mind, we can now address Bourdieu's treatment of the field. First, in order to have any systematic reflective understanding of human activity, we need some basic model which will express both social interchange and the relatedness to the world which that activity simultaneously entails. I say 'entail' here in a strict sense, because self-consciousness is not a private matter. Rather, its growth is directly correlated with the limiting conditions of the physical domain and the acquisition of language (through which the embodied subject is simultaneously initiated into a culture and value-system). Bourdieu's 'field' offers a category which articulates this. But whilst the notion of field (or cognate terms) can thus express a constant in reflective thought, the way it is instantiated will be both historically and geographically variable. In some communities, for example, it will be characterized by a high degree of cohesion focused on collective rite and ritual, and the authority of tradition and hierarchical power relations. In other contexts – such as Renaissance society – matters become much more complex. We will find differentiation in both power relations and patterns of production and consumption, with, of course, homologies between these.

Now the great merit of Bourdieu's approach is the way he shows the fields to be mediated under the specific conditions of modernity. He argues that cultural production in its restricted mode is embedded in much broader social and power relations, and does not begin to function as a relatively autonomous field until the late eighteenth century. Unfortunately, in accounting for this, Bourdieu falls prey to reflective thought's tendency to deploy models with a distorting mechanistic bias. The field is interpreted narrowly as a 'force-field' which strives to conserve its overall level of energy. He also overlaps this usage with a discourse of struggle, competition and relation which is most suited to the notion of *economy*.

The reasons why Bourdieu is tempted to do this are clear. He wants to show that the field of modernity is differentially mediated, and that the striving for distinction and the acquisition of symbolic capital is the governing logic of the field. But to express difference in these terms is to idealize it – to make it purely formal, to fetishize differentiality itself – and, in so doing, to suppress the level of particularity which makes difference *real*. The emphasis which Bourdieu gives to the 'habitus' might seem, superficially, to contradict this. However, the trajectory of his analysis is one which substantially reduces subjective dispositions to an

effect of the social conditions under which they are generated. The whole func-tion of agency in high culture disappears into an infinite regress of differentiality.

There is an element of bad faith in all this. Bourdieu talks as though only his approach will allow a relative autonomy to high culture in a way that avoids the pitfalls of reductionism. But this autonomy is, again, purely formal. It consists in a market for symbolic goods, whose character qua market they deny. Indeed, the putative foundation of the whole field – the aesthetic disposition – is itself simply an effect of these forces. As Bourdieu puts it:

> The artistic field, by its very functioning, creates the aesthetic dispositions without which it could not function. Specifically, it is through the competi-tion among agents with vested interests in the game that the field reproduces endlessly the interest in the game and the belief in the value of the game.[16]

Precisely. The whole thing is a game, whose ultimate rationale is the reinforce-ment of class difference. Modernity is, in the field of high culture, what in this book I have called symbolic arrest or, in Bourdieu's terms, an *alienation* from the truth of objective social relations. Bourdieu's scientistic and objectivist notion of the field, in other words, is implicitly a normative critique of high culture *per se*. It is the subtle revenge of those utopian souls who are unwilling to accept that they ultimately lost the battles of 1968.

The interesting thing is that the critique is quite disastrously wrong. I have already said that Bourdieu's approach formalizes and fetishizes differentiality in a way that suppresses the concrete particular. In effect, his producers and consumers are (like the 'self' of poststructuralist thought) disembodied points, through which the field of forces passes. This diminution of the concrete partic-ular is, of course, fairly inevitable in any discourse which seeks to determine objective sets or laws of social relations. However, in a discourse concerning high culture this distortion is disastrous, since the concrete particular is at the heart of this particular aspect of the civilizing process.

To see why this is so, we must address Bourdieu's account of the aesthetic and, in particular, his misunderstanding of Kant. First, Kant makes a distinction between, on the one hand, our pleasure in the agreeable, the charming and the good and, on the other hand, our delight in the beautiful.[17] The former plea-sures are cruder and more basic, or (in the case of the good) presuppose a 'concept of the object'. Pure aesthetic delight or 'taste', in contrast, is grounded on the enjoyment of formal structure in the way an object presents itself to the senses. It is purely 'contemplative' and 'disinterested', and does not presuppose any specific belief concerning the object's possible functional value, or even any knowledge as to what the object actually is.

Now, according to Bourdieu, the distinction which Kant is making is in effect an arbitrary class-based one. It serves to demarcate the 'coarse' pleasures of the senses and practical existence – which are features of working-class sensibility – from the disinterested aesthetic pleasures, which are the province of the bour-geois. Kant's distinction, in other words, is simply a reflection and legitimization

of *existing social distinction*. It is this ideology of disinterested taste, according to Bourdieu, which then forms the basis of the field of high cultural production. Artists increasingly seek to create and adopt positions which are legitimized by the ideology of tasteful disinterestedness, and which thence achieve distinction from the impure positions of rivals and the already-consecrated establishment figures.

In substantial terms all this is *bunk*. The distinction which Kant draws is, first, a logical one. A pleasure which is grounded on the enjoyment of relations between parts and whole in a formal configuration is a purely cognitive one. It is rooted in the perception of the concrete particular and focuses *on* that. Our pleasure in the good, in contrast, implies that the object is being judged purely in terms of the way it exemplifies a set of more general characteristics (i.e. 'good *for*') bound up with the means/end nexus of practical existence. Pleasure in the agreeable and the charming is different again. It is a function of the causal impact of objects upon the senses – and simply expresses personal preferences and partialities.

Now Kant clearly ranks the disinterested pleasures of taste higher than the others; and reading all Bourdieu's work (especially the Appendix to *Distinction*), one could be forgiven for thinking that Kant does so with no other reason than the justification of his own class-based preferences. In fact, Kant offers *a massive and complex account* of the deeper significance of taste (on lines indicated at the end of Chapter 5). Basically, the enjoyment of formal qualities for their own sake is something which arises from the way in which an object's phenomenal structure engages two cognitive capacities – understanding and imagination – which are constants in experience. Without their interaction, communication between human beings would not be possible. Hence, the pleasure of taste reflects and secures our belonging to both world and other. Indeed, the cultivation of the aesthetic disposition, whilst logically independent of morality, is something which has side-effects. It is a basis of community, and of striving for consensus over narrow social and personal partiality.

In Kantian terms, therefore, taste is not the province of the sensitive and cultivated elite; it is a necessary expression of our shared humanity and of an achieved quality of life *vis-à-vis* the individual's relation to the world. In suggesting that it is the prerogative of the middle classes, Bourdieu evinces the patronization that is (nowadays) the special prerogative of the politically correct. Empirically speaking, taste in modern times may be an important element in defining certain aspects of bourgeois identity. However, it does not *have* to be. It is not *sufficiently* characterizable in these terms. As I have argued in Chapter 5 and elsewhere, aesthetic pleasure can be established as a necessary element in self-consciousness itself.[18] On these terms the aesthetic would then figure as a useful concept for social theory, on the basis of how it is historically mediated. Rather than see it – falsely – as defined by class identity, we would ask what it is about the experience which enables it to function in such identity, i.e. why it is *able* to be regarded as a source of 'symbolic capital'. We would also want to question the patterns of its distribution, and the nature of the circumstances which facilitate or inhibit access to it, for specific groups or classes.

There is another important question raised by taste. For Bourdieu not only misunderstands its cognitive status (and thence true role in culture) but is also completely confused *vis-à-vis* its relation to art. Again, the example of Kant is instructive here. For him, taste has only a peripheral relation to art, since it is primarily oriented towards the *enjoyment of nature*. Art does have a connection with the aesthetic, but it involves rather a different structure of aesthetic response. In particular, *never once in the critical corpus does Kant link the experience of fine art to the notion of disinterestedness*.

He emphasizes, instead, two factors. First, fine art is the product of 'genius'.[19] That is to say, unlike representations which merely transit information or ones which entertain, it must have the qualities of originality and exemplariness. This means that through refining and innovating in relation to traditions of production the world of genius offers a distinctive way of doing things which other artists can learn from. (It is thus separate from 'original nonsense', wherein clever 'individuals' try to be different for its own sake.) Second, the work of art is an embodiment of 'aesthetic ideas'. These are the conceptual core of a representation, whose stylistic treatment is such that the work cannot be reduced to (i.e. paraphrased) in terms of this conceptual core. As Kant puts it, 'by an aesthetic idea I mean that representation of the imagination which induces much thought, yet without the possibility of any definite thought whatever…being adequate to it, and which language, consequently, can never get quite on level terms with'.[20]

Such a work addresses or presents meaningful forms to the senses 'with a completeness of which nature affords no parallel'.[21] It is thus able to 'remodel experience'. Kant's points here indicate that art has a privileged status, not *vis-à-vis* its function as a source of special distinction, but, rather, as a mode of communication between individuals. The artwork is explicitly different from nature and from other works, and in signifying this difference relates individual producers and consumers together in a new and positive way. Kant himself does not say much about this, but it might be linked to a distinctive form of aesthetic empathy wherein one identifies with the other's view of things (or aspects of it), yet without losing track of one's own distinctive outlook on life. Indeed, I have outlined in detail elsewhere how this should be linked to a specifically artistic version of disinterestedness rather than one derived from Kant's position on taste.[22]

Now Bourdieu himself observes that 'the more the field is capable of functioning as a field of competition for cultural legitimacy, the more individual production must be orientated towards the search for culturally pertinent features endowed with value in the field's own economy'.[23] Hence, the more autonomous it becomes, the more the field is oriented towards formal and technical values for their own sake. This is the tasteful disinterestedness which for Bourdieu is the basis of high culture's symbolic capital. However, it is clear that for Kant this disinterestedness, whilst being characteristic of taste, is certainly not characteristic of the production and reception of art. And the growth of art in the modernist period bears out Kant's position. For whilst the traditional didactic and narrative functions of art are gradually subverted, and whilst the notion of

art for art's sake enjoys vogue, the genius of multiple avant-garde movements is one which manifests different approaches to the aesthetic idea.

The development of abstract painting from Kandinsky to Malevich is a perfect instance of this. At first sight, these seem exemplars of purely formal interests, but even a cursory survey of the context of production shows the artists to be striving for new codes in which to address different and deeper aspects of experience than those addressed by traditional art. Tasteful disinterestedness simply does not come into it. The group of artists whom it might loosely fit are Whistler and his Bloomsbury successors, and those 'post-painterly' abstractionists who gravitated around Clement Greenberg. But, even here, the concept would only apply with a great deal of qualification.

The problem is, then, that Bourdieu's notion of the field is one which is organized around a governing concept – disinterestedness – whose application is hugely problematic. The real basis of difference in the field is not simply a space of opposing positions or works, but the substantial difference of visions – of aesthetic ideas – which create those differences. On Bourdieu's model, the field of artistic production becomes more and more autonomous, to the degree that it approximates a circus of bourgeois buffoons maniacally pursuing the achievement of original nonsense so as to achieve distinction from one another.

At a few points – especially in his rich concrete analyses of Flaubert and Manet – Bourdieu does get beyond this. Indeed, he observes that

> Specifically aesthetic conflicts about the legitimate vision of the world – in the last resort, about what deserves to be represented and the right way to represent – are political conflicts (appearing in their most euphemised form) for the power to impose the dominant definition of reality, and social reality in particular.[24]

Yes; but we must have some general criterion of the legitimate aesthetic idea. For it is only insofar as the idea is in some way compelling beyond the circumstances of production that it has the potency to instantiate and occasion real and sustained political antagonism.

The problem with Bourdieu, and indeed poststructuralist notions of the field generally, is that they suppress questioning of this criterion. For (as I argued earlier), rather than seek out the identification and specific historicization of constants in human experience, they assume a kind of cultural solipsism wherein all realities are simply constructed from relations of difference. This means that individual agency is reduced to sets of relations, which in turn can be reduced to other sets of relations. *Signs of difference are taken to sufficiently 'constitute' difference.* Effects are mistaken for causes. This not only invites an infinite regress; in effect, it represents the human subject as disembodied – simply an ideal point where different forces interact. An embodied subject, however, has the power to reconfigure and then transform forces – both conscious and unconscious – which he or she encounters. The concrete embodied individual is qua individual a positive and paramount term.

Bourdieu's sociological imperialism, then, is one which imposes strict burdens upon its cultural subjects, as well as upon its courtiers in the fields of philosophy and art history.

There is also at least one further aspect of contemporary civilization where poststructuralist notions of the field have led to philosophically flawed standpoints. This, as I shall now argue, has led to a wholly inappropriate response to recent encroachments of symbolic arrest upon higher education.

12 Knowledge and the attack upon higher education

Introduction

The modern development of university curricula and teaching methods on a worldwide basis has been primarily a piecemeal affair. Rarely has it been explored on the basis of a systematic conception of knowledge. This has given rise to conditions of extreme vulnerability which have recently been exploited in some parts of the world to the most dire effect. Specifically, there is a broad, symbolically arrested, postmodern approach to higher education which has been forced upon British universities and, increasingly, continental European ones since the late 1980s. The strategy was invented by parties of the right but has been continued with equal – if not greater – authoritarian vigour by parties of the left. The broad rationale for this strategy is the cult (or, rather, fetish) of 'efficiency'.

This rationale is an illusion. The 'strategies' and jargon of 'auditing' 'quality assurance', 'modularization' and the like are not simply pragmatic. They (and their stifling bureaucracies of implementation) represent the imposition of a crude cybernetic consumerist model of knowledge and intellectual exchange upon a reality which is far more complex. This represents the triumph of symbolic arrest in an area which should not only have been immune to it, but which should have been at the forefront of resistance.

It should be clear from the preceding remarks that, at the very least, government interference in higher education raises profound philosophical issues. Outside specialist journals, however, recent debates in the area have not adequately reflected these. Rather than address fundamentals, they have been content to accept the government's authoritarian strictures as a *fait accompli* and to chatter endlessly on the finer points of how these might best be implemented. The pervasiveness of this culture of chatter and jargon is itself, of course, a symptom of how thinking about education has become generally impoverished.

In this chapter, I will raise some fundamental issues of a philosophical kind. Specifically, in section i I will outline a theory concerning the subjective conditions of knowledge and will argue that these are *profoundly* dialogical in character. In section ii, I will trace the ramifications of this account in relation to its institutionalization in higher education. In particular, I will argue that the pressures

currently exerted by government policy are not only empirically flawed, but at odds (in moral and other ways) with the dialogical structure of knowledge itself. I shall also consider some possible objections to my view.

Finally, in section iii, I will argue that the dominant 'poststructuralist' dimensions of contemporary 'oppositional' thinking are actually deeply complicit with the effects of government policy. Again, I will consider some possible objections to this view. My conclusion will hold that the independence of higher education is to be justified on the grounds of it embodying that critical autonomy which is the ultimate condition of a free society.

I

The very concept 'knowledge' entails a relation between an object which is known and a subject who knows it. Is this relation a purely logical one, or does the situation of the subject also play a constitutive role in the relation?

There is a very strong (almost 'commonsense' view) that the relation should be viewed ideally as a purely logical one. On this view – very much the legacy of the Enlightenment – the subjective conditions of knowledge are barriers which are to be overcome. To know in the fullest sense involves a stripping away of prejudices and personal interests in order to yield oneself fully to the object. The knowing subject aspires to a detached universal standpoint free from the historical contingencies of his or her own time and place. This view is problematic. Throughout this book I have argued that there are indeed constants in the human condition, but that these are of functional rather than essentialist significance. How they operate and their broader meaning change under historically specific conditions. Categorial structure and historical instantiation are reciprocally dependent. Each is part of the full definition of the other.

The question arises, therefore, as to how this dynamic reciprocity informs both the actual pursuit of knowledge and those institutions which are meant to facilitate such pursuit. In respect of the former, it is again Elias who provides a vital clue, through his analysis of the structure of conversation. This simple social relation cannot be adequately represented either by the physical model of the action and reaction of balls colliding with one another or by the physiological model of stimulus and response. The reason for this is that the ideas of the protagonists may change during the course of the conversation, and an element of conflict may even appear:

> Then the ideas of one party enter into the inner-dialogue of the other as an adversary, and so drive on his thoughts. The special feature of this kind of process, that we might call a network-figure, is that in its course each of the partners forms ideas that were not there before, or pursues further ideas already present.[1]

Elias then goes on to emphasize that in this conversational relationship the direction and order followed by the structure of argument is determined

primarily by the *relation* between the parties involved. Indeed, as I shall now argue, the relation between the object of knowledge and the subject who pursues it is not a 'network-figure' which is merely analogous to conversation, but in fact a specific kind of conversational network-figure which bonds objects, individuals and the horizon of tradition. To show this I will focus, in the first instance, on one of the four constitutive factors in self-consciousness (outlined in Chapter 1), namely language.

As we saw, language is not simply a medium or tool; rather, it is a fundamental mode of being. In using it, we are predetermined to engage with the world in specific ways. We are situated not only within a present community of language-users, but also within the legacy and tradition of language-use which informs that community. Indeed, the formation of self-awareness through initiation into language is only possible insofar as we are trained in the following of complex rules. These rules are not simply linguistic; rather, they internalize and transmit to the subject a whole network of social norms and values.

Given this, there can be no detached universal standpoint, on ontological grounds. To a finite subject, an object of knowledge can only be given to understanding under a *horizon* of interpretation. This means that what is known is only delineated and brought to attention and judgement on the basis of the position which the subject occupies within a specific culture and tradition of language-use. Subjective conditions of knowledge, in other words, are at least partially constitutive of their object. 'To know', in even its most minimal sense, is to situate and pre-characterize the object on the basis of conditions derived from tradition.

In relation to this, Gadamer has suggested that interpreting a text

> is not an arbitrary procedure that we undertake on our own initiative but…as a question in relation to the answer that is expected in the text. The anticipation of an answer itself presumes that the person asking it is part of the tradition and regards himself as addressed by it.[2]

Generalizing this, one might say that the subjective conditions of knowledge are profoundly dialogical. A knowledge-claim in its formation and destiny is part of a complex conversation between object, tradition and the particular interpreter. Again, Gadamer usefully observes that

> To conduct a conversation means to allow oneself to be conducted by the object to which the partners in the conversation are directed. It requires that one does not try to out-argue the other person, but that one really considers the weight of the other's opinion. Hence it is an art of questioning. For…to question means to lay open, to place in the open. As against the solidity of opinions, questioning makes the object and all its possibilities fluid.[3]

These are important points, for whilst the idea of a detached universal standpoint is problematic, this does not mean that knowledge is simply the reflection of prejudice or the authority of tradition. Rather, the human subject can

become autonomous and impartial *through* critical dialogue. To give the other's viewpoint and the voices of tradition full weight in relation to one's own is to create conditions whereby one's own interpretation is tested with full rigour and thence strengthened. This reciprocal constellation of voices around the object of knowledge is a whole which exceeds the sum of its parts. It is both virtuous and ontological, insofar as, through respect for oneself through the other (exemplified in tradition), meaning and truth are in a process of constant emergence from the object.

The view I am proposing, then, is one which does justice to the finite and fallible nature of human understanding. There is no absolute objectivity – no supreme and definitive moment of enlightenment – in human knowledge. However, the conversation between object, tradition and particular interpretation allows the potential of all parties to be tested and continuously advanced. This does not imply an 'anything goes' relativism. Rather, it acknowledges and turns to positive account the fact that knowledge-claims are capable of being refined, modified, rejected and reinstated. The moment of knowledge is not frozen. It is not a transition from a mutable finite world to a timeless realm of mechanically perfect facts, or essences. Rather, universal significance is generated within the particular.

At the heart of this is the constant mediation of embodiment. All knowledge-claims have reference to the body (and the network of reciprocal relations involved in it) – either in terms of positing or explaining possibilities of action, or in terms of positing or explaining the broader framework in which such action is located. As we have seen throughout this book, this fact is often overlooked by those of poststructuralist persuasion. Consciousness is seen, in effect, as the interplay of one sort of 'text' or another.

However, every text, every knowledge-claim is the extending of what in the context of Cassirer's philosophy I called a 'latent schema'.[4] This schema consists in the fact that around the immediate perceptual field the human subject tacitly projects a field of possible actions or situations, on the basis of the body's capacities, its personal history and social context. Because this condition is shared, every particular action, history and context has a more general significance; it instantiates some *kind* of action, history and context, and thence is capable of being instantiated again in different ways and at other times and places. All texts and knowledge-claims project an aspect of the latent schema in this general way. An astrological work, Newtonian mechanics, *The Odyssey* – indeed *any* text – always has a general excess of meaning that transcends its author's particular intentions and the immediate context of its creation and reception.

Consider, for example, the theory of phlogiston, i.e. the substance once supposed to exist in all combustible bodies and thought to be released during combustion. No chemist now subscribes to this theory. But we can understand what the theory means because the concepts and terms it employs concern the behaviour of bodies, the possession of properties and the relation of release. (Even the most abstract scientific theory harks back to patterns of impact, transmission and exchange which are extensions of patterns first learnt at the level of direct embodied interaction with the world.)

Now although the theory of phlogiston has been abandoned, it does not remain inert. Viewed in the context of tradition we can see it as a strategically valuable hypothesis or as one which actually held back scientific advance. It invites questioning and debate about scientific method in general, and can figure as evidence in contemporary discussion (such as this one). One might even encounter strategies in other realms of human behaviour, which the phlogiston hypothesis might illuminate through structural kinship.

The point is, then, that any knowledge-claim has a potentially universal significance insofar as it draws its terms from or refers back to general characteristics of our embodied reciprocity with the world. This is why earlier on in this work I emphasized the importance of the progressive articulation of specialist symbolic practices in the civilizing process. Genuine intellectual advance is made possible by critically building upon and preserving what has gone before. Civilization moves forward only by carrying its past alongside. The common factor of embodiment provides a core around which knowledge-claims, tradition and individual interpretations constellate in continuing progressive articulation. It is what makes dialogue between different cultures and between the past and present of specific cultures possible.

Let me now therefore draw together the salient aspects of my discussion so far. First, I argued that *vis-à-vis* the subjective conditions of knowledge there can be no detached universal standpoint insofar as we are linguistic beings. Our position within a language and culture – all in all, a tradition – provides a horizon which is partially constitutive of the object of knowledge. It both delineates it and orients us towards it. I then argued that this orientation involves a complex dialogue between the object and tradition and the particular interpretation, hingeing on a respect for the other. This dialogue, however, is not simply an interplay of texts. At its core is the way all knowledge-claims gravitate around what is constant in experience, namely embodiment and the network of reciprocal relations which are inherent in it. It is an engagement with this core which sustains the possibility of a claim having universal significance.

The subjective conditions of knowledge, then, are *profoundly dialogical* in both ethical and ontological terms. In particular, they demand a courageous receptivity to tradition (i.e. one which engages with and does justice to the other's viewpoint in the fullest sense), but one which is willing to discriminate, debate, appraise and then advance. Through this, the provisionality of the knowledge-claim itself is invested with its own ontological dignity insofar as the continuity of dialogue allows it at least latent presence and the possibility of effective return.

II

Given the analysis so far, one can hardly be neutral about how the pursuit of knowledge is institutionalized in higher education. *Dialogue* must be the heart of the matter. One might develop what this involves as follows.

First, my analysis suggests that the teacher's proper role is not so much instructor as mediator. He or she is in the business of addressing some given body

of texts or facts on the basis of an exposition of those interpretations already laid down by tradition. This, of course, cannot be wholly passive or neutral. For the teacher is already situated *vis-à-vis* tradition, and may have a well-formed opinion in relation to it. This opinion, together (of course) with a clear statement of its strengths and possible weaknesses, should also be communicated.

To fully embrace this task demands, of course, that the teacher is not just a mediator, but also a scholar who is fully engaged in the field of research. On these terms, then, the teacher's role is to conduct a dialogue with the student, tradition and the object of knowledge. The aim of such a dialogue is clear. It is the creation of new interpretations, or at least the conditions for them. This demands originality of thought and exposition from the teacher, and a willingness to be guided by where the conversation leads. If this process is to create the conditions for new interpretation in the student, this involves a capacity to inspire. To inspire – as opposed to merely communicating – entails a manifest degree of enthusiasm and commitment to learning on the teacher's part. It is this which energizes, and to some degree directs, the conversation. In effect, it means that the personality of the teacher is more than a contingent part of the teaching process.

As in the dialogical structure of knowledge itself, then, so university education, too, focuses on concrete personal relationships. This dialogue between the parties involved is a constant flow and reorientation of positions, which cannot simply be directed according to rules and canons fully worked out in advance. Of course, not all teachers adhere to methods that follow the dialogical structure of knowledge itself. Indeed, the nature and ramifications of this structure are open to interpretation. This is why the teacher has a responsibility to both his or her colleagues and the university itself. He or she must be willing to engage in a broader dialogue concerning the pattern and standards of his or her own teaching and their relation to those of the university as a whole.

Again, it must be stressed that this is a conversation; it is a search for refinements or revisions of accepted truths and methods. And this, of course, entails a responsibility on the university's part to accept that modes of teaching are – to a considerable degree – personal things, to be mediated rather than directed from on high. It also follows that the university should be prepared to defend the dialogical pursuit of knowledge from those who would seek to manipulate it for particular political ends.

This analysis suggests that the dialogical structure of knowledge has, in its implications for teaching, an ethical import. This does not consist in some high-minded (but blind) ideal of the disinterested pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. Rather, it entails a reciprocal responsibility on the part of the teacher for both self and others. The conversation only works if, for *all* parties involved, there is advance or self-improvement, or (at least) a kind of increase of being, that is not gained at the gratuitous expense of one of the other parties in the dialogue.

Consider, in this respect, the fate of F.R. Leavis. His work radically reoriented the tradition of literary criticism, but is also too frequently dismissed on the basis of reductionist arguments which denigrate the idea of a 'great tradition' as the

'mere' reflection of a certain strand of white middle-class patriarchalism. It has this aspect; indeed, Leavis himself was in some ways as intolerant as his persecutors. However, the very fact that Leavis's work was able to redirect tradition in the way it did argues that it has an existential potency which the texts of other critics did not. Indeed, specific layers and structures of argument in his work may have a capacity to illuminate what is common to humans over and above their gender, race and class. Hence Leavis still has the potential to inspire the student and open out new avenues of exploration, as his work is situated in new critical and historical circumstances.

This all means, of course, that whilst a clever reductive demolition job of Leavis may aggrandize the teacher's ego, it shrinks the experiential and interpretative possibilities of the text, and those of the teacher and student. It is therefore a diminution of knowledge and a failure of responsibility to both self and other.

Now, it should be noted that in articulating this moral dimension to knowledge and learning I am not simply imposing a kind of loose liberal give-and-take ideal on the situation. Rather, as in my tracing of the dialogical structures of knowledge, I am following up the implications of the finite structure of understanding. The human being is not a god. He or she is bound up in a conversation which enforced conformity and arbitrary closure serve only to arrest and diminish. This arrest and closure are an impoverishment of the individual and of the civilizing process itself.

Given this analysis, the question now arises of what happens when the structure of higher education is determined by criteria other than the subjective conditions of knowledge itself. A good example here is the pressure brought to bear upon the universities by Mrs Thatcher and her followers from 1979. Since similar pressures have been exerted by the right in other countries too, I shall call this general approach 'petty-mercantilism'. To consider its implications, I will begin with an anecdote.

Some years ago, the present author attended a debate between a philosopher and a particularly supercilious Secretary of State for Higher Education. When asked about the closure of specific departments in the university hosting the debate, the Secretary of State answered that such individual closures were the responsibility of the particular university and not the government. By the same logic, of course, it follows that in the case of those collaborationist Gendarmerie who selected victims for reprisals instigated by the German occupiers it was the Gendarmerie who were morally responsible, and not the Germans themselves.

There are two lessons to draw from the Secretary of State's response. One will be spelt out now, the other a little further on. The immediate moral is that, in democracies at least, governments will rarely, if ever, accept that their policies directly determine the structure of learning and that they must ultimately be held responsible in relation to these structures. In this respect, the petty-mercantilist programme has explicitly addressed itself to issues of fiscal and operational efficiency through competition, and the cultivation of 'choice' in higher education. These, so the story goes, are measures aimed at how higher education is

organized, and do not have a bearing on the actual way knowledge is pursued or on its content. This remains the prerogative of the universities themselves.

However, let us consider some of the prescribed measures. Familiar examples of changes hingeing on competition are such things as making departments responsible for their own budgets, the introduction of pay differentials (to reward 'high-flyers'), the attraction of funding from private sources, the 'auditing' of teaching and research, and, as a result of all this, the financial rewarding of 'efficient' institutions and the penalizing of 'inefficient' ones. From the viewpoint of stimulating 'choice', pressure has been exerted to introduce semesterization, modular courses and shorter degrees, so as to allow student 'customers' to pick and mix their degrees from what is on offer at different universities.

The pressure for such change raises important empirical, moral and ontological problems. I shall address these in turn. First, the most familiar empirical ones. The changes have already brought about a massive decrease in 'operational efficiency' at the level of teaching and research. From heads of department downwards (but especially for the heads), the pressure of paperwork bound up with budgeting and auditing has diminished the amount of time available for teaching and research. Pay differentials breed envy and resentment, and do not necessarily see 'high-flyers' rewarded. Rather, they also enable those who are academically feeble to secure advancement and preferment though 'service', i.e. participation in the swelling university bureaucracy.

The changes aimed at facilitating 'choice' promise to be similarly unfortunate. The British higher education system has been renowned for its excellence and distinctive character – qualities which (as I said earlier) are connected to one another. To standardize the system in accordance with American 'models' would be an active diminution of choice – at least when it comes to attracting long-term fee-paying foreign students.

Now this listing of changes, and the woes consequent upon them, could be continued far beyond those just enumerated. I do not propose to do so. Suffice to say that those whose profession is teaching in higher education are, as is commonly said, *demoralized*. This is usually taken to mean 'unhappy with their lot', pessimistic, etc. However, it has a much deeper significance. The moral dimension of the dialogical structure at the heart of the pursuit of knowledge is radically disrupted. The burgeoning bureaucracy and university diktats concerning academic auditing, together with the petty rivalries engendered by the whole ethos of competition, distort the flow of dialogue.

Worse still is the fact that the pressures for change are exerted from without the field of learning. In this respect, we will recall the Secretary of State's attempt to shift moral responsibility for departmental closure to collaborationist university authorities. This collaborationist evasion does indeed now pervade the universities themselves. For example, a university well known to the present author introduced a system for 'auditing' teaching. It was admitted by the university authorities that the system was 'alien' to the ethos of a European university. Nevertheless, it was pushed through on the grounds that if it was not adopted something worse would be forced upon the university by the govern-

ment. To make the appropriate analogy: the collaborationist Gendarmerie do not resist the order to select victims, on the grounds that, if they do, even worse reprisals will be instigated by the occupiers. This collaborationist mentality has also infected the ordinary teacher. Even the die-hard Marxist keeps his or her head down, Vichy style, and goes along with the changes in order to keep earning a living, and in the hope that one day they will simply 'go away'.

All in all, then, rather than facilitate the dialogical flow of knowledge, government interference in university organization has inhibited it by creating *an ethos of moral squalor*, wherein responsibility to self and other is abrogated in favour of conformity and closure. This is even worse than it appears, for ontological reasons. At the heart of this are the phenomena of modularization and 'auditing'.

Consider modularization. Here, the notion of a sustained and in-depth dialogue between the student, a body of thought and a specific teacher is abandoned in favour of what promises to be a 'pick-and-mix' approach. A modular system pushes in the direction of the 'liberal arts'-type degree, where the student follows wherever his or her interests or idle curiosity happen to wander. This does not centre on dialogue but, rather, on self-indulgence, where the student is invited to learn a little about portions of a lot.

Now, even before the petty-mercantilist attack it was 'trendy' in higher education to affirm – in loose terms at least – the 'unity' of knowledge. Here, the criterion of unity was not continuity of dialogue, but rather vague (or, in the case of Marxism, rather precise) theories that individual agency and events are primarily a function of much broader and diverse forces acting upon them. Hence, knowledge in the humanities and social sciences should reflect this breadth and diversity by adopting an interdisciplinary approach. The modular system predisposes teacher and student to this view of things, insofar as it attacks the 'artificial' separation of subject areas exemplified by traditional teaching structures. 'Picking and mixing', in other words, putatively facilitates a broad synthesis which is truer to the complex composition of the objects of knowledge; and if the individual module can be 'constructed' on an interdisciplinary basis, so much the better.

This view of modularization's relation to knowledge is at best contentious. It may be, for example, that it radically underestimates the significance of the individual agent. For qua embodied subject, such an agent cannot be reduced to the sum of causal factors at work upon him or her. Each factor of this kind is appropriated in terms of a unique personal history which responds to and situates influences in a distinctive way. Even at a more general level of understanding of historical, societal and artistic change, for example, the concreteness of human practice presents problems. When it comes to explaining and analysing the genesis, structure and effects of these practices, we are operating with an essentially abstract mode of understanding. Its function is to resolve the complex whole into those elements and forces which are constitutive of it.

However, the living unity of the whole cannot be reconstructed from this vantage point. Any interdisciplinary synthesis which seeks to do so is just as

'artificial' as the subject divides it purports to cross in the first instance. Analytic thought functions most effectively when it acknowledges its own limitations *vis-à-vis* the concrete object of knowledge. Given this, it may sometimes be better to take the sustained in-depth approach of the specialist discipline – which, by definition, is confined to a limited aspect of the practice – rather than some *fantasy* of its totality.

There is a further problem which must be mentioned. Modularization often invites the abandonment of sustained chronological or evolutionary-type survey courses. The emphasis instead is on 'problems'. In some contexts that may be of positive significance. However, in disciplines such as art history or languages there is a case for saying that the chronological/evolutionary-type approach is conceptually tied to the very nature of the object of study. Indeed, an understanding of *any* discipline's evolution and formation *as* a discipline strengthens the student's understanding of the knowledge-claims it makes. This provides a powerful reason for preferring the sustained survey course to the modular approach.

The points which I am making here do not pretend to be an exhaustive analysis. Rather, I am showing that 'modularization' is not some self-evident good, but something which raises major philosophical issues. Ideally these should be dealt with on a discipline-to-discipline basis. This *necessity* for dialogue, however, has been totally ignored by university authorities. Discussion only concerns *how* modularization is to be implemented. The packaging of knowledge into easily digestible units for the student-customer outweighs all other considerations.

A similar point applies in relation to auditing. In a university well known to the present author this takes, amongst other forms, the guise of a couple of booklets embodying diktats and sample questionnaires, one of which is entitled 'Quality Assurance Procedures'. What does this ask of the interpreter over and above those questions overtly asked in the text? Well, of course, it asks the teacher/interpreter to regard the dialogical process as a clearly definable and gradable product. He or she is asked to set out 'aims' and 'learning outcomes', to communicate 'skills', and to propose 'models', 'programmes' and the like; '[i]ndividual lecturers need to ensure that their teaching complies with the University's Code of Practice'; students are expected to grade aspects of the teacher's performance on a scale of 1 to 5 and remark on whether information handouts have been issued or not, etc.

At best, the whole impetus of this strategy is to treat knowledge as a body of contained facts to be transmitted as efficiently as possible to the student-consumer. Discussion of the whole notion of 'Quality in Teaching and Learning' is confined to the glib five- or six-line paragraph at the beginning of the document. Again, a topic with *massive* philosophical implications concerning the nature of knowledge is decided, packaged and imposed – without any reference to the need for sustained dialogue. Similar considerations, of course, also hold in relation to national policy *vis-à-vis* the assessment of research. (For a number of years in Britain, indeed, this took the absurd form of books, papers, book reviews, etc. being awarded points. The 'effective' departments were the ones which could accumulate most points.)

The problem with auditing, then, is that it shrinks and distorts the dialogical structure of knowledge itself. It pressurizes the lecturer and student into interpreting knowledge and learning as things which can be sufficiently expressed in pseudo-quantificational terms on the basis of crude 'models' derived from cybernetics. Given the analysis offered earlier, however, it is clear that the pursuit of knowledge cannot be articulated in these terms. The very concept of 'auditing' teaching and learning in higher education is the institutionalization of a category-mistake. *It is symbolic arrest run riot.*

Now as category-mistakes go, this one is actually very bad indeed. In order to please their political masters, university authorities have devised auditing schemes which have the cybernetic look of what they imagine goes on in industrial management. These schemes are, in fact, much narrower. The real affinities are with the techniques of control and manipulation developed by the *advertising industry*. Baudrillard has observed that

> The entire system of human communication has passed from that of a syntactically complex language structure to a binary sign-system of question/answer – of perpetual test.[5]

This is characteristic of Baudrillard overstatement, in that it points out, not an actuality, but, rather, a real threat. The flexible temporalized question and answer of knowledge's dialogical structure threatens to be colonized by the static stimulus/response question and answer of the advertising questionnaire. Again, this distorts not only the structure of knowledge, but also the moral integrity of the interpreter. One adapts what one teaches to the demands of the questionnaire, rather than to those of the questioner and the object. One abrogates a responsibility that runs much deeper than mere conformity to the dictates of authority.

I have argued, then, that the dominant petty-mercantilism currently being enforced on university organization in Britain and elsewhere is one which has, in the final analysis, potentially catastrophic ramifications through its contradictory relation to the dialogical structure of knowledge. This, of course, is what happens wherever a government seeks to remake educational structures in the image of its own ideology. The foundations of knowledge itself become atrophied.

Let me now consider an objection to my position. The Secretary of State (whom we have already encountered) sneeringly dismissed arguments about the value of the pursuit of knowledge *per se* as elitist and, in effect, a return to Matthew Arnold. Leaving aside the fact that Arnold's work is still of potentially great interpretative interest precisely because of contemporary worries about education, the accusation of elitism should be addressed directly.

First, let us give the accusation more substance through the following argument. The connection made between the dialogical structure of knowledge and university teaching might be said to be fundamentally stipulative. This is because whilst the pursuit of knowledge *per se* may be a part of the university ethos it cannot be the whole story. A university has an obligation to the material life as

well as the spiritual life of a society. It must equip a student with skills and capacities which enable him or her to deal with the vicissitudes of earning a living, and must also offer practical subjects which meet the specialized needs of production of an advanced technological society. Hence, if university teaching is increasingly structured by the demands of the audit and technology, and is organized on the basis of 'relevance' and choice, it will be directing knowledge towards real practical needs; it will be a preparation for life in the fullest sense. To base a university education on a dialogical 'model', in contrast, is to suppress and implicitly degrade precisely the practices which are the real basis of present society's communality. In effect, the university teacher elevates his or her own narrow interests into an ideal for the student to aspire to.

In response to this objection, a distinction should be drawn between the overt and hidden curriculum of a university. The overt curriculum is the study of specific subjects on the dialogical basis outlined earlier. It centres on a process of question, argument and evaluation, and involves both verbal and written interchange, and a willingness to follow where the question leads. The mode of being of both teacher and student can be characterized as active and reciprocal mediation. Each draws the other forth in relation to the object of knowledge, in a way that continually realizes the potential of the object. The hidden curriculum of university education consists in the fact that this dialogue is, at the same time, an education for life in *the deepest sense of all*. There is a simple empirical and a more important conceptual aspect to this. The empirical aspect consists in the fact that the best learning of all is by example, rather than by overt instruction. The dialogical process – if effective – draws its protagonists in like players in a game. The dialogue absorbs, and even as it discloses its object it relates the protagonists in a morally positive give and take. Thus the student is initiated non-coercively into a proper – that is to say, both critical and receptive – relation to authority, in a way that is seldom available at the level of school education.

To bring out the conceptual aspect of the hidden curriculum one must first consider the full implications of the 'anti-elitist' position. A student whose education is guided by principles of assessment derived from the advertising industry (i.e. a 'customer' or consumer) is fundamentally a passive subject. He or she is conditioned into expecting what can be said about the world to be packaged (or 'modularized') into an easily repeatable or organizable body of fact. He or she only feels at ease when conforming to some easily defined role or stereotype. Now a subject such as this may have 'skills' or competences of a practical value, but the material and practical basis of a society's communality does not consist of mere worker-automatons in concert. Decisions about facts and practices, their significance and deployment, their potential and validity require precisely the dialogical mediation that is inherent in the structure of knowledge itself.

If the subject is deficient in interpretative potency – which is, of course, more than a mere mastery of facts – then he or she is destined to be manipulated and controlled by external forces, notably those of the media. A subject of this sort becomes less and less capable of distinguishing between what is real and what is mere image or simulacrum. The 'sound-bite' culture of contemporary politics

and the three-minute attention span in the reception of stimuli are entirely characteristic of this passivity.

My conceptual point, then, is this. The basis of communality in a free society is (*at least* as much as its material productions and practices) the dialogical exchange between critically autonomous individuals. It is this exchange which enables material practices to be evaluated, contested and affirmed, etc. This is not only the basis of the moral and political life of a society; it is the basis of its *felt* identity as a society. At a time when sections of the contemporary world are becoming increasingly marginalized (the so-called underclass), when politics is trivialized through adaptation to the needs of the mass media, the dialogical foundation of university education needs to be affirmed all the more imperatively. An individual can only be a citizen in the fullest sense if he or she has the wherewithal to belong to the social substance in a critical way; and the existence of a distinctive and independent university mode of education is the one guarantee that society will continue to be supplied with at least a core of such critically autonomous individuals.

This, indeed, is why university education is an ideal – an experience that ought be made accessible to as many people as possible. Of course, some people do not care for such education, and others simply do not have the right material circumstances to obtain access to it. There are also those who actively disparage it in favour of 'the university of life'. However, even those who are excluded or exclude themselves from the university are constantly brought into contact with and learn from those who have been initiated into the deepest modes of critical autonomy. The university works invisibly thorough its effects wherever there is a passion for debate and dialogue, where answers are not seen to be cut and dried and simply ready for packaging and despatch to the passive consumer. In a sense, the dialogical process of a university education is the very heartbeat of a free society.

Now, again, it might be objected that if university education is so desirable it is surely the duty of a government to ensure that universities use resources efficiently so as to maximize the numbers entering higher education. The introduction of competitive principles into university organizations is precisely an effective means to this end. However, as we have seen, what is being given access to is, increasingly, a distortion of knowledge. And, in the current situation at least, the pressure of student numbers on staff–student ratios is only likely to further distort the pursuit of knowledge in the direction of cleanly packaged, easy-access 'learning programmes'.

There is a further objection to my position, which might be rehearsed as follows. One may dislike the changes taking place in higher education, one may have deep-seated worries about the instrumentalization of knowledge, but this is simply a romantic nostalgia for what was. Given the preponderance of consumer sensibility oriented towards choice, and given also the massive advances in information technology, the culture of easy-access learning programmes is simply the future. Whether one regards this as progress or regression is irrelevant. History cannot be made to go in reverse.

Now it must be immediately noted that this objection embodies a collaborationist stance of the 'keep your head down' sort noted earlier. Such a stance

entails an implicit degradation of the very notion of being human, on two counts: the first is its affirmation of the passive conformist position, i.e. one cannot resist the inevitable; and the second is its willingness to allow choice to be reduced to the mere appetitive level of deciding between stimuli one wants and stimuli one does not.

Interestingly, this morally degrading position is actually mistaken in a most fundamental respect. Human beings can never be entirely passive. No matter how much, in Benjamin's phrase, the 'human sensorium' is subjected to complex training by technology, it will always be more than the mere imprint of this training. The reasons for this are ontological and refer us back directly to the finitude of the human condition. Qua embodied rational subject, the human being can only attain any conception of self through his or her relation to other selves in the context of shared forms of life and experience. The dialogical structure of knowledge – the interpretation of objects, artefacts and situations through the mediation of tradition – is a direct continuation of this original process of self-formation.

While human beings are human this continuation will exert an influence. Hence, although in present historical circumstances technology has engendered a culture which is radically shaping and distorting self-understanding, this need not always be so. The foundation of the self in a dialogical reciprocity with the other could in time engender new forms of life wherein technology serves to augment rather than determine knowledge. The face-to-face encounter, the dialogue, has an ontological priority which means not only that new beginnings are possible, but, indeed, that all forms of life which flow out from it have at best a transitory character. And, of course, transitory structures can be assisted to depart or to transform themselves by appropriate modes of theory and practice.

III

This brings me to a final key issue. The foregoing philosophical analysis suggests that the recent government interference in higher education is disastrous – an attack which disfigures the structure of knowledge itself. The question which now arises is why this has not met with truly *massive* resistance at both practical and theoretical levels.

An immediate answer is that (whatever its success in elections) the political left has suffered continuous ideological defeat, and this has enabled petty-mercantilism to 'set the agenda' on all fronts. The substantial positions on higher education adopted by all the parties really amount to little more than the petty-mercantilist position dressed up in various kinds of politically correct finery.

However, this, in turn, raises the question of why there has been no really effective deployment of theory against the petty-mercantilists. There are left-wing 'think-tanks', but their influence has been feeble in comparison with that of the Centre for Policy Studies and the Adam Smith Institute.

The real reason for the left's inability to effectively resist petty-mercantilism in higher education is philosophical. Again, there are two aspects to this. The first

concerns Marxism and its legacy. The most potent aspect of this tradition is the work of the Frankfurt School, notably Adorno and, more recently, Habermas. Certainly, there is a massive corpus of work to draw from here, but – even at the most general level – it is possible to point out why this corpus is so limited. Adorno and Habermas offer a profound and searching critique of how reason has become distorted by instrumentalism arising from the demands of an increasingly 'administered society'. However, at the heart of both thinkers' work is an absence. The energy of their analyses has a primarily negative direction, insofar as that positive dimension in relation to which the structures of an administered society are unfavourably contrasted is simply a *historicist abstraction*. Adorno's utopia and Habermas's 'community of consensus' are some future states of affairs where the patterns of distortion and domination which hold at present cease to be operative.

However, what this actually amounts to – the structure of what patterns of production, distribution and dialogue will hold there – is defined primarily as a negation of the present. This is, indeed, the problem with all strands of Marxism. 'From each according to his abilities to each according to his needs' is fine as a slogan. To tend cattle in the morning and hold forth as a critic in the evening is fine as an aim. But what is lacking is a systematic exposition of the concrete structures which will realize such sentiments. We have a vision, but without substance.

The second aspect of philosophy's lack of resistance to petty-mercantilism consists in the fact that the dominant strain in 'oppositional' thinking over the past decades is *profoundly complicit* with the effects of petty-mercantilism. The superficial manifestation of this is 'political correctness', i.e. the attempt to sanitize thought and communication by stipulative restriction of terminologies and kinds of argument. However, the deeper ground of complicity lies in the reductive view of knowledge and the self arising from the various strands of poststructuralism.

At first sight, the opposite seems the case. To see why this is so, I will reiterate the key argument found in each of the three major poststructuralist thinkers, namely Derrida, Lacan and Foucault. First Derrida. As we saw in Chapter 9, Derrida's major position arises from a radicalization of Ferdinand Saussure's analysis of linguistic structure. On these terms there is no necessary correlation between a unity of signification – such as a word – and that which it signifies. Rather, linguistic meaning is generated from conventions governing the differential and combinatory possibilities of signifiers. A word can only have meaning insofar as it is different from other words; it takes on its sense and significance only through occupying a position in relation to an indeterminate number of other signifiers within the field of language as a whole. However, whilst any specific language has a set of governing rules, it is inexhaustible. It does not form a closed system which would enable us to fix a signifier's position within it with absolute determinacy.

This challenges some of our most cherished assumptions about meaning, categories and, by extension, consciousness itself. For if the correlation of signifier and

signified is determined fundamentally by the signifier's relation to an indeterminate and uncircumscribed number of other such signifiers, then the achieved meaning is not simply a matter of direct presence-to-presence correspondence.

Likewise, the clear divisions we make between different categories of discourse such as philosophy and literature cannot be established in any definitive way. And again, insofar as there is no thought without language, consciousness cannot simply involve some direct presents to self. Each moment of awareness takes on its character and identity only insofar as it emerges from, and bears the traces of, an indeterminate number of other such moments. The self has no fixed centre.

As we saw in Chapter 10, Lacan's psychoanalytic theories follow a similar trajectory and have similar implications. Like Derrida, Lacan's major argument gravitates around a radicalization of Saussure's analysis of linguistic structure. The context which activates this analysis is a function of the so-called 'mirror-stage' in a child's development and the Oedipus complex. At the mirror-stage the child misidentifies with its image in the mirror – an image which, in its symmetry and fixed variations of shape and size, gives a false impression of the self as stable and controlled. This impulse to identification is also directed towards the mother. The child demands absolute love. He or she wishes to be what the mother desires – the phallus – but this demand cannot be gratified. Indeed, the father prohibits it and threatens castration. This means that the child's desire is displaced on to items associated with the presence and absence of the mother. The presence/absence relation is the structural basis of language – the order of signifiers which is independent of the child. Hence, in acquiring language the child's desire for the mother is absorbed into linguistic transmission, and by virtue of the fact that the symbolic order is external and pre-established (and thence an embodiment of authority) the child is able to identify with the father.

This network of identification and transmission does not stabilize; rather, it involves a ceaseless dialectic between these two factors. On the one hand, there is a constant identificatory urge to completeness projected on to the world of perception and other people; on the other hand, this urge is disrupted and dispersed through being articulated in language. Desire fixes upon its objects – be they items or other people – but it cannot find comprehensive satisfaction. This is because the object is not desirable *in itself*, but, rather, is so only by its shifting relation to the inexhaustible context of other signifiers which are simultaneously, as it were, present and not present.

Given all this, it is hardly surprising that Lacan is profoundly sceptical about any substantial notion of the ego. He holds instead that subjectivity is radically decentred. The individual is a function of the language in which he or she inheres; and, indeed, even to articulate in language is always (at least implicitly) to address and thence internalize the other. Desire is the desire of the other.

Before considering the last of these three major poststructuralist thinkers – Foucault – I shall draw together some salient points from Derrida and Lacan. Each holds a similar position on the nature of the knowledge and the self. Lacan givens us the example of how action seems strange and stagnated when a film is frozen in one frame. We are then told that

this formal stagnation is akin to the most general structure of human knowl-edge: that which constitutes the ego and its objects with attributes of permanence and substantiality, in short, with entities or 'things' that are very different from the *Gestalten* that experience enables us to isolate in the shifting field, stretched out in accordance with the lines of animal desire.[6]

However, Lacan goes on to suggest that this stagnation is of decisive importance to man insofar as it 'is the very condition that extends indefinitely his work and his power.' Likewise for Derrida. He holds that, whilst meaning and formation of the self involve shifting and unstable networks of relations, we cannot help but arrest and stabilize these in a 'metaphysics of presence' (akin to Lacan's notion of 'formal stagnation').

The key point to note from all this is that in Lacan and Derrida the normal functions of knowledge and the ego are as instruments of manipulation and control, determined and given character by the specific social conditions in which they are employed. This thesis is also found in Foucault – in fact it is perhaps the central tenet of his thought. The key concept here is 'discourse'. All human thought and action is situated within discourse – understood as complex bodies of knowledge, belief and practice which exert power over the individual, both in their own right and on the basis of institutions and sets of more informal social relations which they give rise to. Discourse is ultimately a set of power relations (both symbolic and real) which determines the individual at both unconscious and conscious levels.

Now obviously there are some profound conflicts between all of the poststruc-turalist thinkers whose views I have briefly outlined. However, I shall focus on their shared view of knowledge and the ego as formations whose function is primarily to manipulate and control the world. This notion strikes one superfi-cially as having an 'oppositional' significance. It seems to hold that accepted concepts, categories, institutions and the ego itself are mere social 'constructs', and thence open to the most radical revision or rejection. But where does this leave us *vis-à-vis* the petty-mercantilist assault on higher education?

In one sense, most poststructuralists do not like this assault – it consolidates a set of preferences which they would wish to 'contest'. However, this is simply a difference of political programme. Both petty-mercantilist and poststructuralist approaches reduce knowledge and the self to the same level. In relation to knowledge, for example, idea and argument are seen as instruments for use or manipulation in order to further interests or satisfy a notion of choice which is fundamentally appetitive, or rational in only a formal sense. The only real disagreement between petty-mercantilist and poststructuralist is on the question of who should hold the power embodied in different forms of knowledge and the institutions inseparably bound up with them.

Some similar considerations hold in relation to the self. The packaging of knowledge in a form suitable for audit implies a conformist teacher and a student 'customer' who can deal only with easy-access stimuli. There is a diminution of the individual and of the ethics of dialogical encounter; student

and teacher are pushed in the direction of a passive acceptance of what the market prescribes. Their subjectivity is the play of market forces and fashionable technologies. There is a clear parallel here with the poststructuralist decentred self, insofar as the self is seen as the 'effect' of language, or 'the discourse of the Other', or discourse *per se*, or whatever. The subject is little more than a momentary position within some controlling field.

Again, some objections to this interpretation must be considered. The first is that even if both petty-mercantilism and poststructuralism have the effect of reducing knowledge and the significance of the individual self – as has already been admitted – they are profoundly different in terms of both their political programmes and who they would empower. 'Instrumentalist' yes, but in *very* different senses.

This difference, however, is ultimately an abstract one, one which is logically justified, but which at the level of practice tends to cancel itself out. Something of this can be seen at the level of the jargon employed by petty-mercantilism and poststructuralist-influenced politics. Consider, for example, feminism. The feminist movement – at least at the level of theory – has been profoundly influenced by all aspects of poststructuralism. We find much talk of 'subject positions', 'empowerment', 'contesting sites and spaces', 'the construction of subjectivity', the 'production of knowledge', 'consciousness-raising' and the like. Its vocabulary for knowledge and the self is replete with notions of assembly and disassembly and metaphors of spatialization. Thus, insofar as knowledge and subjectivity are dealt with in the pseudo-quantificational jargon of petty-mercantilism's organizational logic, the world is seen in fundamentally competitive terms as a function of conflicting *forces*, as an arena wherein different interest groups strive to impose their products and preferences upon others.

However, just as in the marketplace the success rates of products and consumer tastes are constantly changing, so structures of discourse and subjectivity become obsolescent as historical, social and material circumstances change. This leads to the decisive point. Feminism and other poststructuralist-influenced tendencies on the left are profoundly compromised by poststructuralism itself. There is a difference of programme between the petty-mercantilist right and the poststructuralist left, but there is not, in the deepest terms, a different philosophy, i.e. a wholly different view of the ultimate nature of belonging which holds between self and self and self and world. Without this difference in philosophy, opposition to the depredations of petty-mercantilism cannot be effective. It will simply follow the ebb and flow of empirical political history, which in recent years has been one of successive political defeats for the left.

I will return to this point after considering a second putative objection to my position. This holds that (in relation to poststructuralism at least) I have drastically overemphasized the passivity of the subject. After all, in the 'construction' of knowledge someone is doing the constructing. Indeed, Foucault remarks that

> Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it but it also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it. In

like manner, silence and secrecy are a shelter for power, but they also loosen its hold and provide for relatively obscure areas of tolerance.[7]

Hence, might it not also be said that the various strategies of deconstruction employed by devotees of poststructuralism undermine existing orthodoxies in specific areas of discourse, thus enabling them to be rejected or reappropriated?

The answer to this is that if poststructuralism's central tenets are valid (and a little further on I will adduce even more arguments to show that they are not), then they would undermine the kind of universalist standpoint which could effectively sustain a long-term strategy of resistance and reform. The problem is that if the self and its values and workings really are of the most shifting and provisional kind, then this makes political activity and resistance into a very ad-hoc and circumscribed thing – relative to circumstances and specific interest groups. The political programme will have a kind of transience, and thence fatality, written into it at the outset.

This actually shows up another difference between petty-mercantilism and poststructuralism which works to the disadvantage of the latter. It consists in the fact that the distortions of knowledge and the self brought about by petty-mercantilism are effects of its reorganizational influence upon higher education. They are not an official part of its programme. *That* consists in the rhetoric about competition and freedom of choice. Hence the instrumentalization of knowledge and the pacifying of the self are effectively hidden beneath a grand vision – of the individual in an efficient society, exercising choice and growing rich. Poststructuralism cannot – without profound contradiction of itself – project such a vision. Its implied politics are simply those of endless transformation and group conflict. Even this is hard to articulate in terms of any systematic political programme. Its real impetus is towards the production of more and more abstruse and irrelevant texts. It lacks a substantive philosophical *vision*. All that it has is the empty and self-defeating rhetoric of difference which I have criticized in earlier chapters.

However, there is one final crucial putative objection to my position which must be considered. I have argued that the pressures of petty-mercantilism distort the dialogical structure of knowledge and that the underlying impetus of poststructuralism – despite its oppositional rhetoric – is complicit with this distortion. But what if the poststructuralist critique of knowledge and the self is in fact correct?

Throughout this book I have adduced arguments to show that this 'critique' is actually misplaced. Here are some further points which vindicate this claim.

An important clue to poststructuralist error is to be found in the cybernetic 'models' of petty-mercantilism. Let us consider in this respect the flowcharts from the 'Quality Assurance' document I mentioned earlier. These charts do not pretend to evoke concrete patterns of exchange and dialogue between individuals. Rather, they abstract dominant directions of communication and present them in a schematic form. Armed with this abstract knowledge, we can grasp what is involved in the auditing procedure, even if we cannot comprehend all the

actual concrete interchanges involved. We have, as it were, a text which reflects on an unreflective body of experience, reducing it to operational essentials. It does not pretend to be more than this. Now let us return to Derrida, Lacan and Foucault. To what are their texts addressed?

First Derrida. His work is concerned fundamentally with the problematics of meaning in philosophical texts. We will recall that he radicalizes Saussure's insight concerning the logical structure of language as a network of differential relations. This radicalization centres on the claim that language is not a closed system. Its units cannot be absolutely positioned; the referential relation is not formed by some definitive present-to-presence correspondence of signifier and signified as a whole. This means that within discourse clear distinctions cannot be made between different kinds of meaning such as philosophy and literature. To impose such distinctions is to exert arbitrary 'closure'.

Now, although Derrida's rhetoric functions so as to give the impression of a complex dynamic process, it is at heart a logical and abstract analysis of a certain kind of written language. Like the flowcharts mentioned earlier, it is a reflection on an experience (language) whose acquisition and deployments in speech and writing are generally concrete and unreflected upon. It may adequately schematize the operational dynamics of this body of concrete inter-changes at an abstract level, but it does not do any justice to the pre-reflective cohesion of our bodily interactions with the world. This concrete level, however, is, in philosophical terms, fundamental. Meaning, be it in reading, perception or introspection, is a function of all the senses operating as a unified field – it is a function of (let us call it) *body-hold*. On these terms, meaning is gathered up primarily as a unity correlated with and determined by the present or possible positioning (interpreting this term existentially as well as physically) of the body. This (as I argued in section i) is extended by the latent schema and is continued at a general level in our reading of texts. In Derrida's analyses, however, the function of the body as the organizational principle or centre of gravity of the semantic field is not even considered.

Similar considerations hold in relation to Lacan. His analyses of the forma-tion of subjectivity in the acquisition of language are an operational model designed to explain certain (Freudian) assumptions. The model is false, and so are the assumptions. In relation to the former, for example, Lacan privileges the body in its sexual being, and his analyses of the ego and the formation of knowl-edge are ones wherein the basis of any cognitive relation to the world – namely the co-ordination of all the senses as a unified field – is seen, in effect, as a distorted projection of the imaginary. But without the unity of the self qua embodied subject there would be no subject to project the imaginary or imagi-nary to be projected. The image of completeness and control which Lacan supposes the child to discover and misrecognize in the mirror is already presup-posed, in at least a basic sense, in order for *any* kind of discovery or recognition to take place.

An even grosser circularity informs Lacan's assumptions concerning the Oedipus complex. For a subject to recognize the nature and significance of the

relations involved in such a fiction, cognitive competences of a higher order are presupposed. Such a subject could only be a seasoned language-user. Lacan, however, uses this fiction to explain the origins of subjectivity and the acquisition of language.

Foucault is also open to decisive criticism on the lines which I have been following. In this respect, it is interesting that he had a great deal to say about the body – or at least the way its sexual preferences have been institutionalized and regulated. And *this* is the problem. Like the other poststructuralists, Foucault's treatment of the body is oriented primarily towards the issues of sexuality. It is considered as a 'construction' within specific forms of discourse, but not – in its true role – as the condition of any possibility of discourse.

This explains a fundamental gap in Foucault's work. How is it that some forms of discourse exercise *such* a pervasive and recurrent influence? One can reply, 'Because of the specific historic and social circumstances in which they occur.' But again, whilst this might enable us to effectively map out the operational vectors of specific dominant discourse, it does not enable us to articulate its persuasive potency at the concrete level of human interchanges (i.e. what *enables* it to be effective).

I have argued, then, that poststructuralism fails primarily because its protagonists are unable to provide a philosophically adequate account of embodiment. In the absence of such a philosophy, reality and subjectivity are mistakenly taken to be 'constructed' from subject choices and 'positions'. However, whatever putative affirmations of difference may be involved here are more than cancelled out by their socio-economic context. The field and effects of constantly changing market forces destine those choices which define petty-mercantilism's consumer-subject to speedy obsolescence. The unstable field of language and desire which 'positions' poststructuralism's subject likewise makes it into an ephemeral formation with no hope of redemption. This is the ultimate outcome of what in earlier chapters I have called 'epistemological nihilism'.

Conclusion

In conclusion, then, we are left with the gloomy fact that the most radical opposition to petty-mercantilism's attack on higher education is in conflict with it only in abstract terms. At heart, it involves the same false, empty vision of a world of sheer flux and struggle and lack of constancy. In effect, it contributes to the attack on higher education.

What is needed, then, is a position which not only offers an alternative empirical political programme to petty-mercantilism, but also grounds this in an alternative philosophy, i.e. a real and substantially different account of the relation between self and self and self and world. Such an account would be one which emphasizes the shared aspects of human experience, and the communality and mutual responsibility of one for the other which is implied in this. Indeed, if one is going to make notions such as difference and the individual into something of real significance, one has to think them through in relation to what

is constant in human experience. For the meaning of what is constant and shared, and what is transient and individual, can only be articulated on the basis of how they mediate one another.

Now, the importance which I have assigned to the dialogical structure of knowledge and, throughout this book, to the nature of objectivity and value and the cohesion of the self constitutes a step in an appropriate refoundational direction. But in the context of university education the most important step of all is to refine and extend the notion of critical autonomy. For this, as I have suggested, is not only the focal point of higher education; it is the ultimate condition of a free society. Insofar, then, as the university embodies critical autonomy in its institutions, teaching and scholarship, it protects and affirms the basis of society itself. This is the *ultimate* ground on which its independence must be defended. I shall now consider it as a conclusion to this book.

Part V

Conclusion

Conditions of critical autonomy

In this book I have argued for a refoundational philosophy in the context of problems faced by civilization in the postmodern era. My strategy has been, first, to defend the notion of civilization itself from various sceptical viewpoints. This involved showing how the civilizing process has intrinsic value through its necessary connection with features which define self-consciousness itself. One might say, indeed, that the civilizing process just *is* self-consciousness viewed under the aspect of its diachronic – or, better, *transhistorical* – development.

I also indicated some counter-civilizing tendencies. The most significant of these in the postmodern context is that of symbolic arrest. One manifestation of it at the level of theory is the poststructuralist use of the 'field' and its fetishization of difference. Poststructuralist approaches are unable to negotiate the counter-civilizing ramifications of symbolic arrest because they are themselves an aspect of it.

Accordingly, in order to develop a more appropriate critical tool I radically developed Cassirer's basic philosophical position. This enabled me to articulate (at length) a refoundational theory of knowledge and the self with much broader metaphysical and ethical implications. The theory was also used both to assimilate the notion of the field as the sufficient basis of signifying relationships and to dispel the epistemological nihilism of Derrida and Welsch.

I then went on to deploy this theory so as to clarify deeper aspects of signification, and to criticize some contemporary approaches to cultural production and higher education, which have been colonized by symbolic arrest.

Now it is true that as a critical work seeking to combat counter-civilizing tendencies this book has a negative aspect. However, it also has an extremely positive dimension, which must be emphatically underlined. This consists of progressive articulation and the critical autonomy consequent upon it. Progressive articulation characterizes the way in which those specialist symbolic practices which are so much a part of the civilizing process can be refined, developed and in part superseded in the course of its diachronic history. The decisive factor here is the way in which symbolic transformations historically articulate cognitive categories and other necessary features of embodied subjectivity. This is a reciprocal relationship. The individually necessary elements mediate one another and their historically specific instantiations, and at the same time are

mediated by those instantiations. The means of this mediation is the transformation or invention of appropriate kinds of symbolic code.

On these terms, it could be argued that a cultural agent becomes critically autonomous in the following way. He or she must hold that any given cultural position or form should be interrogated in relation to its antecedent instances, with a view to clarifying the nature of its difference from them. There are five basic possibilities here:

1   Neutral difference – where the new position or form differs only in a nominal sense from preceding instances. In effect, the position or form does no more than repeat established meanings and idioms.
2   Normal difference – where the new position or form differs from its previous instances in a recognizably novel way, but without significant implications for how that position or form should be instantiated in the future.
3   Effective difference – where the position or form opens up a host of new possibilities for future development in a variety of contexts. This can be done either by refining existing tendencies to a level of exemplary excellence or by significant innovation in the way in which the position or form is articulated.
4   Paradigmatic difference – where a position or form opens up a new avenue of instantiation which is qualitatively different from its previous manifestations and which can be employed across a wide variety of contexts.
5   Pseudo-difference – where a position or form seemingly marks a radical transformation, but which, after deeper analysis is shown to bear little or no actual relation to the kind of position or form which it is meant to be instantiating. (This often occurs where a mode of cultural positioning or forming is appropriated by a special-interest group which wishes to redefine it in terms of its own proprietorial orientation and/or which has been colonized by symbolic arrest.)

These categories of difference are only critically activated insofar as they relate specific positions or forms to constant factors in experience, or to conditions which are necessary presuppositions of specific forms of symbolic articulation. I shall now briefly consider an example of each of these in turn.

My first example is that of space. An embodied subject is, by definition, an occupant of space. This means that he or she must find some means of unifying it so as to negotiate its manifold aspects. The first stage of this is the child's co-ordination of its body, which is achieved through the correlation of growth factors with the demands of the physical and social world. The 'thing' is learnt as a correlate of all its extended aspects, and the enveloping three-dimensional space (in which the thing exists) is learnt through the negotiation of many things and situations which are physically proximal to the child and also in relation to those which are more distant.

As we saw in relation to Cassirer (*vis-à-vis* making sense of the unity of space more generally), mythic and magical thought provide the first means of symbolic

articulation. These modes of thinking operate primarily by explaining spatial unity on the basis of analogies with the human body and human and animal agency, and with the relationship between light and dark. Astrology takes this a step further by utilizing numerical relationships. In this context, the use of numbers allows space to be expressed more in terms of a general structure and to be brought within a *predictive* framework of understanding (*vis-à-vis* the regular motion of the celestial bodies).

This relationship of mathematics to the predictive observation of space is decisive for the development of modern science from (and including) Newton to quantum theory. The symbolic codes of mathematics allow space to be described and analysed in the most detailed and abstract terms, and, reciprocally, it is the idea of 'pure space' which enables these codes to be developed as analytic tools. As Cassirer observes:

> It is pure space that serves as model and schema for the building of all the geometrical and mechanical models to which classical physics reduces the multiplicity of empirical phenomena and which it sees as the prototype of all scientific explanation of nature. But the advance from the mechanical view of the world takes us one step further. It creates a type of natural science from which the natural data of the senses are excluded, and which moreover has given up all dependency on the world of intuition [i.e. as revealed immediately by the senses].[1]

What has been described in my foregoing and in Cassirer's remarks is, in effect, successive phases of *paradigmatic difference* in terms of how space is symbolically articulated. There is a movement from mythic, to astrological, to mechanical, to, ultimately, electrodynamic conceptions of space. This is not a rigidly determined temporal progression, but, rather, a *logical* progression wherein a gradual accumulation of effective difference within the symbolic articulation of space brings about great patterns of reorientation within this articulation. With each paradigm shift, space is articulated with more predictive and explanatory depth, and (as a corollary of this) with diminishing reference to space as it is immediately experienced by the senses.

Before remarking upon the more general implications of this account, I shall consider a second example of symbolic articulation – namely pictorial art. Here, two levels of constants are involved. The first pertains to the link between mental imagery and the pictorial image. The former is a key factor in our knowledge of the self and an objective world, but, in terms of its introspective manifestations, is flickering, fragmented and stylized. If, however, the image-forming capacity is employed in the creation of a pictorial representation, then its outcome is more fixed and unified. Indeed, the dimension of style is taken much further than introspection allows, by virtue of the possibilities of handling which pictorial media allow.

This intimate relation between subjective image-forming and pictorial representation is one reason why pictures are intrinsically fascinating and have such

communicative potency. They symbolically articulate the structure of the image. What makes this into a progressive articulation is the relation between diachronic history and the pictorial medium. One might put it like this. A picture – in its most basic definition – involves the projection of a three-dimensional item or state of affairs within a virtual two-dimensional plane. The means of projection is resemblance in terms of shape, texture and/or colour between the picture and that kind of thing which it is a picture of. Given this, there are an infinite number of pictures which can be made, but there is only a finite number of logically distinct ways in which pictorial space can be structured. These are the categories which define the general scope of picturing's symbolic articulation of the image.

Now, whilst these categories are logically implicit in the basic definition of picturing, their explicit formulation involves an enormously complex interplay between the various pictorial media, diachronic history and specific individual and historical circumstances. The emergence of mathematical perspective, for example, is first hinted at in classical antiquity, but is developed to systematic fruition in the tradition extending from Giotto to Masaccio. There was no necessity that it should be historically articulated in just this way; neither, indeed, was it necessary that it should be formulated at all. For, whilst mathematical perspective and other categories are logically implicit in the basic picturing relation, their discovery gravitates around historically contingent processes. In another possible world, for example, it could well be that humans never bother to go beyond merely aggregate unities of pictorial space.

This said, it is significant that in the actual world, once formulated, mathematical perspective was the dominant mode of pictorial space in the European tradition for the next 450 or so years. Unlike other modes of pictorial unity, it has a flexibility and comprehensiveness which link that which is represented in a specific perspectival work to a whole infinite system of spatial co-ordinates. This has absolutely nothing to do with 'correspondence' with how we see; rather, if one wishes to represent three-dimensional states of affairs in a two-dimensional plane in a way which is maximally consistent with the systematic connectedness of physical reality itself, then mathematic perspective is what one needs. Perspective is much more than a culturally relative construct. It is the mode of unifying pictorial space which is most consistent with the systematic spatiality of the physical world.

There are many other pictorial categories, and all of them play a role in the progressive articulation of the image. The advent of disrupted figurative and abstract works in the twentieth century takes this a step further. As I have argued at great length in *The Language of Twentieth Century Art: A Conceptual History*,[2] modern and postmodern visual art orients itself towards a range of reciprocal relations which are perceptual and experiential constants. The articulation of a whole new range of categories becomes possible on the basis of the relation between different visual media and kinds of reciprocal relation.

I shall now develop the implications of these two brief accounts of progressive articulation. First, the symbolic articulation of space which I have described

is one key element in a project which also seeks to clarify temporal and causal relations in the context of a symbolic field of mathematically quantifiable relations and concepts. This *scientific* endeavour has its own relative autonomy by virtue of the distinctive structure of its symbolic codes, and the institutional networks consequent upon them.

This autonomy, however, is at core a *critical* one. The physical sciences advance when their institutional practices, experiments and hypotheses are formulated so as to falsify basic theories or to confirm hypotheses that radically challenge such theories. Here, difference – in the form of experimental results and/or hypotheses consequent upon them – is given meaning by virtue of its relation to the diachronic history of the field. Much difference will be of the neutral or normal kind, developing and consolidating existing theoretical frameworks. In cases such as the Michelson–Morley experiment of 1887, however, matters are somewhat different. The experiment attempted to measure the speed at which the earth travels through the ether. The experiment showed that the method adopted was unable to realize this aim. Subsequent work (attempting to formulate hypotheses concerning why the method failed) led to the abandonment of 'ether' as a working concept and, in due course, to Einstein's formulation of the special theory of relativity.

On these terms, the results of the Michelson–Morley experiment form a body of effective historical difference, which reconfigures the existing field and paves the way for far-reaching paradigmatic difference in the form of Einstein's theories.

We can read the history of pictorial representation in loosely analogous terms. The work of Giotto, Lorenzetti and others abandons the principle of planar unity which characterized late medieval art. Their paintings contribute to a wave of effective historical difference, which culminates in Masaccio's formulation of mathematical perspective. This achieves a qualitative and paradigmatic change in how the pictorial space of the visual image is subsequently conceived. And, again, at the end of the nineteenth century we find art which once more is oriented to a more planar conception of pictorial unity, which, in time, is of decisive significance for Picasso and Braque and the new twentieth-century mode of visual representation. This mode involves a transformation both of the experiential contents which are symbolically articulated and of the categorial basis of the symbolic code itself.

Now the major point to gather from all this is that the progressive articulation of symbolic codes involves the sustained achievement of critical autonomy. Difference within a symbolic practice can have a critical effect, which refines or advances its referential scope and thus articulates its objects of address in new ways. It must be emphasized that this progression is a logical one rather than a chronological one – though these two aspects will sometimes be in broad alignment with one another.

Given these considerations it is clear that a properly informed – that is to say, critically autonomous – cultural position must be informed by *conceptual history*. To practice conceptual history in my sense of the term involves two factors: first, a capacity to think a given cultural form or position through in terms of its relation

both to the fundamental categories which govern the relevant mode of symbolic articulation and to the experiential constants which are articulated through it; and, second, to think such a form or position through in relation to its historical circumstances of occurrence and to parallel factors in other modes of symbolic articulation. Through this latter strategy, what is distinctive and what is merely restrictive about a form or position can be brought more easily into the open. Conceptual history enables difference to become a recontextualizing power. Let us consider an example of this from the world of popular culture.

First, in a number of important essays[3] Richard Shusterman has explored the aesthetic significance of various popular artistic idioms. In 'The Fine Art of Rap', for example, he observes that hip-hop music places an emphasis 'on the temporally changing and malleable nature of the real (reflected in rap's frequent time tags and its popular idiom of "knowing what time it is" '.[4] Shusterman suggests that this gives rap an affinity with the metaphysics of American Pragmatism. However, the connection in question here is better described as a general tie-in between rap and a specific constant (or range of constants) in human experience. Transience and the malleability of the real are one inescapable aspect of our being-in-the-world, and it this inescapability which is internalized and declared by the insistent structures of rap.

Interestingly, Shusterman also observes that

> rap's artistic innovation, particularly its technique of sampling, is closely connected with elements of fragmentation, dislocation, and breaking of forms.
>
> This tension between formal innovation and already appreciable formal coherence constitutes the formal debate in which rap is now engaged. It is still in the process of testing the limits of its innovative techniques and the formal sensibilities of its audience in order to find the right balance – a form that is both new and yet somehow assimilable to our changing aesthetic tradition and formal sensibility.[5]

Now it might be claimed that what Shusterman is describing here is actually a kind of negation of rap's contemporary political significance as a strategy of resistance to prevailing white middle-class cultural values. However, Shusterman's insight is more acute. Whatever 'oppositional' function such music has will not be served at all by a repetition of the stylistic idioms already established. Indeed, the capacity of such art forms to be assimilated by the prevailing culture can only be resisted insofar as the process of assimilation itself brings about a reorientation (however slight) of that culture's normative parameters.

This is precisely what has happened, not only with rap, but also in more general terms through interactions between high art and the symbolic idioms of mass culture. Prevailing high-cultural orthodoxies have had their boundaries extended and their content differentiated through such historical and conceptual interactions. If, in contrast, two cultural forms define themselves exclusively in terms of opposition to the other, they will have critical edge – but in a funda-

mentally negative sense. It is only when the conflict engenders a momentum of mutual modification and an assimilation of elements from the other that we will have the basis of critical autonomy. This is because the forms have now entered a space of genuine growth and self-development. Their continuing articulation is grounded in progression rather than defensiveness and reaction.

The notion of critical autonomy also has application in relation to what – in contemporary parlance – might be called *the construction of subjectivity*. As we have seen at length, it is almost an article of faith in recent poststructuralist and cognate theory that the self is 'ex-centric', not just by virtue of the nature of signification *per se*, but also because of the way in which (to recall a phrase from Benjamin) technology has subjected the human sensorium to complex training. In its postmodern form the 'subjection' in question here is one of *fragmentation* rather than training. The world is dominated by manic transformations based on the play of market and consumer forces, and the plethora of information and images yielded by the mass media and new technologies. Now throughout this book I have identified the dangers of cyber-babble, and the proper philosophical response both to it and to the overemphasis of the self's ex-centric aspect. However, in this task we find an unexpected ally constituted through a specific usage of information technology.

A clue to this is provided by the popularity of websites devoted to genealogy (of the ancestral rather than the epistemological kind). At the heart of this happenstance is the way in which retrieval of factual knowledge concerning the past, and, where, applicable, visual images of it, has taken genealogical research to extraordinary new degrees of efficiency in terms of both time-expenditure and operational parameters.

And here's a massive irony. The proponents of cyber-babble fondly emphasize the 'alternative' and 'fragmented' nature of the perspectives that the new technologies offer on the self. However, such technologies also open up precisely the opposite dimension, namely the possibility of integrating one's own sense of self in a matrix which provides a historical narrative that is grounded on a factual basis, where previously there was only speculation, fantasy and fragmentation.

It should also be emphasized that this function of technology is not just a mediating factor, but also a profound intervention. Photography, film, tape recording and, more recently, video and digital imagery allow key aspects of the past to be preserved and projected near enough at will. And knowledge of this fact must surely inform the way in which we experience the real. The easy availability of visual and written documentation from our own past (both individual and collective) means that the sense of what we were is much more vividly at work in the present than has hitherto been possible. Similarly, we also know that at least some aspects of the workings of the present will not be as irrevocably lost as was once the case.

The available technology, then, opens up a significant space of possibility. The story of the self – our personal narrative – is allowed to grow around a retrievable body of historical fact and imagery. And, reciprocally, the positive function of this narrative in the present can be such as to stimulate us to further

investigate the ramifications and possibilities of our individual and collective history. The self thereby achieves *progressive articulation*.

Now it is vital to acknowledge that however thoroughly we are able to comprehend our relation to the past that relation will never be more than a narrative – facts and images from the past are traces whose content and meaning is not rigidly fixed. But neither, of course, are they merely arbitrary. This means that the narrative of our personal life requires interpretation and creation within the *positive constraints* of historical images and factuality. Our autonomy thus achieves a critical character and enables an extraordinary reversal. In this respect, we will recall that towards the beginning of this book I described the dangers of the qualitative cyborg – that *technologically ideal* creature which can retrieve its past and project its future with all the sensory vividness of the experiential present. Its experience is thus levelled out and becomes a mere continuum. However, if we restate this project as one which involves technology being used to interpret embodied experience rather than being absorbed *within* the body, then we move from technological imperialism to a realm of ethical technology. Technology *enables* our creative becoming by offering a critical historical perspective on our autonomy.

I have, then, outlined the basis of a refoundational philosophy and its relation to the civilizing process. Such a philosophy cannot aspire to absolute comprehensiveness. At best, it delineates those transcendental contours which are the basis of our cognitive orientation towards the world. The particular forms which these constant features take are historically variable and have a different significance according to circumstances. And even if we can devise a conceptual history which can trace the development of these factors, there is one constant which is especially elusive in terms of philosophical articulation. It is the philosophical significance of the concrete individual finite subject *as this particular concrete individual finite subject*. No matter how well one retrieves the past, there is a positive dimension of elusiveness. The poignancy of this is perhaps best expressed in the continuing existential effects of now-forgotten lives (such as that of a long-dead little boy who lived at Railway Cottages in Burley-in-Wharfedale and 8, Helen Street, Saltaire, and who is the dedicatee of this book). We would do well also to recall the words of the dying organic cyborg Roy Batty towards the end of the film *Bladerunner*:

> I've seen things you people wouldn't believe. Attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion. I watched c-beams glitter in the dark near the Tanhauser Gate. All these moments will be lost in time. Like tears in rain…Time to die.

Here are things ultimate. Our philosophy must expand, accordingly, so as to embrace the *particular*.

Appendix
McDowell and the problem of mind-independent reality

In his book *Mind and World*,[1] John McDowell shows an openness to alternative traditions of thought which is able to advance analytic philosophy without – as in the work of Richard Rorty – in effect giving up on a positive standpoint.

As noted earlier, in Chapter 6, McDowell's approach also has some clear affinities with my own refoundational strategy. That said, the problem of mind-independent reality also introduces a worrying ambiguity into his position. In this Appendix, I will identify this ambiguity and will argue that it can be removed on the basis of the notion of mind-independent reality proposed in Chapter 6.

First, then, McDowell argues that, in order to be justified, our judgements and beliefs must be constrained by a mind-independent reality. He further identifies two inadequate ways of supporting such a viewpoint. The first – the 'Myth of the Given' (with Gareth Evans as its most sophisticated exemplar) – involves a dualism of conceptual scheme and empirically given content. Here

> The putatively reassuring idea is that empirical justifications have an ultimate foundation in impingements on the conceptual realm from outside.[2]

For McDowell, however, whilst this view might explain why we cannot be blamed for making the judgements and holding the beliefs which we do, it cannot offer a rational justification of them – 'it offers us at best exculpations where we wanted justifications'.[3]

An equally inadequate response to this problem is found in Donald Davidson's 'empty coherentism'. In McDowell's reading, Davidson holds that experience is causally relevant to our judgements and beliefs but has no bearing on the question of their justification or warrantability.

However:

> This just raises a worry as to whether the picture can accommodate the sort of bearing on reality that empirical content amounts to, and this is just the kind of worry that can make an appeal to the Given seem necessary.[4]

On these terms, then, a deep-seated anxiety about how judgements and beliefs are to be justified leads to an 'oscillation' between two inadequate viewpoints.

To resolve this, McDowell argues that the requisite rational justifications are available only insofar as our receptivity to mind-independent reality involves conceptually mediated experience. What we articulate in judgement and belief is *always* situated in a broader horizon of rational connections acquired as an 'ongoing concern' through our initiation into language and social forms of life.

This central position of McDowell's is potentially an extremely fruitful one. It is, however, beset by an unfortunate ambiguity which leaves McDowell himself in effect oscillating between a view which is (I think) sound and a kind of higher-level reappearance of the Myth of the Given.

Specifically, the problem is that McDowell's central position is consistent with two conflicting notions of objectivity. The first – which I shall call 'mediated objectivism' (a synonym for the approach taken in Chapter 6) – holds that it is only insofar as there are rational subjects to connect mind-independent sensible material that we can talk of an objective world of facts. Such perceptible facts exist independently of the particular subject of perception, but not *wholly* independently of that horizon of rational connections which is the basis of subjective receptivity in general. This horizon is, *in part*, constitutive of objective factuality. Consider, for example, the following remarks:

> If a colour concept is drawn into operation in an experience…, the rational connections of the concept enter into shaping the content of the appearance, so that what appears to be the case is understood as fraught with implications for the subject's cognitive situation in the world.[5]

McDowell's use of the 'shaping' metaphor here is, of course, especially telling *vis-à-vis* the partially constitutive role of the horizon of rational connections.

However, whilst this (and other remarks) bring out the consistency between mediated objectivism and his central position, McDowell is more inclined to favour another notion of objectivity which is also consistent with that position. I shall call it 'absolute objectivism'. It is exemplified in the following claims:

> *[T]hat things are thus and so* is…, if one is not misled, an aspect of the layout of the world: it is how things are. Thus the idea of conceptually structured operations of receptivity puts us in a position to speak of experience as openness to the layout of reality.[6]

Indeed:

> The thinkable contents that are ultimate in the order of justification are contents of experience, and in enjoying an experience one is open to manifest facts, facts that obtain anyway, and impress themselves on one's sensibility.[7]

As I read McDowell, these remarks suggest that there is an objective order of facts – the 'layout of reality' – which exists over and above the epistemic condi-

tions of our receptivity to it. The horizon of rational connections is our only means of experiential access to such an order, but its function is to register or receive the facts. It is in no sense constitutive of their objectivity.

That McDowell seems to favour absolute over mediated objectivism is perhaps due to his wariness concerning accusations of idealism. He observes that if we are to give due acknowledgement to the independence of reality, what we need is a constraint from outside *thinking* and *judging*.[8]
But:

> It would indeed slight the independence of reality if we equated facts in general with exercises of conceptual capacities – acts of thinking – or repre-sented facts as reflections of such things; or if we equated perceptible facts in particular with states or occurrences in which conceptual capacities are drawn into operation in sensibility – experiences – or represented them as reflections of such things.[9]

One might guess, therefore, that McDowell inclines towards absolute objectivism because anything less than this would amount to an 'idealistic slight' on the mind-independence of reality.

But would it? In this respect it is notable that McDowell offers no criteria of mind-independence over and above a loose conditional or regulative principle to the effect that, if our judgements and beliefs are to be rationally justified, this compels (amongst other things) the assumption that they are constrained by the demands of a mind-independent reality. However, even if we accept this as a regulative principle, it does not necessarily commit us to absolute objectivism.

To see why this is so, let us do what McDowell does not, namely consider some experiential criteria of mind-independent reality. Here are three broadly related possibilities:

1 Whilst we can choose to position ourselves in such a way that certain aspects of the world become immediately available to perception, the fact that such aspects are available at all is not a matter of choice on our part. Their avail-ability is a function of the world's own nature and its relation to the physical and cognitive structure of those embodied subjects who are immersed within it.
   Of course, given access to such aspects we may choose to focus percep-tion on their minutiae or on larger-scale structures, but, again, whilst these alternative approaches are subject to the will, the very fact of their avail-ability is a function of the world's being physically amenable to such avenues of scrutiny.
2 Individual perceptions, judgements and beliefs can have physical changes in the phenomenal field as their objects, but they cannot of themselves (qua individual cognitive acts) induce such physical changes.
3 The very fact that our judgements and beliefs can sometimes be in error is indicative of the fact that reality is an independent constraint upon cognition.

Now these three criteria are admittedly presented in a fairly summary form. However, even allowing for this it is surely fair to say that a view which is consistent with all three criteria has at least a good prima facie case for laying claim to a robust notion of mind-independence. By 'robust' here I mean that it would satisfy McDowell's demand for 'a constraint from outside thinking and judging'. However, whilst McDowell's officially preferred absolute objectivism is clearly consistent with the above criteria, so too is mediated objectivism. This latter view holds that there can be no world of objective facts without the mediation of a horizon of rational connections. However, this horizon is itself only made possible as a gradually evolved response to the demands of mind-independent sensible material. It provides a context of general connections whereby such material is given an intelligible character. This dimension of intelligibility is a precondition of us being able generally to assign truth-values to judgements and beliefs, but it does not, in itself, enable us to decide which truth-values apply in individual cases. The horizon is a condition of the possibility of, as it were, objective factuality, but which facts are realized and how accessible they are to cognition is determined by the nature of mind-independent reality itself. It is this factor which ultimately constrains judgements and beliefs.

It is also worth emphasizing that mediated objectivism does not (like those 'idealistic' tendencies which McDowell notes) simply 'equate' facts with the 'reflections' of such exercises. For mediated objectivism, the horizon is a necessary but by no means sufficient condition of objectivity. It may be, for example, that the basic function of such a horizon is to render mind-independent reality intelligible *vis-à-vis* unified notions of spatial and temporal position and modal character. This objectification would require appropriate forms of conceptualization, but not the *imposition* of anything like, say, an idealist categorial framework or forms of intuition of the Kantian sort.

Significantly, McDowell himself endorses the general Kantian point that 'the objective world is present only to a self-conscious subject'.[10] However, whilst he tries to graft an absolute objectivist standpoint on to this position, my claim is that all that his central position entitles him to is a mediated objectivism on the lines sketched out above. The horizon of rational connections is, as McDowell admits, the basis of our knowledge of a world of objective facts. To suppose *in addition* that the objectivity of this world can exist independently of the condition of our knowing it is merely an assumption – and one for which McDowell offers no justification over and above his unwarranted worries about idealistic 'slights' to the independence of reality. He offers us, in other words, no positive grounds for the acceptance of absolute objectivism. To vary his parlance slightly, where we wanted justifications we get a leap of faith instead.

Now, in support of McDowell it might be said that if there are no positive grounds for rejecting absolute objectivism, then we are justified in accepting it simply by virtue of its congruence with our commonsense view on these matters. This view takes objective reality to be fundamentally as it is represented in ordinary experience, i.e. as an order of facts which has objective existence whether or not there are self-conscious beings to perceive it. Against this, however, we

must bear in mind not only that mediated objectivism is equally consistent with McDowell's central position, but that it is also, in terms of Occam's Razor, the epistemically more economical viewpoint. It should be further emphasized that earlier, in Chapter 6, I adduced a number of positive arguments for mediated objectivism. The presence of this, as it were, philosophically more energetic alternative to absolute objectivism means that McDowell's central position is at best indecisive, and at worst subject to precisely the kind of philosophical anxiety about the relation between mind and world which leads to an oscillation between two conflicting viewpoints.

Notes

1 The intrinsic value and scope of civilization

1 *Critical Aesthetics and Postmodernism*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1993.
2 See Norbert Elias, *The Civilising Process, Vol. 1: The History of Manners*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, Urizen Books, New York, 1978, Chapter 1, pp. 3–50.
3 Norbert Elias, *The Civilising Process, Vol. 2: Power and Civility*, trans. Edmund Jephcott, Pantheon Books, New York, 1982, p. 88.
4 *The Civilising Process, Vol. 2*, op. cit., p. 127.
5 See his *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice, Routledge Kegan-Paul, London, 1984. In Chapter 11 of the present work I offer a sustained critique of more recent ideas from Bourdieu.
6 See *The Norbert Elias Reader*, ed. J. Goudsblom and S. Mennell, Blackwell, Oxford, 1998, p. 245.
7 *Ibid.*, p. 236.
8 The best treatment of the significance of narrative in the unity of experience is Chapter 15 of Alasdair Macintyre's *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, Duckworth, London, 1980, pp. 204–25. For a sustained analysis of this, see Chapter 7 of the present work.
9 For more on this theme, see Part 3 of my *Art and Embodiment: From Aesthetics to Self-Consciousness*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1993.
10 See, in particular, his sustained treatments of the topic in the 'Transcendental Deduction' and 'Schematism', chapters of Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. N. Kemp-Smith, Macmillan, 1973.
11 See J.P. Sartre, *The Psychology of Imagination*, Methuen & Co., London, 1972.
12 For a fuller account, see P. Crowther, 'The Significance of Kant's Pure Aesthetic Judgement', *British Journal of Aesthetics*, vol. 36, no. 2, April 1996, pp. 109–21.
13 See, especially, his *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, Vol. 2: Mythical Thought*, trans. R. Manheim, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1970.

2 From civilization to postmodernity: a context for refoundational philosophy

1 David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1989, p. 147.
2 Philip Cooke, *Back to the Future: Modernity, Postmodernity and Locality*, Unwin Hyman, London, 1990, p. 141.
3 Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Showbusiness*, Methuen, London, 1987, p. 28.
4 *Ibid*, p. 131.

5 *Ibid*, p. 131.
6 Tom Wolfe, *The Painted Word*, Bantam Books, New York, 1980.
7 In my 'Against Curatorial Imperialism: Merleau-Ponty and the Fundamental Historicity of Art', in *Blackwell Companion to Art Theory*, ed. P. Smith and C. Wilde, Blackwell, Oxford, 2002, pp. 477–86.
8 For a critique of Baudrillard's position, see Chapter 9 of my *The Language of Twentieth Century Art: A Conceptual History*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1997.
9 Hans Bertens, *The Idea of the Postmodern: A History*, Routledge, London, 1995, p. 11.
10 Wolfgang Welsch, *Undoing Aesthetics*, Sage, London, 1997, p. 177.
11 *Ibid*, p. 171.
12 Michael Heim, *The Metaphysics of Virtual Reality*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1994, p. 5.
13 *Ibid*, p. 10.
14 *Ibid*, p. 21.
15 See, for example, some of the essays in *Virtual Futures: Cyberotics, Technology, and Post-Human Pragmatism*, ed. Joan Broadhurst Dixon and Eric J. Cassidy, Routledge, London, 1998.
16 See, for example, Christopher Norris, *What's Wrong with Postmodernism: Critical Theory and the Ends of Philosophy*, Harvester Wheatsheaf, London, 1990; Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism; or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Duke University Press, Durham, 1991.
17 See, for example, Hal Foster, *Recordings: Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics*, Bay Press, Port Townsend, 1985.
18 The most authoritative presentation of Gadamer's views can be found in his *Truth and Method*, trans. W. Glen-Doepel, Sheed & Ward, London, 1975.
19 See, for example, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith, Routledge Kegan-Paul, London, 1974.
20 The best systematic introduction to Cassirer's work is *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, Vol. 1: Language*, trans. R. Manheim, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1966.

3 Refoundational knowledge: Cassirer's epistemology

1 A sympathetic example of this is Seymour Itzkoff's *Cassirer*, Twayne Publishers, Boston, 1977.
2 P.A. Schilpp's monumental edited work *The Philosophy of Ernst Cassirer* (Library of Living Philosophers, Evanston, 1949) contains a great deal of useful material, notably the essays by Hamburg, Stephens, Hartmann, Urban and Werkmeister. However, all these discussions tend to focus on Cassirer's relation to Kant in at best a schematic way, or primarily in the context of other neo-Kantians, notably Cohen and Natorp. The one more acceptable treatment of Cassirer's epistemology is John Michael Krois's excellent *Cassirer: Symbolic Forms and History*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1987. Even here, however, the substance of Cassirer's position tends to be lost sight of in Krois's attempts to do justice to its broadness of scope. In particular, Krois radically understates the significance of categorial concepts in Cassirer's epistemology. Apart from Krois, Donald Philip Verene is the only other contemporary commentator to have engaged extensively and insightfully with Cassirer's thought. His papers 'Kant, Hegel and Cassirer: The Origins of the Philosophy of Symbolic Forms' (*Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol. 30, 1970, pp. 33–46) and 'Cassirer on Culture' (*International Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 22, 1982, pp. 133–44) are especially valuable.
3 Ernst Cassirer's *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (hereafter *PSF*), trans. R. Manheim, vol. 1: *Language*; vol. 2: *Mythical Thought*; vol. 3: *The Phenomenology of Knowledge*; vol. 4: *The Metaphysics of Symbolic Forms*, trans. J.M. Krois and D.P. Verene, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1953, 1955, 1957 and 1996, respectively. This reference is from vol. 2, p. 35.

4 Cassirer, *PSF*, vol. 1, p. 99.
5 See Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. N. Kemp-Smith, Macmillan & Co. London, 1973, p. 111.
6 In his paper on 'Cassirer and Culture' (op. cit.), D.P. Verene observes that Cassirer has no theory of the imagination. However, it is quite clear that Cassirer is assuming the validity of Kant's notion of the 'productive' imagination. (See, for example, *PSF*, vol. 4, p. 78.) Accordingly, in my interpretation of Cassirer's position I take imagination in its productive sense to play a key cognitive role.
7 Cassirer, *PSF*, vol. 1, p. 100
8 Cassirer *PSF*, vol. 1, pp. 100–1.
9 See, for example, Werkmeister's essay in Schilpp, op. cit.
10 In *PSF* (vol. 3, p. 100), Cassirer emphatically claims that causal relations must be viewed as a function of a more primordial symbolic relation (which I will consider in section ii of this chapter). However, whilst the unity of causal relations can only be articulated on the basis of such a relation we must ask why it is that the relation should issue in conceptions of causal connection. Cassirer does not answer the question directly. Despite this, it is clear that for him our most elemental levels of consciousness occur within a realm of *interacting* but indeterminate factors. Hence, we must use notions of causal unity to take this heterogeneous realm intelligible and determinate.
11 Cassirer, *PSF*, vol. 4, p. 65.
12 See, for example, Cassirer, *PSF*, vol. 3, p. 60, for 'thing' as a category.
13 See, for example, Cassirer, *PSF*, vol. 3, pp. 8, 9, 315–16; also *PSF*, vol. 4, pp. 64–6; and *Substance and Function*, trans. W. and M. Swabey, Open Court, London and Chicago, 1923, p. 238.
14 Cassirer, *PSF*, vol. 3, pp. xv.
15 See, for example, Cassirer, *PSF*, vol. 3, p. 478. D.P. Verene, in his paper 'Kant, Hegel and Cassirer' (op. cit.), suggests that Hegel is the key influence on Cassirer, and shows some significant parallels between the two. But the point I have just made, and indeed the widespread use which Cassirer makes of Kant, suggests that we should not make too much of the Hegel connection at this point.
16 Cassirer, *PSF*, vol. 1, p. 105.
17 Cassirer, *PSF*, vol. 3, p. 114; Cf. vol. 1, p. 90.
18 Cassirer, *PSF*, vol. 1, p. 96.
19 An exception to this is his treatment of the 'sensus communis' in the *Critique of Judgement*, which, in the context of the universal validity of pure aesthetic judgements, is in effect assigned both a constitutive and a regulative role.
20 Cassirer, *PSF*, vol. 1, p. 90.
21 See, especially, the first version of the 'Transcendental Deduction' in Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, op. cit., pp. 141–50.
22 Cassirer, *PSF*, vol. 3, p. 235.
23 John Michael Krois would disagree with this claim. In his *Cassirer: Symbolic Forms and History* (op. cit., pp. 55–62), he suggests that Cassirer anticipates the primacy which Merleau-Ponty assigns to the body in cognitive activity. However, it must be pointed out that whilst Cassirer himself sees the body and soul as involved in the basic level of meaningfulness, he does not assign a privileged role to the former. Merleau-Ponty, in contrast, does, and, indeed, notes some reservations about Cassirer's approach (in a footnote to the page reference cited in my note 26).
24 Cassirer, *PSF*, vol. 3, p. 342.
25 Cassirer, *PSF*, vol. 3, p. 232.
26 See, for example, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith, Routledge Kegan-Paul, 1974, p. 127.
27 Donald Davidson, 'The Method of Truth in Metaphysics', included in his *Inquiries into Truth and Meaning*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1984, pp. 199–214. This reference is from pp. 199–200.

4 Imagination and objective knowledge

1 For an explanation of some of these usages, see, for example, Gilbert Ryle's *The Concept of Mind*, Hutchinson & Co., London, 1969, pp. 245–79.
2 See Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. N. Kemp-Smith, Macmillan, London, 1973, p. 111.
3 Kendall Walton, for example, offers some useful insights concerning the role of imagination in representation (understood in the broadest sense). See, for example, his *Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundations of the Representational Arts*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1990. He does not, however, explore its cognitive role. There is also a well-known paper by Strawson which links imagination to the perceptual process but without doing so in anything other than a piecemeal (albeit illuminating) way. The paper is 'Imagination and Perception', included in *Kant on Pure Reason*, ed. R. Walker, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1982, pp. 82–99. Even more significant is Mark Johnson's excellent *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1987. Johnson explores some connections between knowledge and imagination which go in a similar direction to those explored in the present chapter. My analysis, however, is one which gives a much more explicit emphasis to the transcendental significance of imagination.
4 Even in the work of those Kant commentators who have attempted to reconstruct his views in a sympathetic light, the transcendental function of imagination is rarely assigned much importance. Peter Strawson's influential *The Bounds of Sense* (Methuen & Co., London, 1966) is a case in point, as is also, more recently, Patricia Kitcher's *Kant's Transcendental Psychology*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1990. One approach which does real justice to the problem is Sally Gibbon's *Kant's Theory of Imagination: Bridging Gaps in Judgment and Experience* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1994). Here, however, Gibbon's fundamental intention is to address the significance of imagination in the context of Kant exegesis. The telling general points which she makes receive little in the way of application beyond this context.
5 Gareth Evans, *Varieties of Reference*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1982, pp. 102–3.
6 *Ibid.*, p. 104.
7 *Ibid.*, p. 176.
8 I am, of course, suggesting in effect that the transcendental role of imagination extends to personal identity. I shall explore this connection in more detail in Chapter 5.
9 Kant, op. cit., p. 133.
10 The account of the relation between perception and embodiment which follows is derived substantially from Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. C. Smith with revisions by F. Williams, Routledge Kegan-Paul, London, 1974. It is significant, however, that Merleau-Ponty has no substantive theory of the imagination, let alone of its transcendental role. My account could therefore be seen as a significant *development* of Merleau-Ponty's position by providing a theory of imagination which is broadly consistent with it.
11 Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Psychology of Imagination*, Methuen & Co., London, 1972, pp. 11–12.

5 The cohesion of the self: moment, image and narrative

1 See St Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R.R.S. Pine-Coffin, Penguin, London, 1961, pp. 263–70; Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, trans. E.F.J. Payne, Dover, New York, 1958, vol. I, pp. 36, 85, 151, 186, 284, 359, 266, 498; vol. II, pp. 43, 98, 348, 445, 638; Bertrand Russell, 'The Philosophy of Logical Atomism', in *Russell's Logical Atomism*, ed. D.F. Pears, Fontana, London, 1972, pp. 31–142; see, especially, pp.

44–58; Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3, trans. K. Blamey and D. Pellauer, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1999, especially section 1; Edmund Husserl, *The Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness*, trans. J. Churchill, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1966, pp. 81–5.

2 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, trans. Walter Kaufmann, Modern Library, New York, 1995, pp. 158, 159.

3 For more on this issue, see Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, trans. R. McCleary, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1964, p. 54.

4 See Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. N.M. Paul and W. Scott Palmer, George Allen & Unwin Ltd, London, 1978, pp. 89–94.

5 One of the most fruitful philosophical accounts of the cognitive significance of narrative is offered in outline by Alasdair MacIntyre in his *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, Duckworth, London, 1985, Chapter 15, pp. 204–25. I will consider MacIntyre's theory in Chapter 7 of this book. An important treatment of moment and narrative is found in the cognitive psychologist David Pillemer's *Momentous Events, Vivid Memories*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1998. Chapter 4 ('Image, Narrative, and the Development of Self', pp. 99–135) is of special importance in providing empirical descriptions of the phenomena which, in the present chapter, I am endeavouring to link to the unity of the self on *conceptual* grounds.

6 In my book *The Kantian Sublime: From Morality to Art*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1989.

6 The limits of objective knowledge: what mind-independent reality must be

1 *Kant on Pure Reason*, ed. R.C.S. Walker, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1982, p. 6. It should be emphasized that in this remark Walker is summarizing a view held by H.E. Matthews.

2 The classic exposition is, of course, John Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, J.M. Dent & Sons, London, 1974; see, especially, vol. 2 (Book II, Chapter VII), pp. 102–11.

3 Gareth Evans, 'Things Without the Mind: A Commentary upon Chapter Two of Strawson's *Individuals*', in *Philosophical Subjects: Essays Presented to P.F. Strawson*, ed. Zak van Straaten, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1980, pp. 76–116. This reference is from p. 95.

4 See, for example, *Mind and World*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1996. It should be noted that there is an ambiguity in McDowell's central position, which centres on the question of whether the horizon of rational connections is partially constitutive of objective appearance or simply registers objective facts. For reasons which I will address in the appendix to this chapter, pp. 217–21, the former interpretation yields the philosophically more viable approach.

5 See, for example, Putnam's *Reason, Truth, and History*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1993.

6 Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere*, Oxford University Press, New York and Oxford, 1986, p. 91.

7 Gareth Evans, *The Varieties of Reference*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1982, p. 176.

8 Or at least in the 'local' sense. Such variables could still be feasible on the assumption that they operate beyond the speed of light. This assumption, however, would, to say the least, require considerable revision of the overall quantum approach. Most theorists would probably agree that this is not a viable option.

9 Lawrence Sklar, *The Philosophy of Physics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1992, p. 222.

10 Even if they obtrude upon consciousness in a non-volitional way, our present existential situation forms a context or psychological space which facilitates such obtrusions.

11 This is the basis of McTaggart's so-called *B* series. His major discussion of time is to be found in *The Nature of Existence*, vol. II, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1968, pp. 9–31.

12 Einstein, quoted by Carnap in *The Philosophy of Rudolph Carnap*, ed. P.A. Schilpp, Open Court, La Salle, 1963, p. 37.

13 See, for example, his *The End of Certainty: Time, Chaos, and the New Laws of Nature*, Free Press, London, 1997.

14 See *The Nature of Time*, ed. R. Flood and M. Lockwood, Blackwell, Oxford, 1988, p. 40.

15 See McTaggart, op. cit.

16 See Chapter 6 of his *Real Time*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1981. The present quotation is taken from the revised version of that chapter, included in *The Philosophy of Time*, ed. R. Le Poidevin and M. Macbeath, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1992, pp. 47–59.

17 In Chapter 2 of his *Individuals: An Essay in Descriptive Metaphysics*, Methuen, London, 1971, pp. 59–86.

18 How one should understand causality in philosophical terms is, of course, enormously controversial. I shall treat it in the most basic sense as the capacity for one state of affairs to produce change in another state of affairs from which it is logically distinct.

7 Narrative and self-consciousness: a basis for virtue ethics

1 *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, Duckworth, London, 1990; see, especially, Chapter 15, pp. 204–25.

2 See MacIntyre, *ibid*, p. 218.

3 It is also worth noting that Paul Ricoeur has much to say which is of interest concerning the relation between narrative and identity in a general sense, but without establishing a clearly defined conceptual connection between the two. See, for example, section 1, vol. 3, of his *Time and Narrative*, trans. K. Blamey and D. Pellauer, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1999.

4 The approach taken here is derived substantially from Maurice Merleau-Ponty's account of the relation between the embodied subject and the perceptual world. See his *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. C. Smith with revisions by F. Williams, Routledge Kegan-Paul, London, 1974.

5 *The Norbert Elias Reader*, ed. J. Goudsblom and S. Mennell, Blackwell, Oxford, 1998, p. 72.

8 Attacks upon civilization: some ethical and metaphysical issues

1 *The Norbert Elias Reader*, ed. J. Goudsblom and S. Mennell, Blackwell, Oxford, 1998, p. 236.

2 This, of course, is exactly what the Taliban regime attempted to achieve through its wilful destruction of ancient artefacts in national museums and geographical sites.

9 Against epistemological nihilism: contra Derrida, contra Welsch

1 Jacques Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass, Harvester, Brighton, 1982, p. 11.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 15.

4 See also Derrida, *Positions*, trans. Alan Bass, Athlone Press, London, 1981, pp. 28–9.

5 *Margins of Philosophy*, op. cit., p. 13.
6 *Ibid.*, pp. 14–15.
7 *Ibid.*, p. 16.
8 See, for example, Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*, trans. Dorion Cairns, Nijhoff, The Hague, 1960.
9 See, for example, Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, trans Norman Kemp-Smith, Macmillan, London, 1973, p. 157.
10 *Margins of Philosophy*, op. cit., p. 317.
11 *Ibid.*, p. 318.
12 *Ibid.*, p. 318.
13 *Ibid.*, p. 315.
14 *Ibid.*, p. 326.
15 *Ibid.*, p. 13.
16 *Ibid.*, p. 21.
17 Wolfgang Welsch, *Undoing Aesthetics*, Sage, London, 1997, p. 170.
18 *Ibid.*, p. 170.
19 Wolfgang Welsch, 'Reason and Transition: On the Concept of Transversal Reason', downloaded from Welsch's website (http://sammelpunkt.philo.at:8080/archive/00000192/01/Reason.html), p. 10 of 19. This text, it should be emphasized, is a summary of a larger work (in German) of some 1,500 pages.
20 *Ibid.*, p. 14.
21 *Ibid.*, p. 14.
22 *Ibid.*, pp. 15–16.
23 *Ibid.*, p. 16.
24 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. C. Smith, Routledge Kegan-Paul, London, 1974, p. 170.
25 Welsch's 'Reason and Transition', op. cit., p. 2.

10 From rock music to deep signification: Lacan with Žižek

1 Included in *Art and Design*, Profile no. 35, 1994, pp. 80–7; translated by Mojca Oblak.
2 Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture*, MIT Press, London, 1991, p. 6.
3 *Ibid.*, p. 6.
4 Žižek, *Art and Design*, p. 85.
5 Žižek, *Looking Awry*, p. 41.
6 *Ibid.*, p. 39.

11 Sociological imperialism and the field of cultural production: a critique of Bourdieu

1 The present chapter is a modified version of an essay entitled 'Sociological Imperialism and the Field of Cultural Production: The Case of Bourdieu', in *Theory, Culture, and Society*, vol. 11, 1994, pp. 155–69.
2 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice, Routledge Kegan-Paul, London 1984; see, especially, the Postscript, pp. 485–500.
3 *The Field of Cultural Production*, edited and introduced by Randal Johnson, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1993.
4 *Ibid.*, p. 115.
5 *Ibid.*, p. 115.
6 *Ibid.*, p. 30.

 7 *Ibid.*, p. 30.
 8 *Ibid.*, p. 137.
 9 *Ibid.*, p. 236.
10 *Ibid.*, p. 236.
11 *Ibid.*, p. 117.
12 *Ibid.*, p. 106.
13 *Ibid.*, p. 188.
14 *Ibid.*, p. 263.
15 *Ibid.*, pp. 263–4.
16 *Ibid.*, p. 229.
17 See Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, trans. J.C. Meredith, Oxford University, Oxford, 1973, § 1, pp. 41–50.
18 This theme is developed in my books *Critical Aesthetics and Postmodernism* and *Art and Embodiment: From Aesthetics to Self-Consciousness* (both Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1993); see, especially, Part III of the latter.
19 Kant, op. cit., § 46, p. 168.
20 *Ibid.*, § 49, pp. 175–6.
21 *Ibid.*, § 49, p. 177.
22 See especially Chapter 5 of *Critical Aesthetics and Postmodernism*.
23 *The Field of Cultural Production*, op. cit., p. 117.
24 *Ibid.*, pp. 101–2.

12 Knowledge and the attack upon higher education

 1 *The Norbert Elias Reader*, ed. J. Goudsblom and S. Mennell, Blackwell, 1998, p. 72.
 2 H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans, W. Glen-Doepel, Sheed & Ward, London, 1979, p. 340.
 3 *Ibid.*, p. 330.
 4 See also the notion of 'latent existential space' discussed in Chapter 1 of my *Critical Aesthetics and Postmodernism*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1993.
 5 J. Baudrillard, *Simulations*, trans. P. Patton and O. Beitchman, Semiotext, New York, 1983, pp. 116–17.
 6 J. Lacan, *Ecrits*, trans. A. Sheridan, Tavistock, London 1977, p. 17.
 7 M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1, Pelican, Harmondsworth, 1981, p. 101.

Conclusion: conditions of critical autonomy

 1 Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, Vol. 3: Language*, trans. R. Manheim, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1966, p. 452.
 2 Crowther, *The Language of Twentieth Century Art: A Conceptual History*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1997.
 3 These can be found in his *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1992. A more recent and equally impressive selection can be found in his *Performing Live: Aesthetic Alternatives for the Ends of Art*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 2002.
 4 Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics*, op. cit., p. 212.
 5 *Ibid.*, p. 235.

Appendix: McDowell and the problem of mind-independent reality

 1 John McDowell, *Mind and World*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1996.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 6.
3 *Ibid.*, p. 13.
4 *Ibid.*, p. 14.
5 *Ibid.*, p. 32.
6 *Ibid.*, p. 26.
7 *Ibid.*, p. 29.
8 *Ibid.*, p. 28.
9 *Ibid.*, p. 28.
10 *Ibid.*, p. 114.

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