

ROMANTICISM,  
AESTHETICS, AND  
NATIONALISM

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## CHAPTER I

# *Modernity, subjectivity, liberalism, and nationalism*

### THE POLITICS OF ROMANTICISM

In English language criticism, the place to begin the discussion of the political context of Romanticism is with the work of Raymond Williams. His account of Coleridge in *Culture and Society* lays out the essential terms of discussion:

Coleridge's emphasis in his social writings is on *institutions*. The promptings to perfection came indeed from "the cultivated heart" – that is to say, from man's inward consciousness – but, as Burke before him, Coleridge insisted on man's need for institutions which should confirm and constitute his personal efforts. Cultivation, in fact, though an inward was never a merely individual process.<sup>1</sup>

Williams' account of Coleridge presents us both with opposing terms, "institutions" versus "man's inward consciousness," and with the means of overcoming that opposition through "cultivation," that is, through the medium of culture. As a Marxist, Williams was critical of the conservative elements of Coleridge's political writings, but as a sociologist of knowledge, Williams agreed with Coleridge's key point that institutions and subjectivity are vitally interrelated. Indeed Williams argues in *Culture and Society* that an opposition between institutions and subjectivity developed throughout the nineteenth century, and that this opposition radically transformed the concept of culture. For Williams, the worldview of the Romantic period, exemplified by Coleridge, is characterized precisely by its lack of such an opposition:

The supposed opposition between attention to natural beauty and attention to government, or between personal feeling and the nature of man in society, is on the whole a later development. What were seen at the end of the nineteenth century as disparate interests, between which a man must choose and in the act of choice declare himself poet or sociologist, were, normally, at the beginning of the century, seen as interlocking interests: a conclusion about personal feeling

became a conclusion about society, and an observation of natural beauty carried a necessary moral reference to the whole unified life of man. *Culture and Society*, 30

However, the tendency in modern criticism of Romanticism has been to place the separation between subjectivity and society squarely in the Romantic period itself rather than locate it, as Williams does, later in the century. The history of modern criticism of Romanticism is precisely one of the dichotomizing and privileging of one of these terms over the other: institutions *or* consciousness, politics *or* subjectivity. One can see this in M. H. Abrams' summation in *Natural Supernaturalism* (1971), which emphasizes subjectivity at the expense of institutions: "The Romantic poets were not *complete* poets, in that they represent little of the social dimension of human experience; for although they insist on the importance of community, they express this matter largely as a profound need of the individual consciousness."<sup>2</sup>

The difference between Williams and Abrams can be attributed in large part to a different conception of what texts constitute Romanticism. Although Abrams presents a model of Romanticism based on German philosophical texts, he never analyzes the equally philosophical but politically oriented later prose of Coleridge such as *The Friend* or *Constitution of Church and State*. These are precisely the texts Williams foregrounds in his interpretation of Romanticism. As in any field of study, there is a reciprocal relationship between its theoretical concepts and its canon of texts. Thus, it is because Abrams regards Romantic subjectivity as essentially opposed to social issues that he can deem certain poems (primarily the short lyrics and *The Prelude*) and certain philosophical texts (Hegel's *Phenomenology*) representative of Romanticism, while seeing others as essentially non-Romantic (Wordsworth's *Excursion* or Coleridge's later prose), even though they issue from the same writers and the same philosophical traditions.<sup>3</sup>

Such a view of isolated Romantic subjectivity is not limited to the "traditional" Romantic paradigm of Abrams. It is also evident in the major Deconstructionist critics of Romanticism, Geoffrey Hartman and Paul de Man. Like Abrams, Hartman places Wordsworthian subjectivity in the context of European, and especially German, philosophic thought.<sup>4</sup> In *Wordsworth's Poetry, 1787-1814* (following the paradigm of his earlier *Unmediated Vision*), Hartman stresses the isolation of Wordsworth's subjectivity as it pulls back from nature at crucial moments. And while Paul de Man is now generally identified with an emphasis on the

text as the final level of analysis, isolated subjectivity is the central issue of his influential essay "The Rhetoric of Temporality."<sup>5</sup>

What might be called a new historical movement in Romantic studies has criticized both Abrams and Deconstruction precisely for foregrounding subjectivity in Romanticism at the expense of social and political analysis. For example, in her essay "Plotting the Revolution: The Political Narrative of Romantic Poetry and Criticism," Marilyn Butler has argued against Abrams' assumption that German philosophic models of subjectivity are the keys to understanding English Romanticism. In challenging this, she has also challenged the critical corollaries that Wordsworth, because he is the poet of such subjectivity, should be considered the central figure of English Romanticism, and that *The Prelude*, as his manifesto of subjectivity, should be considered its central text:

The high road of English poetry during the French Revolutionary wars was, we know, of quite another kind: it had to do not with retirement in pursuit of what – the self? God? – but with nationhood and power . . . What we now call English Romanticism . . . had to do with the characterization of the central state – that way of coming to terms with the "platoon" to which we belong, in Burke's word, when the degree to which we *do* belong is in real doubt.<sup>6</sup>

Butler seems to agree with Raymond Williams in focusing on Burke and arguing that Romanticism must be understood in terms of institutions (the "platoon"). But, unlike Williams and like Abrams, she reinstates the same opposition between subjectivity and institutions. Butler and Abrams both begin with the same basic opposition between subjectivity and politics, a dichotomy that defines subjectivity in terms of a retreat from the world. However, while Butler agrees with Abrams in identifying this isolated subjectivity with German philosophy, she draws different conclusions about the relationship between German philosophy and English Romanticism. For Abrams, English Romanticism is romantic because it shares the worldview of German idealism; for Butler, English Romanticism is English precisely because it does not.

Certainly, English Romanticism must be read in light of English history and contexts (as I will do so in this study), but in her reaction against the hegemony of German philosophical models Butler ends up recreating an attitude all too familiar to Coleridgeans, the traditional "common-sense" English attitude that rejects German metaphysics out of hand as otherworldly, abstract, and un-English.<sup>7</sup> In order to oppose this general assumption that the issue of subjectivity is inherently incom-

patible with social and political issues, I want to return to and amplify Raymond Williams' assertion that "cultivation . . . though an inward was never a merely individual process." Furthermore, I will argue that this assertion is true not only for English Romanticism but for the German philosophical tradition of subjectivity that has been regarded as setting up the opposition between subjectivity and the political world in the first place. The context in which I will locate the interrelations between subjectivity and political formation is in the very concept of modernity, which presents itself both as a historical and a philosophical problem.

#### SUBJECTIVITY AND THE CRISES OF MODERNITY

The term *modernity* has perhaps as many meanings as the term *Romanticism* and it is not my intention to describe all of them here. In discussing modernity, one has to be careful to distinguish several elements that are often linked together: (1) modern subjectivity, (2) mass political emancipation and democratization, and (3) the material processes of modernization involved in the development of the modern bourgeois state, including bureaucratization and modes of modern capitalist production, particularly the division of labor. In certain English *laissez-faire* liberal accounts like that of John Stuart Mill, these three elements are ultimately seen as going hand in hand. But, as we will see, the theorists of aesthetic statism often judge each element distinctly. The understanding of modernity that I will be initially describing here stresses the first element, modern subjectivity, as the heart of the development and crises of modernity, and considers the second and third elements primarily in relation to it. This is the understanding of the classical German philosophical tradition of Kant, Schiller, and Hegel. With Marx, Max Weber, and the Frankfurt school, the balance changes, and subjectivity and the possibility of political emancipation are viewed rather as depending on the third element, that is, the material processes of modernization.

The concept of modern subjectivity provides the context that connects Enlightenment and Romanticism, the two great cultural movements that are usually set in opposition to each other. And while this element of modernity is particularly identified with the German philosophical tradition, it is also present in crucial English theorists such as Coleridge and Arnold, both of whom were informed by a variety of continental sources. In my summary here, I will particularly be drawing on the account formulated by Habermas in his history and critique of

modernity in *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*. According to Habermas, the emergence of autonomous subjectivity is the defining feature of the philosophical and historical concept of modernity. Along with and connected to the development of autonomous subjectivity, modernity is further defined by the development of universalistic reason, the constitutional state, and autonomous art. According to Kant's original aspirations for enlightenment, the modern subject has its origin in its emancipation from the oppressive forces that had previously held it in bondage: ignorance, superstition, and the causal nexus of nature. Subjectivity strives to liberate itself from the systems of false thought and the causal determinations of natural forces that confine it. But in doing so, subjectivity also initiates a crisis. In liberating itself from oppressive totalizing forces, subjectivity also runs the risk of splitting itself off from those totalities that give its life meaning.

This is the context in which Habermas describes Hegel's attempt to solve traditional philosophical oppositions through his dialectical philosophy. These philosophical oppositions represent the contradictions that an isolated subjectivity faces in the condition of modernity: "by criticizing the philosophical oppositions – nature and spirit, sensibility and understanding, understanding and reason, theoretical and practical reason, judgment and imagination, I and non-I, finite and infinite, knowledge and faith – [Hegel] wants to respond to the crisis of the diremption of life itself" (*PD*, 21). This is why for Hegel, and the philosophical discourse of modernity that Hegel helps to define, "the critique of subjective idealism is at the same time a critique of modernity" (*PD*, 21).

As a solution to these crises of modernity, the early Hegel looked to a "mythopoetic version of a reconciliation of modernity" (*PD*, 22), a project he shared with Hölderlin and Schelling.<sup>8</sup> These attempts, however, remained tied to models of the past – such as the polis of ancient Greece and the Incarnation of primitive Christianity. But since Hegel felt the situation of modernity to be in some fundamental sense new and unprecedented, in a word, modern, he ultimately had to reject using the solutions of the past to solve the crises of the present. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel turns to subjectivity itself, what he calls absolute spirit, to overcome the crises engendered by modern subjectivity. This is a turn, Habermas argues, that has defined the central paradox within any philosophical project based on a philosophy of consciousness paradigm to solve the crises of modernity.

Since modern subjectivity defines itself in reaction to the structures of

the past, the next question becomes what social and political structures are suitable for the modern moment, and by what basis shall they be judged? For Hegel the criterion is reason, and he posited an identity between modernity and rationality. The modern moment was defined as the progress of the subject towards absolute knowledge and, correspondingly, political freedom. In Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, the modern state (epitomized by Hegel's Prussia) is presented as the culmination of reason, a place where the subject finds freedom within an ethical totality (*Sittlichkeit*) that gives that freedom meaning. Hegel's account of the Prussian state as the culmination of reason was famously criticized by Marx in his *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, in the course of which Marx proposed turning Hegel's dialectic on its head. But although Marx thus changed the terms of the dialectic of history from a spiritual to a material basis, he continued Hegel's identification of modernity with rationality. Marx's materialist dialectic continued the model of the movement of history as the process of the realization of increasingly more rational structures, culminating in the inevitable development of world communism.

A challenge to the identification of modernity and rationality was mounted by Max Weber's work on the processes of modernization. Weber's studies detailed the distinct features of modernization in the West, but while these processes were defined by a distinct logic, Weber cast doubt on whether they were rational in the traditional ethical sense of tending towards the greater human good, the sense that Hegel and Marx had assumed in their identifications of rationality and modernization. Weber's analysis of capitalism and its origins in the Protestant work ethic showed a system of accumulation whose logic of endless accumulation and expansion had completely separated itself from its original ideological justifications and become an end in itself. The paradox that Weber's work brought into sharp focus was the fact that although modernity begins with the goal of emancipating the individual subject, the material processes of modernization, as they are institutionalized in modern economic, political, and scientific structures, work towards destroying those very ways of life that are required to sustain individual subjectivity. This is the paradox vividly illustrated by Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, and explored in some form by all the thinkers associated with the Frankfurt school tradition of critical theory, particularly Habermas, whose own theories of the public sphere and communicative action are specifically formulated as attempts to address this problem.

As I have summarized it here, this Habermasian paradigm of the crisis of modernity is applicable in many ways to English writers such as Coleridge, Arnold, and Ruskin. But there are some differences. As we saw, in the German tradition Hegel identifies the modern moment with the dual perfection of reason and the state. But Coleridge crucially defines English reactions to modernity through his influential distinction between “civilization” and “cultivation” in *Church and State*. Coleridge’s intention is precisely to distinguish the elements that Hegel had sought to identify: the material processes of modernity and spiritual perfection. “Civilization,” in the sense of the economic development of the bourgeois state, does not for Coleridge go hand in hand with “cultivation,” the spiritual progression of society, because, for him, the spiritual state of a nation does not necessarily advance with its economic and bureaucratic development. Thus, the most prominent and influential English reactions to modernity as expressed by Coleridge, Arnold, and especially Ruskin contain at the outset a significant strand of antimodern sentiment.

However, this is not to say that there is no such antimodern strand in German thought. As we will see, in the *Aesthetic Letters* Schiller starts by precisely asserting that the spiritual crisis of contemporary society results from the fragmenting trends of modernity, in particular the division of labor. But as a generalization (although open to many qualifications) one can say that the Germans from Schiller to Hegel celebrate modernity as the fulfillment of their utopian aspirations, even though, and perhaps especially because, they have not yet experienced the full material effects of modernization. The English thinkers of the period from Coleridge through Ruskin, who are in the midst of experiencing the most advanced case of modernization yet seen in the world, are more cautious and critical of modernity and tend to celebrate the premodern structures that modernization is in the act of destroying.

Another difference between the English and German traditions is in their attitude towards reason as the emancipatory element of modernity. For Schiller and the mainstream of the German philosophical tradition in general, the key to the utopian possibilities of modernity is the proper application of reason. In Schiller’s case, it is the application of reason in conjunction with the aesthetic sphere. As for the negative aspects of modernity, the basic attitude of the German tradition is summed up in Habermas’ slogan that the answer to the problems of the Enlightenment is not less, but more enlightenment. But, as we will see, while Coleridge is committed to reason and the values of the Enlightenment, he expresses this commitment through a conservative English

nationalist perspective that looks to premodern traditions as the proper embodiments of reason. Similarly, while Arnold calls for the “sweetness and light” he associates with the free play of reason, he tends to find that the best expressions of reason are already embodied in traditional forms and establishments. And while Ruskin is the most radical in his criticism of contemporary political economy, he looks to the hierarchies of the past, not the mass democracies of the future, for his vision of the proper state.

#### THE LIBERAL STATE AND THE CULTURAL NATION

The period from the late eighteenth century through the middle of the nineteenth is the time of the development of modern conceptions and structures of the liberal state and the cultural nation. As Carl Woodring reminds us, both of these political movements have been connected to Romanticism: “Just as most literary historians continue to associate romanticism with liberalism and revolt, by a linkage already popular when Babbitt and Hulme made it a focus of attack, so with a flip of the coin social scientists, with large obligations to European and especially German thought, currently associate romanticism with conservatism, reaction, or the totalitarian State.”<sup>9</sup> The reason that Romanticism has been identified with two seemingly opposed political movements lies in the fact that both of these movements are responses to the crisis of modern subjectivity that we have discussed above. And indeed one can locate a concept that runs through both political movements and which is identified with Romanticism through its participation in the discourse of modernity. This is the central concept of modern subjectivity, *autonomous self-determination*, which carries with it the corollary notion of achieving freedom through casting off the restraints of oppressive external forces.<sup>10</sup> In Romantic discourse, both literary and political, this principle is expressed in narratives of beings striving after and developing their own particular genius by following the call of their own inward rules. The difference between liberalism and cultural nationalism is that for liberalism the being striving to obtain autonomy is an individual, while for cultural nationalism it is a whole people.

Especially in modern English language usage, much of the distinguishing force has been lost between the words *state* and *nation*. Indeed for most of the twentieth century these two words have been seen as converging, as evidenced by the standard political hybrid term, the *nation-state*. But they have distinct political logics that were felt and

understood by those contemporary theorists who sought to reconcile their oppositions. For example, from his vantage point mid-century, John Stuart Mill begins *Considerations on Representative Government* (1861) by summarizing what he sees as the “two conflicting theories respecting political institutions” that have dominated political speculation up to his time.<sup>11</sup> The first type of theory regards forms of government as “wholly an affair of invention and contrivance”: “Being made by man, it is assumed that man has the choice either to make them or not, and how or on what pattern they shall be made” (*RG*, 374). The opposing school holds that “the fundamental political institutions of a people are . . . a sort of organic growth from the nature and life of that people: a product of their habits, instincts, and unconscious wants and desires, scarcely at all of their deliberate purposes” (*RG*, 374–5). The first position clearly summarizes the tradition of the liberal state and English social contract theory, specifically the reformist Utilitarianism of Mill’s father, James Mill, and Jeremy Bentham. The second position describes the cultural nationalism and continental historicism that Mill had previously identified with the “the Germano-Coleridgian doctrine” in his 1840 essay on Coleridge.<sup>12</sup> For Mill, the next step in political theory required reconciling these seemingly opposed political philosophies. This is precisely the project that Schiller, Coleridge, Arnold, and Ruskin had undertaken in their projects of aesthetic statism, and we will turn to the specifics of their attempts in the chapters that follow. But it is important at the outset to understand the contrasting logics of these opposing solutions to the problem of the modern subject.

Liberalism views government as an invention of individuals created through rational agreements (social contracts, whether actual or implied), and thus treats the state as an entity that can and should be amended through appeals to universal reason and universal human rights. Cultural nationalism, on the other hand, views the nation as an organic outgrowth of a people, a *Volk*. The cultural nation is the political embodiment of the national culture of the people. This national culture is seen as constituting the people, rather than being constituted *by* a people, as it is in liberal theory.<sup>13</sup> The unity of the cultural nation is based on the concept of *common culture*, that is, shared historical and social cultural practices centered around a common language, literature, ethnic practices, religion, and even race insofar as it is tied to the former.<sup>14</sup> The cultural nation is grounded on the ideas of cultural difference and self-determination. According to this, the cultural nation strives to express its unique identity, to form itself autonomously and

follow the lead of its inward being.<sup>15</sup> Since each subject of this nation is the embodiment of a cultural type, of which the cultural nation itself is the most complete expression, there should be no separation between individual and group subjectivity, between public and private spheres.<sup>16</sup> Thus extreme forms of cultural nationalism finally recognize only *one form of subjectivity*, that of the cultural nation itself.<sup>17</sup> For a cultural nationalist, a separate individual subjectivity is identified with the liberal individuality that is seen as the main affliction of modernity. Liberal subjectivity is treated precisely as an illusion to be dispelled or as a problem to be solved through the appeal to common culture and to the cultural origins of the nation. Conversely, it is precisely the separation between individual and group subjectivity that theories of the liberal state seek to maintain. The problem of liberal state theory is the problem of maintaining individual identities within the collectivity of the state. Liberal state theory takes individual subjectivity as a necessary and positive result of modernity, not, as cultural nationalism often views it, as a symptom of the disintegration of authentic social unity caused by the fragmenting processes of modernity.

#### LIBERALISM AND NATIONALISM IN ENGLAND AND GERMANY

As we see in Mill's description, in the cases of England and Germany, the tendency has been to identify England with liberalism, and Germany with nationalism. The traditional historical explanation for this is the differences in political development between the two countries. In short, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, England was a unified political state, while Germany was striving to become one. The decay of the Holy Roman Empire led to the political localism that characterized Germany in the eighteenth century. In 1766, the Empire was split up into 314 territories and towns and into 1,475 free lordships.<sup>18</sup> In contrast, formal political unity had already been achieved in England by the Acts of Union beginning and ending the eighteenth century, and England's political unity and stability were already supposed to be cemented by the set of documents known collectively as "the Constitution."<sup>19</sup>

Theories of nationalism, like those of Kedourie, have maintained that nationalism is fueled by the goal of making the political state identical with the cultural nation. Germany is usually seen as the paradigmatic example because, while the Germans had a unified sense of themselves as a cultural nation of German-speaking peoples, this cultural nation was divided up in multiple political states. In contrast, by virtue of its

early political unification, Britain is usually seen as not having gone through a nationalistic phase. Recent historical scholarship has however disputed this traditional view. Gerald Newman has challenged the accepted account that England had no nationalistic phase, and Linda Colley has shown just how much work it took to forge a popular sense of shared British national identity out of the distinct ethnicities of England, Scotland, and Wales after the Acts of Union had supposedly politically unified the country.<sup>20</sup> Newman's cultural history of nationalism in England is particularly relevant to the context in which the political orientation of English Romanticism should be viewed. He suggests the origin of English nationalism in the period from 1740 to 1789 was a reaction against the French-dominated cosmopolitan culture of the English aristocracy. According to Newman, the ideology of English nationalism becomes the vehicle through which those excluded from aristocratic circles could claim their share of political power. Thus for Newman the rejection of France by Wordsworth and Coleridge after the French Revolution and their subsequent embrace of English nationalism signals not a retreat into conservatism, but rather an embrace of the true socially progressive force of the age.<sup>21</sup>

Conversely, while historiography has usually neglected the presence of nationalism in England, intellectual history has usually neglected the presence of liberalism in the German philosophical tradition. Because of the horrors of German fascism in this century, the tendency has been to cast the shadow back into history and view any German pronouncements on nationalism and the state as forerunners of Nazi totalitarianism. In particular, German Romanticism, with its models of organic national unity, has been seen as irredeemably opposed to liberalism. But this view has been challenged by Frederick Beiser in his recent revisionist account of the politics of German Romanticism, in which he analyzes Novalis and Friedrich Schlegel and argues that within the contemporary political context of their time, these figures were radical rather than, as is often believed, conservative.<sup>22</sup> In an argument similar to Newman's about the progressive force of English nationalism, Beiser states that the appeal to the organic nation by German Romanticism was a revolutionary attack against the unethical order of the *ancien régime*. It is from this political perspective that Beiser asserts, "Romanticism was the aesthetics of republicanism" (*Enlightenment, Revolution, and Romanticism*, 260).

While Newman's and Beiser's arguments about the progressive implications of nationalism viewed with their contemporary political context

are persuasive, from the perspective of traditional Anglo-American liberalism, one is still left with the problem of reconciling the political determination of a people with the inalienable political rights of the individual. As I have indicated in my sketch above, taken to their extreme logical outcomes, liberalism and cultural nationalism seem inherently incompatible. But in fact what characterizes Schiller and subsequent German Romantics and philosophers is the conviction that *Bildung*, the process of autonomous self-development, could and should occur *simultaneously* for both the individual and the political state.

This idea of a joint development of the individual and the state is baffling to the English tradition of liberalism. For, in the social contract theory of Hobbes and Locke, individuals are imagined as formed decision-making agents *before* they enter the state. Indeed it is from the consent of each individual that the state is formed. Even if one reads such social contract theory as a theory of authorization rather than as a historical hypothesis about the actual origin of the state, the same point obtains: individuals are considered formed theoretically *prior* to the political group into which they enter. British liberalism as it descends from Hobbes and Locke sees the political state as constituted to safeguard the *preexisting* rights of individuals and this conception continues into the *laissez-faire* model of the state of classical political economy. For this tradition of British liberalism, the individual and the state are, at best, pragmatic partners, and, at worst, in constant conflict.

Thus, from the perspective of English liberalism, those aspects of the German philosophical tradition that talk in positive terms about the development of the state are taken as signs that this tradition is anti-liberal. But the German philosophical tradition defined by Kant and Schiller begins with the same premise as English liberalism, namely individual freedom. And that the true descendent of this German philosophical tradition is not the cultural nation but rather the liberal state is affirmed in contemporary social theory by Habermas' use of the Kantian tradition to uphold individual human rights and to provide the basis of a noncoercive democratic public sphere.

In order to clarify this issue, let us define liberalism, as is often done, as the political commitment to the freedom of the individual. Both English liberalism and Kantian philosophy can lay claim to this definition. Where the two traditions differ, however, is their understandings of what it is for the individual to be free. For Kant and his followers, including Schiller, freedom means being free to follow the universal dictates of *reason* in the form of the moral law. On the other hand, for

classical British liberalism, which, in *Culture and Anarchy*, Arnold sums up and criticizes in the phrase “doing as one likes,” freedom means being free to follow one’s individual *desire*, whether or not it is in agreement with reason. John Stuart Mill gives the most famous voice to this type of British liberalism in *On Liberty*, and there the very test cases of freedom are precisely those in which individual private desire comes into conflict with universal standards of reason.

These different concepts of freedom entail contrasting attitudes towards the idea of development in the two traditions. British liberalism posits that being free is being able to pursue one’s desires, and that the role of the state therefore is to politically safeguard these pursuits of the individual. Given this model, there is no intrinsic concern with development for either the individual or the state. Either the state is developed enough as a practical entity to provide such safeguarding or it is not. And since the desires of the individual are what the state is designed to protect, the state has no intrinsic role in developing the individual beyond providing it with a law-governed environment in which it can safely pursue its desires, with the sole limiting constraint that the enacting of those desires not result in injury to other individuals.

This conception of the liberal state, Hannah Arendt argues in *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, is precisely what Kant promotes in his political writings.<sup>23</sup> And indeed Kant reflects this conception when he describes the ideal state as one “which has not only the greatest freedom . . . but also the most precise specification and preservation of the limits of this freedom in order that it can co-exist with the freedom of others.”<sup>24</sup> In *Perpetual Peace*, Kant argues that if the political state is properly set up with safeguards for each individual’s freedom then, as Arendt puts it, “a bad man can be a good citizen in a good state” (*Lectures*, 17). In these arguments, Kant reflects Mandeville’s idea that private vices result in public virtues. For, as Arendt explains, Kant holds the idea that nature has a providential design for the progress of the human species as a whole that is worked out through the unfettered movements of individuals following their own desires. In his political writings, Kant does not posit a developmental role for the political state beyond its allowing nature to work out its secret designs.

But, as Arendt points out, this account of human progress in his political writings contradicts Kant’s account of human morality in his philosophical works: “Infinite Progress is the law of the human species; at the same time, man’s dignity demands that he be seen (every single one of us) in his particularity and, as such, be seen . . . as reflecting

mankind in general. In other words, the very idea of progress . . . contradicts Kant's notion of man's dignity" (*Lectures*, 77). In Kant, the contradiction is between what each individual is ideally, that is, a rational being who wills the dictates of the moral law, and what each individual is in reality, a physically determined creature who is under the compulsion of nature in his actions. The problem is how to develop the real into the ideal. Kant does not solve this problem because it is not clear how nature, which for him is behind human progress, can transcend nature. And furthermore Kant's account of progress focuses on the species as a whole, not on the individual.<sup>25</sup>

Schiller seeks to find a way for actually existing human individuals to progress towards the ideal ethical state described in Kant's moral philosophy. And it is in this context that Schiller promotes the idea of the reciprocal development of the individual and the state. For if, as the Kantian model posits, ideal freedom for the individual consists in realizing and then conforming to the universal dictates of reason and ethical behavior, then there is room for development for both the individual and the state as they actually exist. For according to this idea, the *laissez-faire* state of British liberalism is only doing half its job. It is protecting individuals from being victimized by other individuals, but it is not providing an environment in which individuals can cultivate themselves to the point that they can willingly enter into the dictates of the moral law. Like Raymond Williams' definition of cultivation, Schiller's *Bildung* is something that happens in the mind of each individual, but it requires a collective effort to bring it about.

It is at this point that we can appreciate the meaningful ambiguity of the term *state*, as describing both the state of mind of the individual, and the collective body of the political state.<sup>26</sup> In Schillerian *Bildung*, the individual state of mind is cultivated by the collective body, and vice versa. (This same pattern of the dialectical relationship between individual and universal is seen in Coleridge's account of the symbol, as we will discuss in the next chapter.) And it should also be noted that Schiller uses *state* in its collective sense in a broader sense than what we now associate with the term *political state*. Schiller's ideal of the political state is not a totalizing one. It is neither like the paternalistic states of the German kingdoms of his time nor the totalitarian states of ours. His ideal of the political state is based on the model of the free civic engagement of individuals in the polis of ancient Greece.<sup>27</sup> But, as we will discuss in chapter 3 below, Schiller is notoriously vague about the form this would take in the modern era.

The ideal of a state that would develop the moral perfection of its citizens has, of course, a long tradition in western thought, beginning with Plato's *Republic*. And while the idea of twin development of individual and state is not unknown in English thought, there are perhaps historical reasons why the connection between individual and state self-development comes more easily to German philosophers at the beginning of the nineteenth century than to the English. I have described the traditional contrast between a politically unified Britain and a politically fragmented Germany in the early nineteenth century. And while I agree with recent scholarship that has questioned the necessary consequences of this difference for the question of nationalism in the two countries, this difference does remain relevant to the emphasis one finds on the development of a rational state in German political philosophy. For German philosophers, the arbitrary political demarcations of the German-speaking peoples and corresponding hodgepodge of differing political constitutions and legal practices could not help but stand in contrast with their ideals of a rational political state. Furthermore, German political fragmentation was part of a larger sense of Germany's political and cultural backwardness as compared to England and France.<sup>28</sup> It is this feeling of backwardness that encourages such German figures as Schiller, Novalis, and Friedrich Schlegel to call for the mutual development of both the individual and the political state, and to see these mutual developments as harmonious, rather than as conflicting, processes. In their view, neither the individual citizens nor the states, considered either politically or culturally, had yet achieved proper rationality and thus complete identity. Both were still considered to be works in progress.

#### PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SPHERES

Cultural nationalism has no problems defining the ideal relationship between culture and the state, but liberalism does. As I have shown, according to the theory of cultural nationalism all aspects of culture are or should be part of a common culture, which, by definition, provides the basis of unity for the nation. But for liberalism, culture becomes a problematic term that can be assimilated either to public reason or individual desire. Liberalism, in both the British and Kantian forms I have described here, has to place culture according to its dual orientation towards preserving the autonomy of the individual and preserving the unity of the political state, without which the state would not have

the power to preserve individual freedom. Such a dual orientation is the basis for an essential feature of liberalism, the separation between the public and private spheres. And since for both British and Kantian liberalism, culture is not, as it is in cultural nationalism, coextensive with the cultural and political state, the problem of culture for liberalism is how to place culture in relation to the public and private spheres. To draw the contrast as sharply as possible, one can say that for the tradition of liberalism epitomized by Mill's *On Liberty*, culture should not matter in the public sphere and should be seen as purely an individual matter within the private sphere. On the other hand, for the Kantian tradition, culture only matters insofar as it can be connected to universal reason and thereby assist in the public sphere.

British liberalism, freedom as the pursuit of individual desires, has therefore been regarded as resulting in a "procedural" model of the state, with a corresponding sharp division between private culture and public procedural reason. Bentham, with his well-known lack of interest in culture, is the prime example of such a position in classical liberalism. But one can be very sympathetic to culture and still end up with the same division, as we can see in the cases of Mill and his theoretical descendent Richard Rorty. Both thinkers have argued for the value of culture, but in terms that preserve the separation of the public and the private spheres. Rorty's defense of the modern liberal state is based on the separation between the public procedural apparatus of the state and what Rorty calls "private searches for perfection."<sup>29</sup>

Such a separation is what antiliberal theorists, including cultural nationalists, have in mind when they critique the limits of the purely procedural liberal state. What critics of the procedural liberal state point out is that it is impossible to relegate the issue of culture to the private sphere. They argue that the issue of culture inevitably becomes an issue for the state because citizens need some shared *basis of sensibility* to ensure public consensus in the public sphere.

It is on this point that Kantian liberal theorists agree with cultural nationalists that there needs to be some shared basis of sensibility among citizens to insure the public consensus which is at the heart of the democratic liberal state. However, the Kantian liberal theorist differs with the cultural nationalist over how extensive that basis of shared sensibility needs to be. In cultural nationalism, the extension of sensibility is at every point, with the result that one can properly only speak of one sensibility embodied in a people, rather than separate people connected by shared sensibilities. The Kantian liberal theorist needs

enough shared sensibility for there to be consensus, but not so much that individual autonomy is annulled. Furthermore, the Kantian liberal has a different view of the basis of shared sensibility. It should rest on *shared universal rationality* rather than on shared historically based cultural practice, as it does for the cultural nationalist.

Schiller, Coleridge, and Arnold share the Kantian liberal premise that a rational sensibility of the people is essential to the development and unity of the state, but they go beyond Kant in arguing that the aesthetic sphere is the essential medium for overcoming liberalism's problem of the separation between the public and private spheres. In their formulations of aesthetic statism, the aesthetic sphere has to act both as the basis of unifying people through the universality of reason and as the means of preserving their national cultural and individual differences. In short, it has to reconcile the universal and the particular. The means by which this reconciliation is to be achieved is through the special example and logic of the symbol, to which I now turn.