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research proceeds under conditions different from those obtaining in the study of nature. To this end he uses the distinction between nature and freedom, which is the basis of Kantian philosophy. Historical study is different because in its domain there are no natural laws but, rather, voluntarily accepted practical laws—i.e., commandments. The world of human freedom does not manifest the same absence of exceptions as natural laws.

This line of thought, however, is not very convincing. Basing the inductive investigation of the human world of freedom on Kant's distinction between nature and freedom is not true to Kant's intentions; nor is it true to the logic of induction itself. Here Mill was more consistent, for he methodically excluded the problem of freedom. Moreover, Helmholtz's appealing to Kant without following out the consequences of doing so bears no real fruit, for even according to Helmholtz the empiricism of the human sciences is to be regarded in the same way as that of meteorology, namely with renunciation and resignation.

But in fact the human sciences are a long way from regarding themselves as simply inferior to the natural sciences. Instead, possessed of the intellectual heritage of German classicism, they carried forward the proud awareness that they were the true representatives of humanism. The period of German classicism had not only brought about a renewal of literature and aesthetic criticism, which overcame the outmoded baroque ideal of taste and of Enlightenment rationalism; it had also given the idea of humanity, and the ideal of enlightened reason, a fundamentally new content. More than anyone, Herder transcended the perfectionism of the Enlightenment with his new ideal of "cultivating the human" (*Bildung zum Menschen*) and thus prepared the ground for the growth of the historical sciences in the nineteenth century.¹¹ The *concept of self-formation, education, or cultivation (Bildung)*, which became supremely important at the time, was perhaps the greatest idea of the eighteenth century, and it is this concept which is the atmosphere breathed by the human sciences of the nineteenth century, even if they are unable to offer any epistemological justification for it.

(B) THE GUIDING CONCEPTS OF HUMANISM

(i) *Bildung (Culture)*

The concept of *Bildung* most clearly indicates the profound intellectual change that still causes us to experience the century of Goethe as

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contemporary, whereas the baroque era appears historically remote. Key concepts and words which we still use acquired their special stamp then, and if we are not to be swept along by language, but to strive for a reasoned historical self-understanding, we must face a whole host of questions about verbal and conceptual history. In what follows it is possible to do no more than begin the great task that faces investigators, as an aid to our philosophical inquiry. Concepts such as "art," "history," "the creative," "worldview," "experience," "genius," "external world," "interiority," "expression," "style," "symbol," which we take to be self-evident, contain a wealth of history.¹²

If we consider the concept of *Bildung*, whose importance for the human sciences we have emphasized, we are in a fortunate situation. Here a previous investigation¹³ gives us a fine overview of the history of the word: its origin in medieval mysticism, its continuance in the mysticism of the baroque, its religious spiritualization in Klopstock's *Messiah*, which dominates the whole period, and finally the basic definition Herder gives it: "rising up to humanity through culture." The cult of *Bildung* in the nineteenth century preserved the profounder dimension of the word, and our notion of *Bildung* is determined by it.

The first important thing to note about the usual content of the word *Bildung* is that the earlier idea of a "natural form"—which refers to external appearance (the shape of the limbs, the well-formed figure) and in general to the shapes created by nature (e.g., a mountain formation—*Gebirgsbildung*)—was at that time detached almost entirely from the new idea. Now, *Bildung* is intimately associated with the idea of culture and designates primarily the properly human way of developing one's natural talents and capacities. Between Kant and Hegel the form Herder had given to the concept was filled out. Kant still does not use the word *Bildung* in this connection. He speaks of "cultivating" a capacity (or "natural talent"), which as such is an act of freedom by the acting subject. Thus among duties to oneself he mentions not letting one's talents rust, but without using the word *Bildung*.¹⁴ However when Hegel takes up the same Kantian idea of duties to oneself, he already speaks of *Sichbilden* (educating or cultivating oneself) and *Bildung*.¹⁵ And Wilhelm von Humboldt, with his sensitive ear, already detects a difference in meaning between *Kultur* and *Bildung*: "but when in our language we say *Bildung*, we mean something both higher and more inward, namely the disposition of mind which, from the knowledge and the feeling of the total intellectual and moral endeavor, flows harmoniously into sensibility and character."¹⁶

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Bildung here no longer means “culture”—i.e., developing one’s capacities or talents. Rather, the rise of the word Bildung evokes the ancient mystical tradition according to which man carries in his soul the image of God, after whom he is fashioned, and which man must cultivate in himself. The Latin equivalent for Bildung is *formatio*, with related words in other languages—e.g., in English (in Shaftesbury), “form” and “formation.” In German, too, the corresponding derivations of the idea of *forma*—e.g., “*Formierung*” and “*Formation*”—have long vied with the word Bildung. Since the Aristotelianism of the Renaissance the word *forma* has been completely separated from its technical meaning and interpreted in a purely dynamic and natural way. Yet the victory of the word Bildung over “form” does not seem to be fortuitous. For in Bildung there is Bild. The idea of “form” lacks the mysterious ambiguity of Bild, which comprehends both *Nachbild* (image, copy) and *Vorbild* (model).

In accordance with the frequent transition from becoming to being, Bildung (like the contemporary use of the German word “*Formation*”) describes more the result of the process of becoming than the process itself. The transition is especially clear here because the result of Bildung is not achieved in the manner of a technical construction, but grows out of an inner process of formation and cultivation, and therefore constantly remains in a state of continual Bildung. It is not accidental that in this respect the word Bildung resembles the Greek *physis*. Like nature, Bildung has no goals outside itself. (The word and thing *Bildungsziel*—the goal of cultivation—is to be regarded with the suspicion appropriate to such a secondary kind of Bildung. Bildung as such cannot be a goal; it cannot as such be sought, except in the reflective thematic of the educator.) In having no goals outside itself, the concept of Bildung transcends that of the mere cultivation of given talents, from which concept it is derived. The cultivation of a talent is the development of something that is given, so that practicing and cultivating it is a mere means to an end. Thus the educational content of a grammar book is simply a means and not itself an end. Assimilating it simply improves one’s linguistic ability. In Bildung, by contrast, that by which and through which one is formed becomes completely one’s own. To some extent everything that is received is absorbed, but in Bildung what is absorbed is not like a means that has lost its function. Rather, in acquired Bildung nothing disappears, but everything is preserved. Bildung is a genuine historical idea, and because of this historical character of “preservation” it is important for understanding in the human sciences.

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Thus even a preliminary glance at the linguistic history of *Bildung* introduces us to the circle of historical ideas that Hegel first introduced into the realm of “first philosophy.” In fact Hegel has worked out very astutely what *Bildung* is. We follow him initially.¹⁷ He saw also that philosophy (and, we may add, the human sciences, *Geisteswissenschaften*) “has, in *Bildung*, the condition of its existence.” For the being of *Geist* (spirit) has an essential connection with the idea of *Bildung*.

Man is characterized by the break with the immediate and the natural that the intellectual, rational side of his nature demands of him. “In this sphere he is not, by nature, what he should be”—and hence he needs *Bildung*. What Hegel calls the formal nature of *Bildung* depends on its universality. In the concept of rising to the universal, Hegel offers a unified conception of what his age understood by *Bildung*. Rising to the universal is not limited to theoretical *Bildung* and does not mean only a theoretical orientation in contrast to a practical one, but covers the essential character of human rationality as a whole. It is the universal nature of human *Bildung* to constitute itself as a universal intellectual being. Whoever abandons himself to his particularity is *ungebildet* (“unformed”)—e.g., if someone gives way to blind anger without measure or sense of proportion. Hegel shows that basically such a man is lacking in the power of abstraction. He cannot turn his gaze from himself towards something universal, from which his own particular being is determined in measure and proportion.

Hence *Bildung*, as rising to the universal, is a task for man. It requires sacrificing particularity for the sake of the universal. But, negatively put, sacrificing particularity means the restraint of desire and hence freedom from the object of desire and freedom for its objectivity. Here the deductions of the phenomenological dialectic complement what is stated in the *Propaedeutik*. In his *Phenomenology of Spirit* Hegel works out the genesis of a truly free self-consciousness “in-and-for-itself,” and he shows that the essence of work is to form the thing rather than consume it.¹⁸ In the independent existence that work gives the thing, working consciousness finds itself again as an independent consciousness. Work is restrained desire. In forming the object—that is, in being selflessly active and concerned with a universal—working consciousness raises itself above the immediacy of its existence to universality; or, as Hegel puts it, by forming the thing it forms itself. What he means is that in acquiring a “capacity,” a skill, man gains the sense of himself. What seemed denied him in the selflessness of serving, inasmuch as he subjected himself to a frame of mind

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that was alien to him, becomes part of him inasmuch as he is working consciousness. As such he finds in himself his own frame of mind, and it is quite right to say of work that it forms. The self-awareness of working consciousness contains all the elements that make up practical Bildung: the distancing from the immediacy of desire, of personal need and private interest, and the exacting demand of a universal.

In his *Propaedeutic* Hegel demonstrates the nature of practical Bildung, of taking the universal upon oneself, by means of a number of examples. It is found in the moderation which limits the excessive satisfaction of one's needs and use of one's powers by a general consideration—that of health. It is found in the circumspection that, while concerned with the individual situation or business, remains open to observing what else might be necessary. But every choice of profession has something of this. For every profession has something about it of fate, of external necessity; it demands that one give oneself to tasks that one would not seek out as a private aim. Practical Bildung is seen in one's fulfilling one's profession wholly, in all its aspects. But this includes overcoming the element in it that is alien to the particularity which is oneself, and making it wholly one's own. Thus to give oneself to the universality of a profession is at the same time "to know how to limit oneself—i.e., to make one's profession wholly one's concern. Then it is no longer a limitation."

Even in this description of practical Bildung by Hegel, one can recognize the basic character of the historical spirit: to reconcile itself with itself, to recognize oneself in other being. It becomes completely clear in the idea of theoretical Bildung, for to have a theoretical stance is, as such, already alienation, namely the demand that one "deal with something that is not immediate, something that is alien, with something that belongs to memory and to thought." Theoretical Bildung leads beyond what man knows and experiences immediately. It consists in learning to affirm what is different from oneself and to find universal viewpoints from which one can grasp the thing, "the objective thing in its freedom," without selfish interest.¹⁹ That is why acquiring Bildung always involves the development of theoretical interests, and Hegel declares the world and language of antiquity to be especially suitable for this, since this world is remote and alien enough to effect the necessary separation of ourselves from ourselves, "but it contains at the same time all the exit points and threads of the return to oneself, for becoming acquainted with it and for finding oneself again, but oneself according to the truly universal essence of spirit."²⁰

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In these words of Hegel the Gymnasium director, we recognize the classicist's prejudice that it is particularly in the world of classical antiquity that the universal nature of the spirit can most easily be found. But the basic idea is correct. To recognize one's own in the alien, to become at home in it, is the basic movement of spirit, whose being consists only in returning to itself from what is other. Hence all theoretical Bildung, even acquiring foreign languages and conceptual worlds, is merely the continuation of a process of Bildung that begins much earlier. Every single individual who raises himself out of his natural being to the spiritual finds in the language, customs, and institutions of his people a pre-given body of material which, as in learning to speak, he has to make his own. Thus every individual is always engaged in the process of Bildung and in getting beyond his naturalness, inasmuch as the world into which he is growing is one that is humanly constituted through language and custom. Hegel emphasizes that a people gives itself its existence in its world. It works out from itself and thus exteriorizes what it is in itself.

Thus what constitutes the essence of Bildung is clearly not alienation as such, but the return to oneself—which presupposes alienation, to be sure. However, Bildung is not to be understood only as the process of historically raising the mind to the universal; it is at the same time the element within which the educated man (Gebildete) moves. What kind of element is this? The questions we asked of Helmholtz arise here. Hegel's answer cannot satisfy us, for Hegel sees Bildung as brought to completion through the movement of alienation and appropriation in a complete mastery of substance, in the dissolution of all concrete being, reached only in the absolute knowledge of philosophy.

But we can acknowledge that Bildung is an element of spirit without being tied to Hegel's philosophy of absolute spirit, just as the insight into the historicity of consciousness is not tied to his philosophy of world history. We must realize that the idea of perfect Bildung remains a necessary ideal even for the historical sciences that depart from Hegel. For Bildung is the element in which they move. Even what earlier usage, with reference to physical appearance, called "perfection of form" is not so much the last state of a development as the mature state that has left all development behind and makes possible the harmonious movement of all the limbs. It is precisely in this sense that the human sciences presuppose that the scholarly consciousness is already formed and for that very reason possesses the right, unlearnable, and inimitable tact that envelops the

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human sciences' form of judgment and mode of knowledge as if it were the element in which they move.

The way that Helmholtz describes how the human sciences work, especially what he calls artistic feeling and *tact*, in fact presupposes this element of *Bildung*, within which the mind has a special free mobility. Thus Helmholtz speaks of the "readiness with which the most varied experiences must flow into the memory of the historian or philologist."²¹ That may seem to be a description from an external viewpoint: namely, the ideal of the "self-conscious work of drawing iron clad conclusions," according to which the natural scientist conceives himself. The concept of *memory*, as he uses it, is not sufficient to explain what is involved here. In fact, this *tact* or feeling is not rightly understood if one thinks of it as a supervening mental competence which uses a powerful memory and so arrives at cognitive results that cannot be rigorously examined. What makes *tact* possible, what leads to its acquisition and possession, is not merely a piece of psychological equipment that is propitious to knowledge in the human sciences.

Moreover, the nature of memory is not rightly understood if it is regarded as merely a general talent or capacity. Keeping in mind, forgetting, and recalling belong to the historical constitution of man and are themselves part of his history and his *Bildung*. Whoever uses his memory as a mere faculty—and any "technique" of memory is such a use—does not yet possess it as something that is absolutely his own. Memory must be formed; for memory is not memory for anything and everything. One has a memory for some things, and not for others; one wants to preserve one thing in memory and banish another. It is time to rescue the phenomenon of memory from being regarded merely as a psychological faculty and to see it as an essential element of the finite historical being of man. In a way that has long been insufficiently noticed, forgetting is closely related to keeping in mind and remembering; forgetting is not merely an absence and a lack but, as Nietzsche in particular pointed out, a condition of the life of mind.²² Only by forgetting does the mind have the possibility of total renewal, the capacity to see everything with fresh eyes, so that what is long familiar fuses with the new into a many leveled unity. "Keeping in mind" is ambiguous. As memory (*mneme*), it is connected to remembering (*anamnesis*).²³ But the same thing is also true of the concept of "tact" that Helmholtz uses. By "tact" we understand a special sensitivity and sensitiveness to situations and how to behave in them, for which knowledge from general principles does not suffice. Hence an essential part of *tact* is that it

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is tacit and unformulable. One can say something tactfully; but that will always mean that one passes over something tactfully and leaves it unsaid, and it is tactless to express what one can only pass over. But to pass over something does not mean to avert one's gaze from it, but to keep an eye on it in such a way that rather than knock into it, one slips by it. Thus tact helps one to preserve distance. It avoids the offensive, the intrusive, the violation of the intimate sphere of the person.

The tact of which Helmholtz speaks is not simply identical with this phenomenon of manners and customs, but they do share something essential. For the tact which functions in the human sciences is not simply a feeling and unconscious, but is at the same time a mode of knowing and a mode of being. This can be seen more clearly from the above analysis of the concept of *Bildung*. What Helmholtz calls tact includes *Bildung* and is a function of both aesthetic and historical *Bildung*. One must have a sense for the aesthetic and the historical or acquire it, if one is to be able to rely on one's tact in work in the human sciences. Because this sense is not simply part of one's natural equipment, we rightly speak of aesthetic or historical consciousness, and not properly of sense. Still, this consciousness accords well with the immediacy of the senses—i.e., it knows how to make sure distinctions and evaluations in the individual case without being able to give its reasons. Thus someone who has an aesthetic sense knows how to distinguish between the beautiful and the ugly, high and low quality, and whoever has a historical sense knows what is possible for an age and what is not, and has a sense of the otherness of the past in relation to the present.

If all that presupposes *Bildung*, then what is in question is not a procedure or behavior but what has come into being. It is not enough to observe more closely, to study a tradition more thoroughly, if there is not already a receptivity to the "otherness" of the work of art or of the past. That is what, following Hegel, we emphasized as the general characteristic of *Bildung*: keeping oneself open to what is other—to other, more universal points of view. It embraces a sense of proportion and distance in relation to itself, and hence consists in rising above itself to universality. To distance oneself from oneself and from one's private purposes means to look at these in the way that others see them. This universality is by no means a universality of the concept or understanding. This is not a case of a particular being determined by a universal; nothing is proved conclusively. The universal viewpoints to which the cultivated man (*gebildet*) keeps himself open are not a fixed applicable yardstick, but are present to

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him only as the viewpoints of possible others. Thus the cultivated consciousness has in fact more the character of a sense. For every sense—e.g., the sense of sight—is already universal in that it embraces its sphere, remains open to a particular field, and grasps the distinctions within what is opened to it in this way. In that such distinctions are confined to one particular sphere at a time, whereas cultivated consciousness is active in all directions, such consciousness surpasses all of the natural sciences. It is a *universal sense*.

A universal and common sense—this formulation of the nature of Bildung suggests an extensive historical context. A reflection on the idea of Bildung like that which lies at the basis of Helmholtz's thinking leads us far back into the history of this concept. We must pursue this context a little if we want to liberate the problem the human sciences present for philosophy from the artificial narrowness in which nineteenth-century methodology was caught. The modern concept of science and the associated concept of method are insufficient. What makes the human sciences into sciences can be understood more easily from the tradition of the concept of Bildung than from the modern idea of scientific method. It is to the *humanistic tradition* that we must turn. In its resistance to the claims of modern science it gains a new significance.

It would be worth making a separate investigation into the way in which, since the days of humanism, criticism of "scholastic" science has made itself heard and how this criticism has changed with the changes of its opponent. Originally it was classical motifs that were revived in it. The enthusiasm with which the humanists proclaimed the Greek language and the path of eruditio signified more than an antiquarian passion. The revival of the classical languages brought with it a new valuation of rhetoric. It waged battle against the "school," i.e., scholastic science, and supported an ideal of human wisdom that was not achieved in the "school"—an antithesis which in fact is found at the very beginning of philosophy. Plato's critique of sophism and, still more, his peculiarly ambivalent attitude towards Isocrates, indicate the philosophical problem that emerges here. Beginning with the new methodological awareness of seventeenth-century science, this old problem inevitably became more critical. In view of this new science's claim to be exclusive, the question of whether the humanistic concept of Bildung was not a special source of truth was raised with increased urgency. In fact we shall see that it is from the survival of the humanistic idea of Bildung that the human sciences of the nineteenth century draw, without admitting it, their own life.

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At the same time it is self-evident that it is not mathematics but humanistic studies that are important here. For what could the new methodology of the seventeenth century mean for the human sciences? One has only to read the appropriate chapters of the *Logique de Port-Royal* concerning the rules of reason applied to historical truths to see how little can be achieved in the human sciences by that idea of method.²⁴ Its results are really trivial—for example, the idea that in order to judge an event in its truth one must take account of the accompanying circumstances (circumstances). With this kind of argument the Jansenists sought to provide a methodical way of showing to what extent miracles deserved belief. They countered an untested belief in miracles with the spirit of the new method and sought in this way to legitimate the true miracles of biblical and ecclesiastical tradition. The new science in the service of the old church—that this relationship could not last is only too clear, and one can foresee what had to happen when the Christian presuppositions themselves were questioned. When the methodological ideal of the natural sciences was applied to the credibility of the historical testimonies of scriptural tradition, it inevitably led to completely different results that were catastrophic for Christianity. There is no great distance between the criticism of miracles in the style of the Jansenists and historical criticism of the Bible. Spinoza is a good example of this. I shall show later that a logically consistent application of this method as the only norm for the truth of the human sciences would amount to their self-annihilation.

(ii) *Sensus Communis*

In this regard it is important to remember the humanistic tradition, and to ask what is to be learned from it with respect to the human sciences' mode of knowledge. Vico's *De nostri temporis studiorum ratione* makes a good starting point.²⁵ As its very title shows, Vico's defense of humanism derives from the Jesuit pedagogical system and is directed as much against Jansenism as against Descartes. Like his outline of a "new science," Vico's pedagogical manifesto is based on old truths. He appeals to the *sensus communis*, common sense, and to the humanistic ideal of *eloquentia*—elements already present in the classical concept of wisdom. "Talking well" (*eu legein*) has always had two meanings; it is not merely a rhetorical ideal. It also means saying the right thing—i.e., the truth—and is not just the art of speaking—of saying something well.

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This ideal was proclaimed in the ancient world just as much by teachers of philosophy as by those of rhetoric. Rhetoric was always in conflict with philosophy and, in contrast to the idle speculations of the Sophists, claimed to teach true wisdom. Here Vico, himself a teacher of rhetoric, is in a humanistic tradition that stems from antiquity. This tradition is obviously important for the self-understanding of the human sciences; especially so is the positive ambiguity of the rhetorical ideal, which is condemned not only by Plato, but by the anti-rhetorical methodology of modern times. In Vico, we already find much of what will concern us. But apart from the rhetorical element, his appeal to the *sensus communis* contains another element from classical tradition. This is the contrast between the scholar and the wise man on whom the scholar depends—a contrast that is drawn for the first time in the Cynics' conception of Socrates—and its content is based on the distinction between the ideas of *sophia* and *phronesis*. It was first elaborated by Aristotle, developed by the Peripatetics as a critique of the theoretical ideal of life,²⁶ and in the Hellenistic period helped define the image of the wise man, especially after the Greek ideal of *Bildung* had been fused with the self-consciousness of the leading political class of Rome. Late Roman legal science also developed against the background of an art and practice of law that is closer to the practical ideal of *phronesis* than to the theoretical ideal of *sophia*.²⁷

With the renaissance of classical philosophy and rhetoric, the image of Socrates became the counter-cry against science, as is shown, in particular, in the figure of the *idiota*, the layman, who assumes a totally new role between the scholar and the wise man.²⁸ Likewise the rhetorical tradition of humanism invoked Socrates and the skeptical critique of the Dogmatists. We find that Vico criticizes the Stoics because they believe in reason as the *regula veri* and, contrariwise, praises the old Academicians, who assert only the knowledge of not knowing anything; and the new ones, because they excel in the art of arguing (which is part of rhetoric).

Vico's appeal to the *sensus communis* undoubtedly exhibits a special coloring within this humanistic tradition. In this sphere of knowledge too there is a *querelle des anciens et des modernes*. It is no longer the contrast with the "school," but the particular contrast with modern science that Vico has in mind. He does not deny the merits of modern critical science but shows its limits. Even with this new science and its mathematical methodology, we still cannot do without the wisdom of the ancients and their cultivation of *prudentia* and *eloquentia*. But the most important thing in education is still something else—the training in the *sensus*

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communis, which is not nourished on the true but on the probable, the verisimilar. The main thing for our purposes is that here *sensus communis* obviously does not mean only that general faculty in all men but the sense that founds community. According to Vico, what gives the human will its direction is not the abstract universality of reason but the concrete universality represented by the community of a group, a people, a nation, or the whole human race. Hence developing this communal sense is of decisive importance for living.

On this communal sense for what is true and right, which is not a knowledge based on argumentation, but enables one to discover what is evident (*verisimile*), Vico bases the significance and the independent rights of rhetoric. Education cannot, he says, tread the path of critical research. Youth demands images for its imagination and for forming its memory. But studying the sciences in the spirit of modern criticism does not achieve this. Thus Vico supplements the *critica* of Cartesianism with the old *topica*. This is the art of finding arguments and serves to develop the sense of what is convincing, which works instinctively and *ex tempore*, and for that very reason cannot be replaced by science.

Vico's prescriptions have an apologetical air. They indirectly take cognizance of science's new concept of truth by the very fact that they defend the rights of the probable. As we have seen, he here follows an ancient rhetorical tradition that goes back to Plato. But what Vico means goes far beyond the defense of rhetorical persuasion. The old Aristotelian distinction between practical and theoretical knowledge is operative here—a distinction which cannot be reduced to that between the true and the probable. Practical knowledge, *phronesis*, is another kind of knowledge.²⁹ Primarily, this means that it is directed towards the concrete situation. Thus it must grasp the "circumstances" in their infinite variety. This is what Vico expressly emphasizes about it. It is true that his main concern is to show that this kind of knowledge lies outside the rational concept of knowledge, but this is not in fact mere resignation. The Aristotelian distinction refers to something other than the distinction between knowing on the basis of universal principles and on the basis of the concrete. Nor does he mean only the capacity to subsume the individual case under a universal category—what we call "judgment." Rather, there is a positive ethical motif involved that merges into the Roman Stoic doctrine of the *sensus communis*. The grasp and moral control of the concrete situation require subsuming what is given under the universal—that is, the goal that one is pursuing so that the right thing may result. Hence it presupposes a

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direction of the will—i.e., moral being (hexis). That is why Aristotle considers phronesis an “intellectual virtue.” He sees it not only as a capacity (dunamis), but as a determination of moral being which cannot exist without the totality of the “ethical virtues,” which in turn cannot exist without it. Although practicing this virtue means that one distinguishes what should be done from what should not, it is not simply practical shrewdness and general cleverness. The distinction between what should and should not be done includes the distinction between the proper and the improper and thus presupposes a moral attitude, which it continues to develop.

This idea propounded by Aristotle against Plato’s “idea of the good” is in fact what Vico’s point about the *sensus communis* goes back to. In scholasticism, say for St. Thomas, in elaborating on the *De Anima*,³⁰ the *sensus communis* is the common root of the outer senses—i.e., the faculty that combines them, that makes judgments about what is given, a capacity that is given to all men.³¹ For Vico, however, the *sensus communis* is the sense of what is right and of the common good that is to be found in all men; moreover, it is a sense that is acquired through living in the community and is determined by its structures and aims. This concept sounds like natural law, like the *koinai ennoiai* of the Stoics. But the *sensus communis* is not, in this sense, a Greek concept and definitely does not mean the *koine dunamis* of which Aristotle speaks in the *De Anima* when he tries to reconcile the doctrine of the specific senses (*aisthesis idia*) with the phenomenological finding that all perception is a differentiation and an intention of the universal. Rather, Vico goes back to the old Roman concept of the *sensus communis*, as found especially in the Roman classics which, when faced with Greek cultivation, held firmly to the value and significance of their own traditions of civil and social life. A critical note directed against the theoretical speculations of the philosophers can be heard in the Roman concept of the *sensus communis*; and that note Vico sounds again from his different position of opposition to modern science (the *critica*).

There is something immediately evident about grounding philological and historical studies and the ways the human sciences work on this concept of the *sensus communis*. For their object, the moral and historical existence of humanity, as it takes shape in our words and deeds, is itself decisively determined by the *sensus communis*. Thus a conclusion based on universals, a reasoned proof, is not sufficient, because what is decisive is the circumstances. But this is only a negative formulation. The sense of

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the community mediates its own positive knowledge. One does not at all exhaust the mode of historical knowledge by saying that here one has to allow “belief in other people’s testimony” (Tetens³²) instead of “self-conscious deduction” (Helmholtz). Nor is it at all true that such knowledge has less truth value. D’Alembert is correct when he writes, “Probability operates principally in the case of historical facts, and in general for all past, present and future events, which we attribute to a kind of chance because we do not unravel the causes. The part of this knowledge whose object is the present and the past, although it may be founded on testimony alone, often produces in us a conviction as strong as that born from axioms.”³³

Historia is a source of truth totally different from theoretical reason. This is what Cicero meant when he called it the *vita memoriae*.³⁴ It exists in its own right because human passions cannot be governed by the universal prescriptions of reason. In this sphere one needs, rather, convincing examples as only history can offer them. That is why Bacon describes *historia*, which supplies these examples, as virtually another way of philosophizing (*alia ratio philosophandi*).³⁵

This, too, is negative enough in its formulation. But we will see that in all these versions the mode of being of moral knowledge, as recognized by Aristotle, is operative. It will be important to recall this so that the human sciences can understand themselves more adequately.

Vico’s return to the Roman concept of the *sensus communis*, and his defense of humanist rhetoric against modern science, is of special interest to us, for here we are introduced to an element of truth in the human sciences that was no longer recognizable when they conceptualized themselves in the nineteenth century. Vico lived in an unbroken tradition of rhetorical and humanist culture, and had only to reassert anew its ageless claim. Ultimately, it has always been known that the possibilities of rational proof and instruction do not fully exhaust the sphere of knowledge. Hence Vico’s appeal to the *sensus communis* belongs, as we have seen, in a wider context that goes right back to antiquity and whose continued effect into the present day is our theme.³⁶

We, on the contrary, must laboriously make our way back into this tradition by first showing the difficulties that result from the application of the modern concept of method to the human sciences. Let us therefore consider how this tradition became so impoverished and how the human sciences’ claim to know something true came to be measured by a standard foreign to it—namely the methodical thinking of modern science.

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In general, Vico and the unbroken rhetorical tradition of Italy do not directly influence this development, which was determined chiefly by the German “historical school.” One can discern hardly any influence of Vico on the eighteenth century. But he was not alone in his appeal to the *sensus communis*. He has an important parallel in *Shaftesbury*, who had a powerful influence on the eighteenth century. Shaftesbury places the evaluation of the social significance of *wit* and *humor* under *sensus communis* and explicitly cites the Roman classics and their humanist interpreters.³⁷ As we have noted, the concept of the *sensus communis* undoubtedly reminds us of the Stoics and of the natural law. Nevertheless, it is impossible to deny the validity of the humanistic interpretation based on the Roman classics, which Shaftesbury follows. By *sensus communis*, according to Shaftesbury, the humanists understood a sense of the common weal, but also “love of the community or society, natural affection, humanity, obligingness.” They adopt a term from Marcus Aurelius, *koinonoemosune*—a most unusual and artificial word, confirming that the concept of *sensus communis* does not originate with the Greek philosophers, but has the Stoical conception sounding in it like a harmonic.³⁸ The humanist Salmasius describes the content of this word as “a restrained, customary, and regular way of thinking in a man, which as it were looks to the community and does not refer everything to its own advantage but directs its attention to those things with which it is concerned, and thinks of itself with restraint and proper measure.” What Shaftesbury is thinking of is not so much a capacity given to all men, part of the natural law, as a social virtue, a virtue of the heart more than of the head. And if he understands wit and humor in terms of it, then in this respect too he is following ancient Roman concepts that include in *humanitas* a refined *savoir vivre*, the attitude of the man who understands a joke and tells one because he is aware of a deeper union with his interlocutor. (Shaftesbury explicitly limits wit and humour to social intercourse among friends.) Though the *sensus communis* appears here mostly as a virtue of social intercourse, there is nevertheless a moral, even a metaphysical basis implied.

Shaftesbury is thinking of the intellectual and social virtue of sympathy; and on it, we recall, he based not only morality, but an entire aesthetic metaphysics. His successors, above all Hutcheson³⁹ and Hume, elaborated his suggestions into the doctrine of the moral sense, which was later to serve as a foil to Kantian ethics.

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The concept of “common sense” acquired a quite central systematic function in *Scottish* philosophy, which was directed polemically against metaphysics and against its dissolution in skepticism, and built up its new system on the basis of original and natural judgments of common sense (Thomas Reid).⁴⁰ Doubtless this was influenced by the Aristotelian and scholastic tradition of the concept of *sensus communis*. Inquiry into the senses and their cognitive capacity comes from this tradition and is ultimately intended to correct the exaggerations of philosophical speculation. At the same time, however, the connection between common sense and society is preserved: “They serve to direct us in the common affairs of life, where our reasoning faculty would leave us in the dark.” In their eyes, the philosophy of sound understanding, of good sense, is not only a cure for the “moon-sickness” of metaphysics, but also contains the basis of a moral philosophy that really does justice to the life of society.

The moral element in the concept of common sense or *le bon sens* has remained to the present day and distinguishes these from the German concept of “*der gesunde Menschenverstand*” (“sound understanding”). Take as an example *Henri Bergson's* fine speech on *le bon sens* given at the award ceremony in 1895 at the Sorbonne.⁴¹ His criticism of the abstractions of natural science, of language and of legal thinking, his passionate appeal to the “inner energy of an intelligence which at each moment wins itself back to itself, eliminating ideas already formed to give place to those in the process of being formed” (p. 88), was called *le bon sens* in France. Naturally, the definition of this concept certainly contained a reference to the senses, but for Bergson it obviously goes without saying that, unlike the senses, *le bon sens* refers to the “*milieu social*”: “while the other senses relate us to things, ‘good sense’ governs our relations with persons” (p. 85). It is a kind of genius for practical life, but less a gift than the constant task of “renewed adaptation to new situations,” a work of adapting general principles to reality, through which justice is realized, a “tactfulness in practical truth,” a “rightness of judgment, that stems from correctness of soul” (p. 88). *Le bon sens*, for Bergson, is, as the common source of thought and will, a “*sens social*,” which avoids both the mistakes of the scientific dogmatists who are looking for social laws and those of the metaphysical utopians. “Perhaps there is, properly speaking, no method, but rather a certain way of acting.” It is true that he speaks of the importance of classical studies for the development of this *bon sens*—he sees them as an attempt to break through the “ice of words” and discover the free flow of thought below (p. 91)—but he does not ask the contrary

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question, namely how necessary *le bon sens* is for classical studies—i.e., he does not speak of its hermeneutic function. His question has nothing to do with the sciences, but with the independent significance of *le bon sens* for life. We are emphasizing only the self-evidence with which the moral and political meaning of this concept dominated his mind and that of his hearers.

It is very characteristic of the human sciences' self-reflection in the nineteenth century that they proceeded not under the influence of the tradition of moral philosophy to which both Vico and Shaftesbury belong and which is represented primarily by France, the classical land of *le bon sens*, but under the influence of the German philosophy of the age of Kant and Goethe. Whereas even today in England and the Romance countries the concept of the *sensus communis* is not just a critical slogan but a general civic quality, in Germany the followers of Shaftesbury and Hutcheson did not, even in the eighteenth century, take over the political and social element contained in *sensus communis*. The metaphysics of the schools and the popular philosophy of the eighteenth century—however much they studied and imitated the leading countries of the Enlightenment, England and France—could not assimilate an idea for which the social and political conditions were utterly lacking. The concept of *sensus communis* was taken over, but in being emptied of all political content it lost its genuine critical significance. *Sensus communis* was understood as a purely theoretical faculty: theoretical judgment, parallel to moral consciousness (conscience) and taste. Thus it was integrated into a scholasticism of the basic faculties, of which Herder provided the critique (in the fourth "kritischen Wäldchen," directed against Riedel), and which made him the forerunner of historicism in the field of aesthetics also.

And yet there is one important exception: *Pietism*. It was important not only for a man of the world like Shaftesbury to delimit the claims of science—i.e., of *demonstratio*—against the "school" and to appeal to the *sensus communis*, but also for the preacher, who seeks to reach the hearts of his congregation. Thus the Swabian Pietist *Oetinger* explicitly relied on Shaftesbury's defense of the *sensus communis*. We find *sensus communis* translated simply as "heart" and the following description: "The *sensus communis* is concerned only with things that all men see daily before them, things that hold an entire society together, things that are concerned as much with truths and statements as with the arrangements and patterns comprised in statements. . . ." ⁴² *Oetinger* is concerned to show that it is not just a question of the clarity of the concepts—clarity is "not enough for

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living knowledge." Rather, there must be "certain anticipations and predilections present." "Fathers are moved without proof to care for their children; love does not demonstrate, but often against reason rends the heart at the beloved's reproach." Oetinger's appeal to the *sensus communis* against the rationalism of the "school" is especially interesting for us because he gives it an expressly hermeneutical application. For Oetinger, as a churchman, the important thing is the understanding of Scripture. Because the mathematical, demonstrative method fails here, he demands another, the "generative method"—i.e., the "organic presentation of Scripture—so that justice may be planted like a shoot."

Oetinger also made the concept of *sensus communis* the object of an extended and learned investigation, which is likewise directed against rationalism.⁴³ He sees in it the source of all truths, the very *ars inveniendi*, in contrast to Leibniz, who bases everything on a mere *calculus metaphysicus* (*excluso omni gusto interno*). According to Oetinger the true basis of the *sensus communis* is the concept of *vita*, life (*sensus communis vitae gaudens*). In contrast to the violent anatomization of nature through experiment and calculation, he sees the natural development of the simple into the complex as the universal law of growth of the divine creation and, likewise, of the human spirit. For the idea that all knowledge originates in the *sensus communis* he quotes Wolff, Bernoulli, and Pascal, Maupertuis' investigation into the origin of language, Bacon, Fenelon, etc. and defines the *sensus communis* as "the vivid and penetrating perception of objects evident to all human beings, from their immediate contact and intuition, which are absolutely simple."

From this second sentence it is apparent that Oetinger throughout combines the humanistic, political meaning of the word with the peripatetic concept of *sensus communis*. The above definition reminds one here and there ("immediate contact and intuition") of Aristotle's doctrine of *nous*. He takes up the Aristotelian question of the common *dunamis*, which combines seeing, hearing, etc., and for him it confirms the genuinely divine mystery of life. The divine mystery of life is its simplicity—even if man has lost it through the fall, he can still find his way back, through the grace of God, to unity and simplicity: "the activity of the *logos*, that is, the presence of God integrates diversity into unity" (p. 162). The presence of God consists precisely in life itself, in this "communal sense" that distinguishes all living things from dead—it is no accident that he mentions the polyp and the starfish which, though cut into small pieces, regenerate themselves and form new individuals. In man the same divine

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power operates in the form of the instinct and inner stimulation to discover the traces of God and to recognize what has the greatest connection with human happiness and life. Oetinger expressly distinguishes rational truths from receptivity to common truths—"sensible truths," useful to all men at all times and places. The communal sense is a complex of instincts—i.e., a natural drive towards that on which the true happiness of life depends, and to that extent an effect of the presence of God. Instincts are not to be understood, with Leibniz, as affects—i.e., as *confusae repraesentationes*—for they are not ephemeral but deeply rooted tendencies and have a dictatorial, divine, irresistible force.⁴⁴ Based on these instincts, *sensus communis* is of special importance for our knowledge, precisely because they are a gift of God.⁴⁵ Oetinger writes, "the ratio governs itself by rules, often even without God; but sense, always with God. Just as nature is different from art, so sense and ratio are different. God works through nature in a simultaneous increase in growth that spreads regularly throughout the whole. Art, however, begins with some particular part. . . . Sense imitates nature; the ratio, art" (p. 247).

Interestingly enough, this statement comes from a hermeneutical context, as indeed in this learned work the "*Sapientia Salomonis*" represents the ultimate object and highest example of knowledge. It comes from the chapter on the use (*usus*) of the *sensus communis*. Here Oetinger attacks the hermeneutical theory of the Wolffian school. More important than all hermeneutical rules is to be "*sensu plenus*." Naturally, this thesis is a spiritualistic extreme, but it still has its logical foundation in the concept of *vita* or *sensus communis*. Its hermeneutical meaning can be illustrated by this sentence: "the ideas found in Scripture and in the works of God are the more fruitful and purified the more that each can be seen in the whole and all can be seen in each."⁴⁶ Here what people in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries like to call "intuition" is brought back to its metaphysical foundation: that is, to the structure of living, organic being in which the whole is in each individual: "the whole of life has its center in the heart, which by means of common sense grasps countless things all at the same time" (Praef.).

More profound than all knowledge of hermeneutical rules is the application to oneself: "above all apply the rules to yourself and then you will have the key to understanding Solomon's proverbs" (p. 207).⁴⁷ On this basis Oetinger is able to bring his ideas into harmony with those of Shaftesbury who, as he says, is the only one to have written about *sensus communis* under this title. But he also cites others who have noted the

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one-sidedness of the rational method—e.g., Pascal’s distinction between *esprit géométrique* and *esprit de finesse*. Nevertheless, for the Swabian Pietist what crystallizes around the concept of *sensus communis* is rather a theological than a political or social interest.

Of course other Pietist theologians have emphasized application against the dominant rationalism in the same way as Oetinger, as we can see from the example of Rambach, whose very influential hermeneutics also dealt with application. But when pietistic tendencies were supplanted in the later eighteenth century, the hermeneutic function of *sensus communis* declined to a mere corrective: that which contradicts the “consensus” of feelings, judgments, and conclusions—i.e., the *sensus communis*—cannot be correct.⁴⁸ In contrast to the importance that Shaftesbury assigned to the *sensus communis* for society and state, this negative function shows that the concept was emptied and intellectualized by the German enlightenment.

(iii) Judgment

This development of the concept of *sensus communis* in eighteenth-century Germany may explain why it is so closely connected with the *concept of judgment*. “*Gesunder Menschenverstand*” (good sense), sometimes called “*gemeiner Verstand*” (common understanding), is in fact decisively characterized by judgment. The difference between a fool and a sensible man is that the former lacks judgment—i.e., he is not able to subsume correctly and hence cannot apply correctly what he has learned and knows. The word “judgment” was introduced in the eighteenth century in order to convey the concept of *judicium*, which was considered to be a basic intellectual virtue. In the same way the English moral philosophers emphasize that moral and aesthetic judgments do not obey reason, but have the character of sentiment (or taste), and similarly Tetens, one of the representatives of the German Enlightenment, sees the *sensus communis* as a *judicium* without reflection.⁴⁹ In fact the logical basis of judgment—subsuming a particular under a universal, recognizing something as an example of a rule—cannot be demonstrated. Thus judgment requires a principle to guide its application. In order to follow this principle another faculty of judgment would be needed, as Kant shrewdly noted.⁵⁰ So it cannot be taught in the abstract but only practiced from case to case, and is therefore more an ability like the senses. It is something that cannot

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be learned, because no demonstration from concepts can guide the application of rules.

Consequently, German Enlightenment philosophy considered judgment not among the higher but among the lower powers of the mind. In this respect, it diverged considerably from the original Roman sense of *sensus communis*, while advancing the scholastic tradition. This was to be especially important for aesthetics. Baumgarten, for example, is quite certain that what judgment recognizes is the sensible individual, the unique thing, and what it judges in the individual thing is its perfection or imperfection.⁵¹ It must be noted that by this definition judgment does not simply mean applying a pregiven concept of the thing, but that the sensible individual is grasped in itself insofar as it exhibits the agreement of the many with the one. Not the application of the universal but internal coherence is what matters. As we can see, this is already what Kant later calls “reflective judgment,” and he understands it as judgment according to real and formal appropriateness. No concept is given; rather, the individual object is judged “immanently.” Kant calls this an aesthetic judgment; and just as Baumgarten described the “*iudicium sensitivum*” as “*gustus*,” so also Kant repeats: “A sensible judgment of perfection is called taste.”⁵²

We will see below that this aesthetic development of the concept of *iudicium*, for which Gottsched was primarily responsible in the eighteenth century, acquired a systematic significance for Kant, although it will also emerge that Kant’s distinction between determinant and reflective judgment is not without its problems.⁵³ Moreover, it is difficult to reduce the meaning of *sensus communis* to aesthetic judgment. From the use that Vico and Shaftesbury make of this concept, it appears that *sensus communis* is not primarily a formal capacity, an intellectual faculty to be used, but already embraces a sum of judgments and criteria for judgment that determine its contents.

Common sense is exhibited primarily in making judgments about right and wrong, proper and improper. Whoever has a sound judgment is not thereby enabled to judge particulars under universal viewpoints, but he knows what is really important—i.e., he sees things from right and sound points of view. A swindler who correctly calculates human weakness and always makes the right move in his deceptions nevertheless does not possess “sound judgment” in the highest sense of the term. Thus the universality (*Allgemeinheit*) that is ascribed to the faculty of judgment is by no means as common (*gemein*) as Kant thinks. Judgment is not so much a faculty as a demand that has to be made of all. Everyone has

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enough “sense of the common” (gemeinen Sinn)—i.e., judgment—that he can be expected to show a “sense of the community” (Gemeinsinn), genuine moral and civic solidarity, but that means judgment of right and wrong, and a concern for the “common good.” This is what makes Vico’s reliance on the humanistic tradition so impressive, for against the intellectualization of the concept of the sense of the community, he firmly retains all the wealth of meaning that lived in the Roman tradition of this word (and to this day is characteristic of the Latin race). Similarly, when Shaftesbury took up the concept it was, as we have seen, also linked to the political and social tradition of humanism. The *sensus communis* is an element of social and moral being. Even when this concept was associated with a polemical attack on metaphysics (as in Pietism and Scottish philosophy), it still retained its original critical function.

By contrast, Kant’s version of this idea in his *Critique of Judgment* has quite a different emphasis.⁵⁴ There is no longer any systematic place for the concept’s basic moral sense. As we know, he developed his moral philosophy in explicit opposition to the doctrine of “moral feeling” that had been worked out in English philosophy. Thus he totally excluded the concept of *sensus communis* from moral philosophy.

What appears with the unconditionality of a moral imperative cannot be based on feeling, not even if one does not mean an individual’s feeling but common moral sensibility. For the imperative immanent in morality totally excludes any comparative reflection about others. The unconditionality of a moral imperative certainly does not mean that the moral consciousness must remain rigid in judging others. Rather, it is morally imperative to detach oneself from the subjective, private conditions of one’s own judgment and to assume the standpoint of the other person. But this unconditionality also means that the moral consciousness cannot avoid appealing to the judgment of others. The obligatoriness of the imperative is universal in a stricter sense than the universality of sensibility can ever attain. Applying the moral law to the will is a matter for judgment. But since it is a question of judgment operating under the laws of pure practical reason, its task consists precisely in preserving one from the “empiricism of practical reason, which bases the practical concepts of good and bad merely on empirical consequences.”⁵⁵ This is done by the “typic” of pure practical reason.

For Kant there is also another question: how to implant the stern law of pure practical reason in the human mind. He deals with this in the “Methodology of Pure, Practical Reason,” which “endeavors to provide a

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brief outline of the method of engendering and cultivating genuine moral attitudes." For this he in fact calls on ordinary human reason and he wants to exercise and cultivate practical judgment; and certainly aesthetic elements play their part also.⁵⁶ But that moral feeling can be cultivated is not really part of moral philosophy, and in any case it is not relevant to its foundations. For Kant requires that our will be determined only by motives founded on the self-legislation of pure practical reason. This cannot be based on a mere commonness of sensibility, but only on "an obscure but still securely guiding practical act of will," to clarify and strengthen which is the task of the *Critique of Practical Reason*.

The *sensus communis* plays no part in Kant—not even in the logical sense. What Kant treats in the transcendental doctrine of judgment—i.e., the doctrine of schematism and the principles—no longer has anything to do with the *sensus communis*.⁵⁷ For here we are concerned with concepts that are supposed to refer to their objects a priori, and not with the subsumption of the particular under the universal. When, however, we are really concerned with the ability to grasp the particular as an instance of the universal, and we speak of sound understanding, then this is, according to Kant, something that is "common" in the truest sense of the word—i.e., it is "something to be found everywhere, but to possess it is by no means any merit or advantage."⁵⁸ The only significance of this sound understanding is that it is a preliminary stage of cultivated and enlightened reason. It is active in an obscure kind of judgment called feeling, but it still judges according to concepts, "though commonly only according to obscurely imagined principles,"⁵⁹ and it certainly cannot be considered a special "sense of community." The universal logical use of judgment, which goes back to the *sensus communis*, contains no principle of its own.⁶⁰

Thus from the whole range of what could be called a sense faculty of judgment, for Kant only the judgment of aesthetic taste is left. Here one may speak of a true sense of community. Doubtful though it may be whether one may speak of knowledge in connection with aesthetic taste, and certain though it is that aesthetic judgments are not made according to concepts, it is still the case that aesthetic taste necessarily implies universal agreement, even if it is sensory and not conceptual. Thus the true sense of community, says Kant, is *taste*.

That is a paradoxical formulation when we recall that the eighteenth century enjoyed discussing precisely diversities of human taste. But even if one draws no skeptical, relativistic conclusions from differences of taste, but holds on to the idea of good taste, it sounds paradoxical to call "good

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taste”—this strange distinction that differentiates the members of a cultivated society from all other men—a sense of community. Taken as an empirical statement that would, in fact, be absurd, and we shall see how far this description has meaning for Kant’s transcendental purpose—i.e., as an a priori justification for undertaking a criticism of taste. But we shall also have to ask how the truth claim implicit in the sense of community is affected by narrowing the concept of the sense of community to a judgment of taste about what is beautiful, and how the Kantian subjective a priori of taste has affected the self-understanding of the human sciences.

(iv) Taste

Again we must go back further in time. It is not only a question of narrowing the concept of the sense of community to taste, but of narrowing the concept of taste itself. The long history of this idea before Kant made it the basis of his *Critique of Judgment* shows that *the concept of taste* was originally more a *moral* than an aesthetic idea. It describes an ideal of genuine humanity and receives its character from the effort to take a critical stand against the dogmatism of the “school.” It was only later that the use of the idea was limited to the “aesthetic.”

Balthasar Gracian⁶¹ stands at the beginning of this history. Gracian starts from the view that the sense of taste, this most animal and most inward of our senses, still contains the beginnings of the intellectual differentiation we make in judging things. Thus the sensory differentiation of taste, which accepts or rejects in the most immediate way, is in fact not merely an instinct, but strikes a balance between sensory instinct and intellectual freedom. The sense of taste is able to gain the distance necessary for choosing and judging what is the most urgent necessity of life. Thus Gracian already sees in taste a “spiritualization of animality” and rightly points out that there is cultivation (*cultura*) not only of the mind (*ingenio*) but also of taste (*gusto*). This is true also, of course, of sensory taste. There are men who have “a good tongue,” gourmets who cultivate these delights. This idea of “*gusto*” is the starting point for Gracian’s ideal of social cultivation. His ideal of the cultivated man (the *discreto*) is that, as an “*hombre en su punto*,” he achieves the proper freedom of distance from all the things of life and society, so that he is able to make distinctions and choices consciously and reflectively.

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Gracian's ideal of *Bildung* (cultivation) was supposed to be a completely new departure. It replaced that of the Christian courtier (Castiglione). It is remarkable within the history of Western ideals of *Bildung* for being independent of class. It sets out the ideal of a society based on *Bildung*.⁶² This ideal of social *Bildung* seems to emerge everywhere in the wake of absolutism and its suppression of the hereditary aristocracy. Thus the history of the idea of taste follows the history of absolutism from Spain to France and England and is closely bound up with the antecedents of the third estate. Taste is not only the ideal created by a new society, but we see this ideal of "good taste" producing what was subsequently called "good society." It no longer recognizes and legitimates itself on the basis of birth and rank but simply through the shared nature of its judgments or, rather, its capacity to rise above narrow interests and private predilections to the title of judgment.

The concept of taste undoubtedly implies a *mode of knowing*. The mark of good taste is being able to stand back from ourselves and our private preferences. Thus taste, in its essential nature, is not private but a social phenomenon of the first order. It can even counter the private inclinations of the individual like a court of law, in the name of a universality that it intends and represents. One can like something that one's own taste rejects. The verdict of taste is curiously decisive. As we say, *de gustibus non disputandum* (Kant rightly says that in matters of taste there can be a disagreement but not a disputation),⁶³ not just because there are no universal conceptual criteria that everyone must accept, but because one does not look for them and would not even think it right if they existed. One must have taste—one cannot learn through demonstration, nor can one replace it by mere imitation. Nevertheless, taste is not a mere private quality, for it always endeavors to be good taste. The decisiveness of the judgment of taste includes its claim to validity. Good taste is always sure of its judgment—i.e., it is essentially sure taste, an acceptance and rejection that involves no hesitation, no surreptitious glances at others, no searching for reasons.

Taste is therefore something like a sense. In its operation it has no knowledge of reasons. If taste registers a negative reaction to something, it is not able to say why. But it experiences it with the greatest certainty. Sureness of taste is therefore safety from the tasteless. It is a remarkable thing that we are especially sensitive to the negative in the decisions taste renders. The corresponding positive is not properly speaking what is tasteful, but what does not offend taste. That, above all, is what taste

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judges. Taste is defined precisely by the fact that it is offended by what is tasteless and thus avoids it, like anything else that threatens injury. Thus the contrary of "good taste" actually is not "bad taste." Its opposite is rather to have "no taste." Good taste is a sensitivity which so naturally avoids anything blatant that its reaction is quite incomprehensible to someone who has no taste.

A phenomenon closely connected with taste is *fashion*. Here the element of social generalization implicit in the idea of taste becomes a determining reality. But the very distinction from fashion shows that the universality of taste has quite a different basis and is not the same as empirical universality. (This is the essential point for Kant.) The very word "fashion" (*Mode*) implies that the concept involves a changeable law (*modus*) within a constant whole of sociable demeanor. What is merely a matter of mode has no other norm than that given by what everybody does. Fashion regulates as it likes only those things that can equally well be one way as another. It is indeed constituted by empirical universality, consideration for others, comparison, and seeing things from the general point of view. Thus fashion creates a social dependence that is difficult to shake off. Kant is quite right when he considers it better to be a fool in fashion than to be against fashion—even though it is foolish to take fashion too seriously.⁶⁴

By contrast, the phenomenon of taste is an intellectual faculty of differentiation. Taste operates in a community, but is not subservient to it. On the contrary, good taste is distinguished by the fact that it is able to adapt itself to the direction of taste represented by fashion or, contrariwise, is able to adapt what is demanded by fashion to its own good taste. Part of the concept of taste, then, is that one observes measure even in fashion, not blindly following its changing dictates but using one's own judgment. One maintains one's own "style"—i.e., one relates the demands of fashion to a whole that one's own taste keeps in view and accepts only what harmonizes with this whole and fits together as it does.

Thus taste not only recognizes this or that as beautiful, but has an eye to the whole, with which everything that is beautiful must harmonize.⁶⁵ Thus taste is not a social sense—that is, dependent on an empirical universality, the complete unanimity of the judgments of others. It does not say that everyone will agree with our judgment, but that they should agree with it (as Kant says).⁶⁶ Against the tyranny exercised by fashion, sure taste preserves a specific freedom and superiority. This is its special normative power, peculiar to it alone: the knowledge that it is certain of the agreement of an ideal community. In contrast to taste's being governed

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by fashion, we see here the ideality of good taste. It follows that taste knows something—though admittedly in a way that cannot be separated from the concrete moment in which that object occurs and cannot be reduced to rules and concepts.

Just this is obviously what gives the idea of taste its original breadth: that it constitutes a special way of knowing. Like reflective judgment, it belongs in the realm of that which grasps, in the individual object, the universal under which it is to be subsumed. Both taste and judgment evaluate the object in relation to a whole in order to see whether it fits in with everything else—that is, whether it is “fitting.”⁶⁷ One must have a “sense” for it—it cannot be demonstrated.

This kind of sense is obviously needed wherever a whole is intended but not given as a whole—that is, conceived in purposive concepts. Thus taste is in no way limited to what is beautiful in nature and art, judging it in respect to its decorative quality, but embraces the whole realm of morality and manners. Even moral concepts are never given as a whole or determined in a normatively univocal way. Rather, the ordering of life by the rules of law and morality is incomplete and needs productive supplementation. Judgment is necessary in order to make a correct evaluation of the concrete instance. We are familiar with this function of judgment especially from jurisprudence, where the supplementary function of “hermeneutics” consists in concretizing the law.

At issue is always something more than the correct application of general principles. Our knowledge of law and morality too is always supplemented by the individual case, even productively determined by it. The judge not only applies the law in concreto, but contributes through his very judgment to developing the law (“judge-made law”). Like law, morality is constantly developed through the fecundity of the individual case. Thus judgment, as the evaluation of the beautiful and sublime, is by no means productive only in the area of nature and art. One cannot even say, with Kant,⁶⁸ that the productivity of judgment is to be found “chiefly” in this area. Rather, the beautiful in nature and art is to be supplemented by the whole ocean of the beautiful spread throughout the moral reality of mankind.

It is only with respect to the exercise of pure theoretical and practical reason that one can speak of subsuming the individual under a given universal (Kant’s determinant judgment). But in fact even here an aesthetic judgment is involved. Kant indirectly admits this inasmuch as he

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acknowledges the value of examples for sharpening the judgment. Admittedly, he adds the qualification: "Correctness and precision of intellectual insight, on the other hand, they more usually somewhat impair. For only very seldom do they adequately fulfill the requirements of the rule (as *casus in terminis*)."⁶⁹ But the other side of this qualification is obviously that the case which functions as an example is in fact something different from just a case of the rule. Hence to do real justice to it—even if merely in technical or practical judgment—always includes an aesthetic element. To that extent, the distinction between determinant and reflective judgment, on which Kant bases his critique of judgment, is not absolute.⁷⁰

It is clearly not only a matter of logical but of *aesthetic judgment*. The individual case on which judgment works is never simply a case; it is not exhausted by being a particular example of a universal law or concept. Rather, it is always an "individual case," and it is significant that we call it a special case, because the rule does not comprehend it. Every judgment about something intended in its concrete individuality (e.g., the judgment required in a situation that calls for action) is—strictly speaking—a judgment about a special case. That means nothing less than that judging the case involves not merely applying the universal principle according to which it is judged, but co-determining, supplementing, and correcting that principle. From this it ultimately follows that all moral decisions require taste—which does not mean that this most individual balancing of decision is the only thing that governs them, but it is an indispensable element. It is truly an achievement of undemonstrable tact to hit the target and to discipline the application of the universal, the moral law (Kant), in a way that reason itself cannot. Thus taste is not the ground but the supreme consummation of moral judgment. The man who finds that what is bad goes against his taste has the greatest certainty in accepting the good and rejecting the bad—as great as the certainty of that most vital of our senses, which chooses or rejects food.

Thus the emergence of the concept of taste in the seventeenth century, the social and socially cohesive function of which we have indicated above, has connections with moral philosophy that go back to antiquity.

There is a humanistic and thus ultimately Greek component at work in Christian moral philosophy. Greek ethics—the ethics of measure in the Pythagoreans and Plato, the ethics of the mean (*mesotes*) that Aristotle developed—is in a profound and comprehensive sense an ethics of good taste.⁷¹

TRUTH AND METHOD

Such a thesis admittedly sounds strange to our ears—in part because we generally fail to recognize the ideal normative element in the concept of taste and are still affected by the relativistic-skeptical argument about differences of taste. But, above all, we are influenced by Kant's achievement in moral philosophy, which purified ethics from all aesthetics and feeling. If we now examine the importance of Kant's *Critique of Judgment* for the history of the human sciences, we must say that his giving aesthetics a transcendental philosophical basis had major consequences and constituted a turning point. It was the end of a tradition but also the beginning of a new development. It restricted the idea of taste to an area in which, as a special principle of judgment, it could claim independent validity—and, by so doing, limited the concept of knowledge to the theoretical and practical use of reason. The limited phenomenon of judgment, restricted to the beautiful (and sublime), was sufficient for his transcendental purpose; but it shifted the more general concept of the experience of taste, and the activity of aesthetic judgment in law and morality, out of the center of philosophy.⁷²

The importance of this cannot be easily overestimated, for what was here surrendered was the element in which philological and historical studies lived, and when they sought to ground themselves methodologically under the name of "human sciences" side by side with the natural sciences, it was the only possible source of their full self-understanding. Now Kant's transcendental analysis made it impossible to acknowledge the truth claim of traditional materials, to the cultivation and study of which they devoted themselves. But this meant that the methodological uniqueness of the human sciences lost its legitimacy.

In his critique of aesthetic judgment what Kant sought to and did legitimate was the subjective universality of aesthetic taste in which there is no longer any knowledge of the object, and in the area of the "fine arts" the superiority of genius to any aesthetics based on rules. Thus romantic hermeneutics and history found a point of contact for their self-understanding only in the concept of genius, validated by Kant's aesthetics. That was the other side of Kant's influence. The transcendental justification of aesthetic judgment was the basis of the autonomy of aesthetic consciousness, and on the same basis historical consciousness was to be legitimized as well. The radical subjectivization involved in Kant's new way of grounding aesthetics was truly epoch-making. In discrediting any kind of theoretical knowledge except that of natural science, it compelled the human sciences to rely on the methodology of the natural sciences in

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conceptualizing themselves. But it made this reliance easier by offering the “artistic element,” “feeling,” and “empathy” as subsidiary elements. Helmholtz’s description of the human sciences, which I considered above,⁷³ is in both respects a good example of the Kantian influence.

If we want to show what is inadequate about this kind of self-interpretation on the part of the human sciences and open up more appropriate possibilities, we will have to proceed with the problems of *aesthetics*. The transcendental function that Kant ascribes to the aesthetic judgment is sufficient to distinguish it from conceptual knowledge and hence to determine the phenomena of the beautiful and of art. But is it right to reserve the concept of truth for conceptual knowledge? Must we not also acknowledge that the work of art possesses truth? We shall see that acknowledging this places not only the phenomenon of art but also that of history in a new light.⁷⁴

2 THE SUBJECTIVIZATION OF AESTHETICS THROUGH THE KANTIAN CRITIQUE

(A) KANT’S DOCTRINE OF TASTE AND GENIUS

(i) *The Transcendental Distinctness of Taste*

In the process of investigating the foundations of taste, Kant himself was surprised to find an a priori element which went beyond empirical universality.⁷⁵ This insight gave birth to the *Critique of Judgment*. It is no longer a mere critique of taste in the sense that taste is the object of critical judgment by an observer. It is a critique of critique; that is, it is concerned with the legitimacy of such a critique in matters of taste. The issue is no longer merely empirical principles which are supposed to justify a widespread and dominant taste—such as, for example, in the old chestnut concerning the origin of differences in taste—but it is concerned with a genuine a priori that, in itself, would totally justify the possibility of critique. What could constitute such a justification?

Clearly the validity of an aesthetic judgment cannot be derived and proved from a universal principle. No one supposes that questions of taste can be decided by argument and proof. Just as clear is that good taste will never really attain empirical universality, and thus appealing to the prevailing taste misses the real nature of taste. Inherent in the concept of taste is that it does not blindly submit to popular values and preferred