Nature and Culture
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EPILOGUE

“We are approaching the state of crisis and the era of revolutions.”—Emile

The method pursued in this work has comprised an analytic study of texts and a synthesis of their relationships, leading to interpretations of eighteenth-century thought and outlook, and of their historical significance. It has been my hope that the analysis of the texts and their relations is sufficiently objective so that those who may not agree with the interpretations will be able to construct alternate hypotheses and conclusions. In regard to the significance of ideas in our cultural history, I have thought it proper to look both backward and forward. On the one hand, the historian must live both in a given age and beyond it, in order to appreciate its complexities and its half-veiled insights. On the other hand, it is surely of equal importance to understand the reverberations of ideas among the generations which follow, even until our own time. Without this dual perspective, history risks that diminution which we call “antiquarianism.”

In each chapter, we have explored the questions which concerned the men of the eighteenth century and have noted those which they ignored. We have observed what basic assumptions they brought to the solution of problems and the methods they used. We have asked what they were looking for, why, and what results they obtained. One general result of our study was to show the complexity of tensions in eighteenth-century thought. Just as for the twentieth century, or for other periods, simplistic views of the eighteenth century, though popular and appealing, are fallacious and misleading.

The subject we are dealing with is part of a total intellectual and social movement which constitutes our cultural history. Be-
cause of the scientific, technological, philosophic and social evolution, the inherited cosmology, ethics, and politics were also changed. In the "crisis of the European conscience," as Paul Hazard called it (and which we have interpreted as a more or less continuous phenomenon from the Renaissance on, with its first great ethical climax in the eighteenth century), the metaphysical re-examination of man's place and destiny in the world had been the prime mover. Partly contingent on it, but more closely dependent on the new science, was the intensive exploration of human nature and psychology. This, in turn, became the basis for new approaches to ethical problems which, severed from theological dicta and often from a priori principles (such as Natural Law), gave rise to naturalistic theories.

The great problem, in ethical terms, became the validation of ethical value and obligation. Following the methodology in vogue, this was attempted through an analysis of the genesis and development of moral judgment. The genesis of moral experience indicated the status of the moral life: whether it was natural or artificial, primary or secondary, instinctual or rational—a decision which, in the eighteenth century, was bound to have deep effects on constructive theorizing in regard to the principles of ethics.

"The object of ethical enquiry," writes Schweitzer, "is the discovery of the universal basic principle of the moral." ¹ This was assumed to be justice and virtue conceived as altruism (though occasionally other principles, such as self-realization, were proposed). However, because of the reduction of human motivation to egoism (or with some more optimistic analysts, to a coexistence of egoism and altruism), the problem, in terms of morals, became that of the socialization of egoism in favor of virtue. Thus egoistic utilitarianism, a first and persistent result of secular morality, was gradually transformed into the predominant current of social utilitarianism, and to some extent into an emotional altruism and altruistic patriotism. At the same time, as a result of four major factors—the character of upper-class society, certain genetic theories, the unconvincing validation of values, and an exacerbated revolt of egoism and instinct against the social superego—both anarchistic, utopian primitivism and nihilism continued, throughout the century, their attempt to invalidate the rule of culture.

Most men, in the eighteenth century, felt that the supreme task

of ethics was to put an end to this battle. We shall not attempt to summarize all that has been covered in this volume. One fact stands out. There was almost unanimous agreement that human nature must not and could not be violated in its basic demand for happiness. Virtue and happiness, even altruism and happiness, were fused and confused. Thus began a search for means to reconcile happiness with the demands of culture (morals being one principal instrument of culture, whether or not it be considered to possess an independent status in human nature, or even in the world at large). "To make men happy by virtue: that is the great problem which ethics must undertake to solve." Paradoxically, this involved the denial of nature, and the rationalistic assumption that a universal human nature existed which was susceptible of finding happiness in approved ways—a theory which much of the materialist doctrine contravened and which nihilists rejected. By their avowed intention to reconcile nature and culture, the moralists actually established their opposition, and made the problem of "reconciliation," in reality, one of choice. They sought to integrate man into nature as a uniform part of physical nature. But they had to cope with the fact that he is exceptional in several of his faculties and potentialities, as is indicated by his dissatisfaction with the natural course of events and by his effort to control it and supersede it—this being the very essence of moral experience. Endless conflict and dissension with the "natural" follow. Nor could the eighteenth-century moralists escape the fact that human societies differ from others because they rest on convention and law which, not being imbedded in a total order of nature, can be violated. The sexual impulses were one major illustration and focus of dispute.

It was possible, of course, to reduce the moral order to a social manifestation of the physical order (self-love). This idea was congenial to more than one outlook: to the laissez-faire Physiocrats, to the rebellious nihilists, and to some who sought to resolve the scission on the side of culture, through conditioning and repres-

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2 D'Holbach, Système social, III, p. 164.
4 Modern biologists, like George Gaylord Simpson, are convinced that "the proposals of naturalistic ethics have generally failed through either misunderstanding of the evidence or not recognizing that man is a product of evolution and yet is unique, that he is much more than merely a new species of animal."
sion. Others persisted in attributing to man an irreducible moral nature, sometimes considered as a sense, more often as a rational intuition of Natural Law. But in one case or the other, it was necessary to control or suppress “passions,” to enlighten or manipulate the reason, so as to determine will. By and large, it was found well-nigh impossible to overcome the analysis of human nature which, stemming from La Rochefoucauld, Pascal, Nicole, and Abbadie, had been “scientifically” confirmed by Condillac. This analysis led to the uniqueness (or dominance) of self-interest motivation, and either to the possibility of unlimited conditioning envisaged by the pure sensationists or to the “fortunately born—unfortunately born” dualism of the man-machine school. In either view, virtuous behavior is a coincidence of the pursuit of pleasure with the demands of the social group, and the practical moral-political problem is to cause the latter to be experienced as the former. Virtue is something “outside of us,” in a way, a classification of an inherently indifferent act—or else, “inside of us,” as an impulse to pleasure, in the form of a pleasurable altruism. There was nothing to do but to use this motive, and no longer expect men to do the right on the ground that it is their responsibility as men.

It seemed, then, that there was no moral way to make men moral. They would not, knowingly, do the right out of respect or love of right. We may say that many eighteenth-century moralists were not interested in making men moral, not believing it possible. With intention replaced by consequence, and consequence judged in the light of social standards of the desirable, morals really became a matter of managing men. As long as the act was “virtuous,” it could be done from the most nonmoral or perhaps even from an ignoble motive, and still be deemed worthy. That is why, ultimately, humanitarianism becomes substituted for ethics. Viewed in this light, Kant’s revulsion is quite understandable. To state the matter differently, many eighteenth-century moralists did not distinguish the good from the right, or the bad from the wrong.\(^5\) This confusion was less frequent among those who adhered to tradition, or to Natural Law, because they believed that obligations inhere in certain relationships, so that a good might not be a right. They recognized “right” as a judgment

\(^5\) Helvétius’ reasoning is an excellent example: self-interest is the unique principle of judgments and acts; this fact became a right and the ethical rule; therefore the right and the useful are identical.
sui generis. But the philosophes were treading on new ground. Their aim was to construct a secular and social system of ethics that would effectively steer between the equally odious poles of supernatural authoritarianism and anarchy, between a priori rationalism and indiscriminate acceptance of the natural.

They had therefore to avoid the hidden reef that underlay their making happiness (pleasure, or self-interest) the sole motive and the highest value: the conclusion of Rameau’s nephew, that right is whatever produces happiness. We have observed their self-defeating efforts to accomplish this, by making virtue the surest or the sole way to happiness—arguments, it may be claimed, which were themselves quite nonmoral, and merely another kind of egoistic calculation which lacked, moreover, both empirical confirmation and the universality and certainty of law. In answering the question, Is there a right and wrong outside of the subjective act of choice? The most common species of reply—utility to self, to the greatest number, or to the “whole”—has weaknesses which were felt or understood at the time, and which later philosophers have amply criticized. The question is essential, since it involves the objective status or validity of obligation. But another question which seemed equally essential methodologically was that of the nature of moral determinants and their modus operandi in the choice of conduct. The prescriptive moralist is enjoined to show how his prescriptions are relevant to and potentially efficacious in the phenomena of behavioral choice. The eighteenth-century naturalists, however, were very far from a logic which might enable them to do this.

Although the establishment of ethical value is not necessarily dependent on any particular metaphysical position, the metaphysical revolution stemming from the late Renaissance led, in the eighteenth century, to results which were not always favorable to ethics. The end of theocentricity and the consequent contingency of the human deprived acts and existence of cosmic meaning or value, posing the problem of finding another substratum, that is, of legitimizing what man creates for himself and adds to the nonhuman natural world. The result, as Hegel later saw it, was the alienation of modern man from a dead nature, from an impersonal world governed by inexorable laws indifferent to him. But the unconscious tendency was to refuse this alienation, and to seek to establish oneness with the world by a philosophy of
naturalism. While naturalism is a wholly defensible philosophy, and may be in complete harmony with morality and humanism, the peculiar shape of eighteenth-century naturalism tended to be constricted and defective from these viewpoints. In order to avoid alienation, it tried to absorb man into nature narrowly conceived as physical and often as mechanical, diminished the importance of human differentia and distinctiveness (but inconsistently—e.g., the defense of suicide), tried to explain the complex in terms of the elementary (cf. Diderot’s criticism of Helvétius), denied the transcendence of the individual over his body or his culture, and at times, that of culture over nature. But the very effort to establish a social ethics of enlightened self-interest and utilitarianism, or of altruism, in part contravened such a view, despite simultaneous efforts (necessitated by the general position) to seek so-called “natural” laws of ethics and politics, that is, laws which would coincide with the quest for happiness. On the one hand, it was claimed that men are entirely submitted to nature, and that nature is normatively valid (an important source of nihilism); on the other hand, plans were simultaneously entertained to induce or to make men repress or rise above nature.

While the avowed purpose was to free man in order to follow natural laws (which primitivists and nihilists sought to do more consistently), the actual purpose was to free man in order to create a human world and to realize what separates man from nature and makes him transcend it. But the temper of the time did now allow a clear espousal of such a supranatural thesis. The vision of Democritus and the vision of Plato were both accepted, in part. Those eighteenth-century writers who represented the original, distinctive thinking of the age affirmed the accidental character of life and man, his insignificance in the whole, his submission to a universal law indifferent to him. The ethics of this outlook might well have been—as it was for a few—an acceptance of natural facts similar to the cosmic indifference. Yet there is much in their thought which also affirms the unique worth and dignity of life and man. He is the center and the criterion. The world of facts is submitted to his unique values, so that good and evil become real. A. Monod declares correctly that when the philosophes “call nature good, they mean that they accept it such as it is, without making any value judgments about it.” 6 And yet they constantly

*De Pascal à Chateaubriand, 1916, p. 506.
found themselves wanting to, and obliged to make such judgments. As C. C. Gillispie astutely puts it, the conflict was not only between science and religion, but between "science and any naturalistic moral or social philosophy. For your moralist knows what kind of nature he wants science to give him, and if it gives him only a descriptive account, irrelevant to the good, he will . . . repudiate . . . or . . . he will change it." 7

And so it was, precisely, not only with their view of man's place, but with their central ethical fact, that of happiness (pleasure, self-interest) as the unique natural motive and value, which might lead to the conclusion that acts are equivalent except as to their consequences for subjective pleasure. The subjection of man to uniform natural law left the conclusion, "whatever is, is right." But these conclusions the moralistic philosophe never accepted; this is precisely what they devoted themselves to overcoming. "It was necessary to separate society from nature once more." 8

The time of alienation had come, but the Enlightenment was not prepared to accept it fully. There were many manifestations of this refusal. It is visible in the attempt to make reason coextensive with nature, rather than transcendent. It is dramatically present in the desperate quest for happiness in the face of deep feelings of inner emptiness, boredom, meaninglessness, insecurity—all signs of the confrontation with naked existence in an absurd universe. The eighteenth century was not willing to accept the fact which it had (after Pascal) discovered: that spiritual frustration is the human condition; that the absolutes and certainties we most want are not available; that we are free and alone, except for other men who are like ourselves. In a word, that we long to be gods but must remain men.9

It was Voltaire who came closest to it, and that is why, despite other lapses, such pieces as the Poème sur le désastre de Lisbonne, Candide, and the Histoire d'un bon bramin make of him one of the greatest humanists of the age. For whether one was an atheist or a deist was not necessarily crucial. Voltaire and Diderot both said that if God were a do-nothing God, if his justice was not ours,

9 A few nihilists embraced the alienation, but were carried away by the destructive implications—a sure sign of despair and defeat. The nineteenth century will struggle with it on the fringes of "respectable" literature, while waiting for the twentieth to face it fully and live with it.
then it was the same as if there were no God. When God withdraws to the status of universal soul, said Rétif de la Bretonne, or the source of intelligence and matter, then individual organisms become indifferent to him, or at least we must act as if they were.\footnote{“Salvation lies then in acting as if the fruits of knowledge were no longer forbidden; to take upon oneself . . . the risks and responsibilities of the human condition. . . . There we have, prefigured in the Enlightenment, all the dilemmas which are ours. . . .” J. A. Bédé, review of M. Chadourne, 
Rétif de la Bretonne, ou le siécle prophétique.}

But alienation was not accepted either by naturalists or by those who still sought refuge in a universe suffused with the moral will of God or in a semipantheism, which did not give to man his full burden of responsibility and anguish. Here, as in the practical ethical conflict (as it was formulated) of natural man versus artificial man, it was desired to avoid or terminate conflict, to seek reconciliation and harmony. However this cannot be done except by settling for life at the lower level (animals have no “conflicts” of this kind, but no moral life), or alternatively, by a complete denial of nature in the interest of culture.\footnote{Thus Rousseau’s solution (in his socio-political thought) was the substitution of the State for God, the absorption of the individual into the collective Whole.} If we were to settle for love at the level of physical intercourse, or for force without right, there would indeed be no conflict, but then man is no longer human. The \textit{philosophes} argued that might is not right and hoped to put an end to the conflict between them. They dreamed of a society of nature where there were no inner (and for some, no outer) conflicts. But such creatures would not really be men at all. It is through conflict, through the tragic splitting of right, through alienation from pure nature, that man progresses into morality and humanity. To put it differently, the Enlightenment oversimplified the complexities of human nature, of human interrelations, and of our place in the world.

Man, despite dreamers, despite extremists on one side or the other, is condemned to be man, an animal physical and moral, selfish and generous, egoistic and social; in the tragedy of his conflicts, of his victories and his defeats—and not merely in his reason and power—lies the glory of being what Buffon called “the king of nature.” Consequently, the distinction between nature and culture, viewed from a certain perspective, and between nature and moral value cannot be overcome or abolished; nor, on the other hand, can the two be severed and dissociated, in such a manner.
that we can consistently oppose them to each other, and choose one or the other. They are neither absolute contraries, nor can they be completely reconciled. There is, in fact, no pure or logically satisfactory category which we may term, in absolute or exclusive fashion, “nature” or “culture.” There are conflicts between radical egotism and social demands, between man’s psychological endowments and the requirements of social life; but only in a loose sense may these be spoken of as a conflict between nature and culture, since nature is involved in all we do, and culture is man’s nature. We may, more properly, speak of some natural impulses being in conflict with society, or with some societies. As in a classical tragic dilemma, man must live simultaneously in the realms of facts and demands, which produce two different types of valuation. “The world of culture is the world constructed by man in view of values”—both natural and moral, objective and subjective, empirical and rational—a world of meaning. A few liberal philosophes, notably Voltaire and Montesquieu, accepted the conflicts and the unhappiness as part of the human condition, which allows of no utopian solution, no stable El Dorado, but in which men would forever have to struggle to attain a tenuous harmony of contraries—a definition of the human, a struggle unending, but not without hope.

The intellectual dilemma is reflected acutely in the tensions and ambiguities contained in the words “nature” and “reason,” on which we made some observations at the very outset of our inquiry. “Modern man ends by seeking to understand himself in terms of his relation to nature, but he remains even more confused about the relation of reason in nature and man than the Stoics were. The thought of the French Enlightenment is a perfect exposition of this confusion.” Nature and Reason “had absolute normative functions in eighteenth century ethical, political and social theory.” But we have seen how equivocal both words were, having so many contrary meanings that they lose meaning. So it

12 As Hans Morgenthau has well expressed it, there is a tragic antinomy in human experience between lust for power (a ubiquitous empirical fact) and its denial (a universal ethical norm). The dichotomy is irreducible. There can be no renunciation of the ethical denial without renouncing the human nature of man. There can be no denying the lust for power without denying the conditions of existence. (Scientific Man vs. Power Politics, p. 16.)
is that some exalted reason over nature, others the contrary, and still others wished to reconcile them, often while talking about entirely different concepts.

For the Physiocrats, reason was that meaning or aspect of nature which includes and satisfies reason. There was reason as intuition, or again, as an anti-natural human faculty working against amoral and unmoral nature. Still others considered this last reason to be "natural." More basically, the function of reason in the moral life was generally misunderstood. Unlike Hume, the French writers asked, Why be moral? and when they could not find convincing logical reasons for being moral (an impossible question), went off in other directions which removed them from the moral realm. The function of reason, however, is not to convince men that they should be moral, but to help them discriminate between possible acts. In this sense, reason does enlighten men and is not without effect on the making of wiser choices. Reason may not act as a motivating force; but, assuming that we do not know the right choice, it may show the way to more responsible choices. However the French thinkers usually confused the two functions; mistaking the way reason and enlightenment apply to human affairs, they were looking to these to ground that which they already assumed to be right.

By "natural" was meant empirical facts, or else that aspect of of nature which was in accord with moral and social commands, including conscience. "The licentious," Pascal had written, "tell men of orderly lives that they stray from nature's path, while they themselves follow it; as people in a ship think those move who are on the shore." 15 Nature was praised as good and the source of all good, with contrary ideas in mind; and the indifference of an unmoral nature was made (by La Mettrie, Diderot, and Sade) the sanction for human immorality or (by many others) a justification for repression of nature. "The entire disorder of human moral life comes from nature," wrote Bayle, "as from a putrid stream." Whatever good there is "comes from the trouble we have taken to pluck out the natural weeds and to plant others." 16 How different from Shaftesbury, Rousseau, and Bernardin! And how similar to Rousseau's actual program! Leibniz explains, "Now by moral I

15 Pensée 383.
16 Oeuvres diverses, III, pp. 220–21. Compare the image of the garden in La Nouvelle Héloïse. See also the satire in Rasselas, Everyman ed., p. 44. Sade's view of nature, at one end of the century, rejoins Bayle's, at the other.
mean that which is equivalent to ‘natural’ in a good man. . . . Further, a good man is one who loves all men, so far as reason allows.” 17 This reduces itself to: moral is what is natural in a man who follows reason. The definition thus absorbs the natural into the rational. And yet the eighteenth century constantly purports to use reason to discover the natural and to make the natural the criterion of the good!

Clearly, from one viewpoint, nature includes reason and reason includes nature. From another, they are evidently in opposition. For La Mettrie, nature and reason are in eternal war; for Shaftesbury (and for Raynal) both come from God and can be reconciled. For Shaftesbury, again, to follow nature was to subject our individual will; for La Mettrie, it was to fulfill it.

Sabatier pointed out that Natural Law and natural religion were opposed to nature; the philosophes “confuse nature with reason, instinct with duty.” 18 We have seen Diderot, in one work, the Supplément au Voyage de Bougainville, use the word “nature” in the two contrary senses: to take fact as norm, and to assert rational or moral demands of culture. Nature, according to different writers, is both what is prior to reason and social habit, and what is approved by reason as conducive to culture. It leads to societies, and so to the imposition of controls upon itself—and yet such controls are sometimes called invalid if they contradict nature (i.e., impulse). Both nihilists and defenders of morality appeal to it. When Rousseau says, everything is good when it leaves the hands of God, he does not intend it as a sanction for the natural in society; when d’Argens has his Thérèse philosophe say, “Everything is good, everything is the work of God,” he does intend just that. And Sade could say, everything is evil when it leaves the hands of God, therefore let us be evil. Virginie’s fatal gesture of modesty, in Paul et Virginie, contradicts the natural instincts Bernardin praises and preaches, but for him it is a victory of uncorrupted nature. He does not see that if vices are “artificial,” so are modesty and morality; that if the latter are natural, so are the former.

The fundament of every ethical code is self-denial; an imperative “thou shalt,” or “thou shalt not” opposes our primitive will. Ethics, observes Schweitzer, cannot be conceived as a natural

18 Lettres critiques, p. 89.
happening which merely continues itself in man, in the same way
in which insects sacrifice themselves. One cannot both say that
nature is norm and have a moral code. It is scarcely tenable to
affirm that nature is good and the source of law, and to demand
that culture confine and contradict nature. If nature is good and
culture is responsible for vice and crime, then shall we ask culture
to repress nature? If man is evil by nature, shall we look for natural
remedies?

The “nature-reason” antithesis was a Procrustean bed which
could not yield the key to a solution of the moral-social problem.
The contraries could not be reconciled; they could not even be
defined to produce a harmony of discourse. They remained ab-
stractions and arbitrary simplifications. Both reason and nature
could be opposed to contemporary culture, or nature could be
opposed to reason and culture as allies. Man’s relation to nature
and to reason could never be satisfactorily settled. And the “scien-
tific” approach could never yield values, for moral philosophy is
normative, not descriptive; justice is not necessarily the rules of
justice, as Thrasymachus claimed it was.

Thus it was that naturalists, placed in the position of finding
self-love dominant in nature, were compelled to derive moral
experience and to fashion moral values out of egoism. (This,
however, was not as compelling for believers in Natural Law.)
They attempted the feat of pretending to remain within nature
while arbitrarily interpreting the word as it pleased them. Carne-
ades had said justice is either nonexistent or madness. Natural Law
theorists replied that nature gives us an antidote; d’Holbach, that
justice was only intelligent selfishness, given man’s need to live
with others. “O NATURE,” he exclaims, “Sovereign of all beings!
and you her adorable daughters, virtue, reason, truth!” If, as is
generally said, the work of the eighteenth century was to put man
back into nature, then truly, it may also be said that its work was
to separate him from nature. Some writers did this by transferring
valuation from the individual conscience (the realm of moral
experience) to the so-called general interest and the organs of its
determination, which thereby tended to become coercive and
monistic. We have, in fact, encountered four different attitudes.

20 Système de la nature, II, p. 453. On d’Holbach’s contradictions, see B. Willey,
op. cit., pp. 156–57, and our previous analyses.
Nature is good, and so we should follow it; it is good, but it (or a part of it) must be disciplined and denied; it is evil, so we must contravene it; it is evil, and we must follow it, since we are nature.

In consequence of this general confusion, we can understand the difficulty experienced by eighteenth-century naturalists in explaining how their ethics was a part of their view of nature and of man in nature. They wished to establish a unity or congruence of man and nature. On the one hand, this required a reduction of man into nature; on the other, it involved an interpretation of nature that made man’s transcendence of nature seem unnecessary. As C. C. Gillispie has suggested, “the Enlightenment saw a moral revolt against physics, expressed in moving, sad and angry attempts to defend a qualitative science, in which nature can be congruent with man, against a quantitative, numbering science which alienates him by total objectification of nature.” And yet, the nature d’Holbach was appealing to above was really human nature, which he both distinguishes from nature as a whole (necessary and immoral) and confounds with it.

The principle method of evasion from the trap involved in the concepts of nature was to redefine the “moral” to mean “socially useful and approved.” This definition eliminates the requirement of finding virtue in nature or natural motivation. The proponents of this view usually did not note, nor would they admit, that their definition implicitly places culture above nature. Nor did it bother them to proclaim, at the same time, a natural (innate?) love of virtue! For virtue was only self-interest! It was held that we naturally conceive of and embrace this valuation, either immediately, or as a result of (enlightened) egoistic calculation. It is understandable that Kant, reacting against this philosophy, will take the idea of “natural man” not in an empirical sense, but teleologically, looking for constancy not in what man is, but in what he should be. Eighteenth-century naturalists aimed to establish the objectivity and validity of moral laws; but by making nature its criterion and justification, they exposed values to the ambiguity of “nature,” to a levelling process which could (and did)

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21 Review-article in The American Scientist, 1958, p. 70. “Alienates” in the sense that man is not explicable by such a science, and the rest of nature becomes something different, not possessing some of the things that explain man. It should be noted, however, that there were also other reasons for the materialists’ concept of science.

22 Cassirer, Rousseau, Kant, and Goethe, Princeton, 1945, p. 20. This reverses the eighteenth-century genetic approach; but the seed is in Rousseau.
culminate in the lack of valid criteria to distinguish among the various claims of the "natural." As Adam Ferguson was to put it: "employed to specify a conduct which proceeds from the nature of man, [the natural] can serve to distinguish nothing; for all the actions of men are equally the result of their nature." Therefore, if there is to be moral value, if culture is to be possible, something over and above the natural must be recognized as valid and binding on the individual and his natural egoistic propensities. This the eighteenth century found in the social—which is perforce often at odds with the natural, and which, moreover, is partly responsible for corrupting the natural by its fomenting of disorderly desires. If there is only the natural, there is, furthermore, no need for obligation; but the philosophes' moral writings are full of obligation. When it became evident that it is insufficient to assume that the value is given in nature, many moralists simply excluded some manifestations of nature as contingent, pathological, abnormal, i.e., as unnatural! This is to assume that the moral in man is most natural in him. Nihilistic revolts in philosophy, the arts, and in history have been precisely against this assumption, and against the denial of the essential, naturally valid quality of his other demands.

There were, of course, many other cross-currents, contradictions, and antithesis in the philosophy of the Enlightenment, though we cannot attempt to mention them all. Karl Jaspers, for instance, notes the conflict between faith in reason and distrust of it. He sees the Enlightenment as a child of Descartes: "with what I validly think and can empirically investigate, I can achieve the right organization of the world." But he recognizes the strength of the countermovement led by men "who, although in complete possession of rationality themselves, at the same time saw its limits"—men like Pascal, Vico, and Bayle. "The philosophy of the seventeenth and eighteenth century seems to work itself out in these great antitheses."

An important confusion which follows from the body of naturalistic reasoning was the frequently—but far from universally—expressed belief that men would make significant and ever-increasing moral progress. As we read numerous statements of this

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25 For a similar view, well argued, see R. V. Sampson, op. cit., p. 71 ff.
26 Reason and Existenz, pp. 21–22.
kind, it is evident that there is no real hope that man will change, that he will be better, but only that external conditions can be set up, or indoctrination so perfected, that he will perform better, that is, in accord with desired standards of social utility. Others put it in this fashion: man will become enlightened, so that he realizes virtue is the best way to happiness. As Volney states it in Les Ruines, "man will become wise and good because it is his interest to do so." The "good" is prudential, and does not regard the will to accept moral obligation. Mably, d'Holbach, Helvétius, Morelly, Bonnet, Mirabeau, Saint-Lambert, Duclos, among many others, entertain hopes of the kind. The argument is expounded to perfection, in exactly these terms, by Hume. We have, then, a hope for the social redemption of the species. Condorcet alone, perhaps, believed in an actual change in character, in improvement of the moral and physical constitution. "Who knows, for instance, whether the time will not come when our self-interest and our passions will have no more influence on the judgments which govern our will than we see them have today on our scientific opinions, a time when any action contrary to the right of another will be as physically impossible to most men as a barbaric action committed in cold blood is today." Condorcet was to find out, soon thereafter, how "impossible" barbaric actions were to men! Other writers did not believe in moral progress, among them Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Diderot. Robinet held to an eternal equilibrium; Voltaire and Diderot were tempted by Manicheanism.

Passing now to another issue, we find in a philosophy which often proclaims the empirical and the relative, a real preference for the absolute. The Physiocrats, for example, affirm a natural,

27 Treatise, in Aiken, pp. 86–87, 90.
28 Esquisse, 2e Partie, pp. 557–58.
30 Voltaire’s opinions changed from time to time. When he thinks of the injustices in the world, he writes: "This picture of the world, of almost all times and all places, you would like to change! That is the folly of you moralists. Climb into the pulpit with Bourdaloue, or take the pen like La Bruyère—a waste of time: the world will always go as it is going." (Oeuvres, 41:52–53, 1766.) Sometimes his pessimism is attenuated: "The world is getting a little better; yes, the thinking world, but the coarse world will always be composed of bears and monkey, and the canaille will always be a hundred to one." (30:549, 1777.) But he did believe that "preaching men reason" might do some good (6:508). For Diderot, see L. G. Crocker, "Diderot and the Idea of Progress," and R. Hubert, pp. 282–89.
31 R. V. Sampson (op. cit., p. 240) notes the ignoring of the relativity of values in time and place.
physical order containing an invariable moral law as its consequence. They hoped that by transposing utility to Natural Law, it would impose itself as an absolute. The same may be said of Voltaire. Sampson notes that the attack on metaphysics did not generally preclude a belief in Natural Law; that even Helvétius has an unshakable conviction in a universal Law of Nature, discernable by right reason in men of every time and place—at a time when Natural Law was being pitilessly assaulted, by Helvétius, among others. In other words, as our discussion of nature and reason has already made clear, the supposed empiricism of the philosophes was vitiated by rationalism—not, however (as Talmon proposes) by the premise of universals in human nature, but by a simplified and abstract conception of human nature, and by the other factors we have brought out which induced a way of looking at facts, of selecting some and ignoring others.

We need not comment further on the uncertainty of making self-interest and general interest coincide, or on the actual sacrifice of the former. We have examined the difficulty of reconciling happiness, a subjective, capricious, chaotic criterion with the objectivity of announced social desiderata and moral law, and the error of taking psychological fact for ethical criterion. Do not men like Helvétius and d'Holbach really prefer virtue to happiness, culture to nature? To be sure, they refuse to choose between happiness and duty and pretend to offer both. In reality, they are demanding the same old sacrifices, and trying to make them valid and attractive with the sugar-coating of a naturalistic philosophy of egoism. We may say the same of Rousseau, in a somewhat different setting. Analogously, Voltaire and others fought against Original Sin, only to admit innate depravity in naturalistic terms. Or, when they would not admit the innateness of positive evil, their argument amounted, at best, to a declaration that man is capable of good deeds because they give him egoistic satisfactions, impulsive or rationally calculated. There is no attempt to distinguish the felt pleasure of an act from the pleasure of considering oneself as the subject of an act. Man is allowed moral knowledge, conscience, and remorse, but is denied the possibility of acting like a moral being.

The terms in which eighteenth-century French social philosophers were obliged to pose the moral problem—the reconciliation

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82 Ibid., p. 229.
of happiness and virtue, of self-interest and general interest, of nature and culture—created an unbridgeable dichotomy which the attempted solutions (enlightened self-interest, virtue-happiness, etc.) were unable to dissolve, thus opening the way to the contrary but related extremes of nihilism and social tyranny. These were terms, we must realize, which they were compelled to use, and answers they were compelled to seek, because the psychology under which they were working seconded the narrowly conceived naturalism we have described. They had to fashion an ethical philosophy, imposing moral obligation, from suppositions and conditions which denied its very existence: compelled by nature to act in certain ways (to satisfy an instinctual pleasure-pain reaction), an individual has no freedom or moral responsibility. Since pleasure was obviously not synonymous with right action (except for primitivists and nihilists), it became necessary to inquire how we could establish a moral system conforming to man's egocentric tendencies, how he could be coerced, coaxed, or "enlightened" into believing that he should follow virtue for the sake of his happiness. When the *philosophes* said, "Do good," they said, do it because it is good for you, even though the individual really became lost as an existential entity in the halo of "general welfare" and other abstractions.

It was, to be sure, an attempt to fashion a realistic ethics. But such positivism is sufficient neither as a description of men nor as a prescription for moral values. Since it does not clearly discriminate between egoism and obligation, it cannot successfully assert the superior claims of the latter. It encouraged rather than weakened the argument: this is *not* good for me, it does not make me happy; I have only this life and my nature tells me to make it as happy as I can; nature is sacred and right, and from nature I learn to follow pleasure-pain motives, rather than the weaker impulses of sacrifice, sympathy or altruism. It enjoined men to prefer the interest of others, or of the whole, to their own by pretending it was in their own interest to do so, while acknowledging, often enough, that men are not pre-eminently rational or determined by ideas, and that individuals (as life often shows us) have more to gain by frustrating the enjoinder, leaving it to the fools to obey it.

Surely there should be scant wonder if in the passage between the Scylla of supernaturalism and the Charybdis of nihilism, the
humanists often felt the appeal of the one and the temptation of the other. Nor is it hard to understand the eventuation of a strictly political morality, which enabled the shifting both of responsibility and of moral valuation from the individual's shoulders to society's. Such a tendency grows constantly in the second half of the century, but its terminus is already announced in Rousseau's article "Economie politique" (1755), in which he asserts that the body politic is a moral being with its own will which is the rule of right and wrong. His use of the general welfare concept opens a path to totalitarian conclusions. It was following Rousseau's views (and those we have grouped with him would have mainly agreed) that Dostoevski was to condemn, in *The Brothers Karamazov*, the interpretations of freedom as "the multiplication and satisfaction of desires," an interpretation which causes men to "distort their own nature." To be free is to desire what one should desire, and the decision for this is removed from the hands of the individual. The Achilles' heel of all such views is the assumption that those who determine the general interest and direct the conditioning process will themselves be above the same natural temptations and drives of power and self-interest. What is also forgotten is that the word "freedom" is quite meaningless unless it includes the possibility of dissent. At all events, virtue, when it is assumed to be action favoring what is best for the generality, must take on a different garb according to who determines the criteria of the general good. How, then, can we be certain that the "best interests" will also be moral (satisfactory to ethical judgment)? It seemed convenient, therefore, to dispose of the problem by redefining "morality." The "managing" of people becomes the supreme moral and political task, as the two adjectives are fused in consequence of this progression of reasoning; a progression that began with the proposal to re-establish ethics (which involves a surpassing of egoistic instinct) on the basis of the natural egoistic instinct termed self-interest, pleasure, or happiness. Yet to those who opposed the ethical outlook on either extreme this had seemed the only route. They relished neither the pure Christian morality of love and sympathy, which had partly evaporated under the heat generated by the scientific revolution and

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33 In a recent interview, the Rector of the Communist University of Rostock stated that "Democracy is not the freedom to do what you want, but to do what is good for you." When asked, "Who decides what is good for you?" his reply was evasive and unintelligible. We are brought back to Rousseau's *Contrat social*. 
the analysis of human nature; nor the extreme naturalism which
legitimized the law of the strong, or proclaimed that our happiness
depends on asserting our superiority over others, even by hurting
them. Against these, a measured egoism seemed the best ground
to take. But how limit the egoism? By natural process and pru­
dence? By enlightenment? Or was it rather necessary to direct,
condition, and indoctrinate it? We have seen how all three courses
were proposed.

In the political sphere, the extremes of utopian anarchism and
nihilism had little direct importance. The ethical thought of the
Enlightenment worked out into two great rival directions, both of
which have had continuous influence ever since. One was the
liberal-utilitarian. This current of thought did not try to abolish
the tension between self-interest and general interest by absorbing
the former completely into the latter. It hoped rather that they
could be placed in a situation of peaceful coexistence by the organ­
ization of a society tending toward freedom and justice, a society
in which the rights of individuals, limited only by reciprocity and
equal status before the law, would be respected and enhanced.
Science would contribute its share to abundance and a better life.
Self-interest would become enlightened self-interest, among na­
tions as among individuals. Reason, tolerance, liberty, unalienable
rights, legal equality, humanitarianism, progress through enlight­
enment—these are imperishable ideals which still underlie our
civilization. We cannot forget that the Declaration of Independ­
ence, the Bill of Rights, and the Déclaration des Droits de
l'Homme stand as immortal monuments symbolizing the legacy
of the Enlightenment. In this same tradition we must add the
theory of representative government and the separation of
powers.33a

On the other hand, the need to protect culture by overcoming
the ever-present motives and tendencies of the egoistic instincts,
to put an end to the war of self-interest and general interest, to
socialize man, led to the collectivist and prototalitarian moral­
political philosophies and programs we have examined. Beneath

33a In addition to the writers of liberal tendency whom we discussed in the last
chapter, we cannot ignore the fact that certain of Rousseau's theories exerted a
powerful influence in the direction of democratic government. This is particularly
true of his insistence on popular sovereignty, universal suffrage and (apparent) self
government. A few writers, like Benjamin Constant, early pointed out the inner­
most tendencies, and his ideas influenced totalitarian theorists, as well.
all these factors, the rise of totalitarian or collectivist thinking rests on a still more basic cause. This was the loss of confidence in the will or the ability of individuals to order their inner selves in what we call a moral way—to orient their inner lives, and so their behavior, along the reciprocal or co-operative lines which are requisite to healthy societies. Western culture had indeed come to this pass. In the absence of an inner order, then, it seemed more and more urgent that order be imposed from the outside, that men’s lives and inner selves be ordered for them, that they be relieved of this responsibility which was too much for them. Rivarol calls for “a conspiracy for order.” This was not an invention of the *philosophes*; it was a fact of life. The naturalistic reduction of human nature and behavior from which this type of remedy sprang was the theoretical formulation of what seemed to be a realistic observation of phenomena. After all, if men are biological organisms and nothing else, subject to mechanical laws of cause and effect, they must be so treated. There is no use in pretending to universal respect, fraternity, equality, or to a “right” to be treated only as ends—a right which belongs only to creatures capable of giving themselves laws of moral obligation and of adhering to them. In this way the problem of the tension between morality and power was “solved” by placing all power in the hands of society, or rather, in those of its “guides” and rulers.34

This philosophy, as I have tried to show, is basically related to nihilism, accepts some of its premises, and is essentially an extreme form of reaction against it. Consequently it is furthered, in our own time, by the fact to which Sampson alludes, that we live in an age of disillusion with the agencies of progress on which the liberal-progressivist school had counted; disillusion, also, we may add, with moral ideals and the possibility of values which can be both substantiated and made efficacious. The result is one we have witnessed, and sometimes contemplate with equanimity: a rever-

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34 For the descendence of Marxism from the *philosophes*, see R. W. Sampson, *op. cit.*, pp. 6–7. According to Niebuhr, both discount the rational pretenses of man, but expect men to build societies governed by a remarkable “rational coherence of life with life and interest with interest.” (*Nature and Destiny*, I, p. 21.) Cf. the statement of a Soviet Scholar: “Are the morals of a nation bad? The cause is bad laws, a deplorable form of government. To improve manners and morals it is therefore necessary to change the structure of the State. This is the aspect of the social doctrine of French materialism which Karl Marx had in mind when he wrote that eighteenth century French materialism leads directly to socialism and communism.” (I. K. Luppol, *Diderot*, p. 302.)
tion to barbarism. The triumphs of scientific technology—because of the way they have been used in contemporary social orders, though they might also be a potent instrument for the advancement of liberal-progressive ideals—have given proportionately greater strength to the aggressive and destructive forces in man than to the rational and moral, thus precisely reversing the direction of history which the liberal-progressives had foreseen. It is perhaps an element of human tragedy that the discovery of the conditions which might make happiness and equality as nearly attainable as possible involves coming into possession of sources of power which men use to nullify those very potentialities.

These are matters in which the verdict of history has weakened or countered the hopes of the humanistic thinkers of the Enlightenment, without—we emphasize this—having yet proven them finally wrong. On the plane of ethical thought, however, we must conclude that the weaknesses of the eighteenth-century French utilitarian ethics strengthened the alternatives of nihilism and totalitarian control—the first of which had already risen out of metaphysical and ethical rebellion, the second of which was a direct product of an important phase of eighteenth-century moral and social thought. We have examined in detail the development of both alternatives, as well as the attempt to forestall or counter them. Particularly significant and prophetic as a warning is the passage from the Réfutation d'Helvétius which we underscored, in which Diderot expresses his heartfelt desire to refute amoralism, and his inability to make the attempt for fear that a failure would only justify and strengthen the enemy. This passage epitomizes the crisis of ethical thought in our culture, which came to a head at that time.

We may go further. It was not only the weakness of the rationalistic ethics which was at fault. It was also the accompanying inability to envisage other possibilities. A prime example of considering problems in terms of alternatives which are not exhaustive is to be seen in the all-embracing Natural Law—utilitarian antithesis. The belief of many utilitarians that positive law has no prior moral sanction, making it dependent on convention or force, in turn gives the nihilist and the prototalitarian an opening wedge—that is, produces another alternative in which relativism appears conducive either to extreme subjectivism or to total social control.
There are, however, still other alternatives. We may maintain the empirical relativism of instrumental values without having to abandon the universality of terminal values. Such relativism, moreover, does not annihilate the validity of a given cultural experience and thereby sanction a subjective revolt of egoism; nor does it deprive the individual of his dignity as a moral person, thus allowing the collectivity to assume total moral responsibility and control. In regard to the major antithesis of Natural Law and utility, we have seen how at times (in Voltaire, for instance) these two contraries tend to coalesce. But here, too, there are other alternatives. It may be argued, for instance, that moral principles have an objective certainty without being natural laws in the sense of traditional Natural Law. Even for the strictest utilitarianism, the maximization of welfare (or happiness) is an objectively certain principle prior to all positive laws. It is not, however, a self-evident principle, like Natural Law, but derives from the analysis of good or right. It does not set up this principle as a natural or rational absolute, but only states that when we make value judgments, we are making assumptions about maximum welfare. This immediately excludes the statement that all positive laws are moral. For Hume, similarly, a value judgment is simply what a benevolent impartial spectator would assert. He does not claim to offer a rule for value judgments of particular acts, only an account of what we mean when we make a value judgment. He offers an empirical theory which does not sanction the two eighteenth-century alternatives of nihilism or social tyranny, but neither does it provide an absolute justification. This helps to explain why there was so little communication between Hume and the French on matters of ethical speculation.

Another alternative would be to transcend the empirical, without, however, losing it and falling into the a prioris (frequently supernatural) of Natural Law. The Ancients had mostly linked obligation to egoism and self-interest. In the Middle Ages, these two motives were, in theory, surpassed on the earthly level, by postponing their satisfaction to a future existence. The eighteenth century returned to the Ancients. But Locke had already indicated and Kant was to renew the idea of obligation as a defining character of man, transcending self-interest. We may perhaps say that a conceptual morality is demanded by the reason, objectifying and
projecting its own existence, giving a terminal value to every human being. An existential morality in human relations comes from the capacity to direct action in accordance with this universal and the configuration of particular situations.

We may suggest further that apodictic attempts to justify moral value and obligation of the kinds practiced in the eighteenth century are both self-defeating and supererogatory. Moral obligation is no more provable than the simplest axioms and numerical identities. But obligations do not have the rigid abstract forms of mathematical propositions; they have an empirical or concrete existence inextricable from the complex fabric of life, with its diverse patterns. To be sure, what matters to men is happiness and welfare (their own and that of others); but in their pursuit of these ends, they have come to live on a moral plane, to know right and wrong, and the obligation to do the right; and these have come to exist in virtue of their own demands, justice for justice, truth for truth. Whether God has made us moral beings or whether we have become such in the process of evolutionary emergence is irrelevant. We do not need an external substantiation of moral obligation: we are its substantiation. An essential component of our distinctiveness and definition is that we have added moral valuation to a nonmoral universe. This is, perhaps, the redemption of our bestial and sub-bestial iniquities. The existence of ethics depends, then, not on what is physical and common with other beings, but on such specifically human characteristics as conscious and self-conscious knowledge, the power to objectify, choice, purpose, and plan. It is not that the moral world is reducible to or completely explicable by these potentialities. The situation is rather that, as soon as they exist, the responsibility for right judgment, planning, and choice, for the determination of what is right, comes into being. The necessity to judge, choose, and plan involves the selection of criteria for judgment, choice, and planning. Nor is there a need to “prove” our obligation to carry out our obligations. If obligation exists, that is the prime obligation of all obligations, since no other can exist without it, and the word would be self-contradictory. Unless we knew that we ought to do the right, there would be no such category as right. Right and wrong, justice and injustice have no meaning in nature, as Diderot and many others claimed, but their meaning for man is an inescapable part of his nature. Who says “man” says a moral being.
Our very humanity is the origin, the ground, the sole and compelling justification of our moral obligations.\textsuperscript{35}

If the verdict of history has not been entirely favorable to the ethical enterprise of the French Enlightenment, no discredit falls on its humanistic writers. They could not foresee the uses to which two centuries of upheaval were to put their ideas, nor could they easily escape working within the confines of their cultural moment. Many of their great hopes and ideas remain the living part of a liberal society; if we have not sufficiently realized them, the failure is ours more than theirs. It is nonetheless true that the thinkers of the Enlightenment, after starting with the empirical realism of Bayle, gradually lost their grip on the existential claims, experiences, and realities of both individual and social life. Starting with a bold individualism, they ended with the accent on collectivism. Their rationalistic ethics weakened the moral defenses of Western civilization—which they desired to protect—against the challenges of nihilism and totalitarianism. From the eighteenth century we have inherited a fundamental weakness of the social philosophy of democracies, confidence in an easy resolution of the tension and conflict between self-interest and the general interest. Later, when the defenses of culture were faced with the choices of reality, they proved inadequate, and under the mask of humanitarianism was uncovered the face of violence and cruelty. It is true that no one else has provided a satisfactory defense that could operate in a society both modern and liberal.

Consequently, while lauding the Enlightenment, in traditional fashion, for its legacy of liberalism, we must recognize that nihilism and totalitarianism (like liberalism, as theories not as facts) were also parts of its legacy; the small size of the group who furthered these outlooks is quite disproportionate to the historical importance of the problems they raised. History has not been made primarily by thinkers; and the economic, technological, and political events of the following two centuries determined the plight of humanistic culture and the power of its foes. Yet we are not entitled to forget that the eighteenth century contributed to the fashioning of authoritarianism and nihilism in morals and politics, both of which were inimical to the aims of many amongst its

\textsuperscript{35} Bonnet, we noted in our first chapter, held that men have a different way of \textit{being} in nature, one which inevitably puts all our relationships in a unique light of right and ought—the moral plane of existence. It should be noted that this argument is, in essence, the one advanced by Diderot in “Droit naturel.”
intellectual leaders. Again we must remember that their ideas were not so much causative factors as formative factors.

We have tried, then, to see the eighteenth century in the full complexity of its problems and tensions. We have abjured simplistic formulas. We have not read history backwards, but have tried to present all important eighteenth-century viewpoints in their proper relationship—not just those which later history has selected to retain. We have taken sides neither with the eulogists nor with the damners. The Enlightenment gave ample grounds for both, but neither group sees it in its organic wholeness; neither realizes its historical necessity and its historical function. Robespierre said of the philosophes: “To them we owe in large part that kind of practical philosophy which, making a system of egoism, considers human society as a war of ruse, success as the rule of right and wrong, honesty as a matter of taste and convention, the world as the patrimony of clever swindlers.” That he spoke the truth is confirmed not only by the philosophies we have examined, but also by the parallel evidence of the theater, from Turcaret to the Mariage de Figaro, and of the novel. But the same sources would testify to the fact that it is far from the whole truth, and that we may draw opposite conclusions from other aspects of their philosophy.

It is sometimes said that the seventeenth century was a period of originality, discovery, genius; that the eighteenth merely broadened and popularized the work of its predecessor. The proposition, as stated, is true. But the historical significance of the eighteenth century lies in another discovery—that of the meaning for man and his culture of what had been discovered, and was still being discovered about nature, human nature, and man’s place. True, a few individuals had at various or all times acquired a similar realization, but they were not heard. The eighteenth century brought into the open the untenability, in life and society, of the whole inherited religious-rationalistic value structure. After this point, the decisions of societies would no longer be bound by it, not even in theory. If it contained valid truths, they would have to be substantiated. The individual was faced with internal chaos, emptiness, anguish. Societies confronted the problem of reorganizing their approach to the relation of the individual and the whole. As power increased, the need to control it would become

36 Speech to the Convention, 18 Floréal, An II.
ever more urgent and difficult, because of the inability to organize the structure of a compelling moral force which, working through social institutions, could control power for constructive and cooperative ends rather than for the destructively competitive ends which nature, as the eighteenth century had made clear, opposed to culture.

The function and significance of the Enlightenment in our cultural history lie far less in the ideals and panaceas it propounded—though these have rolled on to us with mounting reverberations—than to have brought the hidden flaws, the festering problems, the alternative courses into the light of day. It uncovered the crisis of our culture—the instinctual resistances, the inner war, the contingency, and the lack of certainty. Perhaps the greatest lesson of their enterprise is that the basic problems cannot be solved in terms of political reforms or enlightenment. The trouble is in us, in the human condition. But this is precisely the lesson of which many among them, who comforted themselves with rationalistic schemes for reordering reality, were unaware—a statement from which we should, however, exempt men like Bayle, Montesquieu, Voltaire, and Diderot who looked hard and true at the human condition.

Kant and Hegel, Kierkegaard, Marx, Darwin, Freud and Einstein, nationalism and imperialism, capitalism and its antagonists—these are essential factors among many others, in the structural complex of the twentieth century. The Enlightenment still has its place; but in the unending process of cultural evolution, its role in the formation of successive structural complexes becomes more diluted. It recedes to a background even as, at a further remove, the Greek world has. Much of its work, though useful in its time, now has only an antiquarian interest, is no longer a living part of our structural complex. With its explorations and theories in the domain of ethics and politics, however, it is a quite different matter. Here was not only a moment of transition, as outworn elements were brushed away. Here was the posing of enduring problems in a new light, often in a true light. Here was an attempt at answers, which still have their vigor amongst us, the uncovering of truths eternally applicable, of problems perhaps forever unsolvable. All the hopes for the best and all the fears for the worst are brought out into the open. That is why the *philosophes*, despite the fact that there have been better “philosophers”
both before and after them, have an undying appeal. The gener­
ations beyond were to follow the paths they traced—the rational
and the irrational, the exaltation of culture or nature, the primacy
of the whole or the revolt of the part. Thus we may properly view
the Enlightenment as a cultural moment in the timeless evolution
of the structural complexes of culture. Some of it was ejected in the
historical process, some remains and can be ejected only by a
total revolution. What remains is its humanism, and paradoxically,
as a result of its effort toward humanism, the antihumanism which
grew out of its questioning of all values, out of its inability to
accomplish what it wanted most to accomplish—to establish a
humanistic ethics that could withstand the assaults of right or left,
and a social structure which, together with the moral, would unite
nature and culture for the happiness, the progress, and the brother­
hood of man.