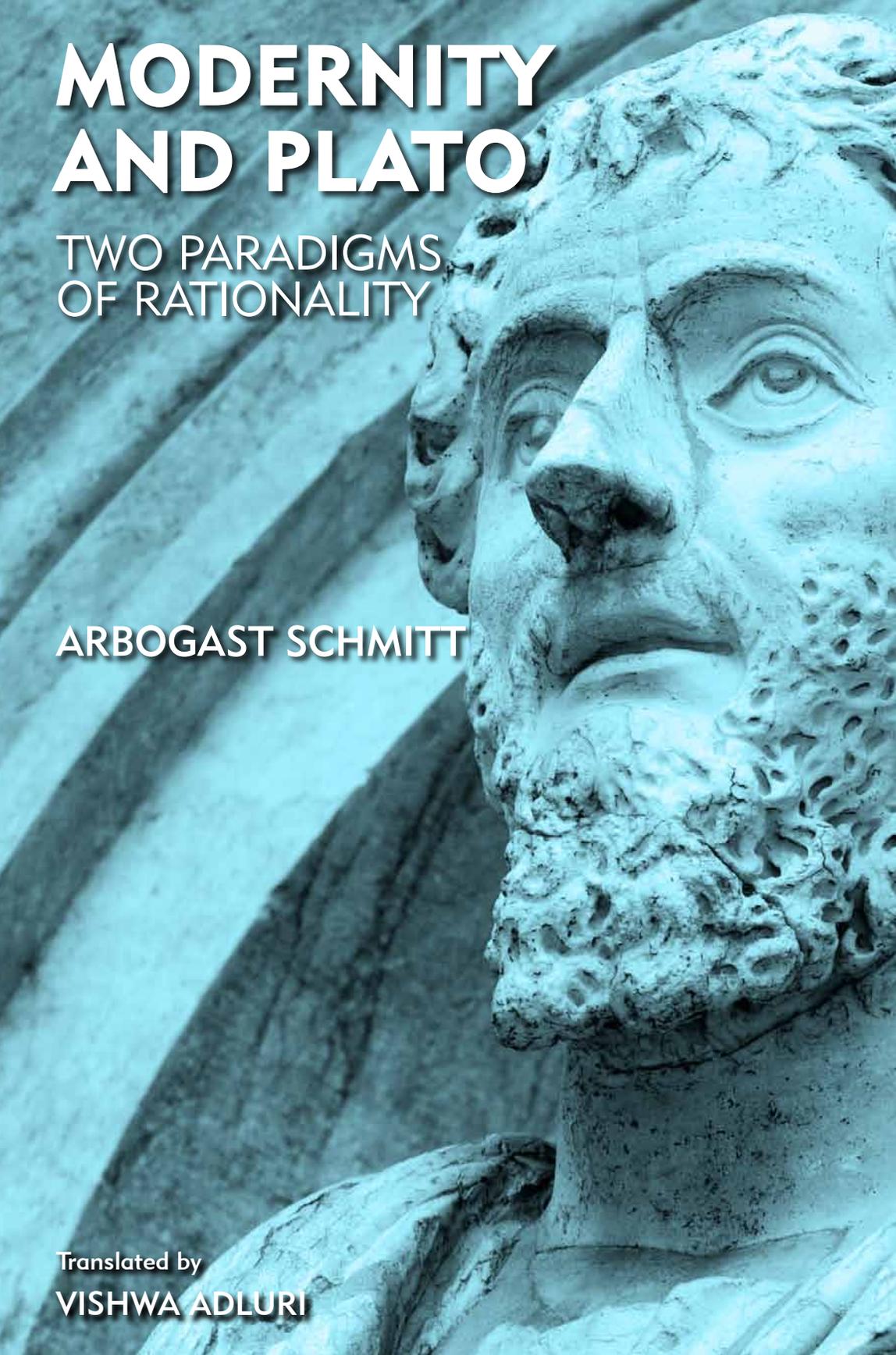


MODERNITY AND PLATO

TWO PARADIGMS
OF RATIONALITY

ARBOGAST SCHMITT

Translated by
VISHWA ADLURI



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WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF
CHRISTINE MELCHART AND JOYDEEP BAGCHEE



CAMDEN HOUSE

Rochester, New York

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For Christine

Behind every long work stands the labor of a muse

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FOREWORD TO THE ENGLISH EDITION

IN MANY MODERN SOCIETIES, there is a widespread tendency to associate the consciousness of modernity with a consciousness of superiority. Naturally, there is also admiration for many of the distinctive features of premodern societies. Indeed, it is not unusual to find nostalgia for what seems to have been lost in the course of progress, even as, beyond that, every modern society considers tolerance toward what is foreign and other than it to be one of its basic obligations. Nevertheless, even this demand already implies a separation from the non-modern, because it is itself part of a consciousness of having reached a higher, more developed standpoint than everything that does not share in modernity's specific achievements. For most people, the roots of this consciousness lie in an awareness of man's free self-determination, with all the consequences modernity derives from this: freedom of conscience, of opinion, of property, recognition of the dignity of every person as an individual capable of the same degree of self-determination, etc.

Nonetheless, too little attention is given to the fact that these values, though positive in themselves, are susceptible to very different interpretation, or to the fact that they have, at least as they have been interpreted in Western societies since the Enlightenment, often led to several highly negative effects. One of these negative effects is a widespread dichotomy of thought, one that, moreover, entails a historically problematic thesis since it distinguishes modernity from the non-modern as its strict antithesis. Since self-determination is dependent on the ability to think on one's own, the reflection upon the autonomy of reason and a methodically grounded mastery over such reflection is regarded as the historic root from which modernity emerges. From the standpoint of this belief, reflective, self-aware thinking stands in contrast to naïve, dependent thought. Thus, individuality, subjectivity, self-responsibility, freedom, conscience, historical consciousness, character, etc., can be ascribed only to modern man. In contrast, non-modern man is considered bound to conventional societies, a mere member of a community, lacking individual responsibility, dependent on authority and mere appearance. Morality, for him, is the result of the values of a shame-culture rather than a guilt-culture.

These judgments and others associated with or derived from them are naturally not used by everyone and certainly not in the same manner

by everyone. Indeed, many employ them without being aware of either their significance or their origin. However, one cannot overestimate their potential historical influence. “Underdeveloped” societies as a rule only have a chance at becoming recognized members of the contemporary world community when they adopt “modern,” that is to say, *Western* norms and attitudes. The refusal to open themselves up to this further development often evokes the charge of being stuck in the (dark) Middle Ages or falling back to such a stage of development.

Even though recent research has provided rich evidence that the Middle Ages were not dark and that they were — in contrast to early modernity (a period that claims to have discovered freedom, tolerance, and individuality) — quite liberal and permissive, the reference to the Middle Ages as the counterconcept to modernity is *essentially* justified: the opposition referred to above is not the result of an experience in modernity but has a long history that reaches back to early modernity and its sharp break with the Middle Ages. This opposition has dominated Western culture in its broad course ever since then, albeit in various guises and transformations but nevertheless with a surprisingly constant meaning.

I refer here only to a few well-known examples of this traditional prejudice. In ethics, modernity is characterized by the fact that individual self-determination replaces the old dependence; in political theory, by the fact that individuals freely contract to organize themselves into political institutions that do away with the old hierarchical order; in economics, by the fact that one no longer orients oneself toward universal justice or the *bonum commune* and the fact that the desires of independent individuals for self-preservation determine market logic; in art and literature, by the fact that creative activity liberates itself from the restriction of having to imitate nature and by the fact that the artistic genius gains his subjective freedom; in medicine, by the fact that health is no longer deduced from abstract concepts but studied inductively.

In a research project conducted together with colleagues and students, my co-workers and I took up the history and extent of these oppositions for analysis; I present the main conclusions of our research in this book. Perhaps the most astonishing result is that one can show on the basis of textual sources that all these contrasts “throw the baby out with the bathwater”: modernity neither “discovers” individuality, subjectivity, conscience, self-responsibility, reflectivity, historical consciousness, nor are these qualities uniquely and intimately linked to modernity. Rather, one can demonstrate that a new and often only marginally altered (and occasionally narrower) interpretation of values such as individuality, freedom, self-determination, etc. gave rise to the impression that these values were fundamentally and originally “discovered” in modernity.

I have tried to present the main reasons that led to this consciousness of having overcome antiquity and of having discovered modern values once

more in a nutshell in the introduction. Furthermore, I would like to point out that the consciousness of an opposition through which early modernity radically distinguished itself from the Middle Ages does not just exercise a monstrous historical effect down to the present — an effect that is all too little noted. Rather, what is at stake here is a break with tradition that was carried out in a sweeping and superficial manner and at an extraordinary pace. One gave short shrift to a centuries-old tradition that had stood the test of time, thinking that one had to only “look forward” since the success that could be attained in all fields in this manner were too rapid, too overwhelming, too promising, and too lucrative (in every sense of the word!) to be ignored. Hardly a scholar in early modernity thinks he needs to justify his rejection of Scholastic Aristotelianism with anything more than impassioned statements about the conceptual distinctions of the Aristotelians, allegedly far-removed from experience and the result of a dogmatic faith in authority. And yet, the feeling of superiority of modernity vis-à-vis the ancients established at that time endures until today. It was therefore an urgent desideratum to subject what is probably the greatest break with tradition ever to occur in the West to a renewed analysis.

In contrast to what one can still read in accounts of the history of philosophy and of the history of culture, the Renaissance does not bring about a rebirth of “the” antiquity — allegedly suppressed in the dark Middle Ages — but a turn to a *different* antiquity. The empirically and practically oriented philosophical schools of the Hellenic age which had already significantly influenced all aspects of cultural existence between 300 BC and AD 200 were rediscovered in modernity as being congenial. Renaissance thinkers felt they had discovered the genuine antiquity in Stoicism, in Epicureanism, and in Skepticism. In contrast, the Neoplatonic Aristotelianism of the Middle Ages seemed to be nothing but a deflection from this genuine antiquity. Many believed that even Plato and Aristotle had to be reinterpreted in the spirit of this modern, Hellenistic antiquity.

It is highly rewarding to examine the loss that this change in reception brought along with it, as it can only be described as substantial from the perspective of both cultural and intellectual history. From the perspective of cultural history, the return to Hellenistic-Roman antiquity meant the end of a centuries-old symbiosis and of a fruitful intercultural exchange. Aristotelian rationality (and the Greek science that was influenced by it; Galen’s medicine, for example) was not unique to the Latin West. On the contrary, it was largely brought back to the West from the Orient after the Roman emperor Justinian had finally driven out the best minds among the heathen philosophers from the empire in 529. In cultures as diverse as the Syrian, Persian, Arabic, and Jewish cultures and in a period stretching across more than one thousand years and encompassing many historical transformations, Aristotelian rationality constituted

a common basis for understanding that also contributed to the tolerant coexistence of religions (although not universally and not always with the same degree of success).

In terms of the matter, the loss was even greater, for the condemnation of Scholasticism from the perspective of the principles of Hellenistic philosophy did not just bring a turn to experience and to the individual with it, as is usually asserted. Rather, it led to a metaphysical and theological overestimation of experience, and, ultimately, as I will try to show in detail, to such a transformed conception of the task of thinking that the dogma could establish itself that there had been no understanding of thought concerning itself prior to this but only an epistemologically naïve judgment concerning the objects of thought. All method, allegedly, was restricted to such judgment. According to the new dogma, whatever we can know we know through experience and through the methodical and technical manipulation of the contents of this experience. A direct consequence of this conviction is that the task of thought now appears to consist exclusively in (the more or less accurate or symbolically reconstructive) reproduction of the world as we experience it. Thought becomes representation [*Vergegenwärtigung*, *Repräsentation*] of the perceptible and observable world; it becomes representation [*Vorstellung*] or, to use the term that has established itself until today: it becomes consciousness.¹

A theory that interprets thinking as the processing of sensorily given material, as the representation or as the conscious organization of a sensory “manifold” to uniform representations cannot be found in the philosophy of antiquity and the Middle Ages influenced by Plato and Aristotle. If, as many still do today, one makes this concept of thought the sole standard for one’s inquiry, then, one necessarily arrives at the conclusion that a methodological reflection of thought upon itself did not

¹ Translator’s note: Schmitt uses a number of words for the activity of representation, all of which will be rendered with “representation.” The word “Vorstellung” (lit., a “placing before [oneself]”) is the closest to the Latin *repräsentatio* in its morphology. Schmitt occasionally also uses the Latin-derived “Repräsentation” in its place, notably as a way of emphasizing the historical genesis of this concept in the Hellenistic and Renaissance philosophical schools. The two terms, that is, “Vorstellung” and “Repräsentation,” are hence identical in content but not in historical connotation. “Vergegenwärtigung,” the third of the terms Schmitt uses, will also be translated “representation,” although it specifically emphasizes the moment of bringing something to presence or of the present (*die Gegenwart*). Finally, besides these three terms, the word “Darstellung” will also be occasionally translated with “representation” (more often with “presentation”); however, it will be usually clear from the context that “representation” here does not have a terminological sense. I will usually (although not always) list the German equivalents for the remaining three usages of “representation.”

“as yet” exist in antiquity. At best, such a reflection existed in antiquity in the form of incipient beginnings or preliminary stages. However, the resultant conviction (viz., modernity first develops an adequate conception of intellectual man’s sovereign disposal over himself) must confront a tradition emerging from the Aristotelian theory of science (the so-called *Second Analytics*) in which a great number of texts explicitly argue that the reflection of *ratio* concerning its own acts is the presupposition for all methodologically secured cognition.

Consequently, it is not true that this tradition contains no reflection of thought concerning itself. Rather, it contains a reflection on a different concept of thought than the one in terms of which we are used to judging antiquity. If one adopts this hermeneutic premise as the basis of one’s research, one can show through a wealth of supporting material that Plato and Aristotle (via a recourse to the Presocratic Parmenides) lay down a concept of thought that regards the basic act of thought not as representation, but as an act of discrimination [*Unterscheidung*].² In the latter case, epistemological reflection on thought does not mean investigating the modes of consciousness, but the criteria of discrimination. Plato calls for such a reflection in book 7 of his *Republic* and demands from it a rigor analogous to mathematics (indeed, a rigor that underlies mathematics itself). This task was undertaken rigorously especially in the framework of the so-called liberal arts and within the framework of commenting upon Aristotle’s *Analytics* by many theoreticians of science in antiquity and the Middle Ages.

As it is this very concept of thought that is lost in the “revolutionary” upheaval through which early modernity sets itself apart from the Middle Ages, I have devoted a large part of this book to its clarification. While going through the relevant texts it became clear that they offered rich answers to the question of how thought must

² Translator’s note: alongside “representation,” “discrimination” is one of the most important concepts in Schmitt’s work. Schmitt distinguishes “philosophies of representation” (*Vorstellungsphilosophien*) or “philosophies of consciousness” (*Bewusstseinsphilosophien*), on the one hand, from “philosophies of discrimination” (*Unterscheidungsphilosophien*), on the other. The former category includes all modern philosophies, which identify representation and hence making conscious or becoming conscious (of the contents of one’s representation) as the basic activity of thought, whereas the latter includes all ancient philosophies, which identify discrimination as the basic activity of thought. Thus, from the perspective of ancient philosophy, even the simplest act of perception is not a simple reception of a sensory manifold, but entails more or less sophisticated acts of discrimination (*krinein*). Schmitt translates *krinein* with the German word “Unterscheiden” and variants, which I have generally rendered as “discrimination.” Occasionally, where context appears to demand it, I also use expressions such as “distinction” or “distinctiveness” or “to distinguish.”

be understood if its fundamental act is discrimination. These answers simultaneously demonstrated that this concept of thinking (that is, as discrimination rather than reflection) is both interesting and highly relevant. Since one can conceive of even the simplest forms of perception (for example, when the eye notes colors or the ear notes sounds) as acts of discrimination, there no longer exists a gulf between sensibility and reason in this concept of thought. Rather, this concept gives rise to ascending degrees of freedom in thought's disposal over itself. Moreover, since a direct act of discrimination is always accompanied by pleasure or aversion (one cannot taste wine, that is, distinguish nuances in taste and odor, without also simultaneously noting that the wine either tastes good or does not taste good) there is also no gulf between feeling and reason in a philosophy of discrimination. Instead, there is a rich spectrum of different experiences of pleasure or aversion that accompany different acts of discrimination. Indeed, if one were to set up a direct comparison between this "old" concept of thought and the modern concept of thought as representation, the approach followed in the philosophy of discrimination would prove itself to be scarcely inferior. One cannot bring something to mind unless one has recognized it first, that is, has distinguished it as something definite. Someone who did not hear a sound or did not identify an enzyme, also cannot represent or make conscious what was present to him in that experience.

It thus becomes clear that the reason for the unity of intuition, feeling, thinking, and volition in antiquity so admired in modernity does not, surprisingly enough, lie in the fact that antiquity fails to distinguish between these psychic faculties owing to its intuitive thinking, but rather, in the fact that antiquity arrived at a nuanced conception of unity through undertaking a critical reflection on the different forms of cognition. This ability to understand man through a critical reflection on him as a uniform being in his diverse faculties also proved its practical value through enabling — at least where one made use of it — an intercultural dialogue that also made it possible to critically counter the consciousness of a "clash of cultures."

Of course, modernity's turn to the empirical and the technological mastery of life's practical problems has brought many advances and achievements — ones antiquity could scarcely have conceived. Nonetheless, the antiquity influenced by Plato and Aristotle (and its offshoots in the Oriental and Occidental Middle Ages) has advantages when it comes to analyzing what makes man truly man, wherein the complete development of his psychic and, above all, his rational capacities must be sought, and thus how he can attain the happiest existence possible. These advantages have to a large extent been lost through the modern sciences' successful and accelerating concentration on the practical sphere. This book

aims to make a small contribution to the task of recouping these advantages and combining them with the achievements of modernity — and thereby to the possibility of overcoming deficiencies on both sides.

A final word on the title of this book: why is it titled “Modernity and Plato”? A title is, of course, always an abbreviation. One could not present what modernity as such is — irrespective of whether one lets modernity begin in the fourteenth, eighteenth, or even in the nineteenth century — in any book in the world. Nor does this book claim to do so in any respect. Most of what has occurred, and is occurring, in the historical period one might term “modern” has either little or nothing at all to do with the consciousness of the opposition through which incipient modernity once distinguished itself from antiquity. Nor does it have anything to do with the effects of this consciousness. Even when one seeks to determine the distinctive features of the Renaissance as a historical epoch, one cannot just point to the turn away from Plato and Aristotle and toward Hellenistic-Roman antiquity. There is much in the Renaissance that is unrelated to this change. Indeed, the Renaissance had its own reception of Plato and Aristotle, one that endured alongside the reception of Hellenistic philosophy.

However, when one asks why there is a radical consciousness of newness and of a new dawn in the Renaissance among many people and why this consciousness is linked with the idea of a rebirth of antiquity and why this consciousness of newness influenced all cultural regions in such a way that its effects endure into the present, then one touches upon questions this book seeks to answer. Thus, when I speak of “modernity” in the following pages, the reference is to that *consciousness* of modernity — with all its presuppositions and consequences — that arose from the thesis of an opposition between the new and modern and the ancient and medieval.

Since this book was primarily written for a European audience, authors such as Descartes and Kant and their consciousness of a “Copernican” turn form the central basis of this inquiry. However, I am quite certain that, had we taken John Locke and Hume as our starting point and traced the history of modernity from these thinkers down to analytic philosophy and the “linguistic turn,” we would not have arrived at a significantly different understanding of what distinguishes these positions from Platonic-Aristotelian philosophy.

The fact that we speak of Plato rather than Plato and Aristotle (or, more exactly, late-antiquity and the philosophical tradition that dominated the Middle Ages) as the counterpart to modernity (or, more precisely, to a specific form of the consciousness of modernity dominant over several centuries) is naturally also the result of an abbreviation. But this abbreviation too has its reasons. It is Plato who established the principles of a philosophy of discrimination through explicit arguments. In spite of many differences in individual aspects, Aristotle stands on the

same foundation as this approach and is thereby fundamentally distinguished from every concept of representation or consciousness. That is why the title refers to Plato. The consciousness of modernity shared by many distances itself from his understanding of philosophy.

I would like to dedicate this book to my teacher Werner Beierwaltes. I first learnt from him that the contemporary contrast between a systematic and a “scholarly” historical concern with philosophy is a false alternative and not only because systematic reasoning, too, turns into history upon completion, with the result that one engages it from a “scholarly” and philological perspective. The prejudice that what has been thought in the course of history does not have any systematic relevance and that one therefore cannot take it up for its own sake does not hold up to critical examination. This is especially valid, as Werner Beierwaltes has shown from many aspects, for the philosophical texts of the Middle Ages and antiquity thought to have been superseded by the “critical” philosophy of the modern period. Many profound thoughts live on in a changed form in post-Cartesian and post-Kantian philosophy, yet others have their own validity and remain unaffected by newer developments. I would like to express my gratitude for being able to learn this from someone who is probably the greatest authority on Platonism in antiquity and modernity.

I would like to thank Camden House for including this book in their list, and my very special and heartfelt thanks go to Dr. Vishwa Adluri for this translation, which was prepared with great understanding for the topic and with linguistic elegance. I would also like to thank Christine Melchart for her support in the earliest stages of this process and Dr. Joydeep Bagchee for his careful corrections and editing of the final manuscript.

Marburg, January 2012

FOREWORD TO THE FIRST EDITION

IN SPITE OF MUCH ADMIRATION and the high regard Plato has always been held in, there is a break in the relationship of early modernity and modernity toward him.¹ The resultant distancing from Plato is not incidental to modern thinking. It is virtually a dogma of all critical thinking that something like an independently existing essence of objects cannot exist and that, were it to exist, it certainly could not be recognized. This, however, is precisely what Plato stands for: he is the real exponent of a precritical dogmatic philosophy that could still be of the view that there exist transcendent substances, defining characteristics, ideas accessible to reason alone, knowledge of which would make possible an adequate explanation of the world without recourse to empiricism. This book deals with the emergence and the validity of this view of Plato, which can be consistently traced since late medieval times. The description, however, is not exclusively historical. This book does not present a history of the reception of Plato through the ages, something that could hardly be attempted in a single monograph. Rather, the discussion centers on a factual debate. What are the reasons that led to this — probably skewed — image of Plato, how valid are the arguments that brought about this break with Platonism, and what are the consequences of this break for the self-understanding through which the critical thinking of “modernity” distinguishes itself from Plato? In that sense this book will also be partial in its judgment: not in the sense of arbitrary partisanship, but in the sense that it evaluates better and less well-reasoned arguments and makes a case for what appears better substantiated through attested arguments.

The reference to Plato is not the starting point of work on this book, but the result of much wider inquiries. Together with colleagues and pupils who participated in a research project over several years, I tried to

¹ Translator’s note: German uses two words for “modernity,” where English has only one: “die Neuzeit” (lit., the “new age” or the “new epoch”) and “die Moderne.” Although their usages overlap, Schmitt uses the former to refer to incipient modernity, that is, the period between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries and the former for the period from roughly the seventeenth century onward to the present day. I have therefore consistently translated “Neuzeit” with “early modernity,” reserving “modernity” for the latter.

answer the question of why one finds so many remarks in influential texts since the break with the Middle Ages to the effect that the “modernity” arising from this break is engaged in a “querelle” or a direct confrontation with antiquity. Even a quick glance at the various forms of this “querelle” makes clear that this consciousness is characteristic of modernity’s self-understanding. Post-medieval “modernity” does not just distinguish itself from antiquity through a heightened consciousness of a contrast but extends this attitude to virtually everything non-modern and thus also to all cultures which did not develop out of European, Western culture. It is thereby generally immaterial whether this antithesis is hailed as an overcoming of the old through modernity or whether it is nostalgically lamented as a loss of traditional ways of life. What is determinative for both the positive and negative evaluation is the same consciousness of a direct opposition: one that sets itself apart from “antiquity” or other non-modern cultures in their totality.

Moreover, the consciousness of a break in tradition together with the prejudices in terms of which the conditions before and after the break are formulated (“enlightened versus immature,” “naïve versus reflected,” “conventional versus individual,” etc.) is not restricted historically to a single epochal division between antiquity as such and modernity as such; rather, it dominates the attitude of individual epochs *within* modernity (with increasing speed since the eighteenth century) toward their immediate past and thus toward the past in general.

Anyone involved in the debates taking place in current “discourses” in philosophy, the arts, science, politics, economics, etc., will invariably be confronted with two constants:

1. There is a universal diagnosis for all areas of life that asserts that we live in a time of upheaval, of crisis, and of constantly accelerating change.
2. The latest state attained at present — whether of a science, an artistic or political “movement,” etc. — is presented as the result of a “turn,” of a “paradigm shift,” of a “revolution.” Thus, the latest brain research does not simply offer an (admittedly significant) improvement over its immediate predecessor, but makes “discoveries” that “revolutionize” the old understanding and usher in a completely new “paradigm.” Something analogous holds for practically every other area.

Of course this way of thinking, for which change occurs primarily as a revolution, is not new at all. It is not just the twentieth century that presents a whole host of such “turns”: the turn toward the unconscious (Freud), the turn toward language (Wittgenstein), the turn toward a philosophy of embodiment (from Herder to Gernot Böhme), the turn toward feeling (“emotional intelligence”), and, recently, the turn toward the picture (Gottfried Böhm, Hans Belting, and others). For many people, Darwin’s specific achievement too can only be described in terms of a revolutionary turn — from a static and dogmatic explanation of life to

seeing life as a historical evolution or development. Kant already made the same claim of himself and thereby gave the paradigm for all these turns its name (a name Hans Blumenberg uses to characterize modernity as a whole): the Copernican turn. Indeed, such a sense of revolution can be found accompanying virtually all processes of change since early modernity up to the most recent present.

Why does one so frequently encounter the consciousness throughout this roughly seven-hundred-year phase of modernity — in contrast to practically all other historical eras prior to it — that the new, the “modern” could only be achieved through a decisive turn away from the old, that is, through its destruction or overcoming? This is the question the research project posed. I shall present the main conclusions of this project in this book. The basic question I shall take up is: why is the claim to representing a “modern” stage of development (found in many texts from the fourteenth until the twentieth century) linked to a consciousness of having transcended the non-modern past in a revolutionary turn, with the result that the consciousness of modernity is nearly always linked to the consciousness of a break in tradition? The past seems to be obsolete in a way that a direct engagement in terms of the matter itself no longer seems possible. The past contains much that is of interest and worth experiencing but it seems that it can no longer be considered relevant for solving current problems.

A critical discussion of this loss of history in modernity that goes beyond merely nostalgic lamentation has not really been attempted to date. If one follows the historically traceable developments that led to this consciousness of modernity and examines the concrete reasons presented in each case that allegedly led to a final overcoming of the old, one will see that these processes are not historically necessary developments — leading to a state modern thinking may no longer fall below — at all. Rather, they are often highly problematic processes that have encumbered modernity with multiple legacies and are responsible for almost all the aporias that still encumber the present. The “turn of thinking onto itself,” that is, the conviction of having laid the foundations for sovereign human self-determination through a revolutionary break with the Middle Ages (and its dependence on antiquity), proves to be the central upheaval, of which virtually all further turns in modernity are derivations or variations.

The central impulse in this turn onto itself is the acceptance of empirical reality and one’s own existence in the here and now as the sole yardstick of insight and action: only that which is presently there and can be sensually experienced and verifiably exists is recognized as being real and as something thought can draw on in forming its concepts. This conviction was originally and is even today anti-Platonic in intent: it rejects the Platonic doctrine of a reality to ideas, that is,

of a “thing itself”² that is recognizable in a purely rational way, and, instead, insists on the immediate evidence of sensually experienceable individual objects. Historically, this development, through which this anti-Platonism became accepted as the virtually unanimous conviction, had several phases. However, even after these speculative theories were allegedly overcome, Plato remained and remains *the* antipode in relation to whom the individual “critical turn” is executed each time.

It can be shown, and I would like to demonstrate this in a series of cases, that there is a succession of turns in early modernity, each of which is conducted ever anew and repeats the same basic pattern. Hence, when “modernity” is characterized and marked off from other epochs in many texts by describing it as a time of a critical turn of thought onto itself and a radical break with the past, this always implies a direct opposition to Plato, even when this opposition is not thematized. This is especially true of the medieval debate on universals, which was the immediate reason for the break with the Middle Ages and the “departure” into early modernity. The nominalistic turn that “settled” the quarrel about the correct interpretation of Aristotle among Aristotelians of the thirteenth and fourteenth century is characterized by its “final” destruction of any kind of realism about universals. “Realism about universals” means that universals, that is, general concepts, are supposed to “really” exist independent of human thought. This is opposed in the late Middle Ages and early modernity by the thesis that concepts are only subjective products, ones human thought itself originally forms through abstracting from individual objects. Plato is considered the founder of the doctrine that concepts have

² Translator’s note: The term “Sache” has been translated in a variety of ways depending upon context. Unfortunately, there is really no English word that fully captures its meaning. What Schmitt means by “Sache” is the thing itself, the theoretical or the ideal content (for example, “triangle”) as opposed to its particular instantiation (existent triangles such as this particular triangle made of chalk or sand or water, etc.). I have variously circumscribed this meaning with “state of affairs” (especially where what is meant is a definite relationship or logical structure; this expression will at least be familiar to readers of Wittgenstein), “theoretical content” (especially for the forms “Sachverhalt”), occasionally “matter” (when what is meant is what it really comes down to) and sometimes “thing” (when Schmitt is referring to the bare quiddity of this ideal content). For this reason, the German “Ding” has not been translated as “thing,” but as “object” especially since Schmitt does not make a terminological distinction between “Gegenstand” and “Ding.” The related adjective “sachlich” is most often translated with “theoretical” as what Schmitt thereby means is precisely that content which is never intuited by the senses but only in an act of intellectual insight and very rarely with “substantial.” Thus “sachliche Bestimmung” is “theoretical determination,” but when Schmitt stresses the ontological aspect (for example, in “sachliche Bestimmtheit” or “Sachidentität”) I have translated “substantial determinacy” and “substantial identity” respectively.

their own ideal existence. Consequently, the position that prevails in this “Scholastic” debate is basically anti-Platonic in intent. Aristotle and subsequent medieval Scholasticism are supposed to have developed a “softer” form of this “realism about universals.” Ostensibly, they do not claim that concepts have an ideal, transcendent existence but attribute to the “Platonic” ideas an existence in the individual objects themselves. Thus, the idea of a human being does not exist in a mental beyond but in the many existent human beings themselves. Nominalism opposes both forms of this realism about universals, that is, both the assumption of a transcendent, “ideal” mode of existence of universals and the assumption of an immanent reality to universal concepts in individual objects. Instead, it holds that concepts only exist in thought.

The historical outcome of the late medieval debate on universals, that is, the manner in which Plato was supposedly overcome once and for all, has so far not been subjected to inquiry. On the contrary, if there is one idea in modernity no one questions (at least no one who wants to be in step with the times), it is the conviction that concepts are subjective products and lack independent real existence. Seen from this perspective, modernity since its earliest beginnings in the fourteenth century can be described as an anti-Platonic age. The historical impact of this anti-Platonism has been so great that it has prevented even sober and diligent interpreters from acknowledging the immense wealth of material that conclusively demonstrates that the whole debate on universals responsible for the break with the Middle Ages is a gigantic misconstruction. As a kind of “stocktaking,” that is, a consideration of the positive and negative, this book presents the results of many years of research on the conditions that gave rise to this “construction of modernity.” I thereby try to show not only how this construction came about, but also what has been lost to view because of it and, as a result, constrains a clear view of us as well as of the past that has been allegedly transcended through this development.

One of the most stunning results of this “archaeology” is that the modern turn to the individual object and to the individual carries considerably more speculative metaphysical baggage with it than is the case with Plato and Platonism. Plato’s central motivation is to provide a rational explanation of empirical individuals based on the principle of non-contradiction. In early modernity, the individual object itself replaces the principle of non-contradiction as a rational criterion. It dictates the unit to which thought’s concepts must conform. Setting out from these two different starting points one arrives at two completely different understandings of rationality and, consequently, of the other capacities of man such as perception, feeling, will, etc. The main objective of this book is to work out these two different forms of rationality, which we may characterize as an abstract and a concrete rationality and their consequences for the different self-conceptions of human beings. I use the expressions

“philosophies of representation” and “philosophies of discrimination” to characterize the basic distinction between these two forms of rationality.

One cannot confront this task without taking into account long-standing traditions and multifaceted interdisciplinary connections. Since fundamental problems are at stake, the inquiry had to incorporate philosophical, aesthetic, ethical, political, economic, and scientific discussions. In order to make the analysis comprehensible at an interdisciplinary level, I have tried to present the factual problems in such a way that one can follow them without first having to familiarize oneself with the different scientific traditions involved. For the same reason, I also abstain from extensive discussion of the scientific literature. However, I have tried to provide the requisite proofs wherever necessary for evaluating the thesis, especially where I rely on less well-known views. I listed the literature in more detail in places where I take up the results of current discussions. However, I did not attempt a simplification of the often highly nuanced structure of the issues merely so as to render them more accessible. As regards many of the conclusions presented here, I accepted important suggestions from collaborators on the project “The Self-Conception of Modernity and Interpretation of Antiquity”³ from their contributions in seminars and exercises and their work on various topics in dissertations, post-doctoral dissertations, monographs, and journal articles. I would like to thank them for their contributions here. I would also like to thank Reinhard Brandt, Wolfgang Bernard, and Friedrich Uehlein for their critical reading, and especially Gyburg Radke-Uhlmann, who both edited the text and, through substantial critical additions and corrections, helped improve the conclusiveness of the arguments and reduce errors. Finally, I would also like to thank the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft for granting me a sabbatical semester to enable me to complete this book.

³ Works published as part of this project to date are marked with an asterisk in the bibliography.

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

THE PRESENT VOLUME is a translation of the second edition of Arbogast Schmitt's *Die Moderne und Platon: Zwei Grundformen Europäischer Rationalität*, published in 2008 (first edition 2003). The text here substantially follows that of the German edition, making only idiomatic changes to produce a translation readable in English. For example, I found it preferable to break up longer sentences into several smaller ones, or to introduce conjunctions or transitional sentences to convey the argument clearly to an Anglophone audience. Further, in agreement with the editors at Camden House, I decided that the English edition should be a self-contained edition; thus, the numbering of sections (although not their order) was slightly modified, and the location of certain footnotes that were unclear in the original was appropriately modified, while yet others were inserted. All these changes were made with the generous collaboration of Prof. Arbogast Schmitt.

A number of translator's footnotes were inserted to clarify either the translation of specific concepts or details of Schmitt's theses. Additionally, the footnotes and bibliography were completely revised in order to reflect English editions and/or translations. However, my goal was that in spite of these changes none of the nuance of the German original should be lost and that this English edition should be an accurate presentation of Schmitt's original work. Finally, in the interests of accessibility, the stylistic conventions followed throughout in this book are those most familiar to English readers, while German words have been retained only where absolutely necessary (for instance, to clarify a nuance that does not exist in English).

I completed the translation between 2007 and 2009, and it was substantially revised between 2009 and 2011. In the initial stage of this translation, I was assisted by Christine Melchart, to whom I owe deep gratitude. Further work continued over the next year to locate standard translations of the German texts cited by Schmitt, and to create a bibliography addressing the needs of English-speaking readers. I wish to thank Joydeep Bagchee for much of this work, especially his efforts in looking up the original German texts and double-checking all citations. I am also deeply grateful to Jim Walker, editorial director at Camden House, for the extraordinary amount of time and work he put into turning the translation into a finished book, and to Jane Best, production editor, for

producing such an elegant book. The effort we all put into this work was motivated by the conviction that this is an important work, one that boldly breaks with orthodoxy and re-evaluates modernity from the perspective of ancient philosophy.

TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

ALTHOUGH I HAVE MADE every effort to present Arbogast Schmitt's thought as simply as possible, there is no evading the fact that this book unfolds a massive and highly complex argument, one that touches not only upon the different concepts of rationality present in antiquity or modernity in the narrow sense but upon these concepts as they manifested themselves in all areas of life in antiquity and modernity. I therefore would like to use this introduction to preview the main thesis of this book briefly and to clarify the order of the chapters and sections and their relation to each other.

Schmitt's work addresses not only the epistemological foundations of the two concepts of rationality, ancient and modern, referred to in the title of this book,¹ but also their historical origins and their historical consequences. His book is thus also a contribution to the history of philosophy at the same time as it is a contribution to philosophy. Further, since the concept of rationality determines almost every aspect of theoretical and practical knowledge (extending to but not limited to economics, ethics, politics, anthropology, sociology, etc.), this book also includes discussions on topics one might ordinarily not expect to find in a work of philosophy.² For all these reasons, it is useful to have a broad overview of the argument at hand, even before tackling the first chapter.

If one were to reduce this extraordinarily rich and complex book to just one central thesis, it would have to be the thesis stated in the

¹ To avoid a potential misunderstanding of the book's project at the outset, the "modernity" referred to in the book's title does not refer to the entire historical epoch referred to as modernity. As Schmitt explicitly clarifies in the text, the title is rather an abbreviation, since no book could claim to cover such a broad historical period, quite apart from the problems of exactly when this period ought to begin. Rather, what Arbogast Schmitt has in mind with the expression "modernity" is the consciousness of modernity that the early modern period developed in an explicit distancing of itself from the Middle Ages and from antiquity. Thus, this book addresses those historical phenomena that, in keeping with this consciousness of a distance, a contrast, or a "break," have since then (and to a large extent even in the present) been described as "modern."

² For example, chapters 9 and 10 of this work present sophisticated critiques of Adam Smith's liberal economic theory and of Darwin's evolutionary theory, respectively, exposing the Stoic and neo-Stoic underpinnings of both theories.

introduction: "Although modernity considers itself an anti-metaphysical age, where 'metaphysics' is understood as the attempt to justify the here and now in a transcendental beyond—it in fact emerged from a transference of the theoretical elements of metaphysics to the world of empirical individual things itself. From this perspective, 'modernity's' foundations are a borrowed (indeed, a falsified and abstractly interpreted) antiquity" (62–63). From this statement arises the book's twofold task: (1) Of challenging and critiquing the understanding modernity has of itself, and (2) Of showing how that understanding emerges from a specific historical constellation. The former engenders the critical task, the latter the historical task of tracing the epistemological misconceptions and confusions through which thinkers such as Duns Scotus, Vico, Descartes, and Kant broke with ancient philosophy.³

The introduction opens with a discussion of the consciousness of newness and of a radical break with antiquity characteristic of early modernity. Section 1 develops the thesis that in spite of the ubiquity of this consciousness it is not so easy to establish the origins of modernity. Further, what are the criteria for judging a work or a period or a person to be "modern"? Schmitt argues that it is the radical consciousness of a break that itself constitutes what is modern about "modernity." "A consciousness of being unique and original is intrinsic to the consciousness of modernity . . . The emergence of historical consciousness as well as the emergence of modernity go together. Moreover, this historical consciousness is an essentially antithetical historical consciousness, that is, a consciousness that is completely opposed to the past. For it, the new emerges only out of overcoming the old, from the break with it, from its dissolution or destruction, out of a reform, a revolution or a turn" (4).

Sections 2–4 then attempt to fill in the contours of this historical consciousness. In section 2, Schmitt argues that this consciousness of a break was largely associated with the consciousness of having turned away from a transcendent, other-worldly, or ontological order to the here-and-now; in section 3, he argues that this consciousness of a turn to a world of empirical verities, contrary to its anti-metaphysical intent, actually entailed a metaphysical re-evaluation and an enhancement of individual objects. The individual object becomes the reference point and the standard for everything that can be known of it, a development that Schmitt refers to as a "metaphysical overload[ing]" (16 and 28) of the individual object. "Every individual object must now be a complete, 'well-determined'

³ Of course, the two are ultimately one in that the engagement with these authors is not conducted out of a purely historical interest, but is an engagement in terms of and for the sake of the matter itself. Likewise, the critique of modernity is not a critique from an extrinsic locus, but one that precisely seeks to elucidate and expose modernity's origins in a misunderstood antiquity.

instance of its concept and everything that can be contained in it and has to reveal this complete conceptual identity to us in an immediate act of intuition [*Anschauung*], of feeling, of intuition [*Intuition*], if knowledge is to be possible at all—to say nothing of the problem of reconstructing such unique experiences through consciousness's abstract concepts" (28–29). In section 4, Schmitt demonstrates how the modern concept of thought as consciousness emerges from this epistemological constellation. As he notes in the foreword, "A direct consequence of this conviction [that is, that all knowledge must be derived from experience, and must conform to the "well-determined" object] is that the task of thought now appears to consist exclusively in (the more or less accurate or symbolically reconstructive) reproduction of the world as we experience it. Thought becomes representation [*Vergegenwärtigung*, *Repräsentation*] of the perceptible and observable world; it becomes representation [*Vorstellung*] or, to use the term that has established itself until today: it becomes consciousness" (xvi).

On the basis of this analysis of the epistemological foundations of modernity, in section 5 Schmitt is then able to frame the inquiry into the origins of modernity not in terms of a naïve faith in intuition versus reason's "Enlightened" self-reflexive disposal over itself, but in terms of the contrast between *two different conceptions of rationality*. Thus, contrary to the prejudice that one cannot find a reflection of thought concerning itself in antiquity, Arbogast Schmitt argues that one can and does in fact find such a reflection, but this reflection is a reflection on a different concept of thought than the one normative in modernity. For Plato and Aristotle, "epistemology does not begin with a reflection upon the manner in which thought manipulates contents it somehow finds within itself, but with a reflection upon the act of thought itself. This act cannot itself already be an act of reflection, at any rate not if the objects thought reflects upon are supposed to be contents of thought and not external objects. Thought must first itself recognize these contents, before it can start reflecting on the conditions and the quality of these contents. For this reason, the basic act of thought cannot already be reflection" (46). Thus Schmitt argues, "thought itself, from itself," must have "a non-reflective component," with the further consequence that "non-reflectivity or prereflectivity" cannot be "a sign of non-rational acts" (46).

This insight into the different concept of thought (that is, as discrimination rather than representation or consciousness) at the root of antiquity leads Schmitt to characterize the two contrasting epistemological approaches (that is, of antiquity and modernity, respectively) as "philosophies of discrimination" (*Unterscheidungsphilosophien*) and "philosophies of consciousness" (*Bewußtseinsphilosophien*). In section 6, he previews his argument that determinacy and distinguishability constitute the basic criteria for knowledge for Platonic-Aristotelian epistemology.

Further, once one realizes that the distinction between antiquity and modernity is not that of a premodern age and a modern one as its logical (that is, both legitimate and inevitable) successor, one will also have reason to revisit the claim raised expressly by the Renaissance of itself as a period that “rediscovered” “the” antiquity. Schmitt argues that the Renaissance does not rediscover “the” antiquity, but rather a different antiquity: a Hellenistic-Roman antiquity rather a Platonic-Aristotelian antiquity. As he notes, “the antiquity-modernity antithesis in its attitude against the Middle Ages plays off one antiquity against another. In its antithesis of intuition and reason, however, it projects a typical late-medieval nominalistic epistemological dichotomy onto the concepts ‘antiquity’ and ‘modernity’—concepts that themselves arose out of the break with the Middle Ages. Within the framework of these concepts, one now understands the present as modern and Hellenism as the only antiquity” (62). From this arises the book’s threefold task of showing: (1) epistemologically, the limitations of the modern conception of reason, (2) historically, how modernity as a whole is an age influenced by Stoicism, and (3) philosophically, how its “foundations are a borrowed (indeed, a falsified and abstractly interpreted) antiquity.” Sections 8 and 9 of the introduction then present an outline of the book in its main theses and arguments and of the order of its chapters.

Chapter 1 discusses the reasons for the emergence of the consciousness of a “break” between antiquity and modernity in the Renaissance. Section 1.1 discusses how Renaissance philosophers such as Vico posited the essence of man as his lack of determinacy—a conception they argued radically set apart the early modern conception of man from its ancient predecessors. Section 1.2 expands on the epistemological content of this break, especially the reduction of the concept of rationality to the spontaneous activity of the reason or understanding in representing or making conscious objects or data that are passively and unconsciously received through sensation.

Chapter 2 takes up the opposition between “nature” and “culture” that emerges from this epistemological theory, especially as it originates from a “common sense” understanding of the world. “Common sense suggests that we perceive the things of the world through our senses and that we construct concepts from what we perceive in this way. If one undertakes a reflective justification of his conviction, one arrives at a ‘philosophical’ theory that sharply distinguishes between the impression resulting from perception and the way we process that impression” (116). Section 2.1 shows how this foundation of reason or of man’s intellectual activity in a common sense understanding of the world could give rise to the impression of antiquity as a whole as a stage of intellectual history preceding the Enlightenment. Section 2.2 clarifies how the early modern understanding of the genuine essence of reason as lying in its capacity for

undertaking a self-reflexive turn toward its own acts leads paradoxically to reason being seen as the faculty through which we subjectively reshape and hence distort the world. This paradox then leads, in section 2.3, to the question of what precisely is “modern” about early modernity: is it the liberation from the naïveté of holding immediate forms of intuition (such as were attributed to antiquity in the Renaissance) to be genuine instances of reason, or is it the liberation from the naïveté of positing absolute and timeless concepts (Forms, ontological structures, etc.) without being aware of their subjective origin in human reason? Section 2.4 discusses the aporias that result from this self-contradictory conception of reason as both that faculty through which humans can undertake a self-reflexive turn toward their own acts and as that faculty through which they subjectively distort what is given them through immediate forms of intuition (sensation, feeling, presemiotic experiences, etc.). Section 2.5 discusses the attempts to resolve these aporias, especially through seeking “pure” forms of intuition, that is, ones such as are “as yet” not subjectively colored by the intrusion of reason. Section 2.6 then examines the elevation of sensory cognition to the primary and genuine faculty of knowledge and the consequences of this elevation for aesthetic theory from Lucretius via Baumgarten to the theory of naturalism in the works of the eighteenth-century writer and dramatist Arno Holz. In two concluding sub-sections (sections 2.6.4 and 2.6.5) Schmitt traces the consequences of the elevation of sensory cognition to the primary and genuine faculty of knowledge for the logical positivism of the Vienna School and discusses the importance of time in the Enlightenment philosophy of Kant and Wolff. Section 2.7 discusses the elevation of demonstrated objects (“I,” “space,” “time”) to evidentiary criteria in the work of Descartes and Kant, and the attendant elevation of consciousness to the epitome of human rationality. In this concluding section, Schmitt also examines some of the consequences of this new understanding of rationality: “The ‘discovery’ of ‘thought itself’ in modernity is . . . not the discovery of thought as such, but a change in direction in the analysis of thought. This change in direction is not . . . an unmediated new beginning. Rather, it is the result of a new, or perhaps, one must correctly say, of an astonishingly careless and simplistic approach to a highly nuanced Scholastic tradition, from which certain rudimentary principles and methods were broken off and combined to a new whole following the logic of common sense thought” (192–93). This conclusion lays the groundwork for the return to Platonic-Aristotelian epistemology (and the culture of ethics, politics, and economics based upon it) in the second half of the book.

Chapter 3 summarizes in outline how, from the perspective of this understanding of thought as the activity of representation or the making conscious of impressions that are taken up unconsciously, antiquity as a whole could appear as an age that had yet to undergo an “Enlightenment”

of thought regarding itself. Contrary to this view of antiquity as a pre-Enlightened or pre-critical age, Schmitt argues that we can find a sophisticated reflection upon thought in Plato and Aristotle—and a systematic foundation of the sciences on the basis of this reflection in the *koinē mathēmatikē epistēmē*.

Chapter 4 works out the epistemological foundations of this concept of thought as discrimination in Plato and Aristotle. Section 4.1 demonstrates how the principle of non-contradiction constitutes the basis of ancient rationality. Because only something that is some one thing can be known, the principle of non-contradiction is simultaneously an ontological and epistemological principle. Section 4.2 addresses the misconception that because Plato bases his philosophy upon this principle, he is unaware of the historicity of man. Section 4.3 addresses the related misconception that because Plato bases his philosophy upon this principle, he must hold a doctrine of “innate ideas.” “Plato’s position,” Schmitt argues, “is not that an identical essence must underlie an empirical object through its various appearances and that, in spite of the ‘manifold’ of its appearances, we intuit this essence through the intellect as always co-present in sensory perception” (220). On the contrary, Plato presents “many examples that show that the assumption of such underlying identical essences is often merely an instance of overhasty generalization” (220) and that these generalizations must be corrected using an epistemological principle, namely that something that is a characteristic of two objects at the same time (for example, a tree and a man) cannot be used to discriminate between them. Thus, the criterion of being some one thing turns out to also be the condition for us to be able to know something as some specific object. It is in this sense that “being” functions as an epistemological criterion in Plato and Aristotle.

Chapter 5 expands on this concept of thought as discrimination. Section 5.1 demonstrates how, once thought is conceived of as an act of discrimination, its field of operation is not limited to the representation of unconsciously received data, but ranges across all of man’s psychic activities, including perception and opinion. Further, as Schmitt discusses in section 5.2, thought can no longer be restricted to making originally unconscious impressions—such as the sensory data received via perception—conscious. Whether we are conscious or not of an activity is not a criterion of its rationality: in fact, an absence of consciousness (such as is the case when we work in a concentrated manner on a specific task) can be an indication of the intellectually demanding nature of the activity.

Chapter 6 compares the differing conceptions of the soul found in a philosophy of consciousness and a philosophy of discrimination. “If, in contrast to modern philosophy of consciousness, one does not set out from consciousness and the certitude of the ‘I think’ as the fundament of cognition, but, instead, recognizes this fundament in the act of

discrimination, a completely different picture of our different psychic activities emerges. For Plato, these activities do not simply represent different states, ‘modifications’ of a consciousness that underlies all of them in the same uniform way. Rather, they represent either different types of discrimination or complex activities built up on the foundation of one or more acts of discrimination—activities of the one soul of man” (277).

Section 6.1 analyzes the Platonic tripartite division of the soul into an appetitive (*epithymêtikon*), a spirited (*thymoeides*), and a rational (*logistikon*) faculty, and shows why the unity of reason, feeling, and will in antiquity much admired in modernity is not due to the inability to distinguish between man’s psychic faculties (itself due to the inability to undertake a self-reflexive turn toward one’s reason). Section 6.2 analyzes the revival of the theory of a form of intelligence inherent to emotions in contemporary neurobiological and neuropsychological approaches, and demonstrates why these approaches fail to overcome the fundamental gulf between sensation and reason instituted in early modernity. Plato’s thesis is not that emotions possess their own unique form of intelligence, one that would be inaccessible to reason, but that the same faculty of reason is at work in all of man’s cognitive activities.

Because the Platonic tripartite division of the soul appears to correspond to the modern analysis of the soul into the three faculties of reason, feeling, and will, chapter 7 focuses on distinguishing between these two conceptions. Section 7.1 demonstrates that the modern analysis is Stoic in origin: contrary to the view that the opposition between thought and will is a “fundamental problem of modern philosophy, it was, in fact, already formulated within the philosophical systems of Hellenism and of the Stoa. It can be understood both in the ancient Stoa and in early modernity only in the context of a doctrine which sets out from the premise that consciousness or the evident representation [*Repräsentation*] of given representations [*Vorstellungen*] is the primary act in the cognitive process that grounds a unity” (288). Section 7.2 demonstrates via recourse to the Homeric concept of *noos* or “intelligence” why the Platonic faculties do not correspond to their modern equivalents. Specifically, the *logistikon* in Plato is not a pure faculty of thought in the modern sense, but itself contains a volitional component. Likewise, the *epithymêtikon* or the *thymoeides* are not purely desiderative or volitional faculties, but are themselves capable of carrying out rational acts in the sense of acts of discrimination. Section 7.3 expands on this insight by demonstrating how each of these two faculties has its specific cognitive domain, that is, respectively, perception and opinion. The analysis of the differences between these two domains in sub-sections 7.3.1–7.3.6 leads to the formulation of the realization in section 7.4 that the objects of opinion and the emotions aroused by these objects differ fundamentally from those of perception. “The feelings of pleasure or aversion that arise when one

is oriented toward a person's perceptible attributes are completely different from those that arise when one focuses on aspects that can only be comprehended via opinion or concepts" (331). Since opinion is oriented towards a person's *ergon* or "work," and this work can only be fulfilled in a political community, opinion also proves to be that cognitive domain that is at the center of man's existence as a political being.

The concluding four chapters of the book are dedicated to outlining the ethical, political, and economic consequences of this different conception of rationality. They build on the epistemological and psychological analyses of the central four chapters (chapters 4–5 and 6–7, respectively), and progressively fulfill the task Schmitt assigns himself in this book of presenting and defending the ancient conception of rationality in all its significant aspects.

Chapter 8 undertakes a defense of the Platonic-Aristotelian understanding of feeling, especially in the context of its pedagogical significance. Section 8.1 demonstrates that feelings for Plato and Aristotle cannot be reduced to abstract feelings of pleasure and aversion but always entail a rational component. Sections 8.2 and 8.3 analyze the genesis of feelings in opinion in ancient philosophy and literature. In contrast to the modern interpretation of feelings in terms of a stimulus-response mechanism, the examples of Medea, Oedipus, and the Homeric heroes show that in ancient thought the domain of feelings such as jealousy, anger, wounded pride, etc. is a cognitive domain. Section 8.4 takes up *philautia* or "self-love" as a paradigmatic example of a feeling that is simultaneously intellectual and concrete and universal. Because self-love in the genuine sense implies seeking what is truly good for oneself, "to be truly well-disposed to oneself . . . means that one is seeking the all-encompassing good for oneself" (346). Such a life, however, is a life "according to *nous* (intellect, reason), the highest mental faculty in us, for '*nous* is what every individual really is,' as Aristotle says" (346). Sections 8.5 and 8.6 expand on the pedagogical significance of this conception of self-love. Section 8.5 demonstrates how the distinction between forms of genuine self-love and only apparent self-love, where the former are not opposed to the well-being of the community, since they are, unlike the latter, not egotistical in the narrow sense, enables Plato and Aristotle to develop the thesis that one can cultivate self-love, guiding it away from its false and reprehensible forms to its correct and socially valuable forms. Section 8.6 demonstrates how tragedy enables such cultivation.

Once one sets aside the modern thesis of a contrast between the rational and irrational aspects of man's psychic faculty (and the flawed epistemological foundations this is implicitly based upon),⁴ a radically

⁴ The epistemological foundations were addressed first in chapters 3–5; the consequences for psychology in chapters 6–8.

different understanding of man's existence becomes possible—both as an individual in search of the best life for himself and as an individual in a political community. In fact, since there is no opposition between man's reason and his (irrational) desire in such a conception, the two coincide: “the perfect unfolding and the greatest possible happiness of the single individual . . . are simultaneously conditions of the greatest possible welfare of all,” while the “contrast of egotism and altruism . . . fundamental in many modern-day ethics, does not exist at all” for ancient philosophy “in this best form of egotism” (69).

Chapter 9 is dedicated to tracing this coincidence of the individual and the state in Plato's political theory and in Aristotle's economic theory. Section 9.1 challenges the Hellenistic-Roman conception of the state, which considers the “sovereign freedom of every individual” to be the “basic principle of the state” and the state itself as “the specific organizational form . . . necessary to ensure that the many individual sovereigns do not reciprocally interfere or indeed destroy each other” (372). Contrary to this understanding of the relationship of the individual to the state common to both contract theory and liberal economics, the state is the condition for the rational unfolding—that is, the freedom—of each individual in Plato and Aristotle. As this notion has frequently been the occasion for a misconception regarding ancient political life, namely that the ancients had no conception of individuality or of the autonomy and self-determination characteristic of genuine individuals, the next four sections (sections 9.2–9.6) are dedicated to refuting this idea by demonstrating that one can find genuine forms of autonomy as well as an explicit appreciation of individuality in ancient thought. Section 9.2 addresses this question vis-à-vis Homer; section 9.3 vis-à-vis Plato. Whereas modernity holds individuality to be a self-evident fact, Platonic-Aristotelian philosophy regards it as a task. Section 9.4 demonstrates via discussion of the distinction between the primary and the immanent universal why Plato and Aristotle consider individuality not to be the starting point of their definition of man, but rather, the end point and the culmination of a long process of self-cultivation which, as such, can only take place within a political community. Since the primary universal, in contrast to the immanent, does not refer to that which can be abstracted from many individual examples of “man” as what is common to them, but is an intellectual concept, individuality cannot be assumed to be something that is simply “given” and common to all men. Rather, in order to become an individual in the genuine sense, an individual human being must first become “one,” and that means he must “develop his qualities in such a way that he comes as close as possible to what it genuinely means to be a human being and what distinguishes humans from animals” (412). “This is nothing other than to develop a unit of character that is differentiated to the highest degree and to make this unit the guiding principle

for one's actions to the extent this is possible for a being that exists as an active agent in the world of experience and in a social context. In this sense, true freedom is not something that is always at the individual's disposal 'ready-for-use' as an inalienable . . . fundamental right. Rather, it is a task one must first master in an individual effort" (412). On the basis of this understanding of individuality, section 9.5 argues that there is no conflict between individual justice and happiness in the state. Section 9.6 then addresses a twofold misconception of the Platonic equation of the happiness of the individual with that of the state as a whole: (1) that it is based on a "metaphysical" conception of man, whereas the modern conception does away with any and all metaphysical residues, and (2) that what the Platonic conception aims at is the same as the maximization of political freedom aimed at in Hobbes's political theory or the maximization of economic welfare in Adam Smith's classic economic liberalism. Section 9.6.1 discusses the Stoic and neo-Stoic foundations of both these modern theories, and demonstrates just how essential this metaphysical inheritance is to each. Sections 9.6.2 and 9.6.4 develop this thesis vis-à-vis Adam Smith and Hobbes, respectively, while sections 9.6.3 and 9.6.5 show how, contrary to the claims made about the "metaphysical" foundations of ancient thought, the corresponding Aristotelian theories (that is, Aristotle's economic and political theory) entail substantially fewer metaphysical commitments. However, the point of this analysis is not merely a contribution to the history of philosophy or even providing an epistemological clarification; rather, the exposure of the tenuous scientific foundations of this conception of man also has the function of an ethical and ontological critique. Thus, Schmitt notes in the concluding paragraphs of this chapter, "a political theory such as that of Hobbes or an economic theory such as that of Adam Smith does not just permit the members of a political or economic community to behave in accordance with their drive for self-preservation. Rather, they explicitly insist on its 'natural' enforcement and provide 'scientific' theories, which, by pointing to a final state no one can control, declare the clearly visible and well-known negative consequences of such behavior to be a necessary condition for the well-being of all" (450). The critique of modern rationality from the perspective of antiquity thus does not have a restorative intent, but is meant as a critique of problematic aspects of contemporary existence, aspects that we are unable to see because we take the underlying conception of rationality for granted and no longer inquire into either its historical origins or its metaphysical foundations.

Chapter 10 appropriately takes up the question of self-preservation and decline, vis-à-vis both the evolution of nature and the evolution of the state. Section 10.1 demonstrates how the implicit Stoic metaphysics at the root of modern conceptions of the state, of economic agency, and of ethics no longer makes room for chance, failure, evil, or destruction of

the individual. Rather, all these are now clarified as necessary occurrences, stages or steps on the way to the development of a greater, that is, higher and more comprehensive, rationality. Section 10.2 demonstrates how this assumption is only tenable if one already assumes something like a divine yet immanent *logos* (whether conceived of as the self-corrective mechanism of the market or as the law of natural selection) that steers all things and ensures that all things turn out for the best. The criticism in this section of the attempted “scientification” of what is, in reality, a metaphysical theory in contemporary evolutionary biology lays the grounds for a reappraisal of the Platonic conception of the state in section 10.3 and of Aristotle’s economic and social theory in section 10.4. Section 10.5 concludes with an analysis of the forms of decline of the state and of the individual in Plato and Aristotle, focusing especially on the failure or reluctance to discriminate as the cause of this decline. This section also concludes by reinforcing the book’s central message that from the perspective of Plato and Aristotle (and perhaps antiquity as a whole) modernity would be a time of reduced discrimination, of a leveling of nuances, both as concerns the experience of pleasure and as concerns intellectual distinctions.

The conclusion is divided into two chapters: chapter 11 and chapter 12. Chapter 11 summarizes the basic contrast between “ancient” and “modern” as it emerged around the fifteenth century and became canonical by the seventeenth century. Section 11.1 recapitulates the basic outlines of this consciousness of a radical break with antiquity and of a new beginning in modernity; section 11.2 recapitulates the main characteristics of the construction of the “antiquity/modernity” antithesis; while section 11.3 restates the main arguments of this book for why the notion of an “Enlightenment” of thought concerning itself in early modernity is false and therefore not a valid criterion for distinguishing between antiquity and modernity. Chapter 12 then summarizes the main conclusions of this book concerning the distinction between the Platonic-Aristotelian and the Hellenistic conceptions of rationality.

INTRODUCTION

1. Difficulties in the Definition and Self-Conception of “Modernity” and the Emergence of “Historical Thinking”

THERE ARE FEW CONCEPTS with such positive associations in both everyday and scientific language as the term “modern.” In contrast, “not modern” normally has a negative association without any further clarification being needed. When someone discovers characteristics and traits of modernity in a work by Dante, he thereby claims to have proven its historical significance, indeed, its artistic rank. Conversely, if one can show that Descartes had in certain respects not “as yet” fully executed the turn toward modern thinking and hence still retains certain aspects of the old thinking, it no longer appears necessary to engage his thought under these aspects.

However, if we ask what content we associate with the term “modern,” we find ourselves confronted by a plurality of meanings that render it practically impossible to determine what should be accorded an object, a person, a theory, or a historical movement judged “modern.” Even if one disregards ordinary language with its often arbitrary associations and concentrates on the scientific analyses that seek to determine what is unique about the modern age, merely the question of when this age begins and (possibly) ends yields such multifaceted and disparate answers in the relevant research that it appears doubtful whether the term “modern” can at all serve to denote a unitary historical epoch or a certain developmental phase.

Many renowned and competent researchers would argue that modernity begins with the Middle Ages or with antiquity, that is, with exactly those epochs from which the general consensus distinguishes modernity. Indeed, many philologists are convinced that Homer’s *Odyssey* (which is several decades later than the *Iliad* written in the second half of the eighth century) offers an example of a time in which the old “conventional” order of the *Iliad* founded on religion and societal authority disintegrates, in which “plastic” unity (and “plastic” has been the basic characterization for “the” antique since the German classical period) cracks from both within and without and man feels thrown back onto himself. The *Odyssey* thus appears “modern” in contrast to the “antiquated” *Iliad*.

However, even the first forms of lyric poetry in the literature of the so-called archaic epoch (starting in the seventh century BC) of the Greeks have been interpreted as the emergence of modernity, that is, as the emergence of initial forms of subjective self-perception. For others, the consciousness “it is me myself who is the culpable origin of his own actions” that can be demonstrated in Greek tragedy from the fifth century BC provides evidence that modern man originated here. For Nietzsche, it was Euripides who through his cold rationality destroyed the primordial Dionysian unity of individual and world, and, along with his mentor Socrates, gave birth to the “theoretical human being of modern science.” Even in antiquity, the list could be extended much further. One can let “the modern” emerge from the break of Hellenistic civilization with classical Greek civilization, one can oppose modern Roman subjectivity to Greek objectivity, and so on.

The idea that it was not the world of antiquity, but only God’s calling to the individual in Christianity, the elevation of individual conscience to the highest instance of personal decision, that paved the way for a modern self-conception of man is often encountered even outside scientific discussions. More detailed individual investigations then identify St. Augustine, or the Carolingian “renaissance” of the ninth century, or the “renaissance” of the twelfth century, or the Thomism of the thirteenth century as the origin of modernity.

The uncertainty over the historical beginning and the concrete reason for the emergence of modernity is no less if one restricts oneself to a concept of modernity based on the assumption of a break with the Middle Ages. Research into modernity is split into many subfields. To name just a small assortment of possible “beginnings,” its range extends from Scotism around 1300 through the Nominalism of the fourteenth century through the Renaissance, or partial aspects of the Renaissance like the Reformation, the invention of book printing, the fall of Constantinople, through the “Querelle des anciens et des modernes” in France of the seventeenth century, the “aesthetic turn” around 1750, the “Sattelzeit” around 1800, through early or late Romanticism, through the symbolism inaugurated by Baudelaire around the mid-nineteenth century, up to the “turn away from the object” in Expressionism at the beginning of the twentieth century.¹

In the *Meno*, Socrates asks the eponymous young nobleman Meno whether he knows what virtue is. Meno considers himself up to this task based on his extensive practical experience and begins to count off a whole list of different virtues. To this, Socrates responds: “I seem to be in great

¹ Translator’s note: The “Sattelzeit” (literally, “saddle-period”) is an expression in German denoting the period of transition between early modernity and modernity. It is usually taken to refer to the period between 1750 and 1850 or 1870, i.e., the period from the late Enlightenment to the establishment of the German Empire (in 1871). The phrase is attributed to the historian Reinhart Koselleck.

luck, Meno; while I am looking for one virtue, I have found you to have a whole swarm of them.”² This statement leads Socrates and Meno in the remainder of their conversation to focus on the question of whether there is any justification (and wherein this justification might lie) for reckoning with the presence of one and the same “virtue” where there are so many different appearances. In an analogous way, a situation like the one described also requires us to examine critically whether there is any demonstrable commonality among the many different instances of modernity that would permit us to speak meaningfully of them as manifestations of modernity and what weight should be assigned to these (in part, very substantial) differences. The research project tried to address this situation. I would like to present and justify its main conclusions in this book.

One basic problem of research into modernity to date is without question that most interpreters concentrate on one specific period and one specific area (literature, art, philosophy, or particular scientific disciplines) and try to discover evidence for the presence or absence of modernity within this framework. From a methodological perspective, such an approach has two main flaws:

1. There is a certain carelessness in the criteria used to determine what constitutes the modernity or lack thereof of a phenomenon, notwithstanding the precision and care with which the respective objects are described and analyzed. These criteria are frequently picked up uncritically from general discussions.

2. The consistent absence of a comparative look at the methods of resolution proposed by others as a whole. Scholars often neglect to mark off their own position even from immediately adjacent or theoretically related positions. Those who let modernity begin with Christianity do not ask how others could then have taken the Christian Middle Ages to be the paradigmatic instance of non-modernity. Those who think they have found the first modern poet in Shakespeare do not ask why and in what sense — often differing only in emphasis — others award the same title to Petrarch or Montaigne, for example, or to Spanish mysticism of the sixteenth century. In many interpretations of Kant, one reads that the “Copernican turn” of thought onto itself which became constitutive of modern philosophy was originally executed by Kant (indeed, Kant himself claimed this achievement). Yet, there is hardly a Descartes scholar who does not claim the exact same achievement for Descartes. If one were to ask how these two “turns” relate to each other, one would come to the conclusion that Kant viewed certain aspects differently or made them explicit or implemented them consistently for the first time,

² Plato, *Meno* 72a; Grube trans. All translations of Plato are from the Hackett edition (Plato, *Plato: Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper [Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 1997]).

but one would not be able to sustain the view, by now accepted as general knowledge, that “Kant is the Copernicus of philosophy. He turned his perspective around, and behold, reason ceased revolving around reality and the earth of the experiential world began to revolve around the sun of reason.”³

The few summary works on modernity, written usually for large encyclopedias, do not remedy these defects but restrict themselves to describing a selection of “phases,” “impulses,” or (where one still holds on to historico-philosophical concepts of development of the past) “stages.” Even allowing for the fact that modernity, whenever it may have originated, has a previous history and probably a long previous history, there is hardly any description that does not describe this process as something incomparably unique through which something came into the world that had previously never existed. The same goes for the eyewitnesses of that era. The self-conception of modernity is always linked to the claim of being original and unique. That is why, even if one speaks of this period in terms of phases and impulses, one cannot evade the question of how something that is supposed to have emerged for the first time through extremely specific “discoveries” could have so many different origins.

This question, however, leads to a real commonality among conceptions of modernity. Once we place the many different histories of modernity’s origin beside each other and review the reasons for the emergence of modernity and the defining characteristics advanced in each case, we see a surprising unity to the underlying theoretical understanding itself (as opposed to the plurality of places and times of origin and the resultant spectrum of manifestations).

A consciousness of being unique and original is intrinsic to the consciousness of modernity. Many are convinced that modernity for the first time enabled a consciousness of the uniqueness of historical phenomena. The emergence of historical consciousness and the emergence of modernity go together. Moreover, this historical consciousness is also an essentially antithetical historical consciousness, that is, a consciousness that is completely opposed to the past. For it, the new emerges only out of overcoming the old, from the break with it, from its dissolution or destruction, out of a reform, a revolution or a turn.

On the basis of empirical and sociological investigations, many believe that the experiences of the twentieth and twenty-first century alone are responsible for this antithetical structure of the consciousness of modernity. They argue that it was “the scientific and technological revolution” that “changed every individual’s thinking in its innermost fiber”

³ Dietrich Schwanitz, *Bildung: Alles, was man wissen muß* (Frankfurt am Main: Eichborn, 1999), 336–37. Translator’s note: all translations from the German are mine unless otherwise noted.

and destroyed the traditional awareness of a continuity between the present and the past. For example, the publication of a nationwide survey of the American National Education Association states: “one is tempted to acknowledge that what exists now may not have existed in the past and that everything is caught up in a process of change.”⁴

From a “discovery” of this kind, Saul B. Robinsohn concludes that an engagement with history — both political and cultural — should be excluded from the school curriculum. Robinsohn does not feel that this demand entails any confrontation with the traditional understanding of history in the humanities. On the contrary. When Wilhelm Dilthey, the authoritative founder of the methodology of today’s humanities, makes the absolute uniqueness and relativity of every historical event the basic principle of his doctrine of “understanding” in the humanities and concludes from this that every historical event can only be understood out of its specific conditions, then, according to Robinsohn, we must also accept the consequence that an engagement with history cannot claim to have contemporary relevance or authority. It may be individually worthwhile for someone who can empathically project himself into a past situation or person and it may lead to a gain in his understanding of history but one cannot expect to gain insights for current problems from this understanding of history.

Unfortunately, one cannot argue that Robinsohn thereby imputes a doctrine to Dilthey that the latter never held. With his demand to ban the teaching of history from schools, Robinsohn merely points out an implication of the modern understanding of history, the effects of which have long since become social reality: an awareness of historicity — in the modern sense of the term — and loss of history apparently go together.

However, the fact that Robinsohn can appeal equally to the result of a survey from the present and to a historical concept of the nineteenth century in order to justify the irrelevance of an engagement with the past proves that the consciousness of constant revolutionary change is not in fact the result of the scientific technological “revolution” but has a much earlier origin. The loss of history that accompanies modern historical consciousness is, however, an occasion to examine the exceptional nature of this consciousness in more detail and to examine the reasons for it. A historical awareness of the fact that different external conditions and social norms, morals and ideals, etc. are prevalent at different times and lead to diverse forms of historical existence can be found in many cultures and many cultural or historical epochs. There are many different ways of interpreting the relationship between the past and the present: the past can be considered superior to the present, the new can be seen as the preservation,

⁴ Publication of the (US) National Education Association cited in Saul B. Robinsohn, *Bildungsreform als Revision des Curriculum* (Neuwied/Berlin: Luchterhand, 1971), 15.

continuation, or as a critical improvement, development, or trumping of the old, not to mention various other attitudes one might adopt. But the idea that the new could only emerge through a revolutionary overcoming of the old, through a break with the old or a rejection of it in a radical reversal or turn, does not say something about the general relationship of historical periods to each other, but about the relationship of divergent mental attitudes to each other. One can thus show of many historical documents that they regard history only secondarily, that is, only under the specific condition that it is also affected by this divergence of mental attitudes.

The most famous examples of such a relationship of mental attitudes to each other in Western intellectual history are found in Plato and (not unrelatedly) in Christianity. Plato describes the relationship between a mode of cognition turned outward to perceptible objects and one directed to the conceptually ideal as a “turning (*periagôgê*) of the soul from a day that is a kind of night to the true day” and as a rethinking (*metanoia*, *metanoësis*).⁵ In Christianity, it is the turn away from earthly life and the total turn toward the God of revelation that is characterized as a “*metanoia*.” It, too, is characterized as a turn from darkness to the light.

The idea of a *turn in the times*, which, according to Christianity, emerges from the fact that, through Christ, mankind has been offered the possibility for such a conversion, is not insignificant for modern historical consciousness. One of the reasons for the emergence of this consciousness lies in the fact that this relationship of an epistemological attitude directed outward to one that is directed to itself has been projected onto the relationship of the “modern” present to its “ancient” past.⁶ The conviction that “what was true yesterday is no longer true today, everything is caught up in a process of change” cannot be understood as the result of experiences of the present such as those we see in today’s scientific and technological changes.

How mistaken it is to think (like Robinsohn) that one can determine the unique position of a society toward history from statistical data about what a majority of members of contemporary society think about its relationship to the past becomes especially clear from the fact that many investigations into the theory and the history of science have since shown that the view “what applied yesterday, no longer applies today, everything is caught up in a process of change” is an outsider’s view of scientific change. What appears as a revolution, a turn, a paradigm shift from the outside is, when seen from the inside, usually nothing more than a reshuffle or a change in emphasis in certain parts of the system. Such a change

⁵ *Republic* 521c; Grube and Reeve trans.

⁶ On the adaptation of the metaphor of darkness and light from its original function as a metaphor for the relationship of heathendom to Christianity to the relationship of the Middle Ages to “modernity” already in Petrarch, see Theodor Mommsen, “Petrarch’s Conception of the ‘Dark Ages,’” *Speculum* 18 (1942): 226–82.

does not call the system as a whole into question; rather, it presumes its existence or even seeks to secure it.

This can also be shown for the “turn” that has been exemplary for modernity as a whole: the “Copernican turn.” Copernicus did not *revolutionize* the theoretical system of ancient Ptolemaic astronomy.⁷ Rather, he sought to prove its correctness and validity in that he hoped by altering a parameter to “save”⁸ the agreement of the theory with the measurable data. Thus, objectively, the consciousness that history and progress proceeds in radical breaks is the perspective of a layman who sees the effect but not the internal development of the factors behind the change.

Nonetheless, even Copernicus’s contemporaries outside of astronomy interpreted the shift of a parameter within the old system as its total destruction — a mentality that in early modernity increasingly enters into discussions in professional journals as well. From Giordano Bruno to Bertolt Brecht or Thomas S. Kuhn the importance of a methodically consistent development of possibilities inherent to the system is brushed aside. Only so could Copernicus’s “scientific” achievement be reduced to a genial idea, to the idea of a revolutionary turn, and give rise to the idea that the *scientific* basis of ancient astronomy was its *intuition* that the earth is at the center of the universe, whereas modern astronomy arrived at the true, converse relationship of earth and sun through a *thought* experiment.

In his materially rich study *The Genesis of the Copernican World*, Hans Blumenberg documents how this *revolutionary* interpretation of Copernicus’s astronomical achievement came to be the epitome of the interpretation of scientific-astronomical changes and, finally, of every other kind of

⁷ In spite of carefully researched analyses that arrive at a contrary view, this idea continues to dominate the history of philosophy and of science, and is always accompanied by a negative prejudice against the “artificial and pedantic thought systems” of the Middle Ages: “It was the great deed of the German Nicolaus Copernicus . . ., to shatter this artificial system and in its place build a clear and coherently worked out intellectual construction, proceeding from the assumption that the earth is a body that circles around the sun. . .” Hans-Joachim Störig, *Kleine Weltgeschichte der Philosophie* (Stuttgart/Berlin/Cologne: Kohlhammer, 1993), 281. What is characteristic about Störig’s remarks is not only the negative judgment on the Middle Ages, but also the accompanying positive evaluation that modernity emerged from “shattering” the “pedantic thought systems” of the Middle Ages. For a contrary view, see Klaus Mainzer and Jürgen Mittelstraß, “Kopernikus,” in *Enzyklopädie Philosophie und Wissenschaftstheorie*, vol. 2, ed. Jürgen Mittelstraß (Mannheim/Vienna/Zurich: Bibliographisches Institut, 1983), 470–74.

⁸ Nikolaus Copernicus, *De hypothesibus motuum coelestium a se constitutis commentariolus*, trans., ed., and with an introduction by Fritz Rossmann (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1966 [Munich 1948]), 9–10; see also Fritz Krafft, “Nicolaus Copernicus and Johannes Kepler: New Astronomy from Old Astronomy,” *Vistas in Astronomy* 18 (1974): 287–306.

change in “modernity.”⁹ It is important to note here that change not only has the formal character of being a turn or a turn through a destruction of the old but also has a specific content associated with it. Not just any arbitrary change but only the turn from a traditional, naïve way of thinking to a scientific, methodically rational way of thinking which simultaneously breaks up traditional thought patterns can be considered truly “Copernican.” In the popular imagination, the scientific or technical achievement that is superseded thereby is condemned as traditional and unscientific. It is only through such a degradation of everything old to something that is no longer at the height of current modernity that modernity’s consciousness of the present, as identified by the authors of the nationwide survey of the National Education Association (see above), can emerge: from the outside, scientific technological development appears as permanent revolutionary change that continually invalidates everything that preceded it. And “from the outside” means: for a thought process that does not evaluate something on its own merits but merely in terms of its effect. This consciousness of modernity is a problematic consciousness and hence calls for critical analysis.

The divergence between the external conditions that inform contemporary society’s opinion of (allegedly) constant change and the conditions that appear to be responsible for the scientific revolutions of the sixteenth century makes it difficult to recognize the fundamental commonality in the consciousness of modernity which has lasted until today. This is why it is not normally noted at all, although it can be read off of many indicators in a continual sequence.

A historically important situation that decisively contributed to the consolidation and formation of the contemporary consciousness of modernity is the argument between the “friends of modernity” and the “friends of antiquity” that took place in the Royal Academy of Louis XIV toward the end of the seventeenth century. Here, “modernity” is not distinguished as modern from just any (and thus also not against the immediate) past. The consciousness of a radical and revolutionary alterity here refers to a specific past, namely, to antiquity. However, the categories used to describe this alterity are the ones already mentioned; they are “Copernican”: antiquity is ascribed a way of thinking that is tied to intuition and follows conventional experience and, along with this, perfection in the visual arts (the latter allegedly stand at their origin). Modernity is understood as an age of clarity of thought and of the logical sciences along with their continuous progress.¹⁰

⁹ Hans Blumenberg, *The Genesis of the Copernican World* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987).

¹⁰ Werner Krauss, *Fontenelle und die Aufklärung* (Munich: Fink, 1969), xxxvii. See also this author’s article, “Querelle des anciens et des modernes,” in *Der neue Pauly*, vol. 15.2, ed. Hubert Cancik et al. (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2002), 607–22.

Hans Robert Jauss has convincingly shown that this categorical differentiation of antiquity and modernity contains the seed of what is today referred to as *historical consciousness* since the distinction between a way of thinking that is directed outward, sensual and hence still unconscious and dark, and a way of thinking that has become conscious of itself and enlightened only arises through a turn or a change.¹¹ Out of such a turn emerges a mental state that is originally created (“constituted”) through this very act of the turn onto itself. It is therefore absolutely unique in each case and in this uniqueness no longer comparable to any state that preceded it: it is incomparable, incommensurable, singular. The seventeenth century felt itself distinct only from antiquity, that is, from *the* past par excellence, in this incomparable way. However, the categories used for differentiation suggest that the consciousness of the incomparability of contemporary modernity and its respective unique perspective would tendentially be directed against any past that, in relation to this perspective, “still” embodied a state of unconsciousness, that is, a state of pre-reflexivity and darkness. Consequently, the consciousness of modernity in the eighteenth century moves precisely toward this outré position and consolidates itself, in a process spanning ever shorter periods, already around 1800 to the conviction that every present stands in an absolutely incomparable relationship to every past — no matter how many conditions of the new might already be contained in it. Jauss sees the pinnacle of this movement in Stendhal, of whose programmatic thesis of 1823 he says: “In it, the consciousness of modernity only pushes away from itself, lets that which is current today, which is thus always left behind in this sudden movement, become the romantic of yesterday.”¹²

The value of these important observations by Jauss is lessened by the fact that he does not subject what he calls “historical consciousness” itself to a further historical critical analysis, but follows the *Communis opinio* in assuming that this consciousness is itself the original discovery of historical consciousness. This thesis, however, has no basis in the texts interpreted by him. The “discovery” that one may not and cannot measure antiquity and modernity against a common, absolute measure, but rather, must understand them out of their historical difference is not the result of a reflection about the incomparability of historical ages as such. Rather, it is based on the thesis of the incomparability of antiquity’s sensually naïve way of thinking with the reflected, self-aware modern way of thinking. This consciousness of the incomparability of historical epochs is thus dependent on a certain concrete judgment about these epochs and is not the product of a reflection on historicity as such. Moreover, the

¹¹ See Hans Robert Jauss, *Literaturgeschichte als Provokation* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970).

¹² Jauss 1970, 53.

distinction between antiquity and modernity in terms of these concrete criteria is not a result of the quarrel but can be traced back to the late Middle Ages.

If one takes the basic statements of the “querelle” as the starting point, then through hundreds of written testimonials one can draw a line between traditions that stretches from the seventeenth century back to the beginning of the fourteenth century. For Fontenelle, next to Perrault probably the most important defender of modernity in the French quarrel, modernity expressly begins through the break with the Middle Ages. He claims that after a long period of barbarism (in the Middle Ages) the beginnings of the rebirth of the sciences and arts lies in the Renaissance and that his own century brings about their perfection following this exit from darkness. Fontenelle, however, sees the special radiance of the seventeenth century in the renewal of mathematics and physics by Descartes and other “great men.” Now the days of sterile physics are (finally) over, gone the reign of words and concepts, and one now turns directly to the objects of experience. External authority has ceased to have more weight than one’s own reason.¹³

Fontenelle’s remarks call attention to a well-known but hardly discussed problem: although he talks about a direct relationship of opposition which, for him, characterizes the relationship of antiquity and modernity to each other, he does not mark modernity off from antiquity but from the Middle Ages instead. However, it is the reasons for this distinction that first illuminate the tradition of a consciousness of modernity to which Fontenelle belongs. They indicate the concrete ideas associated with this consciousness and they ultimately provide an explanation as to how “modernity” could be brought into direct opposition to “antiquity.” For, the historical record does not provide us any reason or any possibility of identifying the period from the Homeric Greeks until the late Roman empire as a unitary epoch and even less does it permit us to directly oppose this “epoch” to “the” modernity.

The reasons Fontenelle advances against the Middle Ages are clichés that had already been repeated a thousand times before his time. He asserts that during the Middle Ages sterile conceptual distinctions made it impossible to engage directly with the objects of experience and that authority reigned in place of reason. Thus, Fontenelle claims for his age, in contrast to the Middle Ages, both:

1. The discovery of intuition, that is, of the observant, receptive turn toward the things themselves — naturally in contrast to an orientation toward general (“transcendent,” existing only in made-up concepts) ideas of order and value, and

¹³ Paraphrasing Fontenelle; for his original text, see Krauss 1969, 174.

2. The discovery of a reason that is enlightened about itself and capable of a methodical use of its rules — in contrast to a dependence upon (primarily religious) authorities and mere views.

Not only does Fontenelle's criticism have a long tradition, it has also gained currency, influencing even the latest research. If a Catholic scholar from around 1750 wanted to demonstrate his modernity, he would write that Scholasticism had drawn "most of its doctrines from the very old books of the philosophers," had "presented it in a logical form" and "relied on as many authorities as possible." The "new philosophy" on the other hand is based "on mathematics and experiments" and rejects "any authority," "insofar as it is not based on reason and experience."¹⁴ Sentences like these were already commonplace in the eighteenth century. Jacob Burckhardt's widely read book on the Renaissance in Italy contributed one of the most influential promulgations of this image of the Middle Ages:

In the Middle Ages both sides of human consciousness — that which was turned within as that which was turned without — lay dreaming or half awake beneath a common veil. The veil was woven of faith, illusion, and childish prepossession, through which the world and history were seen clad in strange hues. Man was conscious of himself only as a member of a race, people, party, family, or corporation — only through some general category. In Italy this veil first melted into air; an *objective* treatment and consideration of the State and of all the things of this world became possible. The *subjective* side at the same time asserted itself with corresponding emphasis; man became a spiritual *individual*, and recognized himself as such.¹⁵

¹⁴ Andreas Gordon, *Varia philosophiae mutationem spectantia* (Erfurt, 1749), 63. See also Paul Richard Blum, "Aufklärung zwischen Humanismus und Scholastik bei Andreas Gordon OSB und seinen Gegnern," in *Die Renaissance als erste Aufklärung*, vol. 3: *Die Renaissance und ihr Bild in der Geschichte*, ed. Enno Rudolph (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 135–47. The anthology edited by Kurt Flasch and Udo Reinhold Jeck offers an easy and yet rigorous introduction to a counterimage of the Middle Ages; Kurt Flasch and Udo Reinhold Jeck, eds. *Das Licht der Vernunft: Die Anfänge der Aufklärung im Mittelalter* (Munich: Beck, 1997). The thesis I seek to demonstrate in this book differs from Flasch and Jeck's and similar investigations in that it places even greater emphasis on the aspect that not only is there a "beginning" of a clarification [*Aufklärung*] of reason regarding itself in the Middle Ages and in antiquity but also an analysis of reason that is substantially different from that of the modern Enlightenment [*Aufklärung*] — one that is nonetheless binding for us.

¹⁵ Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (London: Phaidon, 1944), 81.

Contemporary art historians emphasize that recent research has “seen through the cliché”¹⁶ of Burckhardt’s image of the Middle Ages. All the same, this has not dented his scientific reputation. Even in 1998 one can, when one wants to characterize Renaissance humanism’s contribution to the emergence of modern science, say:

Humanism “liberates” people in the Renaissance from the normativity of the authoritative text as an authentic image of reality, “lifts him” from a situation in which his relationship to the world is one of passive observation to one in which he actively and creatively engages with it, “and thus enables him” to burst the bonds of [the ideal of a] universal science whose justification rests, ontologically, in the fact that it is [held to be] the image of the [very] structure of being, and, logically, in the fact that it is [held to be] a coherent construct, and to develop that concept of the individual sciences which is the condition for the emergence and the progression of modern science.¹⁷

When one wants to understand critically what makes the consciousness of modernity unique rather than simply describing phenomena that are alleged to be modern in conformity with the self-understanding of the texts of the age, the way back to the break between early modernity and the Middle Ages becomes unavoidable. In the following, I will try to determine the importance of this break for the formation of this consciousness from two aspects: from an aesthetic and artistic viewpoint and from an epistemological and scientific viewpoint.

2. The Turn toward This World and the Idealization of Nature to “Beautiful” Nature in Modern Art

The first of the early modern traditions — that of celebrating the break with the Middle Ages as a resurrection of the arts — arises from Fontenelle’s two, seemingly unrelated, criticisms:

1. The Middle Ages neglected intuition and was a period of merely conceptual distinctions, and

¹⁶ See, for example, Gottfried Böhm, *Bildnis und Individuum: Über den Ursprung der Portraitmalerei in der Renaissance* (Munich: Prestel, 1985), 15; Charles H. Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century* (Cambridge, MA/London: Harvard UP, 1927); Aaron J. Gurjewitsch, *Das Individuum im europäischen Mittelalter* (Munich: Beck, 1994); Jan A. Aertsen and Andreas Speer, ed. *Individuum und Individualität im Mittelalter* (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1996).

¹⁷ Eckhard Keßler, “Der Humanismus und die Entstehung der modernen Wissenschaft,” in *Die Renaissance und ihr Bild in der Geschichte*, ed. Enno Rudolph (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 130–31.

2. The Middle Ages did not evaluate the world through reason but merely on the basis of appearance.

From the perspective of contemporary aesthetic judgment, this self-evaluation is a prejudice that fails to recognize the achievements of medieval art in the individual spheres of art such as architecture, painting, literature, etc. This means that a changed interpretation of art is interpreted to imply the (re)emergence of art as such. The conviction that the Middle Ages regarded only the transcendent world as beautiful while regarding the earthly world as ugly and contemptible has favored the idea that it (only) took a turn toward this world to rediscover its immediately accessible and directly experienceable beauty. The importance of this turn for art is already emphasized by Matteo Palmieri in his dialogue *Della vita civile* (1432) — one of the first texts to attest to the image of a rebirth of the arts (“rinascere l’arti perdute”).¹⁸ Leonardo Bruni, for example, takes a similar view two years later in his biography of Petrarch.¹⁹ Already in 1367, Petrarch himself mocked the Paduan Aristotelians for indulging in ultra-fine abstractions. Indeed, he also criticizes Aristotle himself along with them. Petrarch argues that Aristotle’s conceptual distinctions had no influence in practical life in the here and now. In order to have an influence, one needed the concrete vividness of poetry and its capacity to move the reader’s spirit, a capacity Petrarch finds “among ours,” that is, in the art of Cicero, Vergil, or Horace, but not in the learned questions of the Scholastics.²⁰

From remarks of this kind arose the idea that the sensually perceiving and feeling turn toward the concrete individual object or to the individual was the defining condition for the emergence of art as art. When this turnaround is described in contemporary descriptions in art history, the focus is placed on individual “achievements,” which are supposed to have been discovered as something totally new in art. Modern research still relies unquestioningly on the self-understanding of the

¹⁸ Guido da Pasa already speaks of a “resurrection” (of “dead poetry”) in 1325 with reference to Dante; cf. August Buck, *Die “Querelle des anciens et des modernes” im italienischen Selbstverständnis der Renaissance und des Barocks, Sitzungsberichte der Wissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft Frankfurt a. M.* 11,1 (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1973), 4; Benvenuto Campesani uses the same metaphor for the discovery of a Catullus manuscript (“de resurrectione Catulli poete Veronensis”). See Buck 1973, 265–66.

¹⁹ Leonardo Bruni, *Humanistisch philosophische Schriften*, ed. Hans von Baron (Leipzig/Berlin: Teubner, 1928 [1436]), 64–66.

²⁰ Bruni 1928; see also Francesco Petrarca, *De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia*, ed. August Buck (Hamburg: Meiner, 1993), 104 and *passim*. In English: “On His Own Ignorance and That of Many Others,” in *Invectives*, ed. and trans. David Marsh (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2003), 113–83.

contemporary witnesses of the time in its conclusion that the conditions for the emergence of Renaissance art are to be sought precisely in this turnaround, and that this turnaround amounts to the creation of something utterly new:

Mistrust vis-à-vis the world has turned into a deep love for the world. It thereby also becomes worthy of every attention. It yearns to be observed, explored, depicted. . . . The wealth of manifestations of this turnaround is formidable. It results in an opening up of pictorial space through [the discovery of] the principle of central perspective, the discovery of the landscape and its beauty, generally, the secularization of artistic themes, the emergence of historical painting, allegory, portraiture, genre painting, still-life, nudes and other such modes.²¹

As one sees, even a contemporary interpreter still shares the pathos of discovery voiced by the figures of that time: not *a* new view of landscape but “the birth of landscape painting,”²² not *a* new understanding of portraiture but “the beginnings of portrait painting”²³ are the products of this “turn.” But in concentrating on the individual “manifestations of this turn,” he does not take into consideration the strong theoretical claim the theoreticians and practitioners of art in early modernity associated with this turn. According to them, it is the “deep love for the world,” the turn toward the objects accessible to the senses themselves that is the condition for the emergence of art. Beauty is now supposed to be located not in the symbolic reference to a transcendent meaning but in what can be perceived with one’s own eyes. Nonetheless, what was considered beautiful (in the Middle Ages) is not simply “shattered” in this turn. On the contrary, when one goes through the many theoretical treatises on art and literature of early modernity, one finds that the canonical criteria of beauty as they had been formulated in antiquity and the Middle Ages remain untouched: the condition for a work of art to be judged beautiful is — following a determination first developed in Plato’s *Phaedrus* (264c; 268d) and later repeated hundredfold — the agreement of the parts with each other and with the whole and thereby harmony, symmetry, proportion, and their mathematico-geometrical justification.²⁴ *What* beauty is is

²¹ Pierre Wenger, “Die Anfänge der Subjektivität in der bildenden Kunst Italiens vom 13. bis zum 15. Jahrhundert,” in *Geschichte und Vorgeschichte der modernen Subjektivität*, vol. 1, ed. Reto Luzius Fetz, Roland Hagenbüchle, and Peter Schulz (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1998), 523–24.

²² Wenger, “Die Anfänge der Subjektivität,” 536.

²³ Wenger, “Die Anfänge der Subjektivität,” 542.

²⁴ On the emergence, meaning and change of this concept of beauty, see my “Klassische und Platonische Schönheit. Anmerkungen zu Ausgangspunkt und

not “discovered” anew; it is simply taken over as self-evident from the arsenal of existing theories of beauty. New does not mean a newly formed or theoretically developed concept of beauty; it merely means that the object to which the predicate “beautiful” is assigned and the kind of experience in which the object is realized is new.

While the traditional idea of art is not called into question, the traditional concept of beauty is now transferred to the products of intuition: they should meet this claim purely out of themselves. Among other things, this can be seen in the fact that central perspective now becomes interesting once more; it is, after all, the Renaissance’s *costruzione legittima*, that is, it counts as the methodically correctly reconstructed means by which a representation can correspond exactly to the original intuition.²⁵ A perspective drawing shows its objects in their own inherent proportion and rationality. Through this perspective, things are portrayed, as Piero della Francesca puts it, “*commensuramente*” and “*proportionalmente*”; a viewing proceeding in this way is “true science.”²⁶

Once this *costruzione legittima* is judged to be a condition for the artistic quality of a representation, two consequences result:

1. That the reflection upon the conditions of the original intuition, that is, upon the execution of individual acts of intuition and not upon some conceptual conditions, enables the objectivity of a representation.²⁷

2. That the objects of intuition, that is, the individual things or individual persons, are in themselves beautiful and perfect formations which contain their measure and the general principle of their beauty and perfection, that is, the proportionally and symmetrically ordered relationship of the parts and the whole, in themselves. One needs only to have the right eye for it and the ability to rationally reconstruct what has been seen, or, one needs only to become aware of the innermost reason for its natural form in an act of passionate receptivity (so says, for example, Giordano Bruno, from whom Dilthey draws his account of understanding in the humanities).

wirkungsgeschichtlichem Wandel des Kanons klassischer Schönheit,” in *Klassik im Vergleich: Normativität und Historizität europäischer Klassiken*, ed. Wilhelm Voßkamp (Stuttgart and Weimar: Metzler, 1993), 403–28.

²⁵ See, for example, Petrus Pictor Burgensis (Piero della Francesca), *De prospectiva pingendi*, ed. Giusta Nicco-Fasola (Florence: Le Lettere, 1984), 184.

²⁶ See also the article by Rudolf Wittkower, “Brunelleschi und Proportion in Perspective,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 16 (1953): 275–91. Wittkower’s analysis of the importance of proportion in perspective has not received the attention it deserves in contemporary scholarship.

²⁷ As Dietrich Schwanitz notes, “with the composition of the picture from the central perspective, painting was wholly geared to seeing. Everything else could confidently be left to the books.” Schwanitz 1999, 282.

The conviction, indeed, the enthusiasm about having liberated oneself through the turn toward the here and now from the dependence on metaphysical speculations about the afterworld blinds many theoreticians and artists of early modernity to the extent to which they overstrained the sensually accessible “things themselves” through this turn. Every individual object of nature now has to be beautiful in itself. For this period, this still means that it has to be consistently determined, as the much-used formula in the Book of Wisdom of the Old Testament (cf. “*sapientia*”; 11:21)²⁸ runs, by *number, dimension and weight*. Nature in itself is beautiful; indeed, true nature is so completely determined by law in its proportions that one is able to recognize the whole in the individual: *ex ungue leonem* (“the lion from his claw”), as Giorgio Vasari summarizes the view of this tradition.²⁹

That one could see a resurrection of the arts in the “turn to this world” was not due to the turn to sensibility but due to the turn to an overvalued sensibility, that is, to a sensibility that was supposed to reveal the inner rationality of perceived objects out of itself.³⁰ In many respects, the subsequent path of development of the arts in early modernity and modernity is characterized by the fact that this postulation of a perfection to “natural objects” was felt to be a metaphysical overload. The empirical concrete world presents unmistakable evidence of deviations from the rule, of accidents, of deformities, etc. But remarkably, in spite of the increasing acceptance of the non-ideality, arbitrariness, contingency, and the ugliness of “reality,” the conviction inherited from the Renaissance that the authentic replication or the subjective illusionary creation of such a “reality” is art has hardly been questioned. Even the “aesthetics of ugliness” is still thought of as an absolute, autonomous experience of beauty, because the true value of this experience of beauty is the autarchy of the individual — regardless of the consequences and losses that result from this absolutization of one’s self.

²⁸ See Werner Beierwaltes, “Augustinus Interpretation von Sapientia 11,21,” *Revue des Etudes Augustiniennes* 15 (1969): 51–61.

²⁹ See Giorgio Vasari, *Le vite de’ piu eccellenti pittori, scultori e architetti*, vol. 1, ed. Rosanna Bettarini (Florence: Sansoni, 1987), 111.

³⁰ The theory of art of (Platonic) antiquity and of the Middle Ages does not by any means develop an abstract concept of an otherworldly, non-sensuous spiritual beauty for its own sake, as is often alleged. Rather, its conceptual derivations serve the function of providing the critical foundations for a theory of the beauty of sensory appearances, namely, through distinguishing what is beautiful *in* individual objects of sensory perception and in empirical nature from what is contingent and changeable in this nature and is hence deficient in comparison to the beautiful. In contrast, a focus on individual sensory appearances (as that which allegedly offers itself immediately to the intuition [*Anschauung*] as beautiful) makes such a distinction impossible, with the consequence that a reflection on the conceptual conditions necessary for an analysis of this immediate intuitive unity [*Anschauungseinheit*] now appear as a turn away from the beautiful and from sensibility *tout court*.

3. The Turn to Experience and the Idealization of the Individual Object to a “Well-Determined” Object in the Scientific Discourses of “Modernity”

If there is one conviction that divergent schools of early modernity and modernity share, it is the conviction that all insight must begin with experience and ultimately be tested in terms of it as well. Empiricist as well as rationalistic or idealistic approaches of the past as also contemporary approaches before and after the “linguistic turn” agree on this point. Even Hegel fights the misunderstanding that idealism is a “mere” theory not based in experience: “it must be said that nothing is *known* that is not an *experience*,” he emphasizes in the concluding chapter on “absolute knowledge” in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.³¹

Once more, the break with the Middle Ages is the defining occasion for this agreement. To this day everyone rejects the idea that knowledge might set out from conceptual or ideal “objects” not gained from experience. In spite of all the admiration accorded Plato through the centuries, an epistemology that “still” believes in the real existence of transcendent ideas is considered beyond the pale for modern philosophy, notwithstanding the cherished ideals of pluralism and openness in modernity. The same thing holds even for the mere attempt to enter into a serious factual engagement with Plato; to us moderns, the mere attempt to do so now appears as a relapse to a stage prior to the enlightenment of thought about itself, one to which no modern position ought to return.³²

³¹ G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977), 487.

³² Translator’s note: The German word “Aufklärung” refers both to the historical period of the “Enlightenment” and also has the meaning of a “clarification” or an “elucidation.” Whenever the former is primary, I translate with “Enlightenment.” In those contexts where Schmitt refers to an “Aufklärung” of thought concerning itself, I either translate “enlightenment” (lower case) where the sense of having attained maturity or critical self-consciousness is primary or “clarification” where the sense of an ongoing process (for example, the processing of “dark,” subconsciously received “impressions”) is primary. However, the reader should keep in mind that the historical reference is never far off here: because the primary achievement the Enlightenment claimed for itself vis-à-vis the “dark” Middle Ages was achieving a “clarification” (“Aufklärung”) of thought concerning itself, whenever Schmitt speaks of the “clarification” of thought, he is also alluding to the consciousness of superiority associated with this achievement characteristic of Enlightened, modern thought (a consciousness Schmitt regards critically). This nuance, unfortunately, cannot be preserved in the translation. Wherever Schmitt plays off both meanings against each other, I have always given the German word (i.e., “Aufklärung”) alongside the respective English terms to show that it is the same term being translated differently both times.

The medieval representatives of this (alleged) “Platonism” from which early modernity felt it had to distinguish itself are “realists about universals,” that is, Scholastic philosophers who (supposedly) believed that abstract objects (“universals”) were real existing objects. For them, our knowledge begins, according to the general prejudice, with the intuition of transcendent, “really existent” essences, from which we derive our knowledge of experienceable objects through logical deduction. *Vis-à-vis* this view, the modern starting point of knowledge understands itself as a turnaround: only the concrete individual objects of experience are “really existent.” Only from this experience do we derive our general predicates and concepts, which therefore can only be assigned as much reality as is still contained in them of the authentic experience.

Many historical conditions have been advanced as explanations for this break with the universal that takes place in theory and for the turn toward experience of the concrete here and now: the change in religious feeling, particularly through the Franciscan mendicant orders; the dissolution of the church’s authority (for example, due to the conflict between the Emperor and the Pope); the dissipation of the Emperor’s temporal authority through the strengthening of local leaders, through the importance of the cities; the social differentiation in the cities; the expansion of economic activity; the new classes resulting from this expansion who provided new patronage for art and science. Even external factors have been advanced for this turn to a life primarily oriented toward *praxis*: the plague around the middle of the fourteenth century; the “lesser Ice Age,” that is, climate change with its negative consequences; and similar factors.

These historical conditions are certainly important and worthy of consideration. However, the large number of causes identified alone shows that they do not stand in an unequivocal relation to the new age that supposedly emerged from them. One cannot even determine with certainty what is cause and what is effect. Was it the dissolution of Scholastic conceptual hierarchies in intra-university disputations that led to the dissolution of ecclesiastic and political hierarchies or was the theoretical dissolution the result of the practical dissolution? Was it the “separating out” of the cities and classes in society that led to the destruction of the hierarchical system of science and the dissolution of the old, “ontological” order of values in Aristotelian ethics and to the discovery of the moral responsibility of the individual or did the “exhaustion” of the Scholastic conceptual apparatus condition and stimulate social and political changes?

In any case, one has to take into account that the historical “facts” or “observations” presented here represent a selection from among a complex plurality of manifestations and that this selection is influenced by a preconception. This preconception sees indications of modernity in the dissolution of organizational structures and the acknowledgment of the individual’s self-worth and influences and limits the search so that much

that is contradictory is overlooked or gets subordinated to the new as a relict of the old. According to the modern picture of history, the uncritical faith in authority that allegedly characterized the Middle Ages was first overcome in early modernity with the call to dare to use one's own reason (Kant's famous "*sapere aude!*"). On closer examination, however, this faith turns out to have been much narrower and stricter in the humanism of "early modernity," the polemical overturner of the dark Middle Ages, with its elevation of ancient role models (but also the role models of its own avant-garde³³ to legitimizing witnesses of its own position), than was ever the case in the rational disputations of the Middle Ages.

In addition, such research into causes takes the new that emerged in each case as a given for which one (only) needs to seek its causes. This gives the impression that the new is an indubitable objective historical fact. The more conditions one can identify for it, the more the realization disappears that the new is the result of a consciousness of newness, that is, a historically limited subjective perspective, rather than a "given" phenomenon that necessarily emerged from these conditions. Although the new is thereby "explained," that is, "understood" (to a certain degree) out of its conditions, critical discussion becomes practically impossible. A teleology of history characterized by the conviction that just because it is or was like this it also had to be this way replaces all critical discussion. This means that, in spite of all protestation that historical reality cannot be completely disclosed through rational analysis, this "complex" reality is nonetheless subordinated to an abstract universal theory, which, as a consequence of its theoretical claims, is or has to be immune to all empirical evidence.

Someone who declares Franciscan piety to be one of the conditions or even *the* reason for the collapse of Scholasticism's conceptual architecture accepts the "turn to this world" as the given motivating factor for this theoretical process without asking whether this collapse can actually be explained out of this turn or whether it had to proceed the way it did in fact proceed. He does not ask whether this process potentially contains problematic aspects so that it does not by any means have to be viewed as a stage in the development of the Western spirit below which one may no longer fall back but as a process in which one can distinguish what in it was the result of a critical engagement with actual defects of the "learned" tradition and what can be attributed to completely different tendencies (for example, a suspicion against Scholastic education as such).

³³ One example in the area of literature is Pietro Bembo's statement (from around 1525) that all prose written in vernacular Italian (as opposed to Latin) had to be oriented to Boccaccio, whereas all poetry had to be oriented to Petrarch — a dictate that retained its authoritative status for centuries. See Andreas Kablitz, "Warum Petrarca? Bembo's *Prose della vulgare lingua* und das Problem der Autorität," *Romantisches Jahrbuch* 50 (1999): 127–57.

Not everything that emerges as new in this process should therefore necessarily be accepted as a given historical result.

Nor is it correct to ascribe to the two crucial Franciscan scholars of the late Middle Ages — John Duns Scotus and William of Ockham — a new, religiously motivated love for the beauty of the created world as the “historical condition” underlying their transformed interpretation of the epistemological significance of individual objects. Rather, we must take their explicit and rationally justified arguments for this change themselves as the genuine “cause” of this transformation. The former approach renders what is supplementary essential, since, even if a specific religious feeling was a defining moment for the new engagement with sensorily experienceable objects, this feeling does not explain the reasons for the conviction that the basis and controlling instance of knowledge can be found in these objects. Furthermore, this motivation is tied to specific conditions of the thirteenth century, whereas the attempt to found knowledge in experience was also undertaken in different historical situations for completely different reasons.

A direct engagement with these reasons themselves is therefore unavoidable. This engagement brings to light a common framework that has actually remained identical even for seemingly contradictory “modern” positions in philosophy as well as in the sciences and the arts. What came to light in this analysis of the “emergence of the arts” also holds for this framework: direct experience of individual objects is associated with a claim that cannot be sustained in spite of the fact that such experience is now considered the only means of entering into a relationship with the objects of knowledge that is critical, reflected, and therefore capable of truth. The consequence was — and to a great extent still is today — that one ended up calling the possibility of certain knowledge into question. The question of whether the foundations themselves, the anchoring of knowledge in the “conditions of possibility of experience,” might be problematic is hardly raised at all. Such a question, after all, would be a regress in comparison to the achievements of modernity.

If one wants to determine from which philosophical discourses in the theoretical sphere the modern turn to experience originated one has to take the heightened expectation associated with this turn as a criterion of selection here too. Just as what is new in the “renaissance” of the arts is not simply a turn to intuition but presupposes the expectation that this turn is the condition for the emergence of art as such, in epistemology, too, what is at stake is not just a renewed emphasis on the importance of experience. That knowledge has to *begin* with sensual experience is Aristotelian-Scholastic doctrine throughout. However, what is truly new here is that direct, immediate experience of the objects (that is, experience that is as yet not constructively transformed by reason’s reflection) is not only the starting point but a condition for and the measure of the scientificity

of knowledge (that is to say, of the “degree to which it embodies reality”). It is this aspect that is emphatically defended through subsequent centuries and becomes the real banner of the new movement.

If one wants to identify the historical reasons for this “turn” and gain an overview of the relevant texts (for example, by Leonardo Bruni,³⁴ Lorenzo Valla,³⁵ Mario Nizolio,³⁶ Pietro Pomponazzi,³⁷ Jacobus Zabarella,³⁸ and others), one especially notices the absence of positive justification. There is no analysis of the method of knowledge of the individual object such as that presented by Aristotle in book 7 of his *Metaphysics*. What is primary in the development of this conviction is not the view, formed for specific reasons, that experience itself has to be the criterion of all knowledge but the view that the criterion sought cannot under any circumstance be something general. Indeed, the hostility toward the

³⁴ See Bruni 1928. On Bruni’s philosophical assumptions, see Hanna Barbara Gerl, *Philosophie und Philologie* (Munich: Fink, 1981), esp. chapter 3.

³⁵ See Lorenzo Valla (above all, his *Repastinatio dialectice et philosophie*, ed. Gianni Zippel [Padua: Editrice Antenore, 1982]).

³⁶ See Mario Nizolio, *De veris principiis et vera ratione philosophande contra pseudophilosophos libri quattuor*, ed. Quirinus Breen (Rome: Bocca, 1956); German ed., *Vier Bücher über die wahre Philosophie und die wahre philosophische Methode gegen die Pseudophilosophen*, trans. Klaus Thieme, Hanna Barbara Gerl, and Diane Rosenstein (Munich: Fink, 1980).

³⁷ See Pietro Pomponazzi, *Abhandlung über die Unsterblichkeit der Seele (De immortalitate animae)*, ed. and trans. Burkhard Mojsisch (Hamburg: Meiner, 1990). Pomponazzi still appears wholly Aristotelian in letter; in spirit, however, he belongs to the Scotist Aristotelian tradition and, like Duns Scotus, uses Aristotle to argue against Aristotle. Pomponazzi’s central tenet is that, according to Aristotle, there would be no thought without representation [*Vorstellung*], and from this he draws a conclusion that remains popular even today: “as there can be no thinking without representation, thinking must therefore be representation.” See Pomponazzi 1990, 90–110. Pseudo-Mayne also presents a similar argument while introducing the term “consciousness”: “since we cannot imagine any psychic act [to occur] without consciousness, thinking must be consciousness.” See Pseudo-Mayne, *Über das Bewußtsein (1728)*, trans. and ed. Reinhard Brandt (Hamburg: Meiner, 1983). The logic of this argument is no better than saying: “since one cannot fish without sight, therefore sight must be fishing.” Yet, this pseudo-logic is often used even in current scientific discussions: “since one cannot think without neurotransmissions, thinking must be ‘a firing of one’s neurons.’”

³⁸ See Jacobus Zabarella, *De rebus naturalibus: In Aristotelis libros “De anima”* (Frankfurt am Main: Minerva, 1966 [1606/7]). Zabarella bases his argument, above all, on the fact that that from which one wants to abstract, must be fully grasped first. See, for example, cols. 1046, 1051 and *passim*. On the significance this view gains in the empiricism of early modernity, see my “Platonism and Empiricism,” *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 27,1 (2006): 151–92.