ISAIAH BERLIN LECTURE

The Re-description of Enlightenment

J. G. A. POCOCK
Fellow of the Academy

I

I AM FOR A SPECIAL REASON GRATEFUL to the Academy for the invitation to give this lecture. In 1997 I was invited by the University of Oxford to give one of a series of sets of lectures bearing Isaiah Berlin's name, and chose a theme, not unrelated to my subject today, on which I hoped for the privilege of conversation and perhaps debate with Sir Isaiah. In the event, however, I arrived in Oxford during the last days of his life, and when giving (I think) the third of my lectures it fell to me to tell my audience the sad news of his death. These were not circumstances in which to develop a debate about any of his positions; in the universal grief which the news occasioned everyone, including myself, had other concerns. Six years later, I am making no attempt to recall whatever it was I meant to say at that time, but I am glad of this opportunity to reconsider one or two of his many contributions to philosophy and history, and frame a position of my own respecting them.

I met Isaiah Berlin, as far as I recall, three times. On the first and perhaps the second occasion, we talked about Sir Matthew Hale's *History of the Common Law*, a work of the late seventeenth century which had figured in my own *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law*.[1] Hale, a

Read at the Academy 30 October 2003.

[1] Sir Matthew Hale, *A History of the Common Law of England* (posthumously published, London, 1715); 'Reflections on Mr Hobbes his Dialogue of the Law', in W. S. Holdsworth, *History of English Law* (London, 1922–65), 5, 503–5. For comment, see Pocock, *The Ancient Constitution and the Feudal Law* (Cambridge, 1957, 1987), ch. VII, part III, pp. 173–81; Alan Cromartie,

Proceedings of the British Academy, **125**, 101–117.

Chief Justice of the Common Pleas, had developed a philosophy of unwritten law, in which human usages and responses to changing conditions came to constitute a body of custom, never reducible to the separate actions of known agents or to the systematic operations of an analysable body of principles. Berlin was interested in the possibility that this, or something like it, had come to the attention of Giambattista Vico and helped form his concept of law as the poetic creation of early human communities. I was not able to be of much help; Hale's *History* was published, as far as I know, only in England and in English, and I doubt if it entered upon the networks of the time in such a way as to carry it as far as Naples. If Vico derived any of his insights from English common law, it could have been from the writings of John Selden, Hale's teacher, which were available to him in Latin, but are mentioned in his work only in connection with the law of nature.

It is a gloss on this fragmentary memory of Isaiah Berlin to add that I received a communication[2] on the subject of Hale's *History* from another master spirit of the mid-twentieth century: Friedrich Hayek, who wanted me to produce a modern edition of it—as was subsequently done by Charles Gray of Chicago[3]—but wanted this to be a pronouncement of the spontaneous harmony of unintended consequences: of the mysterious laws of the market, in short, so much wiser than the conscious intellect of democratic communities can ever be. Berlin was not a subscriber to this creed, and I do not myself see that Sir Matthew Hale has much to say regarding the free market. The customs he had in mind were those of an agrarian and manorial economy, slowly formed over the generations by human contact between neighbours in the village. What is of greater relevance to my subject today is that customs of this kind, as Hale would have learned about them from Sir John Fortescue in the fifteenth century and as Fortescue claimed to have learned about them from Aristotle himself,[4] provided the people whose customs they were with its 'second nature'—no doubt a rendering of natural law into local conditions and historical experience, but the shaping force which gave that people the

Sir Matthew Hale, 1609–1676: law, religion and natural philosophy (Cambridge, 1995), ch. 7, pp. 98–117.

[2] I regret that I did not keep the original and am relying on my memory of its message.

[3] Charles M. Gray (ed.), *Sir Matthew Hale: The History of the Common Law of England* (Chicago, 1971).

[4] S. B. Chrimes (ed. and trans.), *Sir John Fortescue: De Laudibus Legum Angliæ* (Cambridge, 1949), pp. 14–17; Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, 1975, 2003), ch. 1, pp. 16–30.

individuality that differentiated it from others and therefore, once formed, was almost impossible for that people to shake off. Not even Machiavelli's Prince can change the customs and the character of the people he rules; the transformation of their second nature is possible only to the inspired legislator who appears, perhaps by divine will, when some catastrophe has stripped the people of their second nature and left them a *tabula rasa*.[5] The Prince is only a usurper, and can never do so much or live so long.

There is consequently a medieval and scholastic historicism, operating, it is true, only within the orbit of the moon, subject to the crystalline spheres shining further out, and knowing no historical forces other than the glacially slow formation of custom, but presenting nevertheless a scenario of history rather than nature; a self-invented and self-inventing second nature with which will and reason, in the short run, may contend in vain. Its presence in the history of discourse supplies me with one way of commenting on Isaiah Berlin's thesis of a Counter-Enlightenment arising in response to an Enlightenment and grounding the study of man in history rather than in nature. But this is only one way of commenting on that thesis, and I am not sure that the latter itself lies at the centre of what I might wish to say about Berlin as philosopher. When I look back over my encounters with him on the page rather than in the flesh, I find the greatest wealth of meaning for me attached to *The Hedgehog and the Fox*[6]—Hale was clearly a fox curled up in the posture of a hedgehog—next to *The Originality of Machiavelli*,[7] and then, after a perceptible interval and on special occasions only, to *Two Concepts of Liberty*.[8] If I speak, as I shall today, of Berlin on Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment, it is in a context formed by the readings I have just named.

II

Isaiah Berlin's Counter-Enlightenment[9] is a mixed phenomenon; in history, of course, none the worse for being one. There is Giambattista

[5] Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, ch. VI; *The Machiavellian Moment*, ch. VI, pp. 167–72.

[6] First published 1953; Henry Hardy and Roger Hausheer (eds.), *Isaiah Berlin: The Proper Study of Mankind: an Anthology of Essays* (London, 1997; New York, 1998), pp. 436–98.

[7] Myron P. Gilmore (ed.), *Studies on Machiavelli* (Florence, 1972), pp. 147–206; *The Proper Study of Mankind*, pp. 269–325.

[8] 1958; *The Proper Study of Mankind*, pp. 191–242.

[9] *The Proper Study of Mankind*, pp. 243–68. A full bibliography of this subject is not attempted here.

Vico, working in Naples during the 1720s, when much of what we call Enlightenment had yet to happen; unknown to or ignored by the accredited figures of that generalisation, and presenting a philosophy and anthropology in which nature seemed swallowed up in history. There are the Germans, Herder and Hamann, vehemently rejecting what they saw as a French imposition of universal reason, and declaring that the meanings of human existence could only be found in the customs and culture—dare I say the second nature?—which each *Volk* or nation had created for itself. Vico and Herder between them present us with what becomes known as historicism, a term I have used once and will repeat later, and with that replacement of *Naturwissenschaft* by *Geistes-* or *Geschichteswissenschaft* which is absolutely central to Berlin's scenario. Lastly, there are the counter-revolutionaries or neo-Catholics, headed by Joseph de Maistre, who hate so deeply what they have targeted as a replacement of religion by reason that they aim to reverse it; though one may doubt whether their faith in Catholic Christianity was as deep as their commitment to it, and whether they were not apostate intellectuals seeking to turn reason against itself. We have here the foundations of the European Right, one of the components of what we collectively if questionably call Fascism; it is a little hard to find in the anglophone cultures, though if de Maistre was a Catholic nihilist I have known an Anglican nihilist or two in my time.

I do not mean to go at all deeply into Berlin's Counter-Enlightenment. It has been admirably explored, criticised and enriched in a volume of essays edited by Joseph Mali and Robert Wokler,[10] to be published by the American Philosophical Society, one of the two United States counterparts to this Academy; I was privileged to see a typescript of this volume in advance of publication. I am at a point, however, where it is possible and perhaps necessary to draw attention to a diversity of meanings which the very semantics of the term Counter-Enlightenment may contain. Are we to understand that one species of Enlightenment had arisen to counter another, as the Catholic Counter-Reformation claimed to be a true reformation countering a false? Is it the case that what we know as Enlightenment contained tensions and contrary tendencies, so that Enlightenments and Counter-Enlightenments might occur within it? Or have we to do with intellects that had identified something called Enlightenment in terms much the same as those in which we

[10] Joseph Mali and Robert Wokler (eds.), *Isaiah Berlin's Counter-Enlightenment* (Philadelphia, 2003).

identify it ourselves, and had set out to overthrow it in ways that might be called Anti-Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment in the same breath?

It seems evident that each one of these uses of the term Counter-Enlightenment might be valid, in the sense that it is applicable to one or other of the actors in Berlin's narrative. I have no wish to explore the term or to quarrel with it, beyond pointing out that if we are using the term in a diversity of ways it is as well to be aware of what we are doing. The plot thickens, however—or rather, it may be deceptively thinning—once we make use of the expression 'The Counter-Enlightenment'; for now we must ask what unifying, or perhaps reifying, force the definite article is to exert. In what ways, if any, did these several Counter-Enlightenments come together, or in what ways are we to construct interpretations of them, so that it is legitimate to speak of The Counter-Enlightenment as a single force known to us, and perhaps recognised by others? At the outset of any such enquiry, furthermore, we find ourselves already saying that The Counter-Enlightenment was engaged in countering something else, which we are calling The Enlightenment; so that there instantly arise, not only a new set of questions akin to those I have just asked, but one at least of those I was asking a moment earlier. Did The Counter-Enlightenment arise within The Enlightenment, or in opposition to it as holistically conceived?

III

The position I wish to defend[11] is that we should abandon the attempt to define 'The Enlightenment' as a single movement with a set of shared characteristics, and speak instead of a number of 'Enlightenments', or phenomena it is helpful to call by that name, interacting with one another and displaying sets of characteristics occurring in more than one of them, but no one set that enables us to speak of all of them at once. This is not to empty the term Enlightenment of meaning, but to admit that it bears a richness and diversity of meanings that cannot be embraced within any single formula with the definite article prefixed to it. I have less trouble with the word 'Enlightenment' than with the word 'The,' which I have come to mistrust as an exceptionally dangerous tool in the historian's vocabulary, for its capacity to lead us into reifications, at once over and

[11] Elaborated in Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, vol. I: *The Enlightenments of Edward Gibbon* (Cambridge, 1999).

under-specific, by which we become imprisoned. An advantage of the proposal I put forward is that it reminds us that the word 'Enlightenment', with or without the article, is more 'our' coinage than it was 'theirs'; 'we' being historians, philosophers and critics, and 'they' being actors in the history to which we refer. As we explore the writings of the eighteenth century, we do not find them using the term 'The Enlightenment', and seldom even 'enlightenment' as a noun. References to 'this enlightened age' are common enough in English, and the metaphor of *lumière* is widely employed in ways which seem to indicate processes taking place in contemporary history; but it is only late in the century that Kant offers to answer the question *Was ist Aufklärung?* Even then, he does not use the expression *die Aufklärung*, and we are left to decide how far the use of the German language limits us, or him, to the exploration of specifically German concepts. In our own time, the researches of James Schmidt[12] have been directed to uncovering the formation of such usages as '*die Aufklärung*', '*les lumières*', 'the Enlightenment' and so on, and we are finding that they were overwhelmingly the work of nineteenth-century minds seeking to understand the history of the century before them. We need not doubt that they were understanding it very well, in order to realise that we are still engaged in the same enterprise. The word Enlightenment is therefore ours to use; we are not to bow down before it.

There are, I think, several sets of reasons why this proposal has met with such determined resistance from those who seem resolved that a unitary concept of The Enlightenment shall be upheld against all comers. One is philosophical commitment; The Enlightenment seems to denote a movement or a programme—sometimes though diminishingly called The Enlightenment Project—which some regard as the object of their allegiance and others as the origin of many evils. It is interesting and even important that the same definition of Enlightenment seems to attract both these responses. Another I am tempted to call Eurospeak; to exponents of European unity it is important that historical phenomena belonging to that cultural region be presented in a cosmopolitan perspective, and since Roy Porter and Mikulas Teich edited a volume with the title I am about to give,[13] Eurocentric writers have displayed a great nerv-

[12] James Schmidt (ed.), *What is Enlightenment? Eighteenth-Century Answers and Twentieth-Century Questions* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1996); and his contributions to *Political Theory*, 28 (2000), 734–57, and 29 (2001), 80–90.

[13] Roy Porter and Mikulas Teich (eds.), *The Enlightenment in National Contexts* (Cambridge, 1981). Cf. John Robertson, 'The Enlightenment above National Context; Political Economy in Eighteenth-Century Scotland and Naples', *The Historical Journal*, 40 (1997), 667–97.

ousness about the presentment of Enlightenment in national contexts. I have been told that my own proposal for a number of Enlightenments in a number of contexts is bound to imprison the mind within national histories.[14] I do not think it will do so. Some of the contexts of Enlightenment will indeed be national; the eighteenth century was a period in which nations existed and nation-building was going on, and since I am not a Eurologue I am unafraid of recognising them when I meet them. Other particular contexts were not defined by nations or by states; there were religious connections and communities, and there were of course cosmopolitan (if not universal) networks of correspondence engaged in promoting Enlightenment projects of more than one kind. Enlightenment was, and Enlightenments were, as we find it and them. The third source of opposition to my proposal appears to originate in a kind of *Fakultätenstreit*, an area of divergence or even disagreement as to the enterprise of studying Enlightenment and the ways in which the intellect is engaged in it. I shall return to this at the close of my lecture.

IV

If we see a number of processes, to which the word Enlightenment may be in one way or another applicable, going on distinguishably from one another, yet interconnected and displaying shared characteristics, it must follow that to narrate one, or some, of these processes does not invalidate the narration of others for the moment left un-narrated. These things happened, we find ourselves saying, and to apply the term Enlightenment to them is to enlarge our sense of how to use the word, and of what processes taking place in the past we can interpret better by using it. To say that 'this' happened and is part of what we should mean by Enlightenment is not to deny that 'that' happened and is also to be considered part of it—even if the two should run in directions counter to one another. It does postpone, perhaps *sine die*, the time when we can present a final synthesis of what 'Enlightenment' means and of all that was happening to give it that meaning; but as historians, we do not quite understand why our philosophically inclined brothers and sisters are demanding—as some of them are—that we should present such a synthesis as a precondition of

[14] Jonathan I. Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: philosophy and the making of modernity, 1650–1750* (Oxford, 2001), preface, p. v. I applaud Israel's account of a 'Radical Enlightenment' spreading across Europe, and his demonstration that there was a 'Moderate Enlightenment' running counter to it. Cf. Margaret C. Jacob, *The Radical Enlightenment* (London, 1981).

further research. I am engaged in constructing a narrative of Enlightenment which does not lead towards Isaiah Berlin's Enlightenment or his Counter-Enlightenment either; but I have no wish to deny that a narrative leading in his direction may be constructed and may include many things that really happened—as of course things did happen, difficult though it may be to recapture them. I deny only that his narrative constitutes a history of The Enlightenment or that mine does either. What I myself lost by the moment of Berlin's death was the opportunity to find out whether he would have agreed with these contentions, as I suspect he would.

The narrative I offer did not arise from a desire to contest propositions put forward by Isaiah Berlin, but from a posthumous debate with Franco Venturi; as great a man as Berlin, I think, and more unequivocally and intensely a historian. Not to be tediously prolix in recapitulating what I have written elsewhere, Venturi had a problem with Edward Gibbon.[15] He knew that Gibbon was a great figure in what had to be called Enlightenment; but Venturi—even he—had a unitary concept of The Enlightenment into which Gibbon could not be fitted. There had to be a band of *philosophes*, offering both to lead society and to lead it towards improvement in the *settecento riformatore*; you will see how easily this specification could be made to fit with Berlin's contention that The Enlightenment had aimed at placing human affairs under the control of reason. But no such band and no such project could be discovered in England, even at the end of the eighteenth century when Venturi was obliged to focus on such figures as Thomas Paine and Jeremy Bentham; and he was forced to regard Gibbon—a francophone and cosmopolitan who spent the first and last years of his productive life in Lausanne—as an exile and stranger in an England which Venturi could not tailor around him. But Gibbon was not an improving *philosophe* according to Venturi's specification, and it seemed to me that other definitions of Enlightenment would have to be found if such terms were to be applied to him.

From this starting point I proceeded to a work entitled *The Enlightenments*—please note the plural—*of Edward Gibbon*, elaborating on an essay I had written some years earlier for Venturi's *festschrift*, 'Clergy and Commerce: the Conservative Enlightenment in England'.[16]

[15] Franco Venturi, *Utopia and Reform in the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 1971), p. 132: 'the English giant of the Enlightenment . . . remained an isolated figure in his own country, a solitary figure'.

[16] In Rodolfo Ajello and others (eds.), *L'Età dei Lumi: studi storici sul settecento Europeo in onore di Franco Venturi* (Naples, 1985), 1, 523–62.

This project entailed looking at some kinds of Enlightenment taking place in Protestant and especially Calvinist cultures: Berne and Lausanne, the Netherlands, the Huguenot diaspora, and in other ways both Scotland and England.[17] Intellectually, these could be traced back to the Arminian attack on the Calvinist decrees of grace in the early seventeenth century; but the historical context in which I saw they should be situated was that of a determination, gathering through the 1680s, to prevent a resumption of the Wars of Religion, in which I came to include the Wars of the Three Kingdoms that had afflicted these islands. The claims of spiritual authority—papal, presbyterian, sectarian—against secular magistracy and custom were seen as dangerous to both state and civil society, and programmes were set on foot to reduce them, in which many churchmen joined. These were in turn dangerous to Christian churches, since it was hard to reduce the authority they derived from Christ without reducing the divinity of Christ himself; and much of the literature of Protestant Enlightenment is the record of a debate among liberal theologians, in which Arians, Socinians, deists, unitarians and Spinozists—the latter, in particular, originating independently—confronted the theology of the four general councils and the defenders of Church tradition. Edward Gibbon made himself a historian of this debate, from the Council of Nicaea to the origins of the Reformation.[18] While he was certainly a sceptic and unbeliever, it does not follow that he aimed to replace the authority of clerics with that of *philosophes*, or with any authority but that of state and civil society, which—again—it does not follow that he aimed to improve or to change. When he found Joseph Priestley using the same history as prelude to an apocalyptic fall of the civil powers, he recommended the philosopher of Birmingham to the attention of the civil magistrate.[19] Scepticism might offer its support to civil authority, though its offer might not be welcomed. We are not in the world of Venturi's Enlightenment, or in that which might evoke Berlin's Counter-Enlightenment; but I am saying no more against their narratives than that other things were going on.

[17] *The Enlightenments of Edward Gibbon*, ch. 2; 'Settecento protestante? l'illuminismo reconsiderato,' *Quaderni Storici*, NS 94, 1 (1997), 315–37.

[18] *Barbarism and Religion*, work in progress; see *The Tanner Lectures in Human Values*, vol. XI (Salt Lake City, 1990), pp. 338–61; 'Gibbon and the Primitive Church', in Stefan Collini, Richard Whatmore and Brian Young (eds.), *History, Religion and Culture: British intellectual history, 1750–1950* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 48–68; 'Gibbon and the History of Heresy', in John Christian Laursen (ed.), *Histories of Heresy in Early Modern Europe: for, against and beyond persecution and toleration* (New York and Houndmills, 2002), pp. 205–20.

[19] Gibbon, *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, V, ch. 54 (1788), n. 42 (ed. David Womersley [London, 1994], III, p. 439).

This is the 'redescription of Enlightenment' which I have employed as the title of this lecture. You will see that it entails moving what we know by that name deeper into the context of the theology it was intended to replace, while moving decisively in a Protestant direction to which not all students of The Enlightenment have paid attention. The Protestant Enlightenment I am exploring was in depth a post-Calvinist phenomenon; when we turn to Lutheran and Pietist Germany we embark on a history of *Aufklärung* which it is hard to avoid treating within its own parameters, not those of France or England, the Netherlands or the *république des lettres*. A culture in which universities are organs of state, expected to furnish it with metaphysics for the training of clerics and jurists,[20] is not the world of the *philosophes* or the *gens de lettres*, the Scottish Moderates or the English Dissenting Academies. Gibbon was a close reader of the great Professor Mosheim of Halle and Göttingen, and by the end of his life he knew that German textual criticism was more advanced than his; but of the intellectual processes that produced Kant and Herder, or of the works of these authors, he seems to have known nothing at all. In *The Enlightenments of Edward Gibbon*, I try to show him moving, either in person or as reader, between the cultures of Lausanne, London, Paris and the predominantly Huguenot *république des lettres*. Some of these contexts are national—I cannot help it if they are—but others are diffuse to the point where they are networks of correspondents or the proceedings of societies: the *Bibliothèques* of Jean Le Clerc, or the *Memoirs* and *Proceedings* of the *Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres*. It is also important that these archives belonged to a time past, even to decades preceding his own birth; Gibbon did not belong to any alliance seeking the hegemony of the contemporary intellectual world. Indeed, in his youthful writings he attacked such ambitions.

There may have been such an alliance, seeking that hegemony or assuming that they already had it. If so, it would be reasonable to locate it among the *philosophes* or *gens de lettres* of Paris, engaged according to some scholars in replacing the *république des lettres* by the hegemony of conversational *salons*,[21] but at the same time according to others manufacturing and exporting the *Encyclopédie* and replacing the *république* by 'the business of Enlightenment'.[22] Here if anywhere it would be reason-

[20] Ian Hunter, *Rival Enlightenments: civil and metaphysical philosophy in early modern Germany* (Cambridge, 2001).

[21] Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: a social history of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca, 1994).

[22] Robert Darnton, *The Business of Enlightenment: a publishing history of the Encyclopédie* (Harvard, 1979).

able to look for the programme of bringing all human affairs under the rule of reason, though historians of the last century energetically debated how far the history of The Enlightenment was that of *les lumières* or of *die Aufklärung*. It is of interest to examine how far the younger Gibbon—before the *Decline and Fall* was written or conceived—felt about Enlightenment in its Parisian form. He was deeply attracted by its sociability and by the discovery that the *gens de lettres* were something like an independent estate of the realm;[23] but one can detect his decision that as an English gentleman this was not quite the place for him, and in the outcome he conducted his relations with Paris through his fellow Lausannais Suzanne and Jacques Necker. Lausanne, not Paris, was his alternative to English culture; though how much he knew of Swiss intellectual life, conducted as it was largely in German, would be worth investigating.

As for the *Encyclopédie*, it would seem that Gibbon did not think much of it;[24] and the reasons why not are of significance to the posthumous conversation I am conducting with Isaiah Berlin. The *Essai sur l'Etude de la Littérature*—Gibbon's first published work, which he composed between the ages of 21 and 23—is to be read as a response to Jean d'Alembert's *Discours préliminaire à l'Encyclopédie*,[25] and one may study in detail how he objected to what he saw as d'Alembert's over-rigorous separation between the faculties of reason, imagination and memory. The effect was, he thought, that d'Alembert had relegated the study of written texts to a mechanical operation of recollecting and reiterating what was in them, on which reason and imagination, philosophy and poetry, then operated in ways that owed nothing to the exploration of the texts themselves. The young Gibbon objected vigorously that what at the end of his life he called 'the nobler faculties of imagination and judgment' were involved in the study of ancient texts, and in the *Essai* he imagined the first readers or hearers of the *Aeneid* in Augustan Rome responding to Virgil's imagination of the seven hills as the pastoral landscape they had once been and as the Forum was by Gibbon's time in a fair way to becoming again. The nobler faculties are thus involved in the re-imagination of past states of the imagination itself.

We might then take Gibbon's youthful confrontation with the *Encyclopédie* as a foretaste of Berlin's confrontation between Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment, citing d'Alembert's suggestion that it

[23] *The Enlightenments of Edward Gibbon*, ch. 10.

[24] Womersley (ed.), *Decline and Fall*, III, p. 1214, for a listing of Gibbon's references to 'this immense compilation'.

[25] *Enlightenments*, chs. 8, 9.

might be well to burn most of the records of the past as evidence of a planned dictatorship of reason which the historical imagination resists. But this would be to neglect the interesting fact that Gibbon, as he came to see, was not being quite fair to d'Alembert, whose understanding of the issues involved was more sophisticated than we have yet realised. In the *Discours préliminaire*, he had made it quite clear that what he was presenting was an ideal or natural history of the human mind, of the order in which it would have developed its several faculties and set them to work creatively, had its nature been left to unfold itself untroubled by the contingencies of actual or civil history. In the world as it actually had been, the European intellect had found itself both burdened and stimulated by the huge weight of inherited ancient letters; and d'Alembert was troubled both by the pedantry with which these had been reproduced and by the enthusiasm with which they had been made models for imitation. One thing which Enlightenment was doing, we may say, was establishing its independence of Renaissance; and this was true of Gibbon, who used the image of a generally dawning *lumière* to denote the critical techniques of Jean Le Clerc,[26] developed in the Remonstrant and Huguenot *république des lettres* half a century before his time. And d'Alembert, in the article on 'Erudition' which he contributed to the *Encyclopédie*, spoke of philological and critical scholarship as entailing the very faculties of judgement and insight which Gibbon thought he had neglected in the *Discours préliminaire*. He even urged scholars working in the *Bibliothèque du Roi* to extend the skills developed in the study of Greek and Latin to the Arabic and Chinese texts accumulating in that library, from which he thought much might be learned that the philosophy of nature could not alone supply.[27]

Both Gibbon and d'Alembert, then, knew that there was a difference, a tension and possibly a resolution, between the natural history of society and culture—the ways in which these could be seen as produced by the human mind developing itself according to its own laws—and what may best be termed their civil history, in which they had taken shape under the conditions of contingency, experience and accident, which humans had constantly encountered and which had often driven the mind to act in ways which only this kind of history could narrate and render explicable. No doubt human nature was always there, acting consistently with itself and helping to explain the ways in which it had acted; but narratives consistent with it could not necessarily be reduced to illustrations of its

[26] *Enlightenments*, p. 218.
[27] *Enlightenments*, pp. 205–7.

natural history. The young Gibbon observed that one of the delights of historical study was to discover human beings acting in ways one had not expected; the mature Gibbon was not a social scientist multiplying the laws that made behaviour intelligible, but a historian narrating the ironic, comic and tragic outcomes of both action and acquired culture. That there might be philosophers, and revolutionaries, seeking to reduce human society to its natural intelligibility, need not be doubted; but it was no less Enlightened—according to our usages of the word—that there should be historians, pursuing different objectives and with other roots reaching into the antique and the European past. Their history is not to be told exclusively as a history of philosophy.

I am beginning to rely here on another master spirit of Isaiah Berlin's generation: Arnaldo Momigliano, who observed that Gibbon's achievement—peculiarly his, if not exclusively—was to synthesise three modes of historical thought:[28] the classical narrative of human actions and their often unintended outcomes, the Enlightened philosophy that saw human nature as manifest in society and supplied it with both a natural and a civil history, and the antiquarian scholarship that studied the texts surviving from the ancient and medieval pasts until it had extracted from them the linguistic and social contexts in which they would henceforth be situated. By calling the antiquarian enterprise 'philology' and pursuing it with sufficient philosophic concentration, it is possible to emerge in the vicinity of Giambattista Vico; but my purpose is rather to observe that if we call all these things together Enlightened, and use the word Enlightenment in ways that entail all of them together, we shall emerge with a scenario of *Naturwissenschaft* and *Geschichteswissenschaft* engaged in a conversation at the heart of Enlightenment, not necessitating a schism or a dialectic between Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment to relate or explain it.

Would this mean that Isaiah Berlin was mistaken, or that he imposed a false or misleading emphasis? Not necessarily, depending upon one's reading of his texts. It is perfectly possible that there is a recoverable narrative in which some actors endeavour to make all society, and all history, intelligible in terms of human nature and understood according to its laws, and others respond that this is a false vision and that humans exist only as self-created in various moments of their history. It is also possible

[28] Momigliano, 'Gibbon's contribution to historical method', *Contributo alla storia degli studi classici* (Rome, 1955), pp. 195–211; Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, vol. II: *Narratives of Civil Government* (Cambridge, 1999), pp. 4–6 and 'Prelude: the Varieties of Early Modern Historiography'.

that this narrative can be expanded into a politics of hedgehogs and foxes, drastically separated and then calamitously re-united in the monstrous historicisms of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Berlin, and all of us who lived through the latter part of last century, had every reason for wanting to retell the later phases of this narrative and looking for its beginnings. The redescription of Enlightenment now being offered merely suggests that if the beginnings of the story are to be told as narrative of intellectual encounters in the late eighteenth century, this is better not done by setting up a scenario of Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment, reducing Enlightenment to *Naturwissenschaft* and *Geisteswissenschaft* to Counter-Enlightenment. The definite article —that concealed mantrap of historical thought—tempts us in these directions, and I must make it clear that in redescribing Enlightenment I have not been offering a new description of The Enlightenment which excludes the narrative Berlin desired to tell. I have been using the word with a deliberate lack of precision, enabling me to recount other narratives—like that with Edward Gibbon among its principal actors—but not enabling or obliging me to decide whether Berlin's narrative is valid or not.

V

That being so, what room can I offer for Berlin's narrative? I may have been describing patterns in the history of thought which took shape in another part of the Enlightened forest than his, with the implication that Enlightenment was a forest, in which there were many tangled paths to be found. In giving emphasis to the tangled relations between philosophical and civil history, I have of course been privileging the latter and giving prior treatment to it as, precisely, a history of entanglement, of the circumstantial, the contingent and the unexpected. It must be remembered that in Gibbon's view the greatest of philosophical historians was none other than Tacitus, and that one reason for this was that he had written his history of Romans no longer free to act as they wished, but living under an autocracy where they feared their ruler and one another, and their actions were determined by fear, jealousy and the knowledge that what they did must turn out otherwise than they had intended. The greatness of Tacitus lay in his power to reduce the secrets of state and the passions of the human heart to a narrative tangled and twisted, but in which humans could recognise themselves. 'Je gravis sur les Alpes avec

Hannibal,' wrote Gibbon comparing Livy with Tacitus, 'mais j'assiste au conseil de Tibère.'[29]

Not all civil history was the record of life under tyranny, but not much of it was the record of freedom to shape the world as we chose. The debate, to call it that, between Gibbon and d'Alembert shows us that civil history, the record of what had happened, was the history of circumstance and contingency, in which humans acted both as their nature required and as the contexts in which they found themselves rendered inescapable, and in Tacitean terms intelligible. Enlightened historiography was the record of the encounter between nature and contingency, and though vast strides were being made in carrying this narrative to new levels of intelligibility—above all the study of how human nature operated in successive states of social organisation—it remained a narrative, whose structure and subject-matter were not decreed by nature alone. History as written—that is to say historiography—remained a narrative of what took place among, between and within, the crooked timber, or better the timbers, multiple and multifarious, of humanity.

It is obvious beyond labouring that Isaiah Berlin knew this to be true, both of history as we have lived it at any time and of history as it was written in the eighteenth century. But that being so—to repeat my question on the preceding page—what are we to say of the story he constructed, in which some endeavour to bring history under the control of a reason which understands nature, and others respond that history is the work of creative action and imagination, operating in many contingencies, circumstances, conditions and climates, and can be understood only when we can re-imagine the imaginations of others—as the young Gibbon imagined those of successive hearers and readers of the *Aeneid*? Where did this happen? Did it really happen, or have we been in a series of predicaments which have obliged us to affirm that it must have happened and imagine how it did? These are not absolute alternatives; both may have happened, and Gibbon thought imagination must co-exist with judgement.

I will suggest in conclusion that I have been telling the story of the philosophical history of the Enlightenment period, whereas Berlin's story takes place in the setting of Enlightened philosophy of history. Historiography and philosophy of history are two different things, and it has been a misfortune for both that the distinction has been, and is still being,

[29] Lord Sheffield (ed.), *The Miscellaneous Works of Edward Gibbon* . . . (1814), 4, 66–7; *Enlightenments*, p. 233.

overlooked in favour, but to the disadvantage, of the latter. The business of the historian is, I will unfashionably assert, narrative; he and she are interested in what has been happening, in what kinds of thing are those which have been happening, and they construct narratives which take on a philosophical dimension—and this of course Isaiah Berlin made perfectly clear—once it is discovered that there is no known limit to the diversity of meanings of the things that have been happening. At this point historiography—which is written by historians—may but commonly does not clasp hands with historicism: a pursuit of philosophers, who are interested in history as a philosophical concept, an aspect, dimension or even essence of human existence which presents them with meanings and problems they rightly see to be of existential importance. The historical process which interests them is that which leads to the emergence of history in this sense, and they tend to see this process as taking place in the history of philosophy. This they narrate without paying much attention to the many other narratives related by historians, for whom the history of philosophy is a narrative but not necessarily a master narrative.

I am not far from saying that the history of ideas—the pursuit sometimes defined by Isaiah Berlin as his central interest and concern—is history as written by philosophers; that it amounts to the construction of ideal histories, in which the intimations of one pattern of ideas are seen as challenged and replaced by the intimations of another (perhaps growing out of tensions within the former), and history becomes the narrative of such replacements. I do not mean to challenge this construction, beyond pointing out that it exists in a border territory; if there are points at which it ceases to be history and becomes philosophy of history instead, there are others at which it can be seen happening in traceable human experience. But for the kind of historian I try to be there remains, central and not preliminary, the question of when, where, how and ultimately whether the processes thus conceived can be shown happening in the thoughts, actions and experience of actual human beings at actual historical moments. The historical discipline I practise—and prefer to call by other names than 'history of ideas'—goes in search of such happenings, which may not be containable within the history of philosophy, and necessarily produces narratives which answer the question I have just posed in other ways. All this Berlin unquestionably knew; but his was one map for journeying through this border territory, and there are other routes that may be followed. What, then, are the historiographic and political consequences of this amicable *Fakultätenstreit*?

Edward Gibbon, who took a sceptic's interest in the ways humans behaved in the emergencies of history, was an instant Burkean in his response to the French revolution; scepticism can easily become the case for an ironic acceptance of the actual. But if we were to seek for the central figure of an English Counter-Enlightenment, we should assuredly select Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who did have a clear notion of a process that had been going on and he desired to reverse. This enterprise was both historical and metahistorical. Coleridge wanted to restore Platonism to a place in Anglican and English philosophy from which, he quite rightly saw, powerful intellectual forces had been trying to dethrone it. This had really been happening. But he thought this history and counter-history could be made intelligible only by the supposition of contending Platonic ideas and anti-ideas of the constitution in church and state. From his work there interestingly arose what was for some time known as the 'Germano-Coleridgean' school, whose historiography, essentially an ecclesiastical history, was studied half a century ago by Duncan Forbes.[30] Here, it may be, we have a starting-point, situated in history both English and German, of that distinction—capable of becoming a divorce—between history as philosophically narrated and history as philosophically conceptualised, which I have placed at the origin of the distinction between historiography and historicism. There will have been many other such starting points, and among them will be found several of the historical narratives related by Isaiah Berlin in his search for what he called and we may well continue to call by the useful term Counter-Enlightenment. But like the narrative in which Coleridge is protagonist, they will occur in contexts which can be specified—some national, some multi-national, some cosmopolitan—and in being specified can be made distinct and so distinguished from one another. The redescription of Enlightenment I have been talking about is a search for specificity entailing diversity: the diversity of things we may mean by Enlightenment, of things that were going on and may be (or have been) denoted by that term, of the contexts in which they happened and which made them the happenings they were, and of the many connections between them, and between their contexts, in a highly cosmopolitan group of consciously diverse cultures. In such a historiography diversity and concreteness come to life, and the definite article is reduced to doing its proper work.

[30] *The Liberal Anglican Idea of History* (Cambridge, 1952).