

The rationality of life

On the organismic metaphor of the state

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In 'What is a Nation?' (1882), Ernest Renan provides an exemplary definition of the nation as an organic community:

The nation, like an individual, is the culmination of a long past of endeavours, sacrifice, and devotion... A nation is therefore a large-scale solidarity, constituted by the feeling of the sacrifices that one has made in the past and of those that one is prepared to make in the future.¹

As the subject/object of a common inheritance, a bequest of antiquity that has to be affirmed in the present, the nation is a quasi-natural force from the past that constrains the present and future actions of its members. Moreover, as a personality in its own right, the nation requires the sacrifice of its members.

In this way, Renan captures the two fundamental characteristics of the idea of organic community. We are reminded often enough that the nation qua organic community holds itself together by means of atavistic hallucinations and the violent and oppressive subordination of its members to the larger whole. Hence, the idea of organic community is often associated with 'bad nationalism' – the Prusso-Germanic nationalism of Bismarck; the National Socialism of Hitler; ethnic fundamentalism and cultural chauvinism in decolonized Asia and Africa – and with totalitarianism in general. In the conventional history of ideas, the organismic theory of the political body is said to entail the permanent inequality of members within the collective because the individual is seen as an abstraction that must be subordinated to its function within the larger whole *qua* living organism.² Moreover, these oppressive consequences are said to issue directly from its intellectual origins in the German Romantic movement understood as a mystical or irrationalist view of life that arose in ideological reaction to the Enlightenment.

One feature of Renan's definition of the nation is, however, not so easily reconciled with this received

understanding of the organic community. For instead of defining organic bonds in the irrationalist terms of biological race or geographical or ethno-linguistic descent as we have grown accustomed to expect, Renan suggests that the nation is first and foremost a moral project that involves rational willing and consensual actions of self-renunciation. 'A nation is a soul, a spiritual principle':

Man is a slave neither of his race nor his language, nor of his religion, nor of the course of rivers nor of the direction taken by mountain chains. A large aggregate of men, healthy in mind and warm of heart, creates the kind of moral conscience which we call a nation. So long as this moral consciousness gives proof of its strength by the sacrifices which demand the abdication of the individual to the advantage of the community, it is legitimate and has the right to exist.³

For Renan, the nation's spirituality lies in the fact that the basis of its life is purposive moral work in which individualistic interests are sacrificed so that the more general ideals of the community can be incarnated and given objective existence. This spiritual work makes the nation an organic community.

Renan's definition of the nation is significant because it shows us the importance of the organismic metaphor of the social and political body, and more generally, the concept of the living organism, as *philosophical* bases for the genesis of nationalism and the imagining of nations. Today, it has become difficult for us to grasp the moral dimensions of the idea of organic community because it is almost always read under the sinister sign of ideology. This is a result of the fact that both the nation-form and the organismic metaphor of the social and political body have been subject to the profoundest caricature and misunderstanding. In actuality, the organismic metaphor of the social and political body was initially formulated in German idealist philosophy before the advent of Jena Romanti-

cism. The metaphor had a crucial role in the moral and political philosophy of Kant and Fichte because it was a response to the question of how freedom, understood in the transcendental sense of being unconstrained by the mechanical laws of natural causality, could be realized in the world of experience.

The fact that dissatisfaction with the mechanistic metaphor of the state and the corresponding articulation of the organismic metaphor coincided with the historical rise of European nationalism is part of the rich and vexed theme of the complex traffic between German idealism and nationalism, philosophy and politics. Reopening the question of the *rational* underpinnings of the organismic metaphor of the social and political body, through an examination of its moment of origin in the German philosophy of the last decade of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century, promises to dispel existing intellectual prejudices. But beyond that, it is also part of an attempt to reconstruct a more progressive genealogy for both the organismic metaphor and the nation-form, since the two are inseparable. To the extent that the organismic metaphor persists in the discourse of revolutionary decolonizing nationalism in the Third World, a fuller understanding of the metaphor would enable a more philosophically informed assessment of its continuing feasibility and whether or not postcolonial nationalism has a future in contemporary globalization. My immediate aim in this article is merely to suggest that we should try to understand the *rationality* of organic life itself. Even if one is of the view (as I am) that the organismic metaphor is not plausible today and that its apparent plausibility in the past masked an entire complex of unanswered questions concerning the transcendence of finitude that it promised, one should be wary of rehearsing tired arguments about the irrationalism of organic community.⁴

Myths of the organic community

It is useful to begin with a brief consideration of some confusions in earlier critiques of the idea of organic community that arise because they refuse to consider the rational underpinnings of the organismic metaphor. Many of these critiques were written in the aftermath of National Socialism and remain extremely influential in contemporary discourse. These critiques, which have perpetrated an intellectual-historical myth about the organic community, in which the organismic metaphor is reduced to a manipulative mystification, can be reduced to two main positions. These are neither homogeneous nor mutually exclusive and can be found in various combinations in a given thinker. The first, which has become almost axiomatic, is a socioeconomic

determinist argument that German organic nationalism is the tendentious hallucination of a marginal intelligentsia who overcompensated for their political inactivity and economic backwardness in the realm of speculative thought. This was, of course, Marx's view. A harsher formulation of the same argument is that early German nationalism was a psycho-social pathology of a socially disgruntled *Bildungsbürgertum* irresponsibly out of touch with political and economic reality, and that this lack of a reality principle led to disastrous historical consequences when others tried to put their ideas into practice.⁵

In this type of argument, German idealism is invariably conflated with Romanticism. Consequently, the idea of organic community is viewed as a product of Romanticism and denounced as mystical, fantastic or irrational in the sense that it appeals to faith, imagination and the passions. But the denunciation of the organismic idea as irrational is not always convincing or unequivocal. Since the same idea is also found in the work of many idealist philosophers who were the architects of elaborate philosophical systems, it is also paradoxically characterized as overly rational to the point that it lacks realism.⁶ The complex links and discontinuities between German idealism and Romanticism, especially that of the Jena period, and whether or not Romantic social and political thought has oppressive tendencies are beyond the scope of this essay. Suffice it to say that even if the Romantic use of the organismic metaphor is mystical and may have contributed to an oppressive form of nationalism, this is not an inevitable consequence of the idea of organic community per se. Indeed, the charge that the idea of organic community is irrational is sometimes based on a terminological misunderstanding where a critique of the mechanical state based on the understanding (*Verstand*) is taken as a rejection and complete flight from reason without consideration of the philosophical distinction between the faculties of understanding and reason (*Vernunft*) in Kantian and post-Kantian thought.⁷

The second conventional critique points to the inner affinity between the organismic metaphor and conservatism that is realized in German history even though it concedes that the metaphor has also been deployed in progressive and democratic political theories. It is argued that since an organism implies slow evolution and growth, the organismic metaphor is fundamentally conservative and, hence, has been more readily used, particularly by historicists such as Gentz and Savigny, to justify conservative politics.⁸

In his accounts of the organismic theory of the political body and German conservatism, Karl Mann-

heim combines both of the above arguments. On the one hand, he suggests that there is an elective affinity between political conservatism and the irrational mysticism that typifies organismic thinking.

In addressing the question concerning the legitimation of rule, conservative thinking tends to favour theological-mystical, or, in any case, transcendental definitions of the issue. The argument from 'divine right' belongs to the basic store of conservative thinking, even when the latter has become pantheistic, which is to say, actually unbelieving. History then takes the place of divine transcendence. The line of inquiry followed by conservative justifications accordingly operates predominantly upon a plane of *mythical transcendence*.⁹

On the other hand, however, Mannheim gives a sociological-determinist explanation for why German Romanticism took on an irrational and mystical cast. Echoing Marx, he suggests that this hypertrophy of metaphysical abstraction is a compensation for and reflection of the political and economic underdevelopment of Germany and, more specifically, the political inefficacy of the Romantic intellectuals and their detachment from the bourgeoisie from which they originated. Romanticism, Mannheim argues, is the first oppositional critique of the capitalist rationalization of the world. It is 'a reception, a collecting of all the [irrational] elements and ways of life, derived ultimately from the religious consciousness, which were pushed aside by the onmarch of capitalist rationalism.' But precisely because these intellectuals were socially anomalous and politically inactive, their ideas were incorporated into the ideologies of more politically active social strata as means of justification.¹⁰ The important point here is that for Mannheim, the strong affinity between mystical organismic ideas and conservatism obeys a strict law that follows from German sociological conditions.

Mannheim's critique of organismic theory is certainly one of the most incisive because he emphasizes that Romanticism is not entirely irrational:

The romantic solution does not destroy the Enlightenment faith in reason, but merely modifies it. The faith in the power of reason, in the capacity of thought, is not abandoned. Only one type of thinking is rejected, the immobile thought of the Enlightenment with its deductions from single principles and mere combinations of rigid conceptual components, and the horizon of potential thinking is expanded only in contrast to this one type.¹¹

This distinction between the static rationality of the Enlightenment and a more dynamic form of thought is precisely the distinction between the mechanical oper-

ations of the understanding and the living procedures of reason. But if Mannheim here gestures towards the reason inherent in the organismic metaphor of the social and political body, his repeated identification of organismic thought with Romantic mysticism prevents him from taking the step. Mannheim is clearly cognizant of the fact that it was Kant who offered the first thorough philosophical elaboration of the idea of organism. He points out that Kant's formulation 'foreshadows the growth of the spirit of nationalism and the theory of the "*Volksgeist*"', and that 'the great builders of philosophical systems such as Fichte, Schelling and Hegel could only free themselves from the spell of eighteenth century mechanism by starting with Kant's seemingly dry and abstract definitions.' Yet, in the same breath, 'Fichte, Schelling, Hegel and the romantics like Adam Mueller' are criticized as examples of 'a projection of political experiences on to the metaphysical or aesthetic plane'.¹²

What Mannheim's criticism makes clear is that all these critiques of organismic thought are concerned with the nature of the political itself. They repeatedly suggest that when it comes to political experiences, one should be rationalistic and not mystical. But at the same time, one should also not be overly rationalistic to the point that one loses touch with reality and becomes carried away, transported to metaphysical heights, thereby losing sight of practical exigencies. Against this view, however, one could argue that it is the essence of the political – when it is not merely a pragmatics or a technics but a practice with a critical–normative dimension – to waver unceasingly between reality and ideal, between what is and what ought to be: in the endeavour to realize the ideal and to idealize reality. It is precisely the problem of reality that is at stake, the problem of how norms can be actualized or made real and how reality can be transformed in the image of normative ideals through critical–rational practice. As Frederick Beiser notes, the myth of the apolitical German intellectual who escapes from the harsh world of political reality into an ideal world of metaphysics and aesthetics 'has blinded scholars to the political motivations of so much German philosophy and literature in the eighteenth century.... [The ideas of thinkers such as Kant and Fichte] were not harmless abstractions floating in Plato's world of forms, but potent weapons engaged in political struggle'.¹³

But a definition of the political as the site of the critique of reality and the incarnation of ideals would necessarily involve *metaphysics* if by that term we mean a dimension that is beyond brute facticity and finite existence, a state of existence higher than a

reality that is merely given. It is to this higher state in which we transcend our finitude through the causality of ideas that idealist philosophers like Kant, Fichte and Hegel refer when they speak of moral freedom *qua* basis of political freedom. It is no accident that critiques of the mystical and metaphysical nature of idealist moral and political philosophy almost always focus on the organismic metaphor of the social and political body. For the idea of organic life was formulated in German idealist philosophy precisely to capture a form of being in which reality and ideality, matter and rational-purposive form, can coexist.

From mechanism to organism

The purpose of this brief critical exposition of the dominant intellectual-historical myth of organic community is to suggest that there are organismic conceptions of collectivity that do not repudiate normative reason. If the idea of organic life represents a rupture from rigidly mechanistic conceptions of the world, different conceptualizations of what an organism *is* lead to different uses of the organismic metaphor in moral and political philosophy. For example, whereas Mannheim and others seem to understand organic life in preformationist terms – that is, as a static form of evolution in which the past is a germinal essence from which the present and future unfold – most idealist philosophers were influenced by Blumenbach's theory of epigenesis and conceived of organic life as a dynamic process of self-formation and self-generation, a spontaneous, rational-purposive and auto-causal becoming. It is this dynamic understanding of organic life that informs Marxism as well as the discourse of revolutionary decolonization, where the organic is seen as a rational response to capitalist rationalization under the sign of colonialism.

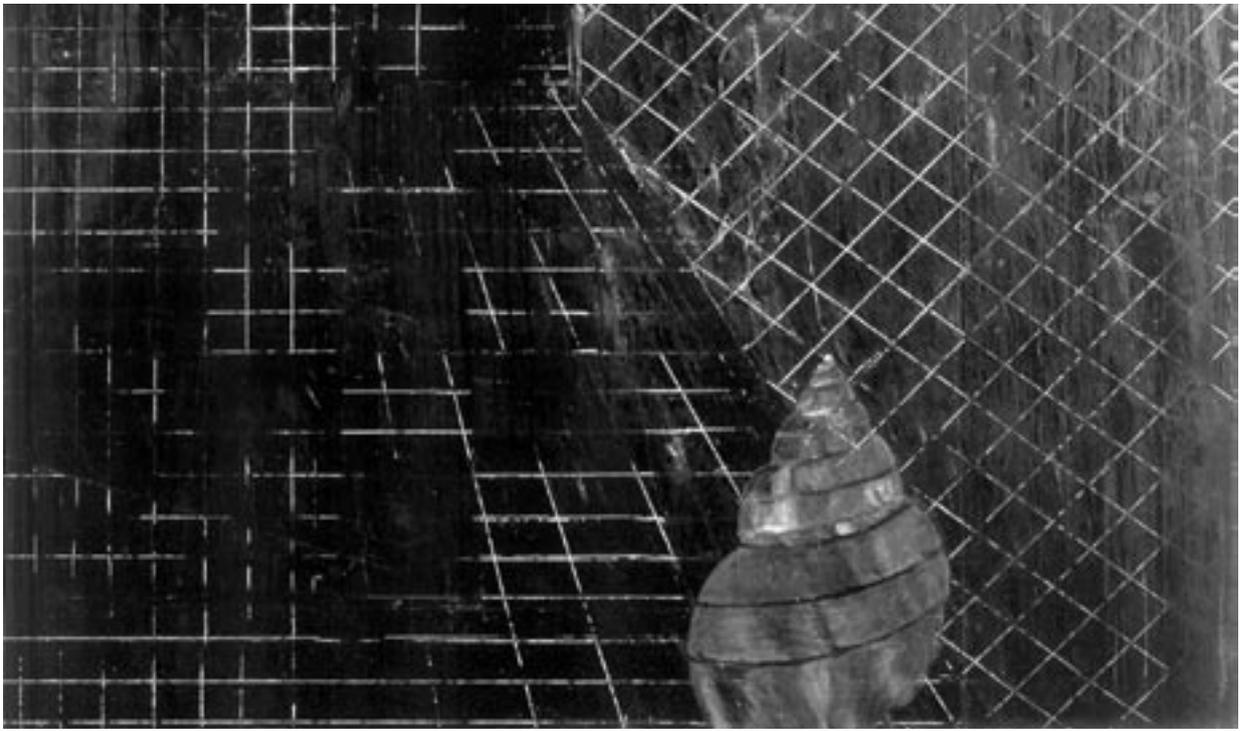
But what motivated the change from the dominant eighteenth-century understanding of collective existence in mechanical terms to the view of society and the political body as an organism? And what exactly did *organism* as the antonym of *machine* mean? In his account of the rise of German nationalism between 1795 and 1815, Friedrich Meinecke gives a laconic description of the transition:

Modern man now entered the political organism with the intent of conquering it. It was nothing new for men with modern attitudes to occupy positions of central authority; they were in evidence from the days of Emperor Frederick II in the Middle Ages to the Frederician age. But on the whole they had driven the state from the outside, as it were; guiding it as one would a machine. The reformers, on the contrary, wanted to possess the state, and infuse it with their blood.¹⁴

The historical situation referred to is the intervening years between the French Revolution and the formation of the German Confederation in the period of Napoleon's decline. During these years, Napoleon had invaded Germany, dissolved the Holy Roman Empire, and subjugated various territorial states including Prussia. This is the historical catalyst of the political reform of the absolutist state and German nationalism. Meinecke draws an analogy between the absolutist state and a machine, distinguishing its organization from that of a warm-blooded, living being. The organization of a machine happens from the top down, by a source that is external to it. In contradistinction, a living being is organized from within and is self-perpetuating. The reform of the absolutist state is seen as an attempt to transform a machine into a living creature, to impart it with the capacity of self-organization – that is to say, to give it organic life. The meaning of the term *organism* in Meinecke's metaphor of the state as a political organism mutates from that of a technical instrument to the completely opposite meaning of a non-artificial living being.

The discursive allusions and references signalling this paradigm change or rupture are necessarily dialectical and operate in two registers. First, in the philosophy of nature, which is not yet clearly divorced from the natural sciences, the study of living forms as phenomena that cannot be explained by efficient or mechanical causality represents a clear 'shifting of scenes' that sets new limits on the field and transforms its legitimate areas of inquiry. For the victory of the emergent epigenetic concept of life over preformationist theories meant that divine creation could no longer be a legitimate issue in the scientific study of the natural world.¹⁵ Second, the new idea of organism stimulated an equally revolutionary epistemic shift in political philosophy: the repudiation of the mechanistic model of the state that had been dominant since Hobbes. One reason the rationalistic aspect of the organismic metaphor of the political body often goes unrecognized is that most contemporary political theorists are unaware of the contemporaneous debates about organic life in the history and philosophy of the life sciences. For the moment, though, let us consider the shift in the register of political philosophy.

The use of the organism as an extended metaphor for the political body was first explicitly formulated by Kant in the 'Critique of Teleological Judgement' (1790, 2nd edn 1793). Prior to this, the political body was predominantly imagined in terms of the mechanistic models of the state and society that had succeeded the hylozoistic Aristotelian–Galenic tradition. In his formulation of the state as 'an artificial man', Hobbes



had been the first to characterize the political body in terms of the mechanistic framework of Descartes' description of the human body qua complex animal body as an automaton.¹⁶ For Hobbes, the artificial life of automata is an imitation by human art of the animal life created by a divine Artificer. The absolutist state or commonwealth, however, is produced when human art undertakes the even more ambitious attempt of imitating *human* life itself with its superior trait of reason. It is in this sense that Leviathan is an artificial man.¹⁷

One may identify three fundamental motifs in Hobbes's metaphor from which the more concrete features of the mechanistic model of the political body are derived. In the first place, the state is characterized by *hierarchy* since its relation to its members is said to correspond to the vertical relationship of subordination between an alien soul and bodily parts. Second, the commonwealth is *artificial* since the harmony of the political body is not given but is first established by the device of a social contract and has to be continually maintained by enlightened despotism. But finally and most importantly, to the extent that these political bonds replicate the soul–limbs relationship found in nature, artifice is itself a mimesis of nature. In other words, the mechanistic model of the state is premised upon the absence of a sharp distinction between the artificial and the naturally living.

Of course, there were vitalist conceptions of society and the political body predating the organismic model of German idealism that challenged the absolutist implications of the mechanistic model, especially in

the discourses immediately preceding and during the French Revolution. But, generally speaking, despite their egalitarian and progressive implications, these vitalist conceptions – unlike those of the second-generation French Romantics such as Renan and Michelet – remained within the mechanistic paradigm for at least three reasons. First, as Hegel among others pointed out, social contract theory was mechanistic since it presupposed that society and state were artefacts brought into being by an act of association which must, by definition, be prior and external to the collectivity that was formed. But more significantly, even though the living person was explicitly opposed to the machine-state, the life-process of the body politic was still conceived under principles of mechanical causality in so far as its source of movement was attributed to something (a soul) that was alien to the body parts in quality or substance. The important point here is not whether the corporate will is autocratic or formed through rational consensus: its mechanistic nature necessarily follows from the idea that it is different from and superior to the individual wills from which it is composed because it is thereby conferred the same intelligible principle of animation that is ascribed to the soul.¹⁸ (In contradistinction, in a genuinely organismic conception of the political body, the relationship between whole and parts can no longer be understood in terms of the relationship between soul and limbs because the parts are both cause and effect of the whole and not subordinate to it.) Finally, to the extent that the totality of nature was conceived as the creation of a divine artificer,

no genuine idea of organism and, hence, no genuine organismic conception of collective existence were possible. This is because in the original instance, nature itself is regarded as a product or creation of something else and not as self-creating.

In its inaugural formulations in German philosophy, the organismic metaphor of society and state is to be understood as a polemical response to the fundamental motifs of the mechanistic model. There were, of course, socio-historical conditions for its emergence: for example, the suitability of the organismic metaphor for expressing the strong desires for active political participation and political unity, and for greater identification of individuals with the state that were felt by the growing bourgeois stratum in the transition from an autocratic-administrative mercantilist state to a modern capitalist state.¹⁹ Here, however, I am more concerned with the *ideational* structure of the organismic metaphor and the philosophical work it was designed to accomplish.

For instance, in the hands of the Jena Romantics, with whom it is most frequently associated, the organismic metaphor was used to articulate a new concept of society that was opposed not only to the mechanical model of enlightened despotism but also to the modern civil society celebrated by theories of social contract and liberal individualism. *The Oldest Systematic Programme of German Idealism* denounced the state *per se* as inimical to freedom because it was nothing other than a machine, and championed its abolition: 'We must therefore go beyond the state! For every state must treat free human beings as if they were cogs in a machine; but that it should not do; therefore it should *cease* to exist.'²⁰ Novalis spoke of transforming the state-machine 'into a living autonomous creature', 'a poetic state' in which 'the unruliness of nature and the forced order of artifice would interpenetrate one another and be resolved into *spirit*'.²¹ Whereas the mechanical state of enlightened despotism is based on self-interest and is a state 'where the interests of the state were as self-centred as those of its subjects, yet where the interests of both are so artificially connected that they reciprocally promoted one another', the poetic state that Novalis has in mind is emphatically *not* a return to a brute state of nature.²² It is instead a spiritual state, an *organized* society that is bound together by the living ties of reason rather than the artifice of self-interested and calculative understanding: 'The drive toward society is the drive toward *organization*. Through this *spiritual assimilation* there often arises from the most common ingredients a good society centred around one spiritual individual.'²³ This

spiritual state is, in a word, an organism, a form of life higher than mere existence. Similarly, speaking of life as an approximation of the concept of freedom, Friedrich Schlegel points to the importance of a harmonious relation of the individual to the whole: 'we cannot consider human beings individually. The question of the vocation of man concerns, therefore, not the individual but the whole of humanity. We have constructed it as an *organic concept*. Practical philosophy should not construct therefore the ideal of an individual person, but the idea of the whole, of society.'²⁴

The common theme in all the above examples is the link between spirit as a concrete form of reason, freedom, self-perpetuating life, and the harmonious unity of individuals in a society in which their autonomy is preserved. As opposed to both the paternalistic state-machine and artificial modern bourgeois civil society, such a society is a rationally organized totality or living organic whole, which is a concrete approximation or even realization of freedom. The early conception of the organismic model of society therefore overturns all the key motifs of the mechanistic model. First, the hierarchical relationship of the different limbs of the individual human body to the soul or mind is replaced by a complete interdependence of parts and whole. Instead of receiving its movement from an alien source, the collectivity is self-animating. Instead of being subordinated to the government, each individual actively participates in its life just as the parts and whole of an organism mutually determine each other. Second, society is not formed by a contract for the pursuit of individual self-interest. It is instead a harmonious whole in which individual self-fulfilment and self-development are fostered through social interaction and co-operation. The community is held together not by external force and coercion, but by bonds that have the permanence of a higher nature. These are the rational bonds of spirit and all its products: art, philosophy and, more generally, culture. Culture in this sense is not necessarily territorially bound, even though for many Romantic thinkers it took the form of a culture of a nation or a people. Finally, such a society is not merely an imitation of nature but a higher form of life. As a self-originating being, its ends, its structure or form, and its development are internally prescribed and inseparable from its parts. In this respect, it transcends mere nature conceived as mechanism. Here, the term 'organism' sharply breaks with artifice and derivation for the first time in the history of philosophy.

One sees here how mistaken the caricature of Jena Romanticism as the purveyor of the theory of the organic state actually is. As Frederick Beiser points out, when Schlegel, Novalis and Schleiermacher articulated their ideal of organic community in the late 1790s at the height of their individualistic period, this was an organic theory of society in which the autonomy and unique self-development of the individual were actively cultivated. Indeed, as we see from *The Oldest Systematic Programme of German Idealism*, there was a strong anarchistic streak in the early Romantics, who thought that the state would be unnecessary to an ideal organic society and would wither away.²⁵

Freedom, culture and organism

But why exactly do the rational ideals of political morality find their most apposite expression in the organismic metaphor? Concomitantly, why is mechanism inimical to the rational ideal of freedom? What is an organism and in what manner of speaking is reason isomorphic with organic vitality? How are reason and organic life connected to freedom?

The significance of the organismic metaphor can only be properly understood if we see it as a braiding together of three fundamental philosophemes that emerged in late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century philosophy: a transcendental idea of freedom, the concept of culture and the idea of organism.

The idea of freedom is, of course, not original to German idealism. What was new was the conceptualization of freedom as a special power (*Vermögen*) of causality, a capacity for willing and acting, doing and making, through which rational beings could transcend the finitude or contingency of their natural existence. The canonical formulation of this transcendental idea of freedom, which is further developed and modified by Fichte, Hegel and others, belongs to Kant:

By freedom in the cosmological sense ... I understand the faculty [*Vermögen*] of beginning a state from itself [*von selbst*], the causality of which does not in turn stand under another cause determining it in time in accordance with the law of nature.²⁶

But this auto-causality that characterizes transcendental freedom contradicts causality according to natural laws, which demand that every occurrence must have a cause that must in turn have a prior cause. Hence, Kant adds that freedom can only be comprehended when 'reason creates the idea of a *spontaneity*, which could start to act from itself, without needing to be preceded by any other cause that in turn determines it to action in accordance to the law of causal connection.'²⁷

Now, in the entire post-Kantian idealist tradition, moral and political freedom are derived from and grounded on the transcendental idea of freedom. This is why mechanism is inimical to freedom. The laws of causality governing nature defined as the totality of appearances dictate that each thing or happening must have a prior cause within the linear succession of time. Such laws are characterized as mechanical in analogy with the fundamentally dependent nature of a machine. For not only is nature as the world of senses a mechanism in the sense that the movement of its different parts exhibits blind necessity or a predetermined regularity that can be expressed through mathematical formulae. More importantly, no part of nature is self-sufficient because no occurrence or movement is possible that is not caused by something else, just as no automaton can operate without being first set in motion by something other, and no moving machine can work without being connected to an external source from which it takes its energy.

The spontaneous self-causality of freedom is thus defined in opposition to mechanical causality. Kant suggests that without this other kind of causality, no moral autonomy would be possible since 'freedom in the practical sense is the *independence* of the power of choice [*Willkür*] from *necessitation* [*Nötigung*] by impulses of sensibility.'²⁸ If our chosen actions are determined by sensuous impulses, we are no better than machines because such impulses are part of the blind necessity of nature. In contradistinction, the moral will belongs to a self-determining being, an autonomous subject whose actions are determined by its own universal reason rather than by some source external to itself. Such a being would be self-originating and an end-in-itself to the extent that it would contain the ground of its own existence qua practical being within itself, a ground which would moreover possess universal validity or rational necessity. It is because the moral will exhibits the same spontaneous auto-causality characterizing transcendental freedom that 'the abolition [*Aufhebung*] of transcendental freedom would also simultaneously eliminate all practical freedom.'²⁹

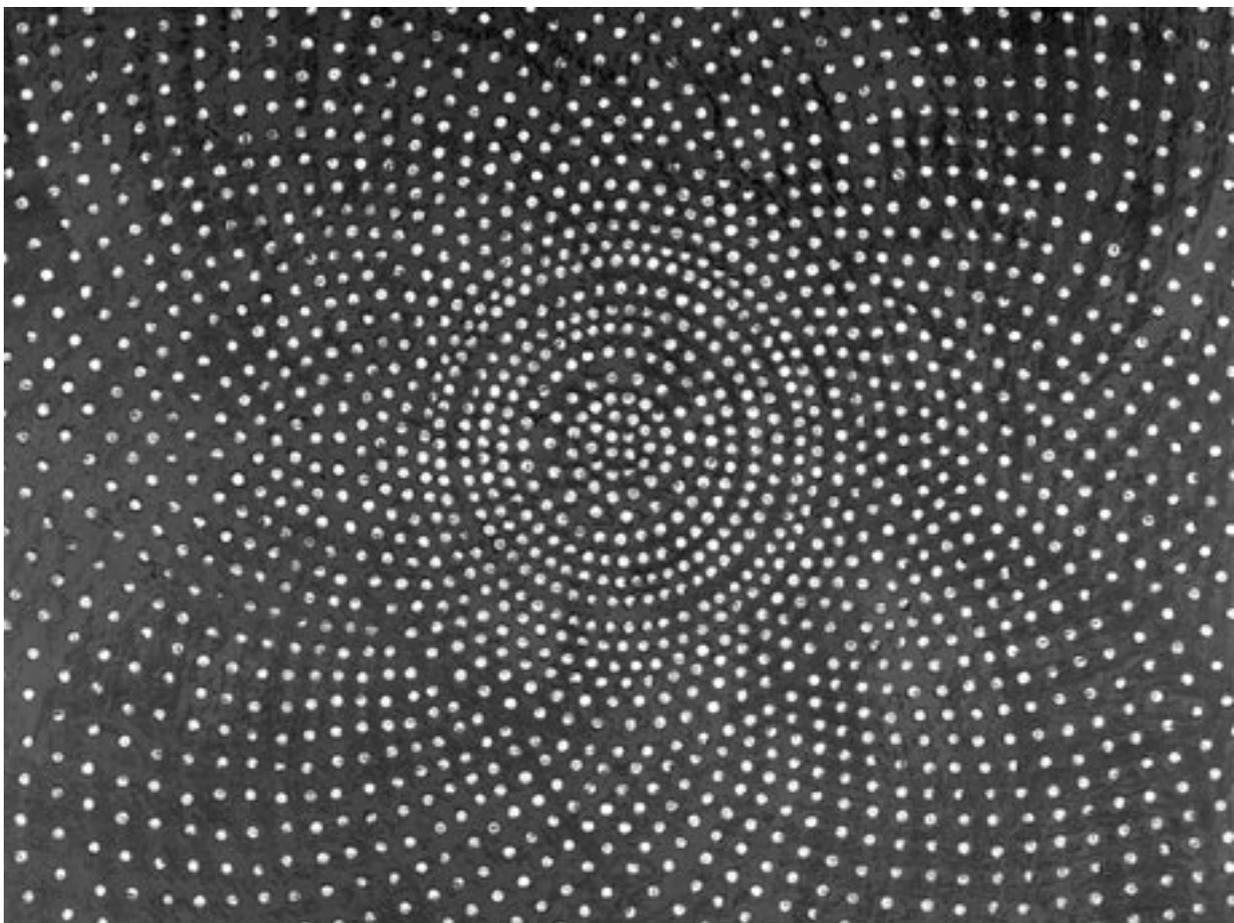
In these and related passages from the First and Second *Critiques*, what is juxtaposed to mechanism is freedom and not organism. However, because the causality of freedom lies beyond spatio-temporal conditions, it is 'outside' the sensible world of experience. The transcendental idea of freedom therefore logically leads to the problem of how this causal power can be manifested or can have effects in the empirical world in which we live. Put another way, how can freedom operate or work in the world that appears to us?

Since practical freedom is linked to the causality of reason, what is broached here is precisely the ability of reason to incarnate or realize its ideals. Phrased in this way, the problem has implications beyond the corpus of German idealist political thought. For, as I have already noted, any normative theory of the political must be concerned with this very question of how rational ideals can be made real. Something more than a rigid neo-Platonic distinction between the existing world and an ideal condition is implied in the modern conception of freedom, for the distinction between the ideal and the real can and must be crossed in so far as the ideal of freedom must be regarded as something that is capable of being realized. Conversely, one must regard the existing world as something that can be transformed in accordance with a rational–universal image.

The transcendental idea of freedom articulated in German idealism merely brings out in the profoundest relief the central paradox of the modern conception of freedom. In more general intellectual-historical terms, this understanding of freedom arose in the wake of the separation of mechanism from human reason effected by the Newtonian/Cartesian predication of the natural or material world as the sum totality of objects governed by arational mechanical laws. For in order that humanity can be free from the constraints and dictates

of natural necessity, the world of mechanism must first be sundered from the sphere of human reason, to the point that they become regarded as two ontologically distinct realms. Henceforth, freedom is precisely what is not or cannot be blindly determined or given by something else – for example, past events that are part of the mechanism of nature. Freedom is, first and foremost, freedom from the given. The paradox of modern freedom is that it is self-grounding. Its crisis, however, is that in order to be realized, the sphere of human freedom must somehow be reconciled with or conjoined to the arational world of mechanism from which it was constitutively sundered.

The modern philosophemes of culture and organism, which emerged at around the same time, became invaluable for articulating a response to the problem of the actualization of freedom. Both concepts shared a striking situational or conjunctural affinity: they were formulated in reaction to the impact of industrial modernity and were therefore opposed to mechanism in a more concrete sense. It has been argued that the theory of mechanism is a symptom of an industrial age and reflects its various features: the life of early industrialism with its use of simpler kinds of machines such as the automaton and the clock; the nascent capitalist economy and the individualistic norms of its rising bourgeois class; and the subsequent specializ-



ation and division of labour required by the expansion of manufacture that led to the dismemberment of a product into its component parts.³⁰ By extension, the harmonious unity of parts and whole in the modern idea of organism appears as the displaced figuration of a desired solution to the vicissitudes of industrial society – the decline of communal spirit as a result of the atomistic pursuit of selfish interests and socio-economic division.

The concept of culture likewise arose in response to the shock of modernity. The philosophy of culture also sought to be a corrective to the mechanistic understanding of the world and the entropy of civil society – factors that caused the accelerated erosion of time-honoured traditions and customs that had been the integrative powers holding societies together. The institutions, skills and spiritual powers of culture were seen as a shelter from and antidote to the vaporizing forces of civil society under conditions of industrial capitalism. Although the division of labour was crucial for technical and social progress, and hence also important for the advancement of the outer aspects of culture such as urbanity and civility, and for the autonomization of the cultural sphere itself, the occupational specialization of individuals in civil society and its direct consequence, the division of society into socioeconomic classes with special functions, had stunted human development, fragmented and separated the powers of the human personality, and hence had dismembered the social character of humanity and degraded its vocation for freedom. If the regulation of society was left solely to the modern centralized state or the self-regulating market, the end result would be ‘civilized barbarism’.³¹ The intense preoccupation with *Bildung* in the late eighteenth century was an attempt to remedy this etiolation of humanity without lapsing into a Rousseauistic idealization of the state of nature.

The concepts of culture and organism thereby became interconnected, most notably in the use of the term *Bildung* to refer to processes of human cultivation as well as organic forms. This locution was popularized by Goethe and the two concepts were used to elucidate each other. Alloyed to the more abstract anti-mechanism of the transcendental idea of freedom, these concepts formed the basis for the organismic metaphor of the social and political body.

The problematic of culture is expressed through a series of cognate terms that include, most notably, *Kultur*, *Bildung*, *Aufklärung*, *Erziehung* and *Geist*. The basic meaning of culture (*Kultur*) as the individual-pedagogical process of cultivation was formed through

a metaphorical extension of cultivation as agrarian activity (the Latin *cultura*) into the educational task of the ethical and intellectual development of the mind or the soul. Thus, *Bildung* is often linked to *Erziehung* and used to refer to processes of training, development, education and formation.³² This was already implied by the term’s religious roots in German mystical discourse of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance and in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Pietism. The process of spiritual forming (*bilden*) involved the remaking or transforming of the soul into the picture or image (*Bild*) of God through individual activity.³³ An objectivational moment was thus always a fundamental part of *Bildung* because it involved the creation of an object that corresponded to an ideal model. When the term was secularized in the Enlightenment and used as a synonym of *Kultur*, *Bildung* designated the inner-directed formation of an individual in the image of a personality prescribed by moral norms. Its product was, in the first instance, the resultant state of mind or the way of existence of the cultivated or moral person. But the incarnational dimension of *Bildung*, the causality of which was self-reflexive and belonged to a spiritual or metaphysical plane, was gradually extended to objects in the external world in such a way that one could speak of a world of *Bildung*, a world of spiritual works that played a fundamental role in the education of humanity to full maturity and the furthering of universal progress because such objects could evoke and stimulate a similar spiritual activity in the minds of other perceivers.

For present purposes, what is most significant is that the incarnational power of culture – its mode of causality – suggests that it can be a crucial agent in the realization of freedom. In its individual-pedagogic dimension, the philosopheme of culture already establishes an internal link between autonomous rational effort and the shaping of some naturally given ground into cultivated form. This ability of rational endeavour to transform and improve *human* nature implies that humanity possesses a degree of freedom from nature in general because it cannot be understood in terms of efficient or mechanical causality. In the process of *Bildung*, the ideal form is not separate from the process and resulting product in the same way that a model is separate from its copy. A model is temporally prior to and external to the copy, which is a reproduction or duplication of the original that can be brought into being by mechanical means. In *Bildung*, however, the form is simultaneously a dynamic forming. *Bildung* is a rational or inner-directed process that we undertake or submit ourselves to precisely because it brings

out and develops natural dispositions or capacities (*Naturanlagen*) that are already in us. Thus, although it has a regulative-normative function, the ideal form to be stamped on us also inheres in and is coextensive with the material and process of production from which it is inseparable.

The peculiar nature of *Bildung*'s causality lies in the fact that the inseparability of the ideal form from the process of its materialization is a spontaneity that cannot be captured by linear mechanical causality. Thus, although *Bildung* takes place in the sensible world, it is also a spontaneous process of auto-causality through reason. As we will see, precisely because the inherent dispositions/capacities that *Bildung* is supposed to bring out are not preformed instincts or innate knowledge, *Bildung* can only be explained in terms of the spontaneous auto-causality of an organism.

When the process of *Bildung* is extended to the external world and is used to designate the realm where ideal forms materialize as external objects with a reality or life independent of the contingent circumstances of their creation, this world of objectified mind or spiritual being (*geistige Sein*) is seen as exhibiting the same spontaneous auto-causality. Because they are stamped or imprinted by spiritual-rational activity, these objects are de-materialized or idealized. Consequently, they become the portals admitting an individual subject into the world of *Bildung*. When they stimulate or revive a similar spiritual or formative activity in the minds of their perceivers, they do not do so as external objects but, instead, as an integral part of an eternally ongoing process of spiritualization and formation.

Culture has therefore been regarded as the process and realm of the transcendence of finitude in at least two senses. In the more obvious sense, it is the inheritable works and accomplishments of earlier generations that endure or live on beyond the finite life-span of mortal individuals and can therefore preserve for posterity the significant achievements of humanity with the hope of reawakening or resurrecting these ideals in succeeding generations.³⁴ But more importantly, these inherited works can reinspirit us because they are objectifications of universally valid norms. Because these norms are not just blindly given by tradition but need to be rationally justified through time in the face of changing conditions of existence, they can be used to guide us as rational self-determining beings in our activity of remaking ourselves and the world. It is in this sense that Ernst Cassirer speaks of culture qua symbolic activity as the process by which the finite existing world is transcended:

'Human culture taken as whole may be described as the process of man's progressive self-liberation. Language, art, religion, science, are various phases of this process. In all of them man discovers and proves a new power – the power to build up a world of his own, an "ideal" world.'³⁵

Consequently, culture in its utopian face is often described as an objective reality that is superior to nature, a realm in which humanity overcomes nature through reason. For Kant, the advance of culture will undermine the state of nature 'until art, when it reaches perfection [*vollkommene Kunst*], once more becomes nature – and this is the ultimate goal [*letzte Ziel*] of man's moral destiny'.³⁶ Similarly, Hegel suggests that 'after the creation of the natural universe, man appears on the scene as the antithesis of nature; he is the being who raises himself up into a second world.... The province of the spirit is created by man himself; and whatever ideas we may form of the kingdom of God, it must always remain a spiritual kingdom which is realised in man and which man is expected to translate into actuality.'³⁷

This recurring theme of culture as a second, higher nature underscores the unique combination of autonomous transformation and stability that characterizes the realm of culture and its causality. Culture is simultaneously like and unlike nature. It is similar to nature in the sense that it is an objective realm. But it is opposed to nature because it works upon nature and seeks to transform it. However, for this transformation to be more than arbitrary change, the objective world of culture must consist of products embodying ideas with universal validity. In other words, unlike the senseless regularity of the mechanism of nature, actions in the realm of culture must be governed by rationally binding ideals. But, unlike the purposiveness of a meaningful cosmos which is predetermined by an ultramundane force, these ideals must issue from and express the self-determining character of human reason. In its transcendence of nature, culture becomes a second or higher nature, a nature that has been spiritualized. This is why *Bildung* is rigorously distinguished from mere civilization, which is concerned with external, sensuous or material refinement. It is precisely this autonomy of culture qua incarnational power and spiritualized nature that makes it a phenomenal analogue of the spontaneous auto-causality of freedom in the transcendental sense. This is why Kant, Fichte, Hegel, as well as Schiller, Humboldt, Herder and the early Romantics, saw cultural education (*Bildung* or *Kultur*) as important to progress and freedom, and, more specifically, to the political state.

Indeed, some of them regarded education as the state's most important task.

My point here is not only that these philosophers and thinkers, who were shocked by the atrocities and violence of the French Terror, regarded spiritual education as an essential precondition for fundamental change that would establish political freedom, preparing the people for freedom by instilling in them social responsibility, civic virtues and a knowledge of public affairs. These are, of course, concrete aims and consequences of *Bildung*, but the issue here is the philosophical valence accorded to these aims in view of the fact that political freedom is derived from transcendental freedom. In other words, *why* did these philosophers see *Bildung* as a prerequisite for achieving (political) freedom? Because of the similarity between the causality of *Bildung* and transcendental freedom. Far from being a retreat from the political, as we commonly assume today, far from being superstructural or secondary to the realm of the political, culture – as the normative process whereby humanity can transform itself and external reality through the prescription of purposive forms, and the realm where human interaction is ordered according to laws and norms prescribed by collective reason – actually supplies the ontological paradigm for the political. This is why, after having characterized *Kultur* as ‘the ultimate and highest means to ... [man's] final goal [as a rational sensuous creature]: complete harmony with himself’, Fichte goes on in his *Lectures concerning the Scholar's Vocation* to proclaim that ‘the true vocation of the scholarly class is the supreme supervision of the actual progress of the human race in general and the unceasing promotion of this progress’ and that ‘it is the vocation of the scholar to be the *teacher* of the human race’.³⁸ Similarly, Novalis defines the relationship between the state and the people as fundamentally cultural–pedagogical in nature:

Politics. The need of the state is the most pressing need of a person. To become and remain a person one has need of a *state*.... A person without a state is a savage. All culture springs from the relationship of a person with the state. The more cultivated one is, the more one is the member of a cultured state.³⁹

The ontological primacy of culture to the political is not an antiquated feature of German idealism, but its enduring legacy to contemporary ethical and political thought. For in so far as it is a fundamental axiom of any modern ethico-political theory that the political involves the transcendence of what is merely given, *the political is by definition a species of spiritual or cultural activity*. Heidegger is thus entirely correct to

say that in modernity ‘human activity is conceived and consummated as culture’ and that ‘it lies in the essence of culture ... to become the politics of culture’.⁴⁰ But in a desacralized world where mechanical causality is the primary mode of causality immediately governing nature, including human nature, how can the incarnational causality of cultural activity be concretely understood? The emergent concept of organism became aligned to culture because organic life forms were natural phenomena that could not be explained solely in mechanical terms. Yet there is an intrinsic or thematic connection between the concepts of culture and organism over and above this extrinsic conjunctural affinity. The autonomous and, indeed, autochthonous character of culture means that like organic life forms as conceived by epigenetic theory, culture is self-impelling, self-producing and self-generating. Culture as a second, higher nature was therefore logically connected to the newly articulated functioning of the organism as a natural purposive being.

Epigenesis

The emergent modern idea of organism was first formulated in late-eighteenth-century biological theory as a polemical response to the mechanistic, preformationist and early vitalist theories of organism that succeeded the Aristotelian understanding of life. Preformationism had sought to address two major deficiencies in neo-Cartesian accounts of organic life: the inability to solve the problems of how a body-machine could be self-moving, and how the complex organization of functional parts found in living bodies came into existence in the process of generation. Although it was possible, with some difficulty, to explain automatic movement by recourse to the art of the motor, the attempt to derive the complex formation of organic beings from movement and the combination of material particles through collision was far less plausible. The idea of the living body as an organized whole that is more than the sum of its parts was, of course, already present in Aristotle. In the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it was rearticulated in the concept of ‘organism’ as a semantic substitute for the soul ‘in order to explain how systems composed of distinct components nevertheless work in a unified manner to perform a function’, where the reciprocal relations between the components were such that ‘the word “part” seemed ill-suited to denote the “organs” of which the organism could be seen as the “totality” but not the “sum”’.⁴¹ Preformationists such as Charles Bonnet and Albrecht von Haller offered a solution to mechanistic accounts of the organism by appealing to

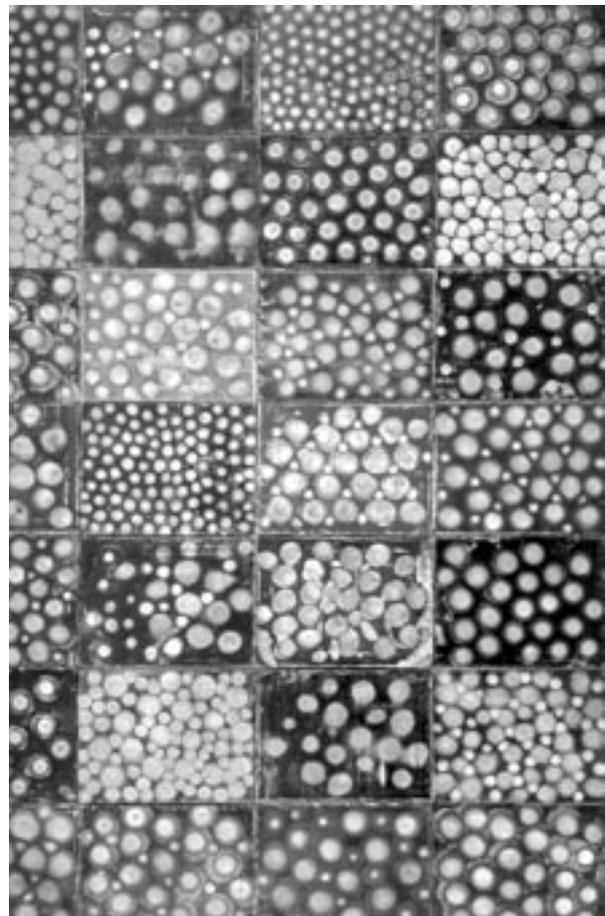
the implicit teleological presuppositions of Cartesian mechanism, which they articulated into a theory of *evolutio*, according to which the successive appearance of anatomical formations (morphogenesis) is seen as the gradual unfolding or geometrical development of a preexisting germ and its latent structures.⁴² One could even say that according to preformationism, nothing is generated by nature!

The causality of the formation of living beings is, in the preformationist view, teleological. But this purposiveness is not *of* the organism or *proper to it*, for unlike the Greek *physis*, which is self-moving and self-generating, its origins are in a divine maker beyond the natural world. Consequently, unlike Aristotle's idea of the soul, which is also the form and actuality of the organic body and governs the generation of new organic beings, the final cause is no longer united to the efficient cause. Because it evacuates physical nature of any purposiveness, preformationism is resolutely mechanistic in the broader philosophical sense, although in the history of biology it is regarded as opposed to purely mechanistic and materialist explanations of life. Moreover, as Canguilhem points out, the organism is in this view also a machine because every facet of its formation and its subsequent activity adheres strictly to the blueprint of the original germ from which it is geometrically derived.⁴³

In contradistinction, epigenesis is, by its name, a theory of spontaneous generation that regards the formation of living beings as 'essentially a matter of the apposition of material particles moved by the forces dwelling in matter'.⁴⁴ It argues that anatomical formations could not be geometrically derived from a preformed germ and that a mechanism of formation had to exist that could organize simple unorganized matter into complex organic forms. But although modern epigenesis broke with the finalist presuppositions of preformationism, its earlier proponents such as Buffon, Maupertuis and Wolff (who argued that organic forms arose out of the combination of various seminal and nutritional fluids) were nevertheless forced to appeal to a soul-like, intelligible mechanism of formation such as affinity, which was loosely based on Newtonian attraction, or a *vis essentialis*. Yet, it was unclear how such simple mechanical forces, which were moreover mysterious and unobservable, could give rise to the complex systematicity of organic structures and their unending development from simple elements. Thus, although these early epigenetic theories enabled generation to be conceived as a self-contained and self-causing process, the autonomy thereby accorded to living nature was only a limited one since, like

preformationism, they also emptied nature of purposiveness. In preformationism and earlier versions of modern epigenesis, the organism remains within a mechanistic framework and is not fundamentally different from a machine.

The significance of Blumenbach's vitalist theory of epigenesis, initially formulated in 1781, was that it enabled an understanding of a living being as an internally organized complex structure or totality capable of auto-construction, auto-maintenance, auto-regulation, auto-repair and auto-genesis; in brief, as a natural organism that was sharply distinguished from an artificial machine. Blumenbach argued that a living body was created by a *Bildungstrieb* or formative force/drive which was in turn responsible for the body's continuing regeneration: 'in all living creatures, there is a particular, innate, lifelong, active, effective force [*Trieb*] that confers a determinate form, afterward preserves it, and when this is deranged, where possible, restores it'.⁴⁵ Blumenbach cautioned that *Bildungstrieb* was a name by which we could understand a group of observable *a posteriori* effects and not a principle that explained the final cause of generation – namely why, and for the sake of what ultimate end, these effects took place. Nevertheless, from a broader philosophical perspective, it is precisely a purposive causality within vital processes, a sort of



final causality that is constitutive of and immanent to the organism. On the one hand, to the extent that one can observe regular harmony in vital processes such as fertilization and morphogenesis, organisms exhibit a purposiveness and therefore possess a causality that is more than the mechanism of nature (i.e. mechanism in the broader sense). On the other hand, this purposive causality does not issue from a divine hand since no preformed germ can be detected in seminal fluids prior to fertilization. Instead, this causality is spontaneously generated from within the organism. Being subject to physical conditions which act as external stimuli, the organic form can undergo deviations as a result of changes in these conditions.⁴⁶

The organism is a self-organizing being that is the cause of its own motility and self-perpetuation. This immanent purposiveness means that organic processes are liberated from divine preformation. Blumenbach's theory of epigenesis can thus be seen, as James Larson suggests, as the counterpart of the declaration of human rights in the sphere of organic nature, 'a declaration of the rights of nature in the name of rational science' that 'opposed the prejudice of immutability in the world of living forms and treated nature as an autonomous power, pursuing, by means of her own forces, the continuities of her own development'.⁴⁷ Henceforth, the organism is sharply distinguishable from the machine in at least three respects. First, whereas a machine cannot construct or repair itself and therefore always presupposes a fundamental dependence on a creator external to it to give it purpose and movement, an organism is self-forming. It grows and develops from within with reference to an end that immanent in its own nature. Second, a machine is merely the sum of its parts whereas an organism is a totality or whole that is greater than the combination of its organs. The organs coexist and are intrinsically related to the whole with which they form a harmonious unity. Finally, despite its immanent purposiveness, an organism exhibits greater variability in its activity than a machine because its causality is more vulnerable to changes in surrounding conditions. Life is aleatory.

But in addition to differentiating sharply between nature and artifice, this definition of a living form as a spontaneously self-organizing being also enforced a more important distinction within nature: the ontological distinction between the living and the non-living as two different kinds of being. As Michel Foucault points out, from the period 1775–95,

The organic becomes the living[, that] ... which produces, grows, and reproduces; the inorganic is

the non-living, that which neither develops nor reproduces; it lies at the frontiers of life, the inert, the unfruitful – death. And although it is intermingled with life, it is so as that element within it that destroys and kills it.⁴⁸

As the opposite of death, life, according to Xavier Bichat in 1800, 'is the collection of functions that resist death'.⁴⁹ Life is therefore a power that transcends finitude, albeit momentarily.

Politics

The analogy between culture and organism had a special significance for German idealist philosophy. The organism is quite literally the basis of culture and a teleological view of history, for the analogy was elaborated into an organismic conception of nature as a self-organizing whole, a system of purposes that historically culminates in the world of culture. Because the purposiveness of culture/organism are natural analogues of the spontaneous auto-causality of transcendental freedom, they provided the basis for the hope or conviction that freedom was actualizable in the otherwise blindly mechanical world of nature. As Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy point out, Kant's attempt to bridge the gulf between nature and freedom is distinctly organismic-cultural:

the resolution was envisaged in the *Darstellung* of the 'subject' by means of the Beautiful in works of art (the formation of *Bilder* able to present liberty and morality analogically), by means of the 'formative power' (*bildende Kraft*) of nature and life within nature (the formation of the organism), and finally by means of the *Bildung* of humanity (what we retain under the concepts of history and culture).⁵⁰

Understood within the philosophical framework of its genesis, the organismic metaphor of the social and political body accrues a more progressive and rationalistic genealogy. At the very least, one ought to regard it with less cynicism, as more than an irrational reactionary myth in the initial moment of its formulation. If it is a myth, then it is a myth of enlightened reason itself (double genitive), with all the dialectical contradictions implied by such a statement, after Adorno. The organismic conception of culture was transferred directly to the ideal form of society or political body, which is viewed as an organism for two reasons. In the first place, the undesirable sociopolitical formations to which it was counterposed – either the bureaucratic state of enlightened despotism or civil society – had been repeatedly described as machines. But, more importantly, in so far as the ideal

collective is regarded as both the material condition for optimum self-cultivation and the highest ideal and product of *Kultur* or *Bildung*, its functionings are by nature organismic.

Broadly speaking, the relationship between individual, society and state is characterized by the same immanent purposiveness and harmonious unity of an organism: on the one hand, the individual can only fully develop his or her powers within the collective. On the other hand, society and the state can only achieve optimal stability and growth through the inner development of the individual. Only if both conditions are fulfilled can the collective and the individual be considered as a self-organizing whole and end in itself. To be sure, the ontological dimension of the organismic metaphor of the social and political body intersects in complex and interesting ways with the socio-historical context of its enunciation. In this regard, one can mention the increasing uneasiness about the impact of complex machines on the character of life under industrial capitalism. But it is the ontological moment that has greater priority in German idealism. The state or society as organism signifies refuge from the atomism of industrial modernity because it is, in the first instance, an analogue for the spontaneous auto-causality of transcendental freedom. Put another way, the destabilizing forces of industrial modernity are a manifestation of the blind mechanism of nature, and the freedom offered by the collective qua organism is essentially the inner-worldly transcendence of this finitude – that is to say, immanent transcendence.

The idea of immanent purposiveness put forward by modern theories of the organism is undoubtedly connected to the increasing use of ‘immanentist’ principles in nineteenth-century political philosophy, recognized by Carl Schmitt among others.⁵¹ Once it came into being, the organismic metaphor of the social and political body was deployed in a variety of political philosophies, idealist and materialist, republican or despotic, monarchical or democratic, and even socialist and anarchist. It was used to characterize various forms of territorialized or deterritorialized political community such as the nation, the state, a cosmopolitan world-federation, or a global community of labourers. The multiple forms that the organismic metaphor can take indicate once more that it is not *inherently* pathological or reactionary as is commonly assumed when we focus on some of its less salutary instantiations: for example, the connection between theories of the *Kulturnation* or late Romantic theories of the state and the violent history of German nationalism. Indeed, it is arguable that in their description of the cultural nation or the

state as an eternally unchanging primordial totality that functions as a genetic principle throughout history, such theories espouse *preformationist* rather than epigenetic ideas. However, my intention is not to excuse these aberrations, but to suggest a different way to account for them. Instead of dismissing them as irrational, we need to link them to the rationality of the organismic metaphor itself.

Notes

1. Ernest Renan, ‘What is a Nation?’, trans. Martin Thom, in Homi Bhabha, ed., *Nation and Narration*, Routledge, London and New York, 1990, p. 19.
2. See, for instance, H.S. Reiss, ed., *The Political Thought of the German Romantics 1793–1815*, Macmillan, New York, 1955, Introduction, p. 8. Cf. C.L. Wayper, *Political Thought*, Philosophical Library, New York, 1954, pp. 40, 247.
3. Renan, ‘What is a Nation?’, pp. 19, 20.
4. For the elaboration of these claims see my forthcoming *Spectral Nationality*. For an account of the persistence of the idea of the ‘body politic’ in the twentieth century in bourgeois-democratic as well as fascist forms, see Mark Neocleous, ‘The Fate of the Body Politic’, *Radical Philosophy* 108, July/August 2001, pp. 29–38.
5. See Hans Kohn, *Prelude to Nation-States: The French and German Experience, 1789–1815*, Van Nostrand, Princeton NJ, 1967, p. 124. Cf. Reiss, *The Political Thought of the German Romantics*, who suggests that Fichte suffers from a lack of realism as a result of the German historical setting (pp. 11, 21); and Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1992, pp. 309–10, 314, 325–6.
6. For example, Hans Kohn’s views on the irrationality of the organismic metaphor are especially confused and contradictory when he discusses Hegel. Having argued that the Romantics saw the nation-state as ‘an organic personality, God’s creation like the individual himself, only infinitely greater and more powerful and the fountainhead of all individual life’, he goes on to note that ‘though ... Hegel ... was not a romanticist but a rationalist, his concept of the state [as the Divine Idea existing on earth] resembled that of the romanticists’ (*Nationalism: Its Meaning and History*, Van Nostrand, Princeton NJ, 1955, p. 35). But the most obvious oversight is the fact that Kant, who is held out as the philosopher of critical reason and liberal individualism by these detractors of the idea of organic community, was the originator of the idea.
7. Thus, Liah Greenfeld creatively amends an English translation of Friedrich Schlegel’s Athanaeum Fragment # 366 (‘Understanding [*Verstand*] is mechanical, wit is chemical, genius is organic spirit’) by substituting ‘reason’ for ‘understanding’ as the appropriate translation of *Verstand* in order to argue that the organic spirit is the polar opposite to reason. See *Nationalism*, pp. 335, 543–4 n. 114.
8. See Reinhold Aris, *History of Political Thought in Germany from 1789 to 1815*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1936, p. 294. Cf. Aira Kemiläinen, *Nationalism: Problems Concerning the Word, the Concept and Classification*, *Studia Historica Jyväskyläensia* III, Kustantajat Publishers, Jyväskylä, 1964, p. 112.
9. Karl Mannheim, *Conservatism: A Contribution to the*

- Sociology of Knowledge*, trans. David Kettler and Volker Meja, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London and New York, 1986, p. 56. This text was originally Mannheim's *Habilitationschrift* of 1925; it was only published in full in German in 1984, after his death. See also 'The History of the Concept of the State as an Organism: A Sociological Analysis', in Karl Mannheim, *Essays on Sociology and Social Psychology*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1953.
10. Mannheim, *Conservatism*, p. 66.
 11. *Ibid.*, p. 142.
 12. Mannheim, 'The History of the Concept of the State as an Organism', p. 172. This theme of 'yes, philosopher X is a rationalist, but still too metaphysical' is repeated in Mannheim's reading of Hegel as a dynamic rationalist. See *Conservatism*, especially pp. 154–5. Hegel would pose problems for Mannheim's characterization of organicist thought as irrational mysticism. Interestingly enough, Mannheim's unfinished text breaks off just as he begins to elaborate on his reading of Hegel.
 13. Frederick C. Beiser, *Enlightenment, Revolution, and Romanticism: The Genesis of Modern German Political Thought 1790–1800*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, 1992, p. 8. Beiser suggests that the myth of the apolitical German originates in Madame de Staël's classic, *De l'Allemagne*.
 14. Friedrich Meinecke, *The Age of German Liberation, 1795–1815*, trans. Peter Paret and Helmuth Fischer, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1977, p. 45.
 15. See Nicholas Jardine, *The Scenes of Inquiry: On the Reality of Questions in the Sciences*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1991, p. 53 (discussing the impact of the epigenetic scheme of Kant–Blumenbach for natural history).
 16. For Descartes' comparison of animate bodies to a clock and hydraulically operated automata, see *Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting One's Reason and Seeking the Truth in the Sciences*, Part V, in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, Volume I, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff and Dugald Murdoch, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1985, pp. 139–41; and 'Treatise on Man', in the same volume, at p. 99.
 17. Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1981, pp. 81–2.
 18. For example, in Abbé Sieyès's famous definition of the nobility in *Qu'est-ce que le Tiers État?* as 'a people apart, a false people which, unable to exist by itself for lack of useful organs, latches on to a real nation like those vegetable growths which can only live on the sap of the plants they exhaust and suck dry' (quoted in Greenfeld, *Nationalism*, p. 172), the model of the body politic as nation is clearly that of a giant human body, a supreme cause that is more powerful than its parts, on which a parasite is attached.
 19. See Aris, *History of Political Thought in Germany*, pp. 292–3. Like most intellectual historians, Aris links the organismic metaphor to the Romantics. He is scathing about its lack of philosophical rigour because he sees it as an uninformed application of a scientific idea in the sphere of politics for tendentious reasons.
 20. Anon., *The Oldest Systematic Programme of German Idealism* (1796/97), in Frederick C. Beiser, trans. and ed., *The Early Political Writings of the German Romantics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1996, p. 4. *Das älteste Systemprogramm des deutschen Idealismus*, in Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Werke I: Frühe Schriften*, ed. Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 1986, pp. 234–5.
 21. Novalis, *Mixed Remarks*, no. 122, in *The Early Political Writings of the German Romantics*, p. 84, emphasis added.
 22. Novalis, *Faith and Love* (1798), no. 36, in *ibid.*, p. 45.
 23. Novalis, *Pollen* (1798), no. 59, in *ibid.*, p. 19, emphasis added.
 24. Friedrich Schlegel, *Philosophical Lectures: Transcendental Philosophy* (Jena, 1800–1801), Part II, excerpted in *ibid.*, p. 156, emphasis added.
 25. It is true that the organismic metaphor was developed by later German Romantics such as Adam Mueller into a conservative theory of the state. Yet, as Beiser emphasizes, unless we are blinded by anachronism, 'what the organic concept meant to Mueller in 1808 was not what it meant to Friedrich Schlegel, Schleiermacher, and Novalis in 1798' (Beiser, *Enlightenment, Revolution, and Romanticism*, pp. 226–7, 238).
 26. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997, A 533/B 561.
 27. *Ibid.*
 28. *Ibid.*, A 534/B 562, emphasis added.
 29. *Ibid.*, A 534/B 562.
 30. See, for instance, Mannheim, 'The History of the Concept of the State as an Organism', p. 169. But see Georges Canguilhem's criticisms of Franz Borkenau's argument that there is a direct link between the mechanistic reduction of the world to quantitative relations and mathematical calculation and the bourgeois concept of abstract social labour and the reduction of value to economic value, in 'Machine and Organism', trans. Mark Cohen and Randall Cherry, in Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter, eds, *Incorporations*, Zone, Cambridge, 1992, pp. 50–51.
 31. The phrase 'civilized barbarism' is from Agnes Heller, 'Culture, or Invitation to Luncheon with Immanuel Kant', in *A Philosophy of History in Fragments*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1993, p. 137.
 32. *Erziehung* refers more narrowly to the process of education and training that is imposed by a person or group on another and implies socialization, whereas *Bildung* can also be used to refer to a process of self-formation, to the form (*Bild*) that is imparted in such a process, and to the results of self-cultivation.
 33. See György Markus, 'Culture: The Making and the Make-Up of a Concept (An Essay in Historical Semantics)', *Dialectical Anthropology* 18, 1993, pp. 3–29, p. 15.
 34. See W.H. Broford, *Culture and Society in Classical Weimar, 1775–1806*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1962, p. 5.
 35. Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture*, Yale University Press, New Haven CT, 1944, p. 228.
 36. Immanuel Kant, 'Mutmasslicher Anfang der Menschengeschichte', *Werkausgabe* XI, (Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main, 1968) p. 95; 'Conjectures on the Beginning of Human History', *Political Writings*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991, p. 228.
 37. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Introduction: Reason in History*, in *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, trans. H.B. Nisbet, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1975, p. 44. Cf. pp. 48, 50, 97.
 38. Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Early Philosophical Writings*, trans. and ed. Daniel Breazeale, Cornell University

- Press, Ithaca NY, 1988, pp. 150, 172, 174.
39. Novalis, *The Universal Brouillon: Materials for an Encyclopaedia* (1798–99), no. 394, in *The Early Political Writings of the German Romantics*, p. 88.
 40. Martin Heidegger, 'Age of the World Picture', *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt, Harper & Row, New York, 1997, p. 116.
 41. Georges Canguilhem, *A Vital Rationalist: Selected Writings*, ed., François Delaporte, Zone Books, New York, 1994, pp. 81–2.
 42. For a succinct account of preformationism and epigenetic challenges to it between 1745 and 1790, see James L. Larson, *Interpreting Nature: The Science of the Living Form from Linnaeus to Kant*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore MD, 1994, ch. 5. My thanks to David Bates for alerting me to this study. This otherwise fine study is not alert to the mechanistic underpinnings of preformationism. Peter McLaughlin, *Kant's Critique of Teleology in Biological Explanation: Antinomy and Teleology*, Edwin Mellen, Lewiston, 1990, pp. 8–24, offers a more philosophically nuanced reconstruction of the theory of organism in the mid-eighteenth century. See also Helmut Müller-Sievers, *Self-Generation: Biology, Philosophy, and Literature around 1800*, Stanford University Press, Palo Alto, 1997, ch. 1.
 43. Canguilhem, 'Machine and Organism', p. 58.
 44. Larson, *Interpreting Nature*, p. 161.
 45. J.F. Blumenbach, *Über den Bildungstrieb und das Zeugungsgeschäfte*, quoted in Larson, *Interpreting Nature*, p. 159. See also Nicholas Jardine, *The Scenes of Inquiry*, pp. 22–8.
 46. See Larson, *Interpreting Nature*, pp. 159–60. Larson makes the interesting point that the causality of the *Bildungstrieb* is indicated by the passive voice.
 47. *Ibid.*, p. 133. Cf. Jardine, *The Scenes of Inquiry*, p. 33. See also Michel Foucault's comment that 'from Cuvier onward, living beings escape, in the first instance at least, the general laws of extensive being; biological being becomes regional and autonomous; life, on the confines of being, is what is exterior to it and also, at the same time, what manifests itself within it' (*The Order of Things*, trans. Alan Sheridan, Vintage, New York, 1973, p. 272).
 48. Foucault, *The Order of Things*, p. 232.
 49. Quoted in Canguilhem, *A Vital Rationalist*, p. 69.
 50. Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute: The Theory of Literature in German Romanticism*, trans. Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester, SUNY Press, Albany NY, 1988, p. 32.
 51. See, for instance, Caro Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab, MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1985, pp. 49–52. Similarly, Jean-Luc Nancy points out that communitarianism (including communism) and individualism are both based on figures of human immanence or humanity as an absolute end-in-and-for-itself, whether it is 'man made equal to himself or to God, to nature, and to his own works' (*The Inoperative Community*, trans. Peter Connor, Minnesota University Press, Minneapolis, 1991, p. 13).