

ONE

TWO CONCEPTS OF INDIVIDUALITY

I) Friedrich Schleiermacher: The Divided Self

IN THE SECOND EDITION of *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, which appeared in 1806, Friedrich Schleiermacher proclaimed a categorical, though compelling, definition of the human condition:

Both the transient actions and the permanent dispositions of the human soul show that it exists as only two opposing drives [*Trieben*]. Pursuing one of them, it strives to establish itself as a unique and separate being. To accomplish this, to expand itself no less than to sustain itself, it draws its surroundings to itself, weaving them into its life and absorbing them into its own being. The opposing drive is the dread fear of standing as a single individual alone against the whole; it is the longing to surrender and be completely absorbed in it, to feel taken hold of and determined by it.¹

The conflict within the self that Schleiermacher described here seems clear enough. On the one hand, each person desires to be an individuated being, separate from everything (and everyone) else, and unique; on the other, each desires to lose his or her individuality and be absorbed into everything else. Yet the formulation raises immediate questions even if its generality is disputed and it is regarded as merely the projection of its author. Why should the human soul contradict itself so radically? Why should the same being that wishes to maintain its unique individuality and even expand it to incorporate the universe wish simultaneously to dissolve itself into the universe and disappear? And there is yet another contradiction that Schleiermacher did not note. Individual particularity is by definition finite, because it is delimited by its difference from others. If, however, the self tries to expand by a constant absorption of the world into itself, its tendency is to become infinite and hence to obliterate its individuated identity. It follows that the two ostensibly opposite drives aim at the same thing, though by opposite means. Both aim not at individuality but at the infinity of the self, the one by absorbing everything into itself, the other by dissolving itself into everything.

To compound these puzzles, the corresponding passage in the first edition of *On Religion* from 1799 seems to have a quite different, indeed opposite, thrust. It too speaks of a conflict of drives, one of which is described in precisely the same terms as in 1806—the drive to maintain and expand individuality by incorporating the external world. But the second

drive is described as the self's longing "to expand from its inmost self outwards into the world, and so to permeate everything with itself, to share of itself with everything, and never to be exhausted . . . [I]t wants to penetrate everything and fill everything with reason and freedom."² The systolic and diastolic, or masculine and feminine, movements of absorption and penetration certainly represent a polarity of passive and active relationships to the world, but in the end they are both modes of mastering the world. The self first makes the world its own by discovering the world's objective qualities and possibilities, absorbing what it has learned about reality and metabolizing its knowledge in its own unique way; it then moves outward to modify the world in accordance with the creative synthesis it has made of what it has internalized.

The difference between the two passages clearly indicates that some change had taken place in Schleiermacher's thinking about the self between 1799 and 1806; by 1806 he was well on his way to the "feeling of absolute dependence" that would define the quintessential religious experience fifteen years later in *The Christian Faith*. Yet the change is not as radical as it first appears. The contradictions of 1806 between self-assertion and self-surrender are also present in the work of 1799–1800. If the desire to surrender was openly acknowledged as being in direct conflict with individuality only in 1806, it was no less explicitly described in chapter two of the first edition of *On Religion*, in the image of the self merged in a fantasy of ecstatic union with the whole. At certain moments of love and wonderment, Schleiermacher wrote, something, whether person or natural scene, is mysteriously but affectively transformed for the individual into a representation of the whole universe: "As the beloved and always sought after image [*Gestalt*] forms itself, my soul flies to meet it, and I embrace it not as a shadow but as the holy being itself. I lie in the bosom of the infinite world; I am in this moment its soul, for I feel all its powers and its infinite life as my own. It is in this moment my body, for I penetrate its muscles and its limbs as my own, and its innermost nerves move as much in accord with my meaning and intention as do my own" (*Religion*, 254–55). Further on, what has been simply description of ecstatic merger becomes advocacy of total surrender, characterized in the same terms as in 1806. Addressing those who would seek personal immortality in this life, Schleiermacher appealed, "Try out of love for the universe to surrender your life. Strive here to annihilate your individuality and to live in the one and all; try to be more than yourself, so that you lose little when you lose yourself" (*Religion*, 289). And this self-annihilation seems to be in absolute contradiction not only to the idea of individuality defined earlier in the text, but to its much fuller exposition the following year in the companion piece to *On Religion*, which Schleiermacher regarded as his most important contribution to the theory of personality and to ethics. "Each human being," runs the famous manifesto in

the *Soliloquies*, “should represent humanity in his own way, combining its element uniquely, so that it may reveal itself in every mode, and all that can emerge from its womb be realized in the fullness of infinity.”³

A closer look, however, reveals that in 1799–1800 Schleiermacher saw no fundamental contradiction between the idea of individuality and the idea of union with the “one and all.” The fusion of the soul with the beloved produces not self-loss but a sense of personal mastery through the soul’s identification with its object and the appropriation of the object’s powers: “I lie in the bosom of the infinite world; I am in this moment its soul, for *I feel all its powers and its infinite life as my own. It is in this moment my body, for I penetrate its muscles and its limbs as my own*” (italics added). The rhetorically elegant and powerful passage repeats in its structure the reciprocity of the symbiosis it evokes. The world’s infinity becomes the self, the self’s intentions animate the world. The “religious” experience of self-annihilation seems not only compatible with the sense of the individuated self’s active mastery of the universe, it is the vehicle for it.

But Schleiermacher also derived the paradoxical relationship between individuality and infinity in a way that does not depend on a perhaps rare experience of ecstatic fusion. The infinite is potentially available to consciousness in the phenomenology of everyday life, in the common experience of enjoying a particular activity as an end in itself. “Whoever . . . can . . . resolve to do and to promote some particular thing for its own sake with all his strength cannot help but recognize other particular purposes as things which can also be undertaken for their own sakes and which have a right to exist. . . . This recognition of the alien and annihilation of what is one’s own, which obtrudes on consciousness everywhere, the simultaneous love and contempt for everything finite and limited, which such recognition demands, is not possible without a dim intimation of the universe and must necessarily bring with them a clear and definite longing for the infinite” (*Religion*, 309–10). The intimation of the infinite is given precisely in our appreciation of limited particular ends. Through the recognition that our enjoyment of the particular activities we have chosen lies in the unalienated activity they allow us, we can appreciate similar passions in others for very different kinds of things. Such a recognition frees us from the limitations of our own narrow preoccupations, enabling us to enter into other, potentially infinite, activities and states of mind. In this case, the way to the universe, to the sense of infinity, is dependent on individuality itself, on our passion for self-fulfillment, for the secret of authenticity is empathy, and hence infinity.

The organic link between individuality and infinity is also part of Schleiermacher’s more detailed exposition of the concept of individuality in the *Soliloquies*, though it is less immediately apparent. Here individuality

has many of the apparently unproblematic features commonly assumed in the contemporary, ordinary language meaning of the term. To be a unique self means above all that one's behavior is governed by one's own ideas and impulses. Suiting method of exposition to content, Schleiermacher offered his own development as an example, negative in this instance, recounting how his late-awakened spirit had long borne the "alien yoke" of his Pietist education and had remained ever fearful "lest it be subjected again to the domination of alien opinion" (*Soliloquies*, 40–41). The lesson he derived from his early life in fact constitutes the peroration of the book: "[W]hatever you become, let it be for its own sake. A stupid self-deception to think that you ought to want what you do not want! . . . Attempt nothing unless it proceeds freely from a love and desire within your soul. And let no limits be set upon your love, whether of measure, of kind or of duration! It is, after all, yours; who can demand it of you? Its law is wholly within you; who has to command anything?" (*Soliloquies*, 101–2).

To be unique, however, means not only to be authentic to oneself but to be different from everyone else, an arduous task because the price of uniqueness is eternal vigilance: "[O]nly if he requires himself to survey the whole of humanity, opposing his own expression of it to every other possible one, can he maintain the consciousness of his unique selfhood. For contrast is indispensable to set the individuality in relief" (*Soliloquies*, 32). Such differentiation might even demand, as it had demanded for Schleiermacher himself, an initial antagonism toward new points of view represented by others, at least until the individual has worked each new idea through for her- or himself (*Soliloquies*, 41). Finally, individuality requires that each individual integrate all his or her varied experiences into a harmonious whole in order to create an internally consistent individual personality. It is of particular interest in the light of contemporary poststructuralist theories of language and text that Schleiermacher posed the issues of originality and self-integration in terms both of language and of art. Language, he implied, might indeed consist of a conventional stock of signifiers, but from them selections could be made and orchestrated to produce an original harmony expressive of a unique self: "Each of us need only make his language thoroughly his own and artistically all of a piece, so that its derivation and modulation, its logic and its sequence exactly represent the structure of his spirit, and the music of his speech has the accent of his heart and the keynote of his thought" (*Soliloquies*, 66).

Important as these features of individuality are in the *Soliloquies*, however, they are not yet its essence. Schleiermacher's concept of individuality ultimately derives from a variety of sources: Pietism, German Enlightenment and neoclassicism, the cultural particularism of Herder, the idealist philosophy of Kant and Fichte, Hemsterhuis's Platonism,

Garve's ideas of communicative sociability. In the *Soliloquies*, however, he chose to simplify his intellectual ancestry and present his idea of individuality in both its filiation from and its opposition to Kant. This choice was historical, ideological, and tactical. To the younger generation of the *gebildete Stände*, Kant was the seminal thinker of the age, the originator of the modern philosophy of human autonomy, and the uncompromising ethicist who had posed, but failed to resolve, the problem of achieving the highest good, the reconciliation of morality and happiness. He was also the thinker who had first introduced Schleiermacher to modernity and liberated him from the stifling Pietism of his earliest education. For Schleiermacher to take on Kant was not only to take on his intellectual progenitor but to take on the challenge of offering a counter-ethic to the most imposing intellectual structure of his time.⁴ It was also, however, to situate himself within Kantian values and concepts, which meant that his countervision had to satisfy the two essential Kantian demands of freedom and universality.

What Schleiermacher had found liberating in Kant's philosophy was the Idealist notion that the world as experienced was as much the product of internal categories of apprehension as it was of external determinants, indeed more. "[W]hat I take to be the world is the fairest creation of spirit, a mirror in which it is reflected. . . . All those feelings that seem to be forced upon me by the material world are in reality my own free doing; nothing is a mere effect of that world upon me" (*Soliloquies*, 16–17). The most important Kantian demonstration of freedom was in the realm of morality. Kant had shown that true morality was autonomous rather than heteronomous because the concept of "duty" entailed the idea of an imperative imposed on the self by itself in the name of reason rather than a command imposed from the outside in the name of authority. This imperative was necessarily the same for all human beings; its only logically consistent form was a universal law that demanded that all persons be treated as ends in themselves. In this way rational morality reconciled the diverse goals of free individuals. "For a long time," Schleiermacher related, "I . . . was content with the discovery of reason alone" (*Soliloquies*, 30). But at some point something changed for him. Just what, and when, he did not say, but the result was that he came to find the Kantian notion of rational moral autonomy inadequate (*Soliloquies*, 31). For although the moral law was unquestionably free because it was self-imposed, its form as universal law meant that "there is but a single right way of acting in every situation, that the conduct of all men should be alike, and that people differed from one another only by reason of their different situations and places. I thought humanity revealed itself as varied only in the diversity of outward acts; the individual human being was not a uniquely fashioned being but only an exemplar of the universal [*ein*

Element] and everywhere the same" (*Soliloquies*, 30). The individual differences that constituted one's uniqueness, that is to say, were not a matter of free will. In the Kantian conception, individual impulses and desires were part of a person's biological nature and hence belonged to the realm of determinism rather than freedom; the behavior they produced was determined, like all natural events, by causal force. Freedom was an idea of reason suggested only in the experience of obligation, which entailed both the concept of a general law and the notion of an ability to choose to act according to it. The free individual was thus free only in his or her moral capacity, as universal human being; in his or her particular identity, the individual was not free and therefore not truly human. But precisely this sense of freedom, Schleiermacher complained, "gave no meaning to my personality, nor to the peculiar unity of the transient stream of consciousness flowing within me" (*Soliloquies*, 31). Rational freedom was not enough if it dismissed the most intimate sense of personal selfhood as meaningless.

In good Kantian terms, however, unique individuality could have "meaning" only if it could be understood both as an expression of individual freedom and as a source of ethical value, in other words if it had a universal, as well as a particular, dimension. This was the ultimate challenge for Schleiermacher because for a Kantian, particular desires and the acts they motivated were in principle unfree as well as egotistical. Schleiermacher's solution to the problem of freedom was to combine two different ideas: the notion that a genuinely individual choice was a choice of *shared* elements of humanity, hence *universal*, but also a genuine *choice*, hence *individual*, because of the possibility of its negation: the person could imagine doing other than he or she in fact did. "Whenever I now act in keeping with my own spirit and disposition, my imagination gives me the clearest proof that I do so by free, individual choice, in suggesting to me a thousand other ways of acting in a different spirit, yet also consistent with the universal laws of humanity" (*Soliloquies*, 33). Negation was the important new element in Schleiermacher's post-Kantian thinking about freedom, one fraught with great consequences. It introduced the idea of the infinity of the self because in order to be free, the self could not be identified with any of its actual choices and dispositions. In principle it was necessary for freedom that the self always have the potential to negate any, and hence all, of its actual choices.

Schleiermacher, however, did not think of the infinity of the self as a mere negative potentiality, as the essential but hypothetical indeterminacy that was the condition for the possibility of freedom. Even as mere infinite potential, of course, the self had no predetermined bounds; it was infinite because in thought at least it was never identical with, never fully exhausted by, its concrete choices and determinations, no matter how

many. But Schleiermacher went beyond the idea of pure potentiality to posit a drive in the self to realize, to make actual, its infinite nature. “What I aspire to know and to make my own is infinite and only in an infinite series of attempts can I completely fashion my own being. The spirit that drives man forward, and the constant appeal of new goals, that can never be satisfied by past achievements, shall never depart from me. It is man’s peculiar pride, to know that his goal is infinite, and yet never to halt on his way, to know that at some point on his journey he will be engulfed, and yet . . . to make no change either in himself or in his circumstances” (*Soliloquies*, 96–97).

Individuality, then, was the aspiration to the most complete freedom; but it was also the highest form of ethics. It was, according to Schleiermacher, not only compatible with the welfare and development of all humankind but a prerequisite for it. Since each individual could realize only an infinitesimal of humanity’s potential, the fullest possible development of each was necessary if the goal of the full development of humanity was to be seriously pursued. Moreover, the free development of each was at least contributory to, and perhaps even the very condition of, the fullest free development of all. This belief is the heart of Schleiermacher’s sketchy social-theoretical ideas in the *Soliloquies*, in particular of his notions of the three core social relationships—friendship, marriage, and citizenship. “As soon as I have genuinely appropriated anything new in respect to culture and individuality, from whatever source,” he wrote of friendship, “do I not run to my friend in word and deed to let him know of it, that he may share my joy, and himself profit as he perceives understandingly my inner growth? My friend I cherish as my own self; whatever I come to recognize as my own, I place straightway at his disposal” (*Soliloquies*, 44). Even more importantly, individuality was the foundation of his idea of love, which he saw as both the ultimate precondition and the finest product of individuality:

The highest condition of one’s own perfection in a limited sphere is a sense for the general [*allgemeiner Sinn*]. And how can this exist without love? Without love, the very first attempt at self-formation would be shattering because of the frightful disproportion between giving and receiving; without love, the spirit [*Gemüt*] that would want to become an authentic being would be driven to extremes, and either be wholly broken or else would sink into vulgarity. Yes love, you gravitational force of the world! Without you no individual life and no development is possible; without you everything would dissolve into a crude homogeneous mass. Those who don’t want to be more than that don’t need you; for them, law and duty suffice, uniformity in conduct and in justice. . . . No development without love, and without individual development no perfection in love; each completes the other, both grow only indivisibly. (*Soliloquies*, 38–39)

Love individualized, while desire was everywhere the same; yet in its very essence directed towards an idealized other, it also universalized the self.

Individuality was thus for Schleiermacher the basis of the most perfect sociability. When each was concerned to foster the individuality of the other, recognizing how his or her own individuality benefited from such concern, a common will was produced that was something more than the homogeneity of consensus, where “each makes sacrifice of his individuality to suit the other, until they become alike, but neither like his true self” (*Soliloquies*, 57). This pluralism was the premise of Schleiermacher’s attack on the minimal state posited by liberalism, whose purpose, as he saw it, was merely negative and defensive, the protection of the narrowest kind of homogeneous individualism—material self-interest. People were not wrong in thinking that they needed such a state in modern society, since accumulation was an inherently antagonistic activity. Not only did such an association fail to be truly ethical, however, it did not foster true individual freedom either. “All . . . is concentrated on this one end: increase in outward possessions or in knowledge, aid and protection against fate or misfortune, stronger alliances to keep rivals in check. This is all that men nowadays seek and find in friendship, marriage and fatherland; they do not seek what they need to supplement their own efforts toward self-development, nor enrichment of the inner life” (*Soliloquies*, 60).

What has become of the fables of ancient sages about the state? Where is the power with which this highest level of existence should endow mankind, where the consciousness each should have of partaking in the state’s reason, its imagination, its strength? Where is the devotion to this new existence that man has conceived, a will to sacrifice the old individual soul rather than lose the state. . . . The present generation . . . believe[s] that the best of states is one that gives least evidence of its existence, and that permits the need for which it exists to be least in evidence also. Whoever thus regards the greatest achievement of human art, by which man should be raised to the highest level of which he is capable as nothing but a secondary evil, as an indispensable mechanism for covering up crime and mitigating its effects, must inevitably sense nothing but a limitation in that which is designed to enhance his life in the highest degree. (*Soliloquies*, 58–59)

Despite these arguments, however, there are many indications throughout the essay of Schleiermacher’s awareness that his concepts of individuality and community are not mutually entailed, indeed are perhaps not even wholly compatible with one another. “Freedom,” he pointed out, “finds its limit in another freedom”; and while those limits actually defined the very idea of human community, they were nonetheless imposed

on the individual from the outside on an original freedom that knew no limits in and of itself: "Outside us is necessity, a chord determined by the harmonious clash of various inner liberties that thus reveal themselves. Within me I can behold nothing but freedom" (*Soliloquies*, 18; translation slightly modified). The native internal standpoint of an individuality that was primarily concerned with its own self-development meant that often in fact and always in theory the contribution of individuality to the community was secondary, a by-product of its action rather than an original intention: "If the purpose of my actions is to shape what is human in me, giving it a particular form and definite characteristics, thus contributing to the world by my own self-development and offering to the community of free spiritual beings the unique expression of my own freedom, then I see no difference whether or not my efforts are at once combined with those of others and some objective result immediately appears to greet me as part of the world order. My efforts have not been in vain, if only I myself acquire greater individuality and independence, for through such development I *also* contribute to the world" (*Soliloquies*, 20; italics added). The first concern of individuality was itself.

Above all, however, the notion of the infinite aspirations of the self brought the concept of individuality into direct contradiction with Schleiermacher's understanding of the interdependence of community and individuality. The latter rested on the self's acceptance of its limitations or finitude; such acknowledgment made the quest for infinity or universality a cooperative, communal enterprise. To the degree that each individual was driven by a personal striving for infinity, no matter how realistically chastened by the awareness of death, that individual was brought into a very different relationship with others. Necessarily, his or her infinitely tending self-expansion encroached upon that of others, as of course did theirs upon him or her. Individuality turned from a venture of cooperation into the same kind of competitive conflict Schleiermacher had scorned in the accumulation of wealth: "[T]he sphere occupied by each sets a limit to the rest, and they respect it only because they are not able to possess the world individually" (*Soliloquies*, 59). At points, moreover, the conflict between individuality and sociability becomes even more glaringly evident, as in Schleiermacher's insinuation that the self's infinity is not only an aspiration but an achieved and achievable reality: "[I]n the future as in the past I shall take possession of the whole world by virtue of inner activity" (*Soliloquies*, 82). This puts a different light on his notion that love and patriotism were both the finest social result of individuality and its very conditions: the beloved and the fatherland not only fostered individuality but tamed it by embodying the totality that the self appropriated as its own through devotion to them. The *Soliloquies* of 1800 thus present the same contradiction in the conception of individual-

ity as *On Religion* of 1799, with lover and country substituting for divinity: on the one hand, the image of the self striving for a personal infinity, on the other, the image of individuality dependent on a whole greater than the self.

II) Wilhelm von Humboldt: The Whole Man

The peculiarities of Schleiermacher's concept of individuality can be brought into sharper focus by comparing it with that of Wilhelm von Humboldt, Schleiermacher's generational peer and fellow Prussian. In 1791–92, nine years before the publication of the *Soliloquies*, Humboldt had written a book in which the ideal of individuality was explicitly advocated as a personal ethic for perhaps the first time. The manuscript was not published in Humboldt's lifetime, though a number of its chapters did appear in contemporary German periodicals in 1792; in any case, Schleiermacher had other means of access to Humboldt's ideas because he frequented the same Berlin salons in the late 1790s that Humboldt had attended in the 1780s. In a passage that would subsequently become famous in the English-speaking world through its citation by John Stuart Mill in *On Liberty*, Humboldt wrote, "The true end of man, that which is prescribed by the eternal and immutable dictates of reason, and not suggested by vague and transient desires, is the highest and most harmonious development of his powers to a complete and consistent whole. . . . [T]hat on which the whole greatness of mankind ultimately depends—towards which every human being must ceaselessly direct his efforts . . . [is]: individuality of energy and self-development."⁵ The possibility of uniqueness and its harmonious development had two essential preconditions—freedom of action and "a variety of situations" in which to exercise it (*Limits*, 16). Humboldt's appeal to the "eternal . . . dictates of reason" points to the same Kantian pressures behind Schleiermacher's insistence that individuality be the foundation of universal ethic. Humboldt too made individuality the source of a tie that binds human beings together rather than one that isolates them within their own egos: "[I]n all stages of his life, each individual can achieve only one of those perfections which represent the possible features of human character. It is through a social union, therefore, based on the internal wants and capacities of its members, that each is enabled to participate in the rich and collective resources of all the others. . . . [It creates] a union formative of individual character" (*Limits*, 17). Schleiermacher's and Humboldt's conceptions of individuality would thus appear to be much the same. Yet precisely because of this, the differences are all the more striking and crucial. Some of these differences might seem a matter of style or emphasis, Hum-

boldt's dryness and objectivity, his rational mode of argument and his historical concerns contrasting with the warmth and confessional subjectivity of Schleiermacher's exhortations. But the stylistic differences are also an expression of differences in substance.

Humboldt, for example, was much less concerned to celebrate the sheer uniqueness of individuality than was Schleiermacher. Not that he excluded it, of course, since uniqueness partly defines individuality. But where Schleiermacher emphasized individual differences and the somewhat combative need to resist alien influence, Humboldt stressed a more inner-directed, less comparative feeling of authenticity. There is nothing in *The Limits of State Action* corresponding to Schleiermacher's complaint that Kant's universalist ethics gave no meaning to *his* unique personality, nothing in general of the autobiographical referentiality of the *Soliloquies*. Humboldt wrote instead of the importance of freedom of action as a necessary condition of genuine selfhood because only that which comes from free choice enters into a person's very being; otherwise it remains alien to him or her and is performed with at best mechanical exactness but without genuine desire and spirit. Perhaps oddly for an ethic of individual diversity, the personal "I" does not seem very significant in Humboldt's work; there is an impersonality both in the tone of his argument and in the articulation of the concept.

The other side of this absence of subjective voice is a conceptual difference that clearly cannot be thought of as simply a matter of texture and personality. Unquestionably the goal of individuality for Humboldt was to a degree quantitative, as it certainly was for Schleiermacher. Diversity was part of his definition of the "whole man," not just in man's external situations but within the self; Humboldt's goal was for each person to develop the fullest range of his faculties. But Humboldt specifically eschewed the idea of infinity. His true individual did not aspire to it. It is precisely because no one human being could develop and perfect every faculty that individuality could be the foundation of a social ethic for Humboldt. Schleiermacher made the same conceptual move from individuality to sociability, but Humboldt was more consistent and less conflicted on the compatibility of the two goals because he did not have the same ambitions for individuality as did Schleiermacher.

In Humboldt's version of individuality, internal harmony and unity were at least as important as freedom, authenticity, and diversity, if not more so. His stress was on integrating apparently antithetical or ill-consorting human faculties and desires. In particular, Humboldt's insistence that sensuousness was natural, hence good, encapsulated *his* version of the struggle with Enlightenment, and specifically Kantian, rationalist morality. Fervently committed to a Kantian ideal of moral perfection knowable and realizable through reason alone, he nonetheless felt that

to make it an exclusive goal betrayed a one-sided and arid understanding of human nature. "The impressions, inclinations, and passions which have their immediate source in the senses . . . constitute the original source of all spontaneous activity, and all living warmth in the soul. . . . Energy appears to me the first and unique virtue of mankind" (*Limits*, 71–72). If, however, Humboldt was here attacking Kant's absolute formal separation of duty and desire and his privileging of duty, it was through Kant's aesthetics that he thought to rectify Kant's ethics. "When the moral law obliges us to regard every man as an end in himself," he argued, "it becomes fused with that feeling for the beautiful which loves to animate the merest clay, so that even in it, it may rejoice in an individual existence" (*Limits*, 72). "It is only the idea of the sublime which enables us to obey absolute and unconditional laws, both humanly, through the medium of feeling, and with god-like disinterestedness, through the absence of all ulterior reference to happiness or misfortune" (*Limits*, 77). Abstract concern for human beings as ends in themselves and objects of duty did not need to be and should not be divorced from emotional concern and love for particular individuals; the disinterested recognition of beauty or sublimity in them made it possible to have feelings for them without the selfishness and desire for personal gratification that necessarily inhered in passion and desire. The main problem for Humboldt's "whole man" was to achieve a balance of reason and feeling, to be able to be concerned simultaneously both for the abstract and for the particular: "his nature should always be developing itself to higher degrees of perfection and hence . . . especially his powers of thought and sensibility should always be linked in their proper proportions" (*Limits*, 79).

Not only is there no invocation of Schleiermacher's infinity of striving in this notion, Humboldt explicitly rejected it. He made the point in the discussion of a topic most significant for a comparison of the two men, religion. The initial purpose of the discussion was to argue that striving for moral perfection did not depend on a belief in divinity. Humboldt understood and sympathized with the desire of the heart, moved by a vision of beauty, to go beyond the limitations of what thought could legitimately claim to know and to imagine an infinite creative Being. But the less speculative way of critical thought yielded more certain, if less spectacular, results, and Humboldt asserted that "man is often compensated for the loss of the drunken exaltation of hopeful anticipation, by a constant consciousness of the success of his attempts not to allow his attention to wander away into infinity" (*Limits*, 62). Humboldt conceded that the idea of perfection in beauty approached the notion of an "absolute, unlimited totality," but questioned whether it was necessary to believe that it entailed such a notion (*Limits*, 62–63). In any case, however, he emphatically believed that such a notion was antithetical to individuality itself,

insofar as such a totality was held to be incarnated in the idea of a “wise order” preserved among an infinite number of diverse and even antagonistic individuals by a divine being. Those for whom individuality seemed more sacred than order, he argued, preferred a system in which “the individual essence, developing itself out of its own resources, and modified by reciprocal influences, itself creates that perfect harmony in which alone the human heart and mind can find rest” (*Limits*, 62). Although it can be argued that there was inconsistency in Humboldt’s own thinking—how, for example, did he conceive the possibility of “perfect harmony” within open-ended diversity without at least some notion of a “limited totality”—he was not tempted by the idea of totality at all, and indeed feared it as the opposite of freedom, because he could not conceive it except as an order created and sustained by something external to the self. For Schleiermacher the exact opposite was true. As Martin Redeker notes, “Individuality is not merely particular existence. If it were that, it would be determined and not really free. . . . [T]he individuality of Schleiermacher’s self-intuition is the organ and symbol of the infinite.”⁶ Although Redeker’s language here is fuzzy, the important point is that the connection Schleiermacher made between infinity and individuality was integral, not simply one of feeling but, as we have seen, a deduction of the conditions of the possibility of individuality from the experience of it.

The second major difference between the two paradigms of individuality is that Humboldt’s was rooted in political and social considerations apparently peripheral to Schleiermacher’s essential concerns. And to the extent that Schleiermacher’s concept of individuality did have political implications, they were in crucial respects almost the diametric opposite of Humboldt’s political ideas.

Humboldt attributed the origins of his ideal of the “whole person” to classical antiquity. The ancients devoted their attention to the “harmonious development of the individual man, as man” (*Limits*, 12); they were concerned to develop all human faculties—intellect, moral sense, passion and imagination—and to integrate them into an unconflicted whole. Modern individuals and modern government, by contrast, were primarily concerned with material happiness, with comfort, prosperity, and productivity. But Humboldt’s contrast between ancient and modern was not a simple antithesis of good and evil. For the ancients, the development of the whole person was the means to an end, the creation of the virtuous citizen. The youth of the republics of antiquity were subjected to a systematic communal education in order to subordinate them to communal life. Regulation and interference were directed at the “inner life of the soul” rather than at outward behavior only, so that the restrictions im-

posed on freedom in the ancient states were in important respects more oppressive and dangerous than in modern times; all the ancient nations betray a “character of uniformity” (*Limits*, 12) because they produced homogeneous rather than diverse personalities. Although, according to Humboldt, the modern individual’s social circumstances were much more limiting in the range of personal qualities they promoted than classical civilization was, with the result that the idea of the whole person was sacrificed in modern times, the individual in a modern commercial society was formally less restricted than was the individual in the ancient city-states of Greece and Rome. There was less legal and institutional pressure to conform to a specific pattern of behavior; laws and regulations governed property rather than character, and it was therefore possible for an individual to struggle against the limits and constrictions of his external environment with his internal resources. The ideal of human development then, according to Humboldt, was to combine the ancient desire to cultivate the whole person with the modern values of individual liberty and privacy.

Even without any reference to specifically political issues, this analysis of individuality was more fully and self-consciously situated in contemporary cultural, legal, and sociohistorical issues than was Schleiermacher’s. Humboldt clearly aligned individuality with eighteenth-century neoclassicism, with the aesthetic ideals of Greek civilization as interpreted by Winckelmann, Goethe, and Schiller, and with the ideal of personality associated with the tradition of classical republicanism.⁷ But he rejected the ethicopolitical ideal of republicanism—the primacy of “political man,” and the pursuit of civic virtue—in favor of the basic outlook of the jurisprudential or natural law tradition, with its concern for the defense of individual rights based in human nature and its historical unfolding, even if he rejected that tradition’s focus on property rights. Humboldt had been tutored in political economy by Christian Wilhelm von Dohm, the widely read Prussian diplomat and administrative reformer who argued for the laissez-faire views of the Physiocrats;⁸ Humboldt himself had read the Scottish political economist Adam Ferguson, whose picture of the evolution of society from primitive to commercial societies in *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* of 1766 he at least partly accepted (*Limits*, 50). Humboldt thus explicitly positioned his ideal of individuality within the contemporary debate over the relative merits of the civic virtue of ancient republics and the self-interested individualism of modern commercial society and put himself in the modern camp to the extent of insisting on the freedom of private life and recognizing its historical linkage with the growth of commerce. “Men have now reached a pitch of civilization,” he wrote, “beyond which it seems they cannot ascend except through the development of individuals; and hence all institutions

which act in any way to obstruct or thwart this development, and press men together into uniform masses, are now far more harmful than in earlier ages of the world" (*Limits*, 50–51). Schleiermacher, as we have seen, to the degree that he dealt with the issue at all, explicitly pitched individuality *against* modern individualism.

Humboldt went even further in his critique of the Greek ideal of wholeness by accusing it of a paradoxical narrowness. The Greeks regarded all occupations connected with the exercise of physical strength or the production of material goods as harmful and degrading, concessions to the necessity of survival, and so not legitimate manifestations of human freedom; that is why they approved of slavery, sacrificing one part of humanity to the cultivation of another. They were wrong, Humboldt argued, not only morally but theoretically. It was not the content of an activity that mattered so far as free human self-development was concerned, but the manner in which it was carried out. "There is no pursuit whatever that may not be ennobling and give to human nature some worthy and determinate form. The manner of its performance is the only thing to be considered. . . . [A] man's pursuits react beneficially on his culture, so long as these . . . succeed in filling and satisfying the wants of his soul; while their influence is . . . pernicious, when he . . . regards the occupation itself merely as a means" (*Limits*, 28–29). What was done for its own sake became a genuine part of the self and expanded its capacities and sensibilities; what was done as a means to ulterior advantage was merely instrumental to self-interest and did nothing to further the range of the self. Although the sweeping assertion that any pursuit could contribute to human development, depending on its motive, in theory sanctioned even commercial pursuits as potentially legitimate modes of self-cultivation, Humboldt could not relinquish the classical (and aristocratic) idea that gainful pursuit was inevitably a means only to the ends of economic subsistence and material acquisition and furnished no other—no intrinsic—satisfactions.

It is not only its rootedness in social thought that marks the distinction between Humboldt's model of individuality and Schleiermacher's. The entire framing purpose of Humboldt's exposition of individuality was radically different. Schleiermacher's discourse is confessional and homiletic; Humboldt's is explicitly political. Individuality was the basic principle from which Humboldt worked, but he did not argue it in the text. He used it rather as the premise of an argument for a particular view of the purposes and function of the state. The state should do the minimum necessary to guarantee the mutual security of its citizens in relationship to one another and against foreign enemies. It must, however, abstain from all solicitude for the positive welfare of its citizens in order to allow for the freest possible development of individuals. Humboldt examined

the spheres of social life that he took up in the book specifically from the point of view of the legitimacy of state action with regard to them. His discussion of the possible connection between moral perfection and religion, for example, tested, and rejected, the proposition that because religion is necessary to form the moral character that conduces to good citizenship, the state has the right to regulate the religious life and duties of its citizens. Of the implications of individuality for the organization and duties of the state, Schleiermacher, on the other hand, had nothing concrete to say in the *Soliloquies*. What he did say negatively, however, is significant. He expressly repudiated Humboldt's notion of the negative state and implied a view of fatherland and patriotism much closer to the classical republican ideal rejected by Humboldt. The state was an embodiment of wholeness and an object of devotion not incompatible with individuality, indeed contributory to it in the way that love was, though perhaps not, at least at this point, the indispensable condition of it that love seemed to be.

Humboldt's book is political in a more topical and concretely historical way as well. The chapter on religion, for example, is not simply an abstract philosophical analysis of the desirability of religious toleration. Behind it in part is the shadow of the 1788 law of Frederick William II of Prussia declaring Lutheranism the state religion and threatening penalties for those who did not conform. The death of Frederick the Great in 1786 had been followed by a retreat from the relative liberalization of his enlightened absolutism, and Humboldt's book was a shot in the war against a return to religious obscurantism and centralized control of conscience. But the broader historical occasion of the essay was unquestionably the French Revolution. The opening pages suggest that Humboldt intended nothing less than that his book serve as the theoretical charter of a bloodless revolution in Prussia. His strategy in the book was one of indirection, indeed reversal. Under the guise of rejecting revolution, he proposed that the Prussian monarchy virtually reform itself out of existence, or at least out of its traditional historical identity. "Real political revolutions," Humboldt wrote, "always produce unfortunate consequences; whereas a sovereign—whether it be democratic, aristocratic or monarchical—can extend or restrict its sphere of action gradually and unnoticed, and in general attain its ends more surely as it avoids startling innovations" (*Limits*, 10). Humboldt's rejection of violence was utterly genuine, but the force of the passage's rhetoric was directed not at condemnation of revolution but at exhortation to change, if indeed change from above. At points his desire virtually breaks into open flattery and pleading: "If to see a people breaking their fetters . . . is a beautiful and ennobling spectacle . . . it must be still more fine and uplifting to see a prince himself loosing the bonds and granting freedom to his people"

(*Limits*, 11). Although the essay is certainly not simply a *pièce d'occasion*,⁹ it was a clear response to the new sense of possibility opened up for Germans by the French Revolution. Many of the elements that went into Humboldt's program of individuality (similar to many in Schleiermacher's concept)—Enlightenment rationality, especially in the form of Kantian critical idealism, the idea of *Bildung* derived from neoclassical aesthetics, sensibility and *Sturm und Drang* feeling and passion, Pietist concern with sincere intention and the inner light of the soul, Herder's doctrine of historical cultural individuality—represented advanced German thinking on the eve of the Revolution. Humboldt's essay was a synthesis and a reinterpretation of this cultural heritage under one rubric, individuality, but it represented the politicization of a previously apolitical ideal.¹⁰

Once again it may seem tempting to reduce these differences about the place of social and political issues in Schleiermacher's and Humboldt's approaches to individuality to personal differences, here of social background and profession. Schleiermacher was a pastor, son of an army chaplain of lower middle class origins; Humboldt was a Pomeranian aristocrat (though not of ancient lineage)¹¹ whose father was chamberlain [*Kammerherr*] to the crown prince, and he himself began his own career in the higher echelons of the Prussian civil service. It seems easy enough to place sociologically Schleiermacher's homiletic orientation and Humboldt's concern with state functioning. But such an explanation is too facile. Themes prominent in one writer and apparently absent in the other are in fact latently present in the second as well. There is a dynamic of suppression and emergence in the texts that reveals that the two concepts of individuality were, so to speak, different stages of one line of development; the full implications of individuality in one direction could only emerge at the cost of its curtailment, suppression, and transformation in another. Humboldt could offer an untroubled defense of sociable individuality and the limited state because he did not pursue the Faustian implications of open-ended diversity in personal development and thus did not see it as a danger to society or the state. The cost of Schleiermacher's concept of infinite individuality was the downgrading of politics and within that reduced politics the insistence on the desirability of the positive state. This entailed what appeared to be Schleiermacher's total rejection of the French Revolution. In the passage proclaiming the state the highest level of human existence, he wrote disparagingly of the dreams of the present generation, ignorant of the true meaning of the state, to reorganize it along with all other human ideals (*Soliloquies*, 59). Political revolution in general, he claimed, was futile and irrelevant: "I, for my part, am a stranger to the life and thought of this present generation, I am a prophet citizen of a later world, drawn thither by a vital imagination and

strong faith; to it belong my every word and deed. What the present world is doing and undergoing leaves me unmoved; far below me it appears insignificant, and I can at a glance survey the confused course of its great revolutions. Through every revolution whether in the field of science or of action it returns ever to the same point" (*Soliloquies*, 62). Yet other passages indicate that Schleiermacher's attitude to the revolution was rather more ambivalent. In the *Soliloquies* there is a mysterious, though obviously personal, reference to the difficulty of finding and uniting with the soul-mate who will foster one's individuality, a reference that hints angrily at the contemporary social resentment that fueled the revolutionary demand for equality. "And even if he, whose heart seeks love everywhere in vain, should learn where dwelt his friend and his beloved, yet would he be restricted by his station in life, by the rank which he holds in that meagre thing we call society" (*Soliloquies*, 54). Somewhat more directly, though still without naming it, he alluded to the French Revolution in *On Religion* as "the most sublime deed in the universe." He also connected the epoch of the Revolution causally with both the personality ideal and the new religiosity he was advocating. "It belongs," he asserted, "to the opposition of the new time to the old that no longer is one person one thing but everyone is all things."¹² These passages suggest that the Revolution and radical politics were more integral to Schleiermacher's concept of individuality than he allowed in his explicit comments. It is a suppressed presence whose role and meaning must be understood.

III) Politics and the Psyche

Schleiermacher's early enthusiasm for the French Revolution has always been known but generally dismissed as a passing phase of no consequence for his later work; Dilthey's classic biography pays it very little attention and gives it no developmental significance.¹³ Between his revolutionary phase and his emergence in the first decade of the nineteenth century as an ardent Prussian patriot—during the period, in other words, when he worked out his new ideas on individuality and religion—Schleiermacher is supposed to have been completely apolitical.

From both textual evidence such as that cited above and material in Schleiermacher's *Nachlass*, however, it appears that the importance of the French Revolution in Schleiermacher's early life and work has been much underestimated. Kurt Nowak proposes to apply the model developed in the modern literary criticism of early Romantics like Schlegel and Novalis as a heuristic for analyzing the Revolution's role in Schleiermacher's thought. He offers the suggestion (long familiar in English Ro-