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“Complete Autarchy”: Self-Determination, Absolutism, and the Politics of Enlightenment

> *We are all in a process of dying from this office of Judge which we have arrogated to ourselves.*
>
> Karl Barth, *CD* IV/1

“What Is Enlightenment?”

In 1784, three years after the publication of his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Immanuel Kant responded to a question posed by Reverend Johann Friedrich Zöllner in the monthly journal *Berlinische Monatsschrift*. This famous response was “An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?” (*Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?*).[1] Kant’s answer to this question is the most famous articulation of the Enlightenment project by a contemporary. For Kant, “Enlightenment is man’s emergence from his self-imposed minority.”[2] Enlightenment is humanity's coming of age, its emergence from the shackles of forms of dogma and control set in place by the "guardians"—those who impose restriction and fear on one's ability to exercise one's faculties of understanding. Enlightenment has less to do with knowledge or understanding, and more to do with the courage to exercise one's faculties of reasoning and so to be formed as a rational, enlightened subject. Therefore the challenge is: "*Sapere aude*!" "Have the courage to make use of your own understanding!"[3]

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[1] Immanuel Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, trans. and ed. Mary J. McGregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 11–22.

This use of one's reason is "free" and "public." The particular duty of the scholar in the public sphere is to display this. Already here we see an assumed secularity of reason, in that the "private" commitments of a particular community are set at odds with the "public" scholarly exercise of a universalised reason. This is illustrated clearly in Kant's attitude toward "revealed" religious narratives, in contradistinction to "natural" religion.[4] In this way Kant embodies the problem Barth locates in enlightened humanity, a humanity that has made itself "absolute," and so beyond existential question. Subject to no authority but that of its reason, and therefore (negatively) "free" for itself:

> For this enlightenment, however, nothing is required *but freedom*, and indeed the least harmful of anything that could even be called freedom:

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2. Ibid., 12.
3. Ibid.
4. "So too, a clergyman is bound to deliver his discourse to the pupils in his catechism class and to his congregation in accordance with the creed of the church he serves, for he was employed by it on that condition. But as a scholar he has complete freedom and is even called upon to communicate to the public all his carefully examined and well-intentioned thoughts about what is erroneous in that creed and his suggestions for a better arrangement of the religious and ecclesiastical body. And there is nothing in this that could be laid as a burden on his conscience. For what he teaches in consequence of his office as carrying out the business of the church, he represents as something with respect to which he does not have free power to teach as he thinks best, but which he is appointed to deliver as prescribed and in the name of another. . . . Thus the use that an appointed teacher makes of his reason before his congregation is merely a *private use*; for a congregation, however large a gathering it may be, is still only a domestic gathering; and with respect to it he, as a priest, is not and cannot be free, since he is carrying out another's commission. On the other hand as a scholar, who by his writings speaks to the public in the strict sense, that is, the world—hence a clergyman in the public *use* of his reason—he enjoys an unrestricted freedom to make use of his own reason and to speak in his own person. For that the guardians of the people (in spiritual matters) should themselves be minors is an absurdity that amounts to the perpetuation of absurdities" (ibid., 19). As Gillian Rose notes, "If Enlightenment is grounded in the free use of reason, then reason is grounded in enlightened self-interest: in what a people may without coercion decree for itself" (*Love's Work: A Reckoning with Life* [New York: Schocken Books, 1995], 137).

> namely, freedom to make *public use* of one's reason in all matters. But I hear from all sides the cry: *Do not argue!* The officer says: Do not argue but drill! The tax official: Do not argue but pay! The clergyman: Do not argue but believe! (Only one ruler in the world says: *Argue* as much as you will and about whatever you *will, but obey!*) Everywhere there are restrictions on freedom. But what sort of restriction hinders enlightenment, and what sort does not hinder but instead promotes it?—I reply: The *public* use of one's reason must always be free, and it alone can bring about enlightenment among human beings; the *private use* of one's reason may, however, often be very narrowly restricted without this particularly hindering the progress of enlightenment. But by the public use of one's own reason I understand that use which someone makes of it *as a scholar* before the entire public of the *world of readers.*[5]

Kant's critical project is both the climax and chastening of the Enlightenment's positivism. Barth notes several historical moments that are significant for this particularly self-reflective moment: (1) Galileo and Copernicus were right; "Man is . . . the centre of things . . . the world was even more properly so his world! It is paradoxical and yet it is a fact that the answer to his humiliation was those philosophical systems of rationalism, empiricism and scepticism which made men even more self-confident."[6] An anthropocentric universe replaced the geocentric universe. (2) The paradox Barth sees embedded in the growth of colonialism, the exploration of the "frontier" lands: "piety was practised at home, reason was criticised, truth made into poetry and poetry into truth, while abroad slaves were being hunted and sold. The absolute man can really do both."[7] (3) The rise of communications, travel, newspapers, the salon culture, journals of philosophy and art, and so forth. "Europe, its countries and its cities, became smaller, more easily seen as a whole, more easily penetrated. And so man too grew in this space in the sense that he unmistakably became more and more master of his existence, though the space too grew larger and larger."[8] (4) Importantly, alongside the development of modern science—which had been stalled after the Renaissance by the so-called Wars of Religion—Barth identifies a unifying philosophy: "A capacity for thinking which was responsible to no other authority than himself. This free thought he once more finds related to nature which was just as freely observed. . . . Logic, observation and mathematics were the three decisive elements of the absolute power now disclosed in science."[9] All of this is in the background to what Barth names "enlightened absolutism"—humanity's absolute determination of the shape of its self and environment.[10] This is both a sociocultural and (formally) political reality embodied in the absolute princes and revolutions that engulf Europe at the end of imperial rule.

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[5] Kant, *Practical Philosophy*, 13–14.

[6] *PT*, 37–38.

[7] Ibid., 38–39.

[8] Ibid., 39.

In this chapter we begin a process of rereading Barth's work in relation to the kind of stable Kantian subjectivity identified in the introduction. Bruce McCormack suggests that after Barth has come to terms with the Reformed *anhypostasis-enhypostasis* distinction (1924), he has overcome the Kantian epistemic problematic, but he has done so precisely "by means of Kant."[11] That is to say, God is conceived as apprehensible without being intuitable. This is also why McCormack rejects any hint of "divinization" in Barth.[12] God is not intuitable to us in the face of Jesus as such, but he is intuitable as he, by the Holy Spirit, "commandeers" our knowing faculties. So McCormack can claim, "If the idea that the work of the Holy Spirit completely reorients our thought *without altering our rationality* is theologically defensible, then it will not be incoherent to say that God 'commandeers' the human knowing apparatus described by Kant without altering it."[13] This deliberately leaves the knowing apparatus of the Kantian subject untouched. Yet, we might ask, is this distinction between "thought" and "rationality" defensible in Barth's early work? This distinction would seem to drive a wedge between revelation and reason to the extent that revelation is always already ordered by our rationality—functioning as something of a datum organized by *our* faculties of intellectual judgment. It is precisely the point at which McCormack thinks Barth's genius is displayed—overcoming Kant by means of Kant—that I want to contest as most problematic. For this does not genuinely overcome Kant, but rather submits to him. Indeed it would seem that Kant has once again "created space" for "religion."[14]

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[9] Ibid.

[10] At this point Barth notes the exception of the British. "Only the clever English—perhaps one of the few nations really gifted politically—saw in time the folly of this development, though they were just as penetrated by the spirit of absolutism as the rest, and introduced checks which spared them the catastrophe to which the system by nature must lead" (ibid., 44).

[11] McCormack, "Revelation and History in Transfoundationalist Perspective: Karl Barth's Theological Epistemology in Conversation with a Schleiermacherian Tradition," in *Orthodox and Modern: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 34. See also McCormack, *Karl Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology: Its Genesis and Development, 1909–1936* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), 358–67. We shall address the *anhypostasis-enhypostasis* distinction in detail in chapter 2.

[12] McCormack, "Participation in God, Yes; Deification, No: Two Modern Protestant Responses to an Ancient Question," in *Orthodox and Modern*, 235–60. The logic being that a "divinization" of Christ's humanity would compromise the unintuitability of God by identifying the phenomena with the divine being as such. However, given that phenomena are always mediated by our judgment, is it not redundant to make this distinction given we cannot know a thing-in-itself, whether divine or creaturely? It is always only a representation of the object we are presented with. It is the subject, not the object, restricting knowledge of God, even if we construe the humanity of Jesus as "divinized."

Having garnered fame for the publication of his *Der Römerbrief* in 1919 (and a second edition in 1922) and *The Word of God and the Word of Man* in 1924, Barth emerged as a theological giant. The late 1920s through the early 1930s were a period of intense reflection as Barth cleared the ground for the eventual publication of *CD* I/1 and the lifetime of work that would develop out of that enormously ambitious project. Several large texts, lectures, and abandoned dogmatic projects lie along the way.[15] Key to much of this work is the way Barth rethinks his relationship with the Enlightenment project and its child, modernity. McCormack's genealogy makes much of Barth's christological developments; however, he does so largely in isolation from Barth's broader concern to construe humanity under the conditions of the Enlightenment. This section will explore the background that will help us to see more clearly what Barth is attempting to accomplish in *CD* I/1. The simple argument I will mount here is that Barth locates the problem of theological knowing in modernity in the turn to the subject. The beginning of an antidote to this is faithful obedience to gracious divine self-disclosure, undoing the theologically problematic modes of thinking from a center in the self in both *modern* idealism and realism. In this sense, both idealism and realism are read as symptomatic of the one historical-theological problem: the "absolutism" of Enlightenment humanity. The principal question Barth asks himself as he proceeds in the development of his dogmatic project is: What does it mean to articulate human agency and rationality as formed by revelation, rather than as providing the condition for the possibility of revelation? As we shall see, revelation and rationality cannot function in different spheres for Barth. This distinction begins a movement of noetic (and ontic) dispossession that shapes Barth's entire oeuvre to the extent that he finds himself unable to accept the terms of the turn to the subject.

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[13] McCormack, "Revelation and History in Transfoundationalist Perspective," 34 (italics added).

[14] We shall see hinted in this chapter, and fleshed out further in chapter 3, how this kind of Barthianism creates all manner of problems for political engagement by ordering a priori "religion" to "rationality," and indeed by already tacitly conceding modernity's location of "religion" in the "private," as the construction of the state mirrors the construction of modern anthropologies.

[15] For an exposition of Barth's development in this period, see George Hunsinger, *How to Read Karl Barth: The Shape of His Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993). See also McCormack, *Barth's Critically Realistic Dialectical Theology*, though I do not follow McCormack's narrative entirely, as should be plain by now. For a more politically oriented and contextually sensitive reading of Barth's early work, see Timothy J. Gorringe, *Karl Barth: Against Hegemony* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). Gorringe's work, largely on the back of Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt, *Theologie und Sozialismus: Das Beispiel Karl Barths*, 3rd ed. (Munich: Kaiser, 1985), does more justice than McCormack's to the deep political rationale of Barth's work. He is also correct in my estimation to question the way McCormack has construed Barth's dialectics as a methodology. Another critically significant text is Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Theology of Karl Barth: Exposition and Interpretation*, trans. E. Oakes (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1992). Even though McCormack has cast into doubt Balthasar's identification of a shift to analogy in Barth's study of Anselm, instead locating the critical juncture in his discovery of the *anhypostasis-enhypostasis* distinction, and therefore far more continuity between the *Göttingen Dogmatics*, the *Christian Dogmatics*, and eventually the *CD*, Balthasar's text remains a landmark in Barth scholarship. Developmental

This chapter will first pay particularly close attention to Barth's thick description of "absolute" humanity, showing how he is simultaneously setting an historical and theological stage upon which to consider the problems facing modern theologians in his *Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century* (*PT*) lectures. I will then move to an examination of Barth's idiosyncratic, and in many ways oddly conceived, problematization of modern idealism and realism in *Fate and Idea in Theology.* Finally, after quickly reminding ourselves of the problems in the contemporary secondary literature, I will offer a fresh

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studies have shown, however, that there is no single way up the mountain that is Barth's corpus. They provide helpful, but not absolutely constraining, guides. As such, I do not commit myself here to any one scheme, but will chart a course through Barth's texts in conversation with these commentators.

reading of Barth's doctrine of the Trinity in *CD* I/1 that is concerned with the way he has already problematized the absolute subject of modernity.

"Enlightened Absolutism"

Barth opens his 1932–33 *PT* lectures with a discussion of humanity in the eighteenth century. Significantly, his lectures had been developed and revisited over the period of 1926–33. When he first delivered the lectures in 1926 they began with a short summary of events in the nineteenth century followed by brief discussions of major theological figures of that century.[16] He then repeated the lectures in 1929–30, completely rethinking and expanding the contents. He now included essays on Lessing, Kant, Herder, Novalis, and Hegel. However, when the lectures were given the third time in 1932–33 (1933, significantly, being the year Hitler became chancellor) he did not see fit to revise the theological material (except for the Lessing essay) but rather devoted his time to writing substantial essays on the eighteenth century as background to the problems faced by the nineteenth century.[17] These essays include sizable resources for understanding how Barth was reading the modern period as a whole, and also how he understood the transition from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment.[18] Barth wrote several texts during this period of revision (1926–33) that are illustrative of the reasons why he finally decides in the 1932–33 version to include discussions of the "absolutism" of humanity in the eighteenth century. Among these are *Fate and Idea in Theology* (1929) and *Anselm: Fides Quaerens Intellectum* (1931). Within these two texts Barth begins to discuss his relation to post-Enlightenment philosophical and theological inquiry and so deals explicitly with theological-epistemological issues. So, he asks, what is theologically significant about the process of coming to know, and how does this then form the ground on which dogmatic inquiry takes place? It is also significant that throughout this period Barth's relationship with fellow dialectical theologian Emil Brunner had been souring.[19] This climaxed in the publication of *Nein!*, a response to Brunner's *Nature and Grace*, in 1934 (the very same year as the Barmen Declaration).[20]

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[16] The lectures on Schleiermacher and Feuerbach were published in *Zwischen den Zeiten* and *Theology and Church: Shorter Writings 1920–28*, trans. L. Pettibone Smith (London: SCM, 1962).

[17] Gorringe locates Barth's development in this period within the movement for a *Neue Sachlichkeit* during the Weimar Republic (*Against Hegemony*, 73–116). McCormack, in a review of Gorringe's work, objects that there is no concrete evidence that Barth had any knowledge of these cultural developments, let alone interest in them: "[N]o direct evidence had ever surfaced that Barth took any interest in this development in the world of art or that he even had a knowledge of it. Nor is Gorringe now in a position to remedy this defect" (Review of *Karl Barth: Against Hegemony*, by Timothy J. Gorringe, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 55, no. 2 [2002]: 237). While this may be so strictly textually, it seems an odd claim given Barth's own deep awareness of cultural trends throughout his career. Barth is often not explicit in his inhabiting of cultural forms, and deliberately so. He is also notorious for offering silent criticisms, such as of Rudolf Bultmann in *CD* IV/1. McCormack suggests that Gorringe's thesis reveals its "bankruptcy" at this point, and proceeds to locate Barth's quest for objectivity from 1915 onward. But Gorringe himself is not so naive, as his exposition of 1909–21 makes plain. Barth is not interested in any partisan theological subjectivity given the ways this manifested itself politically both in neo-Protestantism's incapacity to resist World War I and Religious Socialism's emerging problems. What McCormack misses is the way the quest for a "new objectivity" has been relocated by Gorringe in the light of the political texture of Barth's texts in the 1920s, in his move away from the Religious Socialism of Ragaz and the developing political tensions in the dialectical school, eventually culminating in Barth's falling-out with Brunner and Gogarten in particular.

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[18] Much of the genealogical content of these lectures remains substantially unchanged throughout Barth's career, as is displayed in his lecture "Panorama of a Century" in *HG.* The problem is continually located in the turn to the subject as it plays out in theology, particularly in Schleiermacher. "Nineteenth-century theology was burdened with the heritage of the 18th century. There was an all-pervasive rationalism and a retreat of vital or would-be vital Christianity into undergrounds of many kinds. These factors, coupled with the emergence of obscure forms of religious fanaticism, led to a kind of secularism probably more pointed than the much praised or deplored secularism of today" (*HG*, 15). Again, "[t]here is hardly any doubt that the distinctive beginnings of 19th-century theology coincide with the publication of Schleiermacher's book *On Religion, Speeches to its Cultured Despisers* in 1799. . . . It clearly shows the breach separating the new theology at that time from both 17th-century Orthodoxy and 18th Century Enlightenment and Pietism" (ibid., 12).

[19] Barth's *Nein!* does come as something of a surprise to Brunner; however, the relationship was already under pressure, as is in evidence from Barth's correspondence with Eduard Thurneysen. See Barth and Thurneysen, *Revolutionary Theology in the Making: The Barth-Thurneysen Correspondence, 1914–1925*, trans. James D Smart (Richmond, VA: Westminster John Knox, 1964). For an exploration of the nature of Barth and Brunner's theological relationship, see John W. Hart, *Karl Barth vs. Emil Brunner: The Formation and Dissolution of a Theological Alliance, 1916–1936* (New York: Lang, 2001).

[20] It is significant for our purposes that Barth notes the reason for writing this essay is that he fears a lapse back into very modern ways of going about the theological task in that theology is being unmoored from its classical concerns: "The reason I must resist Brunner so decidedly is that I am thinking of the future theology of compromise, that I regard him as its classical precursor, and that I have heard the applause with which all who are of a like mind have greeted his essay, *Nature and Grace*. His essay is an alarm signal. I wish it had not been written. I wish that this new and greater danger were not approaching or that it had not been Emil Brunner who had crossed my path as an exponent of that danger, in a way which made me feel that for better or for worse I had been challenged. But all this has now happened, and seen in some greater context it probably has its sense. But I hope that since it has happened I shall not be misunderstood if I act according to the use of our times and treat his doctrine of 'Nature and Grace' without much ceremony as something which endangers the ultimate truth that must be guarded and

This section shall follow three of Barth's texts from this period. We shall begin by examining his narration of the Enlightenment, of humanity as "absolute," in the *PT* lectures. This takes shape in two intimately entwined ways. First, Barth provides us with a magisterial reading of the anthropology and culture of the eighteenth century, detailing the ways various cultural arenas are shaped by the turn to the subject. Second, he reads the political shifts of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as manifestations of the same turn to the subject insofar as political "authority" is relocated. Our exposition shall follow these two loci of exposition, although we shall need to be continually aware of the conceptual unity of Barth's account of the eighteenth century.

Humanity in the Eighteenth Century (1): Authority in Anthropology and Culture

Barth begins the *PT* lectures by noting the poverty of contemporary readings of the eighteenth century, various controlling ideas having functioned as the center of historical expositions of the period. According to these readings, Enlightenment humanity was "the champion against prejudices and passions, against vice and hypocrisy, ignorance and superstition, intolerance, partiality and fanaticism; he would honour wisdom, virtue, reason and nature."[21] In contradistinction Barth exposits the Enlightenment as the assertion of autarchy in the face of the political turmoil in the aftermath of the Reformation and the Wars of Religion.[22] The problem of the Enlightenment is not rationalism per se, rather the problem is the

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defended in the Evangelical Church" (Brunner and Barth, *Natural Theology: Comprising "Nature and Grace" by Professor Dr. Emil Brunner and the Reply "No!" by Dr. Karl Barth*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2002), 12. See also Rowan Williams, "Dialectic and Analogy: A Theological Legacy," in *The Impact of Idealism: The Legacy of Post-Kantian German Thought*, vol. 4, *Religion*, ed. Nicholas Adams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 274–92. Williams offers a fascinating account of both Barth's and Przywara's accounts of the *analogia entis* as responses to idealism, helping further to make sense of Barth's response to Brunner.

[21] *PT*, 33.

[22] For a discussion of the complex relation of the "religious" to the political in the modern period, particularly after the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, see William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

"absolutism" of humanity. However, Barth does not see this as a new problem insofar as it is illustrative of the primordial problem of the determination of good and evil by the isolated self-determining subject; the Prometheanism of the determination of the good in abstraction from the gracious divine accomplishment and embodiment of the good.[23] In this way the Enlightenment is a theological issue, a matter of the very conditions of our existing and, therefore, our knowing as subjects.

His account of cultural life in this period is divided into two sections: the "outer life," which manifests itself in the particular cultural achievements of the period; and the "inner life," which is expressive of the relation of humanity to itself and God. These two spheres implicate each other in many ways, but the distinction is helpful in that it expresses the ways a will to reduce everything to an "absolute form" takes shape.[24] The world of "nature," now established independently of a theological ground, conforms to human sensibility, and so the outer is made to conform to the inner. The outer takes shape in various forms, both aesthetic and scientific. The inner takes shape in the various philosophical revivals and innovations of the century. Our explication will follow this pattern.[25]

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23. In his later dogmatics Barth reads the Genesis creation myth as indicative of the problem of human life generally. Humanity is created for communion and encounter with the other: "Real man lives with God as His covenant-partner" (*CD* III/2, 203). The temptation that the serpent offers is read as the temptation of self-determination in action. So, Barth is able to make the claim that "what the serpent has in mind is the establishment of ethics" (ibid., 203). Nigel Biggar notes that what Barth has in mind here is the "subjective idealist conception of the making of moral judgements as an autarchic process, as a process in which the human subject is self-determinative" (*The Hastening That Waits: Karl Barth's Ethics* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996], 7–8). In eating the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, humanity is determining for itself the course of its ethical action in such a way as to undermine the gracious gift of life, and so the claim of God on human life. "It is concealed from him by the fact that he simply wants to be himself, man, in a particular way: not responsible to any other, not disturbed by any address or claim, not subject to any disposition but his own, controlling himself, sufficient to himself, the first and the last in his being for himself, in an individual or collective—the distinction is not important—but at all events his human being for himself" (*CD* II/2, 518). The words of the serpent, *Eritis sicut Deus*, are read as an "invitation to man to become the master of his own destiny" (*CD* IV/1, 420). The temptation faced by humanity in the garden is then to defy grace, that is, to determine for oneself good and evil in abstraction from the graciousness of God's good gift of life.
24. *PT*, 55.
25. Nicholas Lash notes that the dominant thought forms of post-Enlightenment culture are dualistic, "'inner' and 'outer', 'mental' and 'physical', 'value' and 'fact', 'spirit' and 'flesh', 'private' and 'public', 'feelings' and 'institutions.'" These dualisms function to shield us from the trauma of the concrete contingencies of lived experience. The spirit, as the "real" person, can eternalize the

At the outset, it is important to note that the sixteenth century is critical to Barth's rendering of things. The Renaissance is the beginning of the end of the Middle Ages, and so the beginning of modernity. The dictum "man [*sic*] is the measure of all things" encapsulates all that is characteristically modern, yet at the same time Barth wants to see this as an accentuation of what is latent in the medieval.[26] The Renaissance had been interrupted for a century and a half by the Reformation, and in the eighteenth century was revived in the form of the Enlightenment. "Once again man, led by a philosophy, which was only apparently disunited but was in essentials united, began to be conscious—and more forcibly than before—of a capacity for thinking which was responsible to no other authority than himself. This free thought he once more finds related to nature which was just as freely observed."[27] This is instructive in that it reveals the way Barth is relating the medieval to the modern. Modernity discloses what was already latent in the medieval in that both, in various ways, engage in forms of theological thinking that absolutize human judgment. It is important to note that Barth is not disparaging of the advances of the Enlightenment as such, but is critical of an ideological maneuver latent in the autarchic forms of knowledge, being, and action.

So it is that Barth understands the shift from Renaissance humanism to the Enlightenment as a "spiritual movement" insofar as it is expressive of the revival of a Renaissance "will to form." The

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person independently of the flesh, the private shields us from the turbulence of the political, our values give us shelter from the crude world of facts, and so forth. Lash continues by arguing that these dualisms eventually give birth to a God, the God of modern theism, a God who is removed from the contingencies and limits of lived experience. The God of modern theism allows us to "seek solace and significance in some inner, private, spiritual realm of feelings and ideas" (Lash, "Considering the Trinity," *Modern Theology* 2, no. 3 (1986): 192).

[26] Barth offers this same reading in the twilight of his career. "From the standpoint of Christianity, the Church and theology, the centuries since the Renaissance and the accompanying Reformation have been and are a period of deep shadow. To be sure, the shadow is no greater than that of later antiquity and the Dark and Middle Ages, but it is of a different kind. It must certainly be seen and said that the new element in the modern period, and therefore the distinctive characteristic of the shadow now cast over the whole sphere of Christianity, the Church and theology, did not become visible and effective at a single stroke at the beginning of the 16th century. Intimations of many kinds were not lacking in the later and even the earlier Middle Ages. But the modern epoch is distinguished from those which precede by the fact that certain tendencies which were previously latent, isolated and in the main suppressed have now become increasingly patent, general and dominating" (*CD* IV/3.1, 18–19). See also *HG*, 26.

[27] *PT*, 39.

Enlightenment is a "spiritual movement. . . . Enlightenment has been understood to mean man's optimistic effort to master life by means of his understanding ('thoughts'), and that the age of that movement, the eighteenth century, has been classified, praised or blamed *a parte potiori* as the age of Enlightenment and that of this kind of Enlightenment."[28] The zeitgeist of the period is described as the desire to "reduce everything to an absolute form."[29] This "will to form" then shapes cultural life in that the "outer" world is made to conform to an "inner" rationality expressive of the order of things; this is seen particularly in the late eighteenth- and nineteenth-century idealisms.[30]

Barth begins his explication of the actual cultural forms of the period with a discussion of the relation of the human *ratio* to nature. Humanity's connections with nature "were far from being simply of the kind which lead man to study nature scientifically . . . they could also be felt and enjoyed aesthetically."[31] Nature had been rationalized so that it conformed to the human *ratio*. In this sense it is a rather sanitized vision of nature, a wild tamed by civilization. This expressed itself in various forms, "the stream as the fountain, the lake as the clean and tidy pond,"[32] that demonstrate the conformity of the natural world to human creative powers and aesthetic sensibility. "The man who expresses an attitude to nature such as this must be unusually conscious and certain that he knows how he feels and that his feeling is valid in the sense that it is the true feeling."[33] So it is significant that the subject has surety of her own apprehension of herself (is immediate to herself), which functions to provide a unity with nature through feeling.

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[28] Ibid., 33.

[29] Ibid., 55.

[30] In *FIT* Barth locates something of a basic fear of idealism that will allow us to make some sense of his ability to gloss over various different forms. For, even in the text of the "History" lectures in *PT* on the various theological and philosophical figures themselves there is little textual exegesis as such. For instance, Barth is able to make rather grand claims concerning Hegel's system without any real textual analysis per se, as Nicholas Adams complains is common among many theological commentators. See Adams, *The Eclipse of Grace: Divine and Human Action in Hegel* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 1–16. We shall return to this in chapter 3.

[31] *PT*, 55.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid., 56. Barth seems to be identifying a kind of proto-Romanticism in earlier eighteenth-century thought. This remains textually unspecific.

Barth complicates this, however, for the aesthetic is not read as the domain of a simple expression of feeling as such. Aesthetic form only takes shape in a proper relation to the *ratio*. The composition and performance of music in the eighteenth century, in which Barth was well versed,[34] is indicative of this move. The conformity of the composition to the form of beauty prescribed by the laws of an established harmony resulted in "more musical certainty than any age that had gone before and perhaps any since."[35] As Goethe said of Bach, it is "As if the eternal harmony were discoursing with itself."[36]

> Art was in those days still most definitely the product of technical ability. Art was proficiency. . . . Not sensibility, not experience, not mystique and not Protestantism, but art as skill, as proficiency in the manipulation of the most exacting rules—not without 'invention', certainly, as it was then called, but invention continually inventing a new necessity, invention in the expression not so much of what the composer himself found personally stimulating, but rather of general laws.[37]

The art of composition was therefore a more precise matter of conformity to, and exploratory expansion of, existing forms of rational aesthetic determination. The task of the composer was to bring a rational order to sounds in that "for them it was a question of evolving harmony from the confused mass of possible combinations of sounds and, from the equally confused mass of possible sequences of sounds, something that was henceforth to be a singing cosmos, put forth by man and penetrating space. . . . Making music means subjecting the sound to the laws."[38] These laws were the "humanising" of the sounds

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[34] See Karl Barth, *Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart*, trans. Clarence K. Pott, foreword by John Updike (1986; Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2003). Barth does explicate various other areas of cultural life in which this same absolute form and conformity of outer to inner take shape, e.g., architecture, education, poetry, literature, and language. See *PT*, 55–72. It should be noted, however, that this is not an entirely negative assessment of musical form, as Barth's affection for Mozart demonstrates. Barth is questioning the internalized *ratio* guiding composition.

[35] *PT*, 68.

[36] Ibid., 72. In this sense it is a great shame that Barth never completed his intended lecture on Goethe, which may have provided some real conceptual clarity here (indeed, this entire section could be read as an exposition of the "age of Goethe"). The kinds of tensions being explicated here are in many ways internal to Goethe's biographical movement through Sturm und Drang toward Weimar Classicism. See Nicholas Boyle, *Goethe: The Poet and the Age*, vol. 1, *The Poetry of Desire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

[37] *PT*, 68.

[38] Ibid., 71.