2003-07

Inventing the Enlightenment: Anti-Jacobins, British Hegelians, and the Oxford English Dictionary

https://hdl.handle.net/2144/2409

Boston University
Inventing the Enlightenment: Anti-Jacobins, British Hegelians, and the *Oxford English Dictionary*

*James Schmidt*

Collecting the Prejudices

For over a century the *Oxford English Dictionary* has defined “enlightenment” as follows:

1. The action of enlightening; the state of being enlightened ... [I]mparting or receiving mental or spiritual light.
2. Sometimes used [after Ger. *Aufklärung, Aufklärerei*] to designate the spirit and aims of the French philosophers of the 18th c., or of others whom it is intended to associate with them in the implied charge of shallow and pretentious intellectualism, unreasonable contempt for tradition and authority, etc.¹

The second definition has, understandably, not sat well with historians of the period. More than four decades ago, Peter Gay began a dissection of the persistence of various “stubborn misreadings” of the Enlightenment by noting that the virtually identical definition in the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* had the dubious distinction of “collecting most current prejudices in one convenient spot.”²

A version of this article was presented at meetings of the American Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies, New Orleans, Louisiana, 19 April 2001. The author thanks David Armitage, Darrin McMahon, and Ken Haynes for their comments.

¹ The definition dates from 1891 and has survived, unchanged, into the recently released online third edition.
The OED provided three examples of the second usage. The first two came from James Hutchison Stirling’s *Secret of Hegel* (1865): 1) “Deism, Atheism, Pantheism, and all manner of isms due to Enlightenment” and 2) “Shallow Enlightenment, supported on such semi-information, on such weak personal vanity, etc.” The third came from Edward Caird’s *Critical Philosophy of Immanuel Kant* (1889): 3) “The individualistic tendencies of the age of Enlightenment.” The OED’s choice of examples has also raised some hackles among dix-huitizmistes. John Lough observed, “What these examples have to do with French thought it is difficult to see; the first source is a book on Hegel and the second one on Kant.”

A glance at the context from which the Caird quotation was taken would have been enough to ease Lough’s confusion. While Caird’s book may have been about Kant, the passage quoted was part of a general characterization of eighteenth-century philosophy:

> The individualistic tendencies of the age of Enlightenment, which separated each man from the unity of the social organism to which he belonged, separated him also from the past out of which his intellectual life had grown. Hence to the writers of that time the independence of philosophical thought seemed to involve that each thinker must begin the work of speculation *de novo*: and to admit the possibility or necessity of a mediation of truth to the individual by the *communis sensus* of humanity was in their eyes the same thing as to accept the dictation of an external authority.

While there is much here that might be criticized, such a characterization of the Enlightenment still enjoys support in some quarters today.

A closer look at the examples from *The Secret of Hegel*, however, yields a few surprises. For in the first extract the OED misquoted Stirling and in the second it misrepresented how he employed the phrase “shallow enlightenment.” Both examples are taken from a passage in the book’s Preface which launches a diatribe against Henry Thomas Buckle, whose materialist approach to history particularly incensed Stirling. At issue in the first is the question of whether Buckle—who conveyed to Stirling “the air of a man who is speaking by anticipation, and who only counts on verifying the same”—truly understood Kant’s work. The passage runs as follows (the portion extracted, and misquoted, by the OED has been italicized):


He had a theory, had Mr Buckle, or, rather, a theory had him—a theory, it is true, small rather, but still a theory that to him loomed huge as the universe, at the same time that it was the single drop of vitality in his whole soul.—Now, that such redoubted thinkers as Kant and Hegel, who, in especial, had been suspected or accused of Deism, Atheism, Pantheism, and all manner of isms dear to Enlightenment, but hateful to Prejudice—(or vice versa)—that these should be found not to fit into his theory—such doubt never for a moment crossed even the most casual dream of Buckle!

In the passage misquoted in the *OED* Stirling speaks not of “isms due to Enlightenment” but rather of “isms dear to Enlightenment.” The notion that “Enlightenment” holds Deism, Atheism, Pantheism dear, while “Prejudice” finds them hateful conforms to conventional notions about the Enlightenment and echoes Hegel’s account in the Phenomenology of Spirit of the struggle between “enlightenment” and “superstition.” Since “enlightenment” denounces as “superstition” everything that the faithful hold dear, it is hardly surprising that Stirling suggests that “Deism, Atheism, Pantheism” are “dear to Enlightenment” but “hateful to Prejudice.”

The difficulties with the passage rest less with what the *OED* misquotes than with what it leaves out: Stirling’s equivocal “or vice versa.” One way of making sense of this reversal is to read “Enlightenment” in the first of the *OED*’s two senses—“imparting or receiving mental or spiritual light”—rather than the second. In its non-religious sense (as “mental” rather than “spiritual” light) Enlightenment is kin to “Deism, Atheism, Pantheism” and will be viewed with revulsion by the faithful (who will be regarded by the enlightened, in turn, as the victims of prejudice). But since Stirling implies that it is Buckle—a man who is a victim of his own “anticipations” and who finds in texts only what he presumes he will find there—who is prejudiced, it is possible to reverse the relationship, thus making Deism, Atheism, and Pantheism “dear” to prejudiced souls like Mr. Buckle and hateful to the spiritually enlightened. Thus, while Stirling likely associated Buckle with any number of “isms” that, allegedly, were dear to French philosophers of the eighteenth century, the relationship of “Enlightenment” to these “isms” is quite unstable: it can regard them as either “dear” or as “hateful.”

The second example is buried in the midst of a passage that speculates on what would have happened had Buckle actually understood the German au-

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In this passage, the OED’s excisions make it appear that Stirling regards “the Enlightenment” as “shallow.” But when read in context, the thrust of the passage is that Buckle—“crude, conceited” lad that he is—has only a very limited understanding of philosophical matters: had he actually understood Kant, he would have had to reject the “shallow Enlightenment” he had attained. Stirling’s point, then, is that it is Buckle who is “shallow,” not something called “the Enlightenment.” What is particularly striking about these two passages—aside from the staggeringly digressive style in which Stirling couched his attack—is that neither of them uses the term “Enlightenment” in the way that Caird would a quarter of a century later. In neither passage does “Enlightenment” refer to a philosophical movement associated with a particular historical period. When Stirling needs to do that, he makes use of other words.

The English term Stirling employs to designate those philosophical tendencies associated with the eighteenth-century philosophes is “Illumination,” not “Enlightenment.” The attack on Buckle, for example, is preceded by a dismissal of Ludwig Feuerbach and David Friedrich Strauss as “an inferior Atheistico-Materialist set” who constitute the “remnants of the Aufklärung, of Eighteenth Century Illumination.” Buckle—who “still knew nothing and would know nothing but the Illumination”—is placed among their ranks. However, Stirling’s favorite term for referring to eighteenth-century philosophy is not an English word at all. The German Aufklärung appears throughout the Preface to The Secret of Hegel and while a reader will search Stirling in vain for “the

7 Stirling, The Secret of Hegel, xxxiii.
8 Ibid., xxvi-xxvii.
9 Stirling, ibid., xxvii.
Enlightenment,” the macaronic formulation “the Aufklärung” can be found quite often.\textsuperscript{10}

Stirling’s use of terms may be odd, but it is not capricious. “Enlightenment”—used sparingly and never with a definite article—denotes an activity that, for lack of a better description, involves “imparting or receiving mental or spiritual light”: the first meaning noted by the OED, not the second.\textsuperscript{11} “Illumination” is sometimes used in this sense as well, though Stirling tends to use it, more particularly, to designate those philosophical tendencies associated with the French philosophes (i.e., the second of the two definitions of “Enlightenment” in the OED)—hence his use of the formulation “the Illumination.”\textsuperscript{12} But his favorite term for referring to this collection of attitudes is the German Aufklärung. It is as if Stirling regarded the word as uniquely capable of designating one of those things that—like Gemütlichkeit and Schadenfreude—only Germans fully appreciate.

The sense that Aufklärung designated something for which English did not have a word was not confined to Stirling. Eight years earlier, when John Sibree translated Hegel’s Lectures on the Philosophy of History into English, he found himself stymied by a section that bore the title “Die Aufklärung und die Revolution.” He translated Aufklärung with the French “éclaircissement,” explaining in a footnote that

There is no current term in English denoting that great intellectual movement which dates from the first quarter of the eighteenth century, and which, if not the chief cause, was certainly the guiding genius of the French Revolution. The word “Illuminati” (signifying the members of an imaginary confederacy for propagating the open secret of the day), might suggest “Illumination,” as an equivalent for the German “Aufklärung”: but the French “Éclaircissement” conveys a more specific idea.\textsuperscript{13}

Stirling held that the word had been “badly rendered” by Sibree,\textsuperscript{14} and his fellow Hegelians seemed to have agreed. For much of the nineteenth century,

\textsuperscript{10} For a particularly striking example, see \textit{ibid.}, liv: “The principle of the Aufklärung, the Right of Private Judgment, is a perfectly true one, but it is not true as used by the Aufklärung, or it is used only one-sidedly by the Aufklärung.”

\textsuperscript{11} See, for example, \textit{ibid.}, xxxiv-xxxv.

\textsuperscript{12} One of the remaining two uses of “enlightenment” in the Preface employs the term as a synonym for “Illumination” understood as an activity, not a period: “Aufklärung, Illumination, Enlightenment, destroyed Greece; it lowered man from Spirit to Animal ...” (livi). The remaining use of “enlightenment” likewise employs the term to as a name for a process: “When Enlightenment admits at all the necessity of control, the what and how far of this control can be argued out from this necessity—and self-will is abandoned” (liii).

\textsuperscript{13} Hegel, \textit{Philosophy of History}, tr. J. Sibree (New York, 1956’), 438.

\textsuperscript{14} For Stirling’s judgment on Sibree, see his essay “Lord Macaulay,” \textit{Jerrold, Tennyson, and Macaulay with Other Critical Essays}, ed. James Hutchison Stirling (Edinburgh, 1868), 121.
Hegel’s translators and commentators either used “Illumination” to render *Aufklärung* or simply left the word untranslated. It was not until J. B. Baillie’s 1910 translation of the *Phenomenology* that “Enlightenment” consistently translates *Aufklärung* in any of Hegel’s works. Thus, it would appear that the *Oxford English Dictionary* has only one valid example of a use of “Enlightenment” to designate “the spirit and aims of the French philosophers of the 18th c.” The example, from Caird, is virtually contemporaneous with the publication of the dictionary. While the passages from Stirling express a distaste for attitudes and activities associated with the period that we have come to designate as “the Enlightenment,” the term “enlightenment” has a rather minor role in Stirling’s account and is never preceded by the tell-tale article “the.”

This absence is easily overlooked. It is all too easy to see the definition in the *OED* as evidence of a long battle between “the Enlightenment” and “the Counter-Enlightenment.” But this assumption conceals the extent to which, at the time the *OED* attempted its definition, “the Enlightenment” lacked the identity that it has come to have for us. Hence the curious character of the definitions in the *OED*. In the second, the *OED* seems to be referring less to “the Enlightenment” as a particular historical period than to a more general project born in the eighteenth century but reaching beyond it. Thus the *OED* offers definitions of “enlightenment” as a *process* (“imparting or receiving mental or spiritual light”) and as a *project* (“the spirit and aims of the French philosophers of the 18th century”), but not yet as a *period* (“the Enlightenment”).

To understand how “Enlightenment” came to take on a particular reference (as a term used to refer to a particular historical period) and a particular set of resonances (as “shallow and pretentious intellectualism” and “an unreasonable contempt for tradition and authority”), we must look more carefully at the complex relationship between a variety of ways of characterizing the eighteenth century, a relationship that the *OED* sought to summarize, somewhat prema-

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15 George S. Morris opted for “Illumination” as a translation for *Aufklärung* in the summary of the argument of the *Philosophy of History* in Hegel’s *Philosophy of the State and of History* (Chicago, 1887), 292. The 1896 translation of Hegel’s *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* by E. S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson for the most part left the German *Aufklärung* untranslated, but rendered its appearance in the title of the last chapter of Part III, Section II as “The German Illumination.”

16 Caird’s *Hegel* uses “Enlightenment” in passing as a translation for *Aufklärung* in the translation of a passage from one of Hegel’s Tübingen manuscripts, 23.


18 See, for example, Roy Porter’s comments on the “English philistinism” and “Oxonian deference to ‘authority and tradition’ ” that he finds in the definition. *The Creation of the Modern World: The Untold Story of the British Enlightenment* (New York, 2000), 4-5.
turally, at the close of the nineteenth century. This will involve, first, a brief survey of some of the other terms that the nineteenth century used when talking about the eighteenth century. This will be followed by an examination of the emergence, in the wake of the French Revolution, of a few terms of abuse employed by opponents of the Revolution to characterize those eighteenth-century movements that they saw as promoting the Revolution. An examination of Stirling’s claims about the development of English and German terminology will prepare the way for some concluding observations on the use and abuse of “Enlightenment” in characterizations of eighteenth-century thought.

Translating *Aufklärung*

We can take the first of the two definitions in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as unproblematic. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the use of “enlightenment” to designate a process of clarification is a commonplace.\(^{19}\) This sense of the word develops independently of the German *Aufklärung* and has nothing to do with judgments about the alleged shallowness of French eighteenth-century philosophy. The *OED* finds “enlighten” (or the variant “inlighten”) used in religious discussions in the early sixteenth century, where it referred to a removing of the dimness or blindness from the eyes and, figuratively, from the heart. It cites a number of examples from the latter part of the sixteenth century where the term is used in the sense of supplying “spiritual light.” By the end of the seventeenth century the convention of using the verb “enlighten” to designate the activity of bringing “intellectual light” to bear on a subject is well established. A similar path of development can be traced for the German verb *aufklären* and its nominalization *die Aufklärung*. Here too, the trajectory runs from an initial metaphorical usage in religious contexts to a more general sense of imparting wisdom, a banishing of mental darkness.\(^{20}\)

Our concern is with the second, and more problematic, of the *OED*’s definitions. It advances three claims: 1) that the English usage is modeled on the German *Aufklärung*; 2) that the English term refers, in the first instance, to philosophical tendencies in France; and 3) that the term carries with it a decid-

\(^{19}\) A search of the Chadwyck-Healey Literature Online database finds only one use of “enlightenment” prior to 1825 but records 56 usages between 1825 and 1850, all of them classifiable as examples of the *OED*’s first definition. It should be noted, however, that while this database is quite extensive (allowing for searches of 300,000 English texts), its coverage is limited to literary works: a number of the examples cited in the *OED*, for example, are not recorded.

edly negative judgment on these philosophical tendencies. While the third of these claims has become a *bête noir* among *dix-huitièmistes* because of the ease with which it blends definition and defamation, this annoyance might be dismissed as a case of blaming the messenger if, in fact, the *Oxford English Dictionary* accurately conveyed nineteenth-century usage. After all, it is hardly surprising that Victorians disliked the Enlightenment. But the problem with the definition may be more serious: the connection with the German *Aufklärung* appears to be much more tenuous than the *OED* suggests. As we have seen, two of the three examples offered do not illustrate the meaning under which they are grouped. But might there be examples other than those mistakenly attributed to Stirling where we can find the English “Enlightenment” used after the fashion of the German *Aufklärung* to refer, not to a process, but rather to a historical period?

One obvious place to look for examples is in English translations of German histories of philosophy. Between 1856 (a decade prior to the appearance of Stirling’s *Secret of Hegel*) and 1893 (four years after the publication of Caird’s *Critical Philosophy of Immanuel Kant*) four histories of philosophy appeared in which the translators were faced with the task of coming up with a term for the historical period designated in the text as *die Aufklärung*. The first, from 1856, was a translation of Albert Schwegler’s *Geschichte der Philosophie im Umriss* (1847) by Julius H. Seelye, an American who was clearly confused by what to do with two chapters entitled “Die französische Aufklärung” and “Die deutsche Aufklärung.” The choice of “The French Clearing Up” and “The German Clearing Up” suggests that Seelye had an understanding of German word stems, but few other clues as to what to do with the term.21 Two years after the publication of *The Secret of Hegel*, Stirling tried his hand at Schwegler, with somewhat less comic results. As might be expected from the pattern of usage established in *The Secret of Hegel*, the chapter titles are rendered as “The French Illumination” and “The German Illumination.”22 Seven years later, Friedrich Uebenveg’s history of philosophy was translated by George S. Morris. The work offered a passing discussion of the French *Aufklärung* which Morris rendered into English as “the French ‘illumination.’ ”23 Finally, in 1894, James H. Tufts employed “the philosophy of the Enlightenment” in his translation of Wilhelm Windelband’s *Geschichte der Philosophie*.24 But Tuft’s translation

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appeared five years after the example in the *OED* from Caird. At all points prior to Caird, translators who needed an equivalent for *Aufklärung* generally opted for “Illumination,” not “Enlightenment.”

The convention of translating *Aufklärung* as “Illumination” was firmly established well before Stirling and his colleagues began their struggles with “the uncouth unintelligibleness” of that “extraordinary new German” which they confronted in the pages of Hegel’s works. Translations appearing in *The German Museum*, a short-lived periodical that between January 1800 and July 1801 translated a wide range of late eighteenth-century German texts into English, routinely rendered *Aufklärung* as “mental illumination.” Thus, Georg Joachim Zollikofer’s 1783 sermon “Der Werth der grössten Aufklärung der Menschen” appeared in *The German Museum* as “An Estimation of the Advantages arising from the Progress of Mental Illumination” and, in a listing of the most important German literature from the 1780s, the *Berlinisches Journal der Aufklärung* is referenced as *The Berlin Journal, intended to promote mental Illumination*.

There was, however, at least one place where the editors broke with this convention: a translation of Moses Mendelssohn’s 1784 “Ueber die Frage: Was heisst Aufklärung?” opted for the phrase “enlightening the mind.”

This use for “enlightening”—rather than the, to us, more familiar “enlightenment”—can also be found in John Richardson’s 1798 translation of Kant’s essay “Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?” In his translation, the familiar opening of the essay reads:

> Enlightening is, Man’s quitting the nonage occasioned by himself .... 
> Sapere aude! Have courage to make use of thy own understanding is therefore the dictum of enlightening.

However peculiar this rendering may sound to our ears, Richardson’s translation—like those in *The German Museum*—faithfully captured a crucial feature of the late eighteenth-century usage. What Willi Goetschel has noted with respect to Kant can also be extended to Mendelssohn and Zollikofer: in their texts the term *Aufklärung* is employed as “a term of process,” not as a designation for a period. Thus, our examination of English translations of *Aufklärung*

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26 For Zollikofer see *The German Museum* (May 1800), I, 396-403. For the reference to the *Berlin Journal* see the supplement to I, 590. For other translations of *Aufklärung* as mental illumination, see I, 77, 211, 304, 392, 435.
29 Willi Goetschel, *Constituting Critique: Kant’s Writing as Critical Praxis* (Durham, N.C., 1994), 150.
has brought us to a point where neither the English “Enlightenment” nor the German Aufklärung designates a historical period. This result teaches us something about how concepts associated with historical periods develop. Reinhart Koselleck has noted that while Renaissance humanists “favored verbs and adjectival expressions” to refer to the process of renewal and awakening in which they saw themselves engaged, “‘Renaissance’ first entered regular use during the Enlightenment.” The terms employed by eighteenth-century enlighteners exhibit a similar pattern. While there was much talk in the eighteenth century about what the process of “enlightenment” might entail, and while there was a host of ways of categorizing the particular period in which this process was carried on—“a philosophical age,” an “age of critique,” an “age of enlightenment,” “an enlightened age”—the designation “the Enlightenment” is nowhere to be found. Perhaps this should come as no surprise: Minerva’s owl, as Hegel reminds us, arrives to survey the scene only after the contestants have left the field. As the eighteenth century came to a close, a good deal about it remained hotly contested.

Designating the Pathologies of the Age: Philosophists and Illuminizers

At the beginning of Book II of his History of the French Revolution (1837), Thomas Carlyle pondered what to call the final decade before the Revolution:

Shall we call it, what all men thought it, the new Age of Gold? Call it at least, of Paper; which in many ways is the succedaneum of Gold. Bank-paper, wherewith you can still buy when there is no gold left; Book-paper, splendent with Theories, Philosophies, Sensibilities—beautiful art, not only revealing Thought, but also so beautifully hiding from us the want of Thought!

“The Paper Age,” the title Carlyle gave to Book II of the History, was much too clever to serve as a catch-phrase for the period in question and, in any case, was eventually abandoned in Carlyle’s own narrative. When he needed to refer to those who populated this age of paper, he called them philosophes. When he required a term for the system of thought that they embraced, he called it “philosophism.” Close cousins etymologically, the two words came from different worlds ideologically.

32 For example, “What wisest Philosophe, in this halcyon period, could prophesy that there was approaching, big with darkness and confusion, the event of events?” (24-25).
33 For example, “Philosophism ... has got her Turgot made Controller-General ...” (34).
Since the middle of the eighteenth century, the group of French thinkers who made up what we call the Enlightenment had described the activity in which they were engaged simply as “philosophy.” D’Alembert’s *Elements of Philosophy* entertained the prospect that the middle of his own century might, like the middle of other centuries before it, represent a turning-point in intellectual development; he suggested that his century might come to be known as “the century of philosophy.” Diderot echoed this characterization in the entry he wrote on the idea of “encyclopedia” for the *Encyclopédie*, claiming that the *Encyclopédie* had played a fundamental role in transforming the eighteenth century into a *siècle philosophe*. But the eighteenth century was not unique in that regard. In the history of philosophy D’Alembert sketched in his *Preliminary Discourse* to the *Encyclopédie*, the eighteenth century is characterized as a time of “regeneration” following in the wake of a “long interval of ignorance” that had, in turn, been preceded by “centuries of light” (*siècles de lumière*). That the eighteenth century, like other centuries before it, might be a “century of light” was a hope shared by those who named themselves, after their predecessors in earlier centuries of light, “philosophes.” But they were certainly under no illusion that they or their century had any exclusive claim to such titles. “Philosophism” had a decidedly different pedigree. Coined by Catholic opponents of the philosophes, it was popularized in England in part through the Abbé Barruel’s use of the term, in his widely read *Memoires pour servir à l’histoire du Jacobinism* (1797-98), to designate the principles shared by members of the conspiracy of philosophes, free-masons, and Illuminati that he saw as responsible for the French Revolution. “Philosophism [philosophisme],”

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37 Dumarsais’s article “Philosophe” in *Encyclopédie* Tome Douzième (Neufchastel, 1765), 509-11, offers a quick sketch of how the Philosophes understood themselves. For a sense of how they used the terms *philosophe*, *philosophie*, and *philosophique*, consult the citations collected under the entries for these terms in the *Encyclopédie’s Table Analytique et Raisonnée*, Tome Second (Paris, 1780), 434-35.

he explained, "is the error of every man who, judging of everything by the standard of his own reason, rejects in religious matters every authority that is not derived from the light of nature." By the last years of the eighteenth century, the word was the favored term of abuse employed in the pages of conservative journals such as the Anti-Jacobin Review to refer to supporters of the French Revolution. A review of the English translation of Barruel's Memoirs offered the following etymology lesson:

From philosophy sprang philosophism, a word which ... signifies the love of sophism, the love of falsehood, as philosophy imparts the love of wisdom, the love of truth. In the Greek language the terms sophism and sophists sufficed to mark the abuse; in the French language, as in our own, this is not the case, because the sophists of modern times bear no resemblance to those of antiquity. The latter never disturbed the earth; the former endeavour to enslave it and to bring back the reign of chaos. Here then is a love of evil, and consequently much more than error.

Those who embraced "philosophism" were not "systematic infidels who ... rallied around some positive dogma." Rather they were "men without any fixed principles, inconsistent in their conduct" bent on "establishing their empire on the ruins of the truths which they labour to destroy." Aiming at the annihilation "not only of the Christian religion, but of all positive religion whatever," philosophism thus represented "nothing more than scepticism applied to the leading principles of metaphysics, morality, and religion"; it was no older than the work of Pierre Bayle.

The plague of "philosophism" had spread beyond France. According to the Anti-Jacobin Review, ever since Frederick the Great (or, as Barruel preferred to call him, "Frederick the Sophister") introduced French philosophy into his domains, philosophism had become "fashionable throughout Germany"; indeed, "ninety-nine out of every hundred German writers adopt the revolutionary jargon of the French." The Review found Germans to be troubling creatures

41 Anti-Jacobin Review, appendix to volume IV (August to December 1799), 560. The explanation of the etymology of "philosophism" was taken from J. F. de la Harpe, Lycée ou Cours de Litterature Ancienne et Moderne (Paris, 1800), VII, 195.
42 Anti-Jacobin Review, appendix to IV, 561.
43 Anti-Jacobin Review, appendix to III (May-August 1799), 552; for the characterization of Frederick, see Barruel, I, 99.
indeed. "A German writer," it informed its readers, "is, in general, a man that is discontented with every thing about him; his chief happiness, and glory consist in publishing a successful journal."44 In no land was the "itch for writing and publishing" so pervasive. One correspondent wrote that there were

about eight or ten thousand persons in Germany who derive their livelihood entirely, or the greater part of it, from scribbling, or, as they call it, enlightening the public mind.45

In some German universities, the Review reported, "not a single professor is to be found who dares admit the existence of a God." The Elector of Saxony, it reported, "has lately been obliged to suppress a periodical publication, written by professor Jena, entitled the Philosophical Journal, in which atheism was openly recommended."46 Subsequent articles in the Review recognized that Jena was, in fact, a town, not a person, and stated that the atheist "professor of philosophy, or, rather, of philosophism" was a man named "Furchte."47 Accuracy was not one of the Review's strong points.

While we tend today to think of the Enlightenment in Germany as a rather timid affair, the picture that emerges from the pages of the Anti-Jacobin Review was terrifying indeed. Here was a land where "upwards of 8,000 writers and scribblers of all descriptions... continually direct and lay siege to the public opinion"; where students "go about the country arrayed in Republican uniforms" and band together in secret clubs "which are the scenes of perpetual broils, riots, and disorders"; where the low cost of college tuition allowed every farmer and burgher to train their sons to take up "the trade of book-making"; and where "the boundaries which separate virtue from vice appear to be entirely removed, and the best cement of society is consequently dissolved."48

In short, such a scene of corruption as Germany now exhibits, an English mind shudders to contemplate. The young women, even of rank, uncontrolled by that natural diffidence, unchecked by that innate modesty, which at once heighten the allurements of, and serve as a protection to, beauty, but which have been destroyed by the fatal infusion of philosophical principles, consider the age of puberty as the period of exemption from every social restraint, and sacrifice their virtue to the

44 Anti-Jacobin Review, appendix to VI (April to August 1800), 566-67.
45 Anti-Jacobin Review, appendix to V (January-April 1800), 573.
47 Anti-Jacobin Review, preface to volume IV (August to December 1799), viii. The discussion of Fichte's dismissal was followed by criticisms of Schiller (xiii-xiv) and Goethe (xiv). Kant's system of philosophy was characterized as "extremely dangerous" in volume V (January-April 1800), 339.
48 Anti-Jacobin Review, III, 553; preface to IV, ix, xii, xii-xiii.
first candidate for their favour, who has the means either of captivating
their fancy, or gratifying their avarice; while the dreadful number of
abortions serves to proclaim the frequency and extent of their crimes.49

But of all the horrors that Germany unleashed on the world, none played as
important a role in the imagination of the opponents of the Revolution as the
Illuminati.

Founded by Adam Weishaupt in Bavaria in 1776, the Illuminati flourished
briefly in the early 1780s, combining Masonic rituals, egalitarian political ide-
als, and an organizational structure that borrowed much from its arch-enemies,
the Jesuits.50 It was suppressed by the Bavarian government in 1785 and its
documents published, allowing the movement to attain a notoriety in legend
that far exceeded its limited actual achievements. The movement figured promi-
nently both in John Robinson’s Proofs of a Conspiracy Against All the Reli-
gions and Governments of Europe (1797) and in the third volume of Barruel’s
Memoirs. When the latter appeared in English in 1799, Robert Clifford, Barruel’s
translator, attached a footnote to the volume’s “Preliminary Observations” which
suggests the difficulties he had in finding words equal to the task of describing
what the Illuminati sought to do.

The translator thinks it proper to inform the Reader, that, considering
how much the abuse of terms, such as of Philosophy, Reason, &c. &c.
has contributed to diffuse the new-fangled doctrines, he has adopted in
the present volume … the words Illuminee, Illuminize, and Illumini-
zation, though Illuminate and Illumination might perhaps be more cor-
rect expressions. Every reader will feel, that the illumination of the
world, and to illuminate mankind, are objects worthy of the true phi-
losopher. But may the man be ever accurst who shall attempt to
illuminize his countrymen, or aim at the illuminization of the world!51

Clifford’s concern with language echoed Barruel’s own sense that much of the
success of the conspiracy lay in its ability to redefine the meaning of words.52
Indeed, what made the conspiracy of philosophers and illuminizers so insidi-
ous was their ability to advance their program under the cover of a language

49 Anti-Jacobin Review, IV, xii.
50 For discussions of the movement, its suppression, and its prominence in conspiracy theo-
ries, see Klaus Epstein, The Genesis of German Conservatism (Princeton, 1966), 87-104, Rich-
ard van Dülmen, The Society of the Enlightenment: The Rise of the Middle Class and Enlighten-
ment Culture in Germany, trans. Anthony Williams (New York, 1992), 104-18, and Richard van
Dülmen, Der Geheimbund der Illuminaten (Stuttgart, 1977), which includes a selection of docu-
ments.
52 Amos Hofman, “Opinion, Illusion, and the Illusion of Opinion: Barruel’s Theory of Con-
that seemed so innocent. For who could object to “philosophy,” to “reason,” or to the “illumination of the world”?

For this reason, opponents of Jacobinism found it necessary to draw some distinctions. An anti-Jacobin poem entitled Bubble and Squeak, a Galli-maufry of British Beef, with the Chopp’d Cabbage of Gallic Philosophy and Radical Reform sought to distinguish the “old” philosophy which, working together with religion, had sought “To humanize and bless mankind” from the new “Philosophy of Gallic climes / Parent of unexampled crimes!”

Philosophy, of curst extraction,
Whom infidelity and faction
Evok’d from midnight darkness Stygian
To plunder and proscribe religion,
And half th’ insensate globe ensnare
With hollow smile and tinsel’s glare:
As Paphos’ sov’reign meretricious
Rose from the sea so fair and specious,
Yet, spite of all that lovers swore,
And poets lied, was but a wh—.53

Likewise, Clifford chose to translate Barruel’s sophiste as “sophister” rather than “sophist,” explaining that he thought it important to distinguish the modern rebels from the Greek Philosophers of the school of Sophists. Johnson in his dictionary, defines SOPHISTER as a disputant fallaciously subtle; an artful but insidious logician; such is the species of men that have been described in this work, who, conscious of their own fallacy, but acting the part of Satan to pervert mankind, should never be confounded with those men of antiquity whose systems of disputation may have been fallacious, but whose intentions were upright, and who did not combat every sacred or social principle in hopes of subverting society.54

But while considerable labors were devoted to the terms “philosophy,” “sophist,” and “illumination,” “enlightenment” remained above the fray. Clifford used “enlighten” in a passage where Barruel had employed éclairer and employed “enlightened” to deal with an appearance of aufgeklärite in one of the Illuminati documents which Barruel quoted.55 Robinson, working his

53 Quoted from the review in The Anti-Jacobin Review III, 286-90.
54 Barruel, Memoirs, IV, 342.
55 For éclairer see Barruel, Memoirs, I, 31 and III, 183; for aufgeklärite see III, 106. III, 118 employs the image of the diffusion of light to deal with an appearance of Aufklärung in another Illuminati document.
way through some Illuminati documents, offered a footnote that explained that the “only proper translation” of “Auffklärung” [sic] “would be clearing up, or enlightening” before finally deciding that “Instruction seems the single word that comes nearest to the precise meaning of Auffklärung.”

When the Anti-Jacobin Review, in a discussion of “Furchte,” spoke of the “noble discoveries of this enlightened man,” the second adjective, like the first, was used ironically.

Edmund Burke had employed the phrase “this enlightened age” a number of times in his Reflections on the Revolution in France. But the passages in which the term is deployed—like much of the Reflections—are drenched in sarcasm and, in any case, he did not restrict the designation “enlightened” to the eighteenth century. Alluding to the execution of Charles I he observed sardonically, “The last century appears to me to have been quite as much enlightened.”

In short: “philosophism” and “illumination” did most of the work in anti-Jacobin rhetoric; “enlightened” and “enlightenment” had, at best, a minor role.

The image of the light of truth banishing the darkness of error was far too powerful a trope for opponents of the Revolution to surrender to their enemies. So they used it themselves. The frontispiece of the first volume of the Anti-Jacobin Review was an engraving by James Gillray entitled “A Peep into the cave of Jacobinism.” It depicts a woman wearing a banner on which is inscribed the word “Truth.” Holding a torch in her hand, she enters the cave in which “Jacobinism”—a creature that is half-human and half-snake—sits surrounded by books bearing the titles “atheism,” “ignorances,” “anarchy,” “sedition,” and “libels.” The light from Truth’s torch not only frightens the creature in the cave (causing its mask to pop off, revealing the hideous face beneath); its rays also cause the equally monstrous books surrounding the creature to burst into flames. What is striking about the imagery employed in the engraving is how familiar it is. Change the name of the creature in the cave to “Jesuitism” and alter the titles on the books to “fanaticism,” “enthusiasm,” and “prejudices” and the frontispiece could have been used on any number of Enlightenment journals.

Thus, as the eighteenth century came to a close, the word “enlightenment” seems to have carried no negative connotations, even among those who we now regard as the Enlightenment’s first opponents. “Illumination,” however,
was another story altogether. A letter from 12 November 1800 to the editor of *The German Museum* reported that

> the impositions of Abbe Baruel [sic] and Robinson [sic] have had such an effect upon the minds of the reading community, that it will take some time to subvert the fabric which they have erected; for here in the North, the very word illumination conveys perfect horror to the mind, and he who professes himself a friend to mental illumination, is branded with the name of plotter against the state, and an underminer of morality and religions.59

At the dawn of the nineteenth century, opponents of the French Revolution had successfully saddled something called “the Illumination” with all the negative attributes that the *Oxford English Dictionary* would later associate with “Enlightenment.”

Shelving the *Aufklärung*

In opting for “Illumination” as a translation for the German *Aufklärung*, Stirling and his colleagues were employing a term that carried considerable ideological baggage. Indeed, Sibree—who questioned whether the Illuminati existed—rejected the word in his translation of Hegel’s *Philosophy of History* precisely because of these associations.60 Stirling employed it, but—as we have seen—for much of the Preface to *The Secret of Hegel* simply left *Aufklärung* untranslated. Over thirty years later, in a footnote added in the second edition to the end of the Preface, he finally provided an explanation for his curious attachment to the German term. Noting that “in its ordinary use” the word meant simply “enlightenment—up lighting or lighting up,” he referred the reader to an essay he had written in 1860 on Lord Macaulay, an essay which he claimed marked “the first British mention of a German word that is now somewhat current.”61 The notion that *Aufklärung* had become “somewhat current” probably tells us more about Stirling’s limited contact with those outside the peculiar circle of British Hegelians he inhabited than it does about mid-nineteenth-century English usage. But Stirling’s discussion of the German term in his essay on Macaulay is invaluable in explaining why he persisted in using a German word that would appear, at least to us, to have a rather straight-forward English translation.

At one point in the essay, Stirling pondered what “system of thought” Hume was “held to represent” and suggested:

59 *The German Museum*, II (December 1800), 521.
60 Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, 438.
In one word, it is the philosophy of the eighteenth century. Now, to most of us, that one word is suggestive only of infidelity, free-thinking, deism, atheism, of scepticism in religion, of sensualism in philosophy, and of republicanism in politics. Still to apply any of these terms to the philosophy of the eighteenth century would be to name it badly, for, though the doctrines and opinions implied in such expressions are certainly concomitants and attendants of that philosophy, they are, in reality, only phenomenal and temporary forms. English thinkers, whichever side they have taken, have been content to remain with a very indistinct, obscure, and confused consciousness on these points; and the consequence is, that at this moment we know of no single really intelligent and fully enlightened discussion of this subject in the English language. The Germans, on the contrary, have coolly turned upon it, lifted it, looked at it, and examined it piecemeal, till now, having at length fairly filled and satisfied themselves with what of instruction, negative or positive, they could extract from it, they have long since packed it up, and laid it on the shelf, labeled Aufklärung, a word which, meaning in its ordinary use simply enlightenment—up-lighting or lighting up....

Stirling went on to propose that the word might best be translated “with reference at once to the special up-lighting implied, and a certain notorious exposition of that up-lighting, the ‘Age of Reason.’ ”

For Stirling, then, Aufklärung was something more than a name for a period. It summarized a process of reflection and categorization that, while completed in Germany, still remained to be accomplished in England. Stirling granted that there had been a series of “partial re-actions against the Aufklärung” in England, including a “Prudential Re-action” triggered by “Public considerations” (presumably a reference to British opponents of the French Revolution), a “Re-action of Poetry and Nature” (Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley), and finally a “Germanico-Literary Reaction” (Carlyle and Emerson). But these reactions, he insisted, had never been carried to completion and had been overwhelmed by “a retrograde re-action—a Revulsion—and of the shallowest order, back to the Aufklärung again.” The leading representatives of this “reaction” included Feuerbach and Buckle. As a result, the battle continued to rage in England between critics and advocates of the various “concomitants and attendants” of eighteenth-century philosophy in which both sides failed to grasp the animating principle that underlies and sustains “infidelity, free-thinking, deism, atheism ... scepticism in religion ... sensualism in philosophy, and

62 Stirling, “Lord Macaulay,” 120-21. It might be noted that in this passage the adjective “enlightened” would appear to carry only positive connotations.

... republicanism in politics.” In contrast, Germans had gained the requisite distance from these eighteenth-century controversies to see them as issuing from a single event and to comprehend the fundamental principle on which this event rested: “the right of private judgment.” This, for Stirling, was what “really constituted the spiritual attitude of humanity—its principle—in the eighteenth century.”

Strange though Stirling’s argument may appear initially, there is much to be said for it. Since the middle of the 1780s, when an article by Johann Friedrich Zöllner in the _Berlinische Monatsschrift_ challenged readers to answer the question “Was ist Aufklärung?,” Germans had been engaged in a protracted examination of the nature, limits, and possible dangers of the process known as Aufklärung. The authors of these essays sought to weigh the implications of a process, not to define the characteristics of a period. Aufklärung had not yet—as Hegel would put it—been placed on the shelf. In Stirling’s view, it was Hegel’s great achievement to have done just that.

Hegel was one of the first (if not the first) to use Aufklärung to designate a particular historical period, rather than an ongoing activity. His first, tenuous step in this direction was taken in the _Phenomenology of Spirit_. There Hegel employed Aufklärung to designate a cultural constellation that was preceded by the world of the “Self-Estranged Spirit” (a world which corresponds roughly to the Ancien Régime and whose bizarre contours come to life in Hegel’s account thanks to the Diderot’s recently translated dialogue _Rameau’s Nephew_) and followed by “Absolute Freedom and Terror” (Hegel’s account of the French Revolution). While it is understandable that recent English translators of the _Phenomenology_, when rendering the title of this section, opt for “the Enlightenment,” the translation is not without its problems. As P. N. Furbank has observed, just as the title of Marx’s _Das Kapital_ is conventionally translated as _Capital_ rather than _The Capital_, there is no reason to suppose that _die Aufklärung_ always needs to be rendered as “the Enlightenment.” Much of the time “enlightenment” will work quite nicely. It bears remembering that all the headings and subheadings in the section of the _Phenomenology_ dealing with the category of “Spirit” are preceded by definite articles. Why, then, do translators who have successfully resisted the urge to turn _der Geist_ into “the Spirit” or _


66 This convention is followed both in A. V. Miller’s translation (Oxford, 1977) and in the translation of chapter VI by the Toronto Hegel Group, Hegel, _Spirit: Chapter Six of Hegel’s Phenomenology_, ed. Daniel E. Shannon (Indianapolis, Ind., 2001).

67 P. N. Furbank, _Diderot_ (New York, 1992), 450.
Moralität into “the Morality” conclude that die Aufklärung must be “the Enlightenment”?

J. B. Baillie’s 1910 translation of the Phenomenology eschewed the definite article, and the footnote Baillie appended to the section he titled simply “Enlightenment” suggests that he, free from the anachronistic assumption that Hegel was making a first stab at what Ernst Cassirer was later to achieve, may have had a better sense of what was going on in this section than later translators. Baillie observed that the section should be understood as the outcome of the previous section’s account of “Faith and Pure Insight,” thus recognizing that there is a very close relationship between the concepts Aufklärung and reine Einsicht. Indeed, Hegel himself emphasized the connection in the definition of Aufklärung he offered at the start of the section devoted to “The Struggle between Enlightenment and Superstition.” The passage in question appears as follows in Baillie’s translation:

The various negative forms which consciousness adopts, the attitude of scepticism, and that of theoretical and practical idealism, are inferior attitudes compared with that of pure insight and the expansion of pure insight—enlightenment.68

“Enlightenment” thus denotes the spread of a stance towards the world that Hegel had earlier denoted as “pure insight.” We are still dealing with a term that refers—like the first definition in the Oxford English Dictionary—to a process: the Phenomenology is concerned with the dissemination of a cognitive stance that manifested itself most explicitly in a particular geographical location (France) and at a particular historical period (the period leading up to the French Revolution). But the Phenomenology, for all of its historical allusions, was neither a philosophy of history nor even a history of philosophy. It was, as Hegel himself came to realize, a rather peculiar undertaking that attempted to use a historical narrative to resolve conceptual problems.69

Hegel did not finally place Aufklärung “on the shelf” until two decades later when, in his lectures on the history of philosophy and the philosophy of history, the word is finally used to refer to a particular period in world history and to a particular period in the development of philosophy. His discussion of eighteenth-century philosophy in the Lectures on the History of Philosophy distinguished between the paths that the Enlightenment had taken in French and in German philosophy, thus laying out the basic framework that Schwegler,

68 Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit (Baillie) [Moldenauer and Michel edition, 400].
69 Shortly before his death Hegel attempted to revise the work, but he soon gave up, characterizing it as “a curious early work” whose arguments were much too closely bound to “the time of its composition” and, as such, incapable of revision. See Hegel’s note in Hoffmeister’s edition of the Phenomenology (Hamburg, 1952), 578.
Uebenveg, and Windelband would subsequently follow. In the Lectures on the Philosophy of History he emphasized the atypicality of the French experience and stressed that they were cursed with a philosophy that could not help but remain “formal” and “abstract” since it sprung from a culture that had never undergone a Reformation. As a result, the French Enlightenment was thrown into a struggle against both Church and State, while in Germany Enlightenment was carried out “on the side of theology” and was thus more favorably disposed towards the political and social order that confronted it. Hegel’s later discussion of the relationship between enlightenment and revolution thus offered something that reads much more like conventional history than the often puzzling movement of categories that animates the Phenomenology. In his Berlin lectures, Hegel was aware of the diversity of forms that the Enlightenment had taken and the unique set of circumstances that produced the French Revolution. He was able to do this because he knew, as he could not when he was struggling to complete the Phenomenology even as Napoleon’s armies closed in on Jena, that both the Enlightenment and the French Revolution were over. Dusk had fallen and it was safe for Minerva’s owl to take flight.

Conclusion: Enlightenment as Period and as Process

It seems, then, that Stirling may—in part—have gotten it right: the transformation of a process known as “enlightenment” into a period known as “the Enlightenment” moved at a different pace in Germany and in Britain. The transformation was well underway by the time Hegel delivered his Berlin lectures on the philosophy of history and the history of philosophy. For the rest of the century, Aufklärung would have a long and productive career in German histories of philosophy. From the middle of the nineteenth century onward, English translators of these histories and of Hegel’s own works struggled to find English equivalents for this curious German word, initially employing the politically charged term “the Illumination” but, by the end of the century, settling on “the Enlightenment,” a word which—as Stirling noted in 1898—carried none of the connotations of “infidelity” that Germans associated with the term Aufklärung.

A watershed of sorts was reached in 1910 with the publication of John Grier Hibben’s The Philosophy of the Enlightenment, the first study of eighteenth-century philosophy to employ “Enlightenment” in its title. Hibben, an American Hegelian, offered a sensible, comprehensive account of eighteenth-century thought, free from the prejudices and distortions that the definition in the Oxford English Dictionary associated with the term. Indeed, twenty years

70 Hegel, Werke, XII, 526 [Philosophy of History, 444].
71 Stirling, The Secret of Hegel, lxiii.
before Ernst Cassirer’s similarly titled work, Hibben produced a survey that exhibits many of the virtues of Cassirer’s now-classic account. Far from carrying—as the OED would have it—an “implied charge of shallow and pretentious intellectualism, unreasonable contempt for tradition and authority,” at the end of the nineteenth century the designation “the Enlightenment” had the virtue, unlike “the Illumination,” of steering clear of the political polemics of the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. While “the Enlightenment” might still be criticized for its shortcomings, it was—unlike “the Illumination”—not something to be feared and despised.

Twentieth-century discussions of “the Enlightenment” did not, however, follow the course that Stirling projected: “the Enlightenment” has not remained on the shelf. Critics of various persuasions continue to feel the need to take it down from time to time and bash it around a bit. Despite the best efforts of its admirers, it has come to serve as a convenient scape-goat on which those who feel ill at ease in the modern world can vent their frustrations. At the same time, historians working in the area of eighteenth-century studies have found themselves in need of more shelf space. The cubby hole which once held “the Enlightenment” has not proved capacious enough for the various Enlightenments—“high and low,” “radical and moderate,” French, German, Scottish, Austrian, Italian, and English—that have come into prominence over the last half century. Those who have been taking “the Enlightenment” off the shelf to slap it have paid little attention to those who have been finding that “the Enlightenment” does not really fit into the slot into which it was crammed at the close of the nineteenth century. Those who have been busy finding new species of enlightenment in places where its presence was, at best, a rumor, have understandably devoted little time to defending “the Enlightenment” from its critics. The very notion that there was a single thing called “the Enlightenment” appears, more and more, to be an illusion best left to the fevered brains of those whose approach to the eighteenth century seems to owe more to the Abbé Barruel and John Robison than it does to anything that might pass muster as history. Why attempt to defend “the Enlightenment” from criticism when the notion that there was such a thing as “the Enlightenment” begins to look suspiciously like a red herring that a group of English Hegelians somehow managed to smuggle into the OED?

Yet, if a certain amount of skepticism may be warranted about “the Enlightenment,” the reader of eighteenth-century texts will, nevertheless, sometimes find passages that prompt an appreciation for the process known as “en-

73 Cassirer cited Hibben’s study in this 1931 article on “Enlightenment” in the Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences.

lightenment.” Let us close with one example. The second volume of Richardson’s 1798-99 collection of Kant’s Essays and Treatises on Moral, Political, and Various Philosophical Subjects opened with a translation of Kant’s Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and the Sublime, a text that reiterated, without comment, David Hume’s doubts that it would be possible to produce “a single example where a Negro has shown talents.” At this point in his translation Richardson inserted a footnote that reads:

During the American rebellion the translator knew in South Carolina a Negro physician of reputation; and in Antigua a heaven-born Negro preacher, without shoes and stockings.75

It is a brief note, perhaps scarcely worth noting, and certainly not the sort of indulgence that a translator would be permitted today. Yet there is something touching in Richardson’s gesture, both for what it suggests about how he understood his relationship to the text he was translating and for what it suggests about the age in which he lived. Richardson took the challenge that Hume posed and that Kant passed on as something that he ought to address. An empirical claim had been made, and Richardson knew that he was in a unique position to respond to it. For he, unlike Hume and Kant, had once lived in that strange land called America and, while there, had met Negroes whose talents could not be denied. So he mentioned them. From the little we know about Richardson, he does not appear to have had an “unreasonable contempt” for authority—he was horrified by the French Revolution and he had enough respect for Kant not to bother him with too many questions about how to go about translating his writings.76 But he did seem to think that getting facts right mattered, that false claims needed to be refuted, and that in the cosmopolitan world of readers and writers that formed the republic of letters, translators had an obligation to talk back to texts if such conversation might push back the barriers of prejudice and ignorance. Had Kant been able to read what Richardson had written, one hopes that he would have appreciated his able translator’s comment for what it was: an example of the “public use of reason”—the touchstone of the activity that Kant called “enlightenment.”

Boston University.

75 Kant, Essays and Treatises, II, 75.
76 For Richardson’s views on the French Revolution see his footnote in Essays and Treatises, II, 62. For his questions to Kant, see Correspondence, tr. Arnulf Zweig (Cambridge, 1999), 548.