Ends of Enlightenment

Critique defined the Enlightenment so strongly that the two terms approach tautology. We might now call this critical impulse reflexivity—whether as exemplified by Newtonian induction, by the restless skepticism of a David Hume, or by the *esprit philosophique* that for Denis Diderot and his colleagues proudly defined contemporaneity as such. In Immanuel Kant's article "What Is Enlightenment?" (1784), the *philosophe*, who had been sketched in a 1765 entry in the *Encyclopédie* as the model of independently balanced critical thinking, reemerges as the ideal subject to live under an enlightened monarch. In America, the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution assumed such an ideal new citizen. As Kant declared in the preface to his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781): "Our age is the genuine age of criticism, to which everything must submit. Religion through its holiness and legislation through its majesty commonly seek to exempt themselves from it. But in this way they excite a just suspicion against themselves, and cannot lay claim to that unfeigned respect that reason grants only to that which has been able to withstand its free and public examination." Enlightenment critique delineated not only distinctive ideas but also idealized actors and institutional outcomes.[1] Enlightenment was a state of being, a personal stance, an orientation to the world, and a present moment in history. We live with residual versions of these ideas, actors, and institutions in today's world, even if most often in the modes of cultural unconsciousness and fragmentary recollection.

The essays collected here aim to be in the spirit of Enlightenment critique, though of our own time. I am concerned, that is, with the Enlightenment and its consequences, but always from today's perspective. I try

to step outside of the framework of eighteenth-century ideas and not to let the objects of enquiry define my approach. We must conserve our own systems of reference and our own contemporaneity. Otherwise, as Anthony Giddens has remarked, the result approaches recapitulation. Without such distance, any period's historical character will remain elusive.[2] Thus, although my essays centrally engage the now remote period called the Enlightenment, I do not attempt strict reconstruction, even when my arguments depend upon historical understanding. Rather, I look back upon the past through analytic and interpretive lenses that crystallize around the armature of the Enlightenment and that stabilize our perceptions of its residual and fragmentary survival in the realms of philosophy, ethics, institutional formations, and in imaginative creation in literature and the arts. The Enlightenment ended long ago, and its initial ends are part of history, but its purposes return as new impulses that produce seemingly new endings. My title, *Ends of Enlightenment*, refers both to the past of a period long over and to the continuing presence of its purposes. Enlightenment repeated itself in the twentieth century and is doing so still today, but with the differences inevitably present in return and with the productive dissonance that belated repetition enables.

Critical distance allows me to redescribe the eighteenth-century novel as an Enlightenment knowledge system that overlapped with those of science and philosophy in a period before the modern disciplines were marked off from one another. I show how ways of probing experience in the novel were interleaved with methods of experimentation in science. My continuing discussion of realism and fictionality focuses on techniques of narration that emerged in novels of the period but that much later became apparent as such—techniques that in fact permeated social thought and interaction as well. Realism and its accompanying fictionality are, in my account, not so much literary practices as modes that attribute coherence to life as it is lived in the modern world—ways of imparting order and decipherability to the flux of data conferred by our perceptual faculties. Eighteenth-century realism, significantly, replaced the techniques of classical rhetoric, which, as David Wellbery and I maintain in "Rhetoricality," no longer had the power to organize experience within networks of social communication. Instead of formal oral persuasion, which had motivated classical rhetoric, one finds increasingly in the eighteenth century that socially motivated forms assumed dominance: conversation, conversationally actuated writing like letters and essays, and the informally structured exchange of ideas through public opinion.[3] Realism, with its systems of evidence and judgment—as

well as its capacity to render thought and thus to foster the communal sense that our minds are interconnected—sustained the fiction that people could move collectively in the wake of the solipsistic, individual-centered faculty psychology that empiricism had brought with it. Such fictions still structure ordinary life in modern society. Ideas central to my analysis, such as literary "realism," "virtual witnessing," and "free indirect discourse," among others, did not exist in the eighteenth century. But, living as we do now at one of the ends of Enlightenment, later ideas allow us to reframe the period and to reinhabit it on our own terms.

In this introduction I interweave short accounts of the essays that follow with an overview of recurring central themes of the volume. The sections of my introduction mark out central concerns for the reader: "Novelistic Realism and the Forms of Knowledge"; "Debating Enlightenment"; "Verisimilitude and New Media"; "Ends and Persistence of Enlightenment"; and "Enlightenment Today?" The table of contents shows that the essays themselves are grouped into parts centered on knowledge, on the novel as a genre, and on the framework of rhetoric inherited from the past.

I. Novelistic Realism and the Forms of Knowledge

How did the novel of the eighteenth century embody knowledge? In my essays, this question lies sometimes at the surface, sometimes in the substrate. How do I place the novel in the epistemological field of the period? I consider the novel not merely as an aesthetic genre but as a force in thinking. In *Imagining the Penitentiary*, I claimed an enabling presence for the novel in the emergence of reformative conscience and thus in the cognitive system that justified, actuated, and shaped the new penitentiary prisons of the later eighteenth century. There, I sought to engage novelistic practice and narrative technique with reformist discourse and with social psychology of the period, especially with the ideas of Jeremy Bentham and of Adam Smith in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759). I found not only thematic conjunctures but also alignments between the narration of thought in the novel—especially with the technique now known as free indirect discourse—and the constitutive impersonality underlying individual mental states and social formations. Although Locke, Hume, Smith, and Bentham were strongly present, my story traced the confluence of diverse knowledge practices more than the specific arguments of philosophers themselves.[4]

Six essays in this volume strive explicitly to broaden the domain of practical philosophy to include the novel—more often as a genre that inquires

into knowledge and knowing than as a site of philosophical argumentation itself. I am guided, always, by Hume's understanding that the ideal of philosophy is to bring together, in a "double existence," the examination of experience through reasoned reflection with the consideration of ordinary life in light of imagination and the moral sentiments. These essays refer often and centrally to Hume, who is for me a presiding point of reference.[5]

"Enlightenment Fiction and the Scientific Hypothesis," traces ways in which unease about fiction played out during the eighteenth century, both in the novel and in theories about the proper role of hypotheses in scientific inquiry. I argue that, as the century unfolded, the earlier discourse that integrated fictionality in narrative and science mutated into a proto-disciplinary division between manifest fictionality in the novel and the tacit, methodologically submerged fictionality that supported a new factuality in science—a fiction that is called "hypothesis." I maintain, further, that manifest fictionality in the realm of the novel came, over time, to certify scientific factuality.

"Matters of Fact: Virtual Witnessing and the Public in Hogarth's Narratives," shows how an ostentatious hyperrealism in Hogarth's early progresses, along with the sheer density of factual reference in these plates, calls objects to attention as physical facts—bringing them to focused awareness in ways analogous to Martin Heidegger's claims that philosophy makes the everyday available to reflective consciousness. I parallel Hogarth's realism with narrative and visual methods of persuasion that fostered consensus about scientific factuality in the period—"virtual witnessing" as Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer call it.[6] Invitations to reflection opened by realism, I argue, demanded for their audience the traits Jürgen Habermas in his account of the public sphere assigned to the ideal disinterested actor.

With "Novel Knowledge," I again put the novel explicitly into the realm of epistemology and treat it alongside works of philosophy and natural science. Having observed that the words "experience" and "experiment" lie in the same semantic domain (explicitly in French, implicitly in English), I consider the novel side by side with the period's presentations of scientific findings using devices of surrogate witnessing, a topic I also explored in the essay on Hogarth. I compare the staging of experience in the novel with experimental contrivance in science and claim that fictionality is central to both. Finally, with reference to the debate about the validity of induction sparked by Hume, I turn to the problem of generalization from specific instances that lies at the heart of claims to knowledge both by the novel and by experimental culture during the Scientific Revolution.

In "The Novel as Modern Myth," the topic of verisimilitude recurs, along with questions about the nature of the "real." Here, again influenced by Hume, I maintain that our experience of the real as such is verisimilar and that realism is, thus, a way of proceeding in life, not merely a literary mode. I venture that the real operates in the modern world as myth and, further, that realism in the novel is not chiefly thematic and referential but rather deploys an arsenal of narrative techniques that permit language to mimic the experience of transparency through which we certify the real as such. The real, in this account, is phantasmatic and the realism that renders it is fundamentally Gothic. The Gothic novel is, then, not an aberrant subgenre but the metagenre that exposes the nature of realism itself.

Realism, as it figures in the European novel from the seventeenth century to the present, has profound ideological implications. I explore these in the essays described above but also in "Prison Reform and the Sentence of Narration in *The Vicar of Wakefield*" and in "Impersonal Violence: The Penetrating Gaze and the Field of Narration in *Caleb Williams*." I accept many standard markers of realism: for instance, attention to detail, settings in a recognizable present or historical past, characters with everyday concerns, plots driven by probabilistic connections of cause and effect, and stylistic forms that echo plain, factual reporting. But I focus in particular on the interchange of first- and third-person narrative forms in free indirect discourse, where first-person thoughts appear impersonally in third-person grammar. External sociolinguistic usage interweaves with internal subjective states to form the structure of the modern human character and citizen as at once public and private. Adam Smith described this modern person in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* and gave an account of the fusion of social norms with individual conscience. With Goldsmith, I explore the political placement of the impersonal within the personal in the 1760s and track the presence of implicit omniscient authority both in the vicar's ideas about prisons and in the covert third-person grammar concealed within his first-person narrative. These concerns lead me, especially in "The Novel as Modern Myth," to identify how the spectral effects of devices such as free indirect discourse reveal a crucial, if counterintuitive, kinship between classic realism and the Gothic in fiction. With Godwin, I uncover the violence which, overtly present in his account of Lord Falkland, is everywhere implicit in the narrative techniques Godwin employs to anatomize (his metaphor) the characters. As a personal aside, I may note that my fascination with the medical and anatomical imagery of the eighteenth century, which arose during my work on this piece, led me to participate fully for a term in

the Stanford Medical School's course in gross anatomy. A postscript to the essay on Godwin offers a kind of anthropology of my experience of anatomizing a human body with a team of three other students.

Realism and verisimilitude crystallize important values that we associate with the Enlightenment, just as do other such characteristic phenomena of the eighteenth century: the consensus-building that yields scientific fact, free-floating conversation in coffeehouses and salons, and the rapid exchange of ideas in expeditiously available print media.

II. Debating Enlightenment

During the 1950s, while working within the Frankfurt School critique of Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, and yet straining against boundaries drawn by its masters, Jürgen Habermas redescribed the Enlightenment as both a historical phenomenon and a model for public discourse in the present, whereas Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* emerges, in typical abstracts, as an attack on eighteenth-century thought. For them, the example of Nazism became the horrifying endpoint of the will to master nature through scientific, technological, and governmental devices. In fact, they traced the rationalistic impetus toward mastery—seen as the elimination of uncertainty, doubt, and fear—back to the ancient Greeks, and, in doing so, they marked "enlightenment" as a philosophical and societal urge across Western history. Yet, in a real sense, the project to improve humankind through enlightenment had ended again with the antifascist construction of Horkheimer and Adorno.[7]

Habermas focused in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* on the eighteenth century itself and on social interaction more than on philosophical thought. He recast the Enlightenment as a historical moment that figured forth ideals worthy to guide public discourse in the present. His account of Enlightenment conversation and writing in the public sphere as models for rational discussion in contemporary society departed sharply from the characterization by his mentors of the Enlightenment's instrumental reason, which set the stage for twentieth-century atrocities. Similarly, Habermas rejected the negative stance of Reinhart Koselleck's *Critique and Crisis*—a work roughly contemporaneous with his own positive construction—although he acknowledged Koselleck's account of the destructive contradictions unleashed by Enlightenment critique.[8]

Habermas attempted to restart the Enlightenment by framing it as a constructive model. Referring to ideals about sociability promoted by

Joseph Addison's periodical *The Spectator* and to the representation of private subjectivity in Samuel Richardson's novel *Pamela*, as well as to the conversational practices that governed coffeehouses in eighteenth-century London and salons in Paris, Habermas constructed a history that reinforced his ideal of rationally driven, interest-free discussion by politically engaged but unofficial actors, as the basis for progress in modern democracy. He crucially designated the kind of speaker capable of participating in disinterested discourse as one in possession of a species of self-reflexive interiority shaped privately within the bourgeois family. This speaker's authority derived not from title or social rank but from reflective reason, emotional poise, and social responsiveness.

These ideas were widely recognized and disputed in Germany after Habermas's book appeared in 1962. But only in 1989—after almost thirty years of intervening work during which Habermas's emphasis had moved away from actual actors to the structure of discourse itself—did the English translation of *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* set off powerful new waves of research into Enlightenment ideas and practices. Disputes about the historical accuracy of Habermas's account of the eighteenth century and about the validity of the ideals he defined for public discourse continue unabated. But the 1765 *philosophe*—historically concrete, possessed of *l'esprit philosophique*, and conversationally engaged—was transmuted in Habermas's later work into abstract language-functions defined by rules. What had been conversation recurred as motivated discourse. The historical Enlightenment, which in Habermas's critique had ended because of the domination of writing and discussion in print by commercial and political interests, had, in effect, been transformed by his thinking during the latter decades of the twentieth century into a debate about the nature and validity of debate.

Some of my essays join in the resurgence of attention to Habermas, and my thinking has been responsive to his ideas about the formation of knowledge and the roles of those involved in its construction and dissemination. Often, I consider readers and the nature of social actors in the eighteenth century. Although I cited Habermas in *Imagining the Penitentiary*, the real impact of his historical work on me and on the field of eighteenth-century studies came only after the English publication of *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. All of the essays in this volume were written after the appearance of this translation except those on Goldsmith and Godwin. Habermas is present especially in "Enlightenment Fiction and the Scientific Hypothesis" and in "Matters of Fact:

Virtual Witnessing and the Public in Hogarth's Narratives." In these pieces, I connect two tendencies: on one hand, Habermas's claim that consensus may be reached among disinterested actors in public discussion; and on the other, the derivation of scientific fact through surrogate witnessing in genres of publication that Shapin and Schaffer take as crucial to the constitution of *fact* in the period. In my introduction to *Tom Jones*, I align the audience that Henry Fielding defines and addresses in his introductory essays to the eighteen books of his novel with Habermas's public. Fielding's narratorial stance enables him to educate the reader as a judge of the complexities of human action—to lead the reader to judgments characteristic of the ideal citizen/speaker/writer in the public sphere: judgments that are rational, impartial, balanced, evidentiary, and subject to change through altered circumstance. Habermas took Richardson's *Pamela* as a test case revealing the formation of what he called "audience-oriented subjectivity," and thus defined the inner world and social orientation of the actor/citizen who speaks in public on the basis of traits formed in the private realm of the family. But Fielding, much more explicitly than Richardson, delineates the private/public symbiosis crucial to Habermas.[9]

Habermas insists that the ideal actor in the public sphere had to put rank and private interests aside in order to act ideally in the debates of the coffeehouse, the stock exchange, or the salon. In one of my essays, I raise an implicit challenge to his assumption. In "Rational Choice in Love," I consider the depiction in Choderlos de Laclos's *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (1782) of the limits of rational planning and gaming—activities specifically excluded from Habermas's definition of rational discourse. I pose the alternative discourse of interests so powerfully documented in Albert O. Hirschman's *The Passions and the Interests*.[10] In his account, during the first half of the eighteenth century and in prior decades, important intellectuals maintained that the exercise of self-interest—sometimes driven by reason but, more typically, by the passions—was beneficial to society. The countervailing forces of such interests, interacting with one another, brought the passions of men into balance and worked to the benefit of civilization. In this analysis, the traditional moral advocacy that placed reason over the passions had failed to control fundamental human drives and had not recognized their productive social dynamic. This view, in which an active tension among interests beneficially shapes society, is incompatible with Habermas's idealization of interest-free actors engaged in autonomous, free-flowing discussion as the essential basis for modern social and political structures. Hirschman accounts historically for a range of theories that

justify the pursuit of self-interest by groups and individuals as valuable to society. Habermas, by contrast, poses a utopian ideal for communication that posits interest-free critical discussion as the route to consensus and rational action in modern society. My account of Laclos's novel implicitly casts doubt in both directions.

III. Verisimilitude and New Media

Since the first of these essays was published in 1987, the Enlightenment has returned in virtual guises and dispersed forms. My writings here are like recollections, at once capturing a past that has ended and holding it present in newly mediated forms. Knowledge systems, for example, have become digital and exhaustively indexable. Such indexing made a recent essay like "Novel Knowledge" possible. The Enlightenment ideal of universal, ever-expanding learning might seem at last to have been digitally realized, just as the technology of cross-referencing so vital to Diderot and d'Alembert's *Encyclopédie* might appear to have been fully achieved by multi-indexical data mining, and by the internet itself, where a search using Google yields the content I seek and silently cross-references my search with other searches. The internet's parallel to Diderot is Wikipedia, an online encyclopedia that notionally is unmoderated by any central authority, barring minor censorship and the prevention of vandalism. Anyone may contribute and anyone may modify the ever-transient entries. A listing of recent changes allows knowledge vigilantes to confirm the accuracy of newly added materials. Wikipedia's fundamental principles—its "five pillars"—interestingly include central markers of Enlightenment critique. Articles must assume a neutral stance and represent multiple points of view. Articles must "strive for verifiable accuracy," exclude personal experiences and opinions, and cite verifiable sources. Authors must be civil, respectful, act in good faith, and work toward consensus. All of this testifies to the durability of Enlightenment values.[11] But internet systems are vast on a scale that alters the nature of things. Wikipedia, for instance, approaches 4,000,000 articles in English. By contrast, Diderot and D'Alembert's *Encyclopédie* contained only about 74,000 articles. The earlier systems were scaled to the human being—a reader capable of grasping diverse fields of inquiry.

The present scale of knowledge is ungraspable—dispersed into modules of extreme specialization that are indexable, and thus superficially accessible, but that do not interlock. This dispersal arises not merely because of scale, but because the objects of knowledge are now organized into

disciplinary domains, each with its own separate protocols. Such disciplinary segmentation had barely begun to take shape during the Enlightenment. It is now pervasive, even in digital media like Wikipedia. The essay in this volume on "Hume's Learned and Conversible Worlds," coauthored with Robin Valenza, traces this process and the consequences of the divergent cultures and expectations that were already emerging in the eighteenth century for the sciences and the humanities. We live still today with the assumption that difficult scientific ideas can be satisfactorily explained for general audiences, even as they remain technical and complex, whereas specialized arguments in the humanities are given bad-writing awards if they are not couched in everyday language immediately accessible to the common reader.[12]

Running parallel with the transformation of knowledge into data has been the mutation of conversation into social networks enabled by the internet. I may communicate with anyone at any time, anywhere, but at least on Twitter, only in isolated bursts of 140 characters. Under these conditions, the formation of individual personality in face-to-face socio-psychic interactions of the kind that Adam Smith described in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, his account of the "impartial spectator" as the ever-vigilant monitor in each of us, could become irrelevant. The basic mechanism that Smith delineated remained influential well into the twentieth century, whether in the psychic force of Freud's superego derived from one's personal past, in George Herbert Mead's literally Smithean inner person in *Mind, Self, and Society*, or in Alvin W. Gouldner's forces of cultural guilt and shame in *Enter Plato*. Current social-networking devices are too new for us to judge, and others will yet emerge, but with the enormous potential they allow for deceit—far beyond the possibilities of face-to-face interaction—they will open society to new personality formations. As early as 1959, in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Erving Goffman launched a long series of studies that may anticipate the new person without personality—the situational and performative social human being. Recently, however, studies of consciousness and thought in cognitive science reveal new dimensions within which to consider social formation. So-called "mind reading" addresses issues similar to those Smith raised but with conceptual tools from today's cognitive science. More intriguing are findings about the ways "mirror neurons" link us to others through mutually reflexive responses at the brain's most detailed levels.[13]

Is verisimilitude the new truth? Are the new media not the new knowledge but rather verisimilar infrastructures in which truth-value is secondary?

Will the alert user confuse form and content? The skeptical, always critical *philosophe* of the *Encyclopédie*'s 1765 article had thought not:

> For the philosopher truth is not a mistress that corrupts his imagination. . . . He does not confuse it with verisimilitude: he accepts as true what is true, as false what is false, as doubtful what is doubtful, and as probable what is merely probable. He goes even further: when he does not have any proper basis, he knows how to suspend judgment, and this is the most perfect trait of the philosopher.[14]

In his *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739–40), Hume had been more rigorous about method and more reserved about the possibility of finding truth. Even the faculty of reason is contingent. I quote him at the end of my essay "Novel Knowledge."

> We must . . . in every reasoning form a new judgment, as a check or controul on our first judgment or belief; and must enlarge our view to comprehend a kind of history of all the instances, wherein our understanding has deceiv'd us, compar'd with those, wherein its testimony was just and true. Our reason must be consider'd as a kind of cause, of which truth is the natural effect; but such-a-one as by the irruption of other causes, and by the inconstancy of our mental powers, may frequently be prevented. By this means all knowledge degenerates into probability; and this probability is greater or less, according to our experience of the veracity or deceitfulness of our understanding, and according to the simplicity or intricacy of the question.[15]

When it comes to the search for knowledge and the conduct of human life, Hume cannot dismiss verisimilitude like the *philosophe*, but instead pragmatically assigns contingent value to it. Yet he and the *philosophe* crucially share confidence in the contingent power of judgment to sort out hierarchies of value.

The state of suspended judgment endorsed by the 1765 *philosophe* as one dimension of the quest to separate truth from the flux of verisimilitude has, in the postmodernist account, been supplanted by the media containing every form of life. Jean Baudrillard's simulacra are nothing if not verisimilar stand-ins for a real that had been guaranteed from the eighteenth century onward by the sensory faculties. Then, one might suspend judgment but also move toward probability by making critical observations and gathering facts. Veri-Similitude may seem now to be a permanent condition. Theories such as those of Baudrillard and Jean-François Lyotard point in this direction.[16] But, leaving out such extreme theories, the world around us actually does run on probabilistic procedures, which, for all of their vulnerability to failure, generally do allow lives to function and knowledge

to be gained. Scientific findings that underlie cures to diseases and space-landings are, at their base, statistical in nature and therefore not absolutely certain. I believe that vigor yet remains in these Enlightenment practices, no less than in such real, if at times tremulous, values as those of rights, majority rule, compromise, judicial evidence, and even in the observation of trivial rules, such as stopping at stop signs, that let us get on without harm to ourselves and others.

IV. Ends and Persistence of Enlightenment

The Enlightenment as a cluster of writings and performative events already had been defined by the end of the 1780s, when the French Revolution bloodily refigured its crafted critical balances into stark oppositions. Although Enlightenment giants such as the Marquis de Condorcet played important roles after 1789, a brief but cataclysmic few years soon unleashed the reason-haunting demons of Francisco Goya's *Caprichos* (1799) in a Terror of Gothic extremity. The Enlightenment was now in the past—engulfed by the very emotions that it cherished but sought to moderate through the force of civil society. Whether challenged by revolution, by the Romantic embrace of the individual creative imagination, by the elevation of spirit in German idealist critique, by the vast social changes wrought by urbanism and industrialism, by nationalistic fervor, or by extreme rearticulations of its own intellectual productions such as Utilitarianism, or centrally inspected prisons and factories, the Enlightenment would recede during the nineteenth century into a topic for historians. Only aesthetic reminiscences could, nostalgically, recall the period's texture: Sir Walter Scott's novels; the writings of the Goncourt brothers on Rococo art; the Wallace Collection of eighteenth-century French painting, furniture, and art objects; reconstructions of eighteenth-century musical style in cameo moments by Tchaikovsky; and, most oddly, phantasmagoric reappearances of Marie Antoinette in memoirs and jeweled portraits.[17] Or, personal ironists might cast backward glances at eighteenth-century skeptical critique, echoing it in works such as Lord Byron's *Don Juan* (1819–24), Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* (1833–34), or William Makepeace Thackeray's *Vanity Fair* (1847–48).

Critique had produced potent ideals such as the autonomy of the self and institutionalized freedom. But Kant's Horatian dictum "dare to know" could turn corrosive. Jean-Jacques Rousseau's condemnation that society's most basic institutions were fundamentally corrupting reversed the

reigning assumption that the *philosophes* lived in an age of ever-increasing refinement and intellectual acumen. Even an idea such as the rights of man, positive in itself, produced ideological stresses that existing political institutions could not subsume. Neither Enlightenment systems nor the period's political and social order could remain whole in the presence of critique's acid environment of skepticism and paradox. Critique, by its very nature, according to Koselleck, was governed by internal contradictions of such profundity that they undermined even the regimes that attempted to assimilate them through reform. The ends—the very purposes—of Enlightenment shattered.[18]

Michel Foucault declared that Kant's "What Is Enlightenment?" posed a question that "modern philosophy has not been capable of answering but has never managed to get rid of either." Nor has the question remained quite the same as for Kant in 1784. This is because "criticism is no longer going to be practiced in the search for formal structures with universal value but, rather, as a historical investigation into the events that have led us to constitute ourselves and to recognize ourselves as subjects of what we are doing, thinking, saying."[19] To be for or against Enlightenment, for Foucault, is a burden—a false dichotomy—compared with an acceptance of the skeptical posture implicit in critique itself. This is the stance I strive to maintain. More explicitly, Foucault's words could well serve as an epigraph to the earlier essays in this collection, for the articles here on Goldsmith and Godwin, no less than my book *Imagining the Penitentiary*, were written under the sign of Foucault.[20]

V. Enlightenment Today?

What is the standing of Enlightenment today? Do its ends, in the sense of its purposes, remain vital through multiple endings? Is it still possible to experience Enlightenment, or are we bound by the postmodern condition merely to recollect it? In *The Culture of Diagram*, which Michael Marrinan and I coauthored, we concluded by suggesting that

> the descriptive regimes of our digital age, bound historically and philosophically to those of the *Encyclopedia*, are capable of producing working descriptions for living, despite—or even because of—their reliance on sampling, calculations, and probability. . . . Perceptual certainty has been sacrificed, but human beings are highly adaptable: our fascination with new media means that we have all become creatures of chance. Reality returns as virtual so that we might see.[21]

Can we move beyond critique to action staged pragmatically within the remnants of Enlightenment? Habermas's own thought about the public sphere has transmuted over the decades into a highly abstract set of theories defining the rules of disinterested rational discourse concerning society. But he seeks to grasp the essence of an ideal that continues to fascinate. The virtual domain of Wikipedia still attempts to govern itself within categories that survive from the Enlightenment. However great the stresses and strains, citizens of the United States and the countries of the European Economic Community, among many others across the world, live politically under constitutions built on Enlightenment principles defined by Locke and his successors. The legacy of equality, human rights, objective scientific inquiry, and open communication continues with normative force for countless citizens of the world. Functional differentiation among human beings has replaced hierarchy based on birth as an ideal in large sectors of the world, though class heritage and economic privilege constantly threaten to replace new forms of hierarchy with the old.[22]

In launching a project called "Re:Enlightenment," aimed both to grasp and change this ideal, Clifford Siskin, William Warner, Peter de Bolla, Kevin Brine and others, representing universities, libraries, museums, and academies, assert that

> The Enlightenment of the eighteenth century—the revolution in tools, methods, and institutions that recast inquiry and enterprise in the West—still shapes the ways in which knowledge is produced and disseminated today. . . . Now, more than two centuries later, gradual and sudden changes in technology, finance, and society have put that inheritance and its heirs under pressure—pressure not only to understand those changes but also to participate actively in shaping them.[23]

The very term "Re:Enlightenment" implies endings definitive enough to require the reformulation of basic premises. We may juxtapose a phenomenon from modern cognitive science such as the mirror neuron with Adam Smith's description of social interactivity, but the idea of the mirror neuron is not a return to Smith or a repetition. It occupies a parallel universe of thought and experience. While recalling eighteenth-century ideas about conversation, we may consider Facebook or Twitter without confusing social networking with face-to-face give-and-take. Yet, as Michael Marrinan and I suggest, we might still rediscover the real within the virtual. If so, Re:Enlightenment would represent not the new within the old, but rather a new that refabricated fragments of the old.

To present the essays collected here for publication together seems to imply a larger coherence of thought not present in any single piece standing alone. For me, such coherence resides more in an orientation to the past—and thus to the present—than in method alone. I consider Enlightenment thought to have been driven fundamentally by skepticism and the critiques it produced, but Enlightenment aspiration also was impelled by empiricism and pragmatism. The drive to make "working objects" in the mind—to engage in constant thought experiments as Marrinan and I insist—supplanted classic forms of philosophy.[24] The Enlightenment was built on paradox, for it yielded institutions and forms of knowledge-production like virtual witnessing and statistical thinking that are fundamental to modern knowledge, yet which retain a stance of critique through their very stylization as procedures that produce so-called facts, but are not themselves factual. The Enlightenment's legacy enfolds continual enactment of such paradox.

As I maintain such a bifocal view of the Enlightenment, I see myself echoing Hume's double posture when he closes book 1 of his *Treatise*. Hume there specifies critical distance as the orientation required of the learned—the capacity "knowingly" to "embrace a manifest contradiction." He declares that, "In all the incidents of life we ought still to preserve our skepticism." Yet he is driven "almost to despair" by skeptical philosophizing, which leaves him in "forelorn solitude" and beset by "the wretched condition, weakness, and disorder of the faculties." At the same time, thanks to the power of imagination to confer upon us memory, the senses, the understanding and even the substructure of reason itself, he can turn for consolation to the unreflective routines and habits of "common life." For Hume in 1739–40, these included not only dining, backgammon, and conversation but would, later on, embrace his scholarly authorship of *The History of England* (1754–62).[25]

Like Hume, "my only hope is, that I may contribute a little to the advancement of knowledge." I am a skeptical historicist who believes in evidence, in documentation, and in our capacity to grasp the past—even if in the manner of the vignette rather than of the grand narrative. I align myself with Hume and his double vision: there actually is one passage in the *Treatise* in which he manipulates his own eye to produce overlapping images.[26] Jean-François Marmontel's account of "demi-illusion" or mixed illusion in the theater also comes to mind, for he followed Diderot's theory of theatrical representation in imagining that we are capable of profound absorption in the actions of theater, but he insisted that viewers also mentally maintain

a constant, shadowy awareness of the proscenium arch of the stage and of themselves as spectators. His account could well apply to the novel as I frame it:

> It was to furnish imitation with all the external appearances of reality that the genre of drama was invented, where not everything is illusion as in a painting, nor real as in the natural world, but where the mingling of fiction and truth produces this restrained illusion that constitutes the magic of theater. . . . The illusion exists only in my head.[27]

Marmontel's aesthetic points to the layered infrastructure of Enlightenment thought itself—a suspension of disbelief that enabled actions with profound force in the world of the eighteenth century and that may do so in our own day.