CHAPTER 1

Prologue to *A Philosophy of Culture* (2002)

I BEGAN MY serious philosophical thinking under the influence of several major currents of thought, among them the pragmatism of John Dewey and the analytic philosophy of G. E. Moore. I found Moore a persuasive advocate of the view that the philosopher should analyze extralinguistic concepts, attributes, or propositions, and arrive at truths that are analytic and not dependent on experience for their support; but I soon discovered that Moore was unsure about the notion of analysis that underlay his main philosophical efforts, because he had developed serious doubts about the idea of an analytic statement. At about the same time, I came to know Nelson Goodman and W. V. Quine, who, in reaction to their mentors—C. I. Lewis in Goodman's case and Carnap in Quine's—did not seek analyses of intensional entities such as concepts, attributes, and propositions, because they thought that reference to such entities was obscure and because they had no clear notion of how their identity was to be established. Sharing these doubts, I came to think that the philosopher's task is an empirical enterprise requiring an examination of how we do and should use language rather than an effort to decompose concepts.

Soon afterward, Quine, Goodman, and I concluded that the search for an empirical criterion of synonymy and therefore of analyticity was hopeless, and that if one ever did emerge, it would make the distinction between analytic and synthetic a matter of degree. I was also encouraged in this belief by Dewey's epistemological gradualism and by the epistemological holism of the logician Alfred Tarski, who held that logical statements may be components of conjunctions tested by experience. Around the middle of the twentieth century, study of Wittgenstein's later works, with their emphasis on the need for the philosopher to recognize the many different uses of language, as well as contact with J. L. Austin reinforced my view that philosophy is primarily a study of language and led me to think that Mooreian analysis of concepts was a remnant of classical rationalism from whose influence even James and Dewey did not wholly escape.

Once I had shed the vestiges of rationalism in my own thinking, I came to see more clearly that Dewey was right to claim that much of the history of philosophy had been a fruitless quest for certainty; but I also saw that even he, perhaps under the influence of logical positivism, had unconsciously participated in that quest in his later writings when he accepted something like a sharp distinction between analytic and synthetic statements in his *Logic*. At about this time, I was writing a book on American social thought that focused on what I called the revolt against formalism in the work of Dewey, the jurist Holmes, and others, so I was much interested in cultural history, which was certainly an empirical discipline. Thus the two souls within my breast—the philosopher and the histo-

rian—were epistemically united. I tried to bring them together in a book on the philosophy of history, where I concentrated on the language of explanation and narration, with special attention to the roles of generalization and valuation in historical inquiry.

Soon after that I began thinking seriously about Quine's view that epistemology is a branch of psychology; this line of thought led me to believe that the philosopher may view moral thinking in a holistic way and therefore should not limit holism to thinking in natural science. From this I concluded that Quine was on the wrong track when he said, as Carnap had, that philosophy of science is philosophy enough. I also came to realize that James's psychologically oriented investigations of religious experience and Dewey's of artistic creation were philosophical even though they were not exclusively concerned with language, and I saw the error of Wittgenstein's view in his *Tractatus* that "Psychology is no nearer related to philosophy than is any other natural science."[1] This position allowed me to see that philosophy of religion, philosophy of art, philosophy of law, philosophy of history, and philosophy of politics are coordinate with the philosophy of natural science, thereby buttressing a view I had already expressed. In an essay published in the early 1950s,[2] I had observed that although there were many mansions in philosophy, the more splendid ones housed metaphysics, logic, epistemology, and ethics, which lived on a commanding hilltop, while somewhere downtown were the two-family dwellings for political philosophy and jurisprudence, the small apartments for esthetics, and the boardinghouses for philosophers of the special sciences. In reaction to this invidious ordering of the philosophical disciplines, I came to think that a more democratic division of housing should be devised, one that provided better quarters for the deprived disciplines. After I came to believe that metaphysics and epistemology were empirical disciplines, I had an even stronger reason for urging this reapportionment since I came to see more clearly that those privileged parts of philosophy could not defend their conclusions by *a priori* methods. I also came to believe that ethics may be viewed as empirical if one includes feelings of moral obligation as well as sensory experiences in the pool or flux into which the ethical believer worked a manageable structure (to use a James-like figure that Quine had once used when characterizing the purpose of science).

As I reflected on my expansive conclusion about the various branches of philosophy, I began to think that the most interesting and most fruitful products of so-called linguistic philosophy were in the philosophy of culture. This appeared to me to be illustrated in Quine's work in the philosophy of science, which he at one point called a study of a Wittgensteinian game or an institution; in Goodman's work in the philosophy of art; to some extent in Holmes's legal philosophy; and in Rawls's work in the philosophy of politics. Consequently, I decided to

[1] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. C. K. Ogden (London, 1933), 4.1121 (p. 77).

[2] See "A Plea for an Analytic Philosophy of History," in my *Religion, Politics, and the Higher Learning* (Cambridge, Mass., 1959), p. 61. Reprinted below.

write a critical history of recent philosophy of culture to show, among other things, how such work and my own in semantics, the philosophy of history, and ethics were part of an effort to escape the influence of classical rationalism. I saw this effort as the hallmark of a movement that included Hume and Mill; that was to some extent supported in the nineteenth century by figures I call thinkers, to distinguish them from the great philosophers who wrote about culture; that was encouraged to some extent by those I call half-hearted antirationalists; and that was impeded by irrationalists. Although [*A Philosophy of Culture*] is in part a historical study of the roles of reason, sensory experience, and sentiment in twentieth-century philosophy of culture, it is one in which I am mainly concerned to show why certain philosophical ideas about culture should be accepted and others rejected. Therefore, I do not hesitate to express both favorable and unfavorable opinions of some of the views I examine—all this in the interest of furthering the aims of the philosophy of culture.

However, I am not concerned to explain by reference to social circumstances why certain philosophical beliefs arose at certain times and why others succeeded them. I leave that different and difficult job to others who, I hope, will not carry it out at the expense of gliding over philosophical views and the arguments offered in their behalf. In my opinion, the sociohistorical explanation of the emergence of philosophical beliefs depends on an understanding of them that can be gained only by a careful study of what philosophers have said. Philosophical beliefs are not black boxes whose historical antecedents and consequences can be discerned without knowing what is inside them, but inasmuch as the philosophical task of reporting the beliefs of a philosopher is empirical, it is not radically different from the task of historians who try to say why those beliefs arose when they arose and what their effects were on society. That is why annalists who deal with ideas would do well to study the work of analysts who work in what might be called cultural philosophy.[3] I think cultural philosophy or philosophy of culture is more inclusive than philosophy of science because the latter is a study of only one cultural institution and therefore coordinate with studies of other institutions that make up a culture or a civilization. For this reason, I add a terminological point that will by now be obvious: I use the word "culture" as some have used the word "civilization"—to denote those institutions—and therefore not as some anthropologists use the term.

About a half century ago in my *Age of Analysis* (1955),[4] I said that nothing could be more important than applying the techniques of analytic philosophy to subjects in the philosophy of culture; but little did I expect that by the end of the twentieth century my hope would be realized in the work of several philosophers trained in the analytic, linguistic, and pragmatic traditions who managed to free themselves from the vestiges of rationalism in logical positivism. I think

[3] See my essay "Why Annalists of Ideas Should Be Analysts of Ideas," *Georgia Review* 29 (1975), pp. 930–47.

[4] Morton White, *The Age of Analysis: Twentieth Century Philosophers, Selected, with an Introduction and Interpretive Commentary* (Boston, 1955).

that this ironic development in the history of philosophy bodes well for its future, since it opens up new avenues for humanistic inquiry. It also shows that study of the many aspects of culture is not the exclusive preserve of muddle-heads, philosophasters, and charlatans. Indeed, the relation between sane, sound, and sober philosophy of culture and its competitors today is reminiscent of what David Hume said in the introduction to his *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739) when he compared the use of what he called experimental reason in discussions of logic, morals, criticism, and politics with that of its rivals: "Amidst all this bustle 'tis not reason, which carries the prize, but eloquence; and no man needs ever despair of gaining proselytes to the most extravagant hypothesis, who has art enough to represent it in any favourable colours. The victory is not gained by the men at arms, who manage the pike and the sword; but by the trumpeters, drummers, and musicians of the army."[5] I would prefer to use a less military figure, but I agree with what Hume was driving at as I scan the intellectual scene today. I also agree with Hume's remark in his introduction that there is no question of philosophical importance "whose decision is not compriz'd in the science of man," and that "the only solid foundation we can give to this science itself must be laid on experience and observation."[6] Would that Hume had remembered this when he distinguished sharply between statements that are based on "experimental reasoning" and statements established by "abstract reasoning."

[5] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford, 1888), p. xviii.
[6] Ibid., p. xx.