

Interpretation

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Inquiries: (Mrs.) Guadalupe S. Angeles, Assistant to the Editor,
INTERPRETATION, Queens College, Flushing, N.Y.
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Modernity, Aesthetics, and the Quest for Political Consensus

Luc Ferry, *Homo Aestheticus: The Invention of Taste in the Democratic Age*, trans. R. De Loazia (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993) viii + 276 pp., \$ 32.00.

BRIAN C. ANDERSON
American Enterprise Institute

What is it to be just? What is it to be moral? What is it that we call beautiful? According to Luc Ferry, one of France's most prominent new intellectuals, the experience of modernity has brought with it an uncertainty in answering these questions. There are those, followers of Nietzsche, who seek to dispel them in a radical perspectivism: there is no justice, only power; no morality, only self-interest; no beauty, only an infinity of interpretations. At the other extreme, there are the defenders of stable hierarchies, traditional orders, eternal verities: there is no question of what is just, or moral, or beautiful, only certainties. Ferry rejects both the relativism of the first and the dogmatism of the second; what he embraces is the space of philosophical reflection. In *Homo Aestheticus: The Invention of Taste in the Democratic Age*, Ferry tells the story of the beautiful in modern thought. Although it is a story that primarily seeks an answer to the third question above, it is also rich with subplots in the ethical and political. As a political theorist, I find the subplots most interesting, but before I get to them, I want to present the basic tale Ferry tells. In order to do this I first have to describe the setting.

There are two basic props which form the background to Ferry's entire enterprise. The first is a tragic reading of the modern age; the second is bound up with the history of subjectivity. Let us briefly examine each in turn, although they are ultimately inseparable. As we shall see, they remain essential to Ferry's concerns in *Homo Aestheticus*.

The first prop is what Ferry refers to elsewhere as the "diabolical circle of modernity."¹ What does Ferry mean by this rather fearsome phrase? Something that has been stressed by pessimistic liberals from Tocqueville to Berlin: modernity, for all its benefits, has resulted in loss, irredeemable, tragic loss. The twin revolutions that constituted the modern experiment—epistemological and political—have resulted in the discrediting of tradition. The erosion of tradition has in turn opened up existential and normative dilemmas that are increasingly

difficult to solve. The resulting culture of suspicion problematizes an ever larger range of human life, from the ridiculous—what should I wear today? to the sublime—what is the meaning of life?² At the limit, Ferry contends, the historical forces unleashed by modernity have resulted in the complete eradication of shared frameworks for interpreting the world. We talk past each other, each speaking his or her own private language, endlessly recreating the fall of the tower of Babel. The space of communication has been filled by static and distortion: the impossible consensus. I will later call into question this portrayal of modernity, at least in some of its aspects; for now, let us turn to our second prop.

Martin Heidegger wrote of the modern age that it was the inevitable procession of the individual liberating itself from every constraint until it culminated in a raging “will to will” ravaging the planet through technological domination.³ This seductive vision of modern subjectivity, echoed in the pages of Horkheimer and Adorno, and found, interestingly enough, in the works of conservative thinkers like Strauss and MacIntyre, is spurned by Ferry, although it severely tempts him. It is spurned for two reasons: first, because it fails to recognize the substantial achievements of the modern consciousness; second, because it reduces what is a complex and conflictual history to a linear process. Ferry unequivocally supports modern inventions like democracy, tolerance, and human rights. He also feels that there are lessons to be learned from the history of modern subjectivity, lessons neglected by the narrative of decline recited, often mantralike, by Heidegger and his admirers. Ferry’s ambition has been and continues to be an effort of philosophical retrieval: what “positions” of the subject remain open in a postmetaphysical age?

So we come to the history of aesthetics with this context and these considerations in mind. But why aesthetics? How can pursuing the often elusive writings of the great modern thinkers on what constitutes beauty contribute anything to the understanding of our tragic condition, or help renew our thinking on the question of the subject? Ferry supplies an answer in the initial pages of *Homo Aestheticus*: “aesthetics is the field par excellence in which the problems brought about by the subjectivization of the world characteristic of modern times can be observed in the chemically pure state”(p. 3). It is there, Ferry hypothesizes, that the tension between modern individualism and the demand for objective criteria is most starkly revealed. This tension does not manifest itself solely in the aesthetic realm, but appears in the moral and political quandaries each of us encounters on a regular basis, in our own lives or in the lives of others. Certainly in our life together. Ferry isolates five “moments” in the history of aesthetic contemplation, each, he thinks, representative of a paradigmatic response to the configuration of the relationship of the individual to collective norms in the modern universe. His panorama of aesthetic theory is admittedly schematic—there is no discussion of Goethe, Humboldt, Burke, Gadamer, Oakeshott, or the Frankfurt School—but it is illuminating on the

towering figures it discusses: Kant, Hegel, and Nietzsche. Chapters dedicated to these thinkers are framed by an extended look at the prehistory of modern aesthetics, on the one hand, and an investigation of the aporias of the twentieth-century avant-garde, on the other. Ferry concludes *Homo Aestheticus* with an elaboration of the moral and political subplot I mentioned earlier, but it reads more like a “coming attraction,” announcing a work yet to be written, than a sufficient treatment of the myriad threads connecting aesthetics to moral and political philosophy. I will return to this later.

We have, then, two broad problems we are concerned with—the tragic loss of shared horizons and the perplexing question of the subject—along with Ferry’s justification for approaching the history of modern aesthetic theory in the quest for answers to these problems. How does Ferry’s history proceed, in substance? In order to grasp the logic of Ferry’s narrative, it would be useful to spend a moment discussing the matter of beauty in the premodern Western world. There, whether in Platonic thought or in Christian theology, art, concerned as it was with the sensible—the essential mark of human imperfection and finitude—was considered as completely dependent on a truth established elsewhere. This elsewhere was the omniscient, purely intelligible view of the Divine. The aesthetic realm was consequently considered something somewhat suspect, and those who dedicated themselves to it as subversive, perhaps even dangerous. They trafficked in illusion and were masters of seduction. We can see this suspicion of the aesthetic represented in the expulsion of the poet from Plato’s *Republic*. Thus, the idea of consecrating a project dedicated solely to the study of sensibility was a radical break with the entire classical tradition:

We have to size it up correctly: the object of aesthetics, the sensible world, *has no existence except for man*; it is, in the strictest sense, man’s own. The birth of aesthetics, implying as a specific discipline a decision taken about the autonomy of its object, expresses thus in concentrated form the upheaval the eighteenth century inaugurates in all domains. It symbolizes better than metaphysics or religion the project of providing the human point of view with a legitimacy which the development of the finite knowledge of the positive sciences is beginning to require. (P. 20)

The break Ferry is referring to did not occur all at once, however; rather, several stages preceded it, stages in the “withdrawal of the Divine.” In the seventeenth century, for example, aesthetic considerations tended to fall into two categories: an aesthetics of reason, heavily dependent on the Cartesian epistemological revolution; and an aesthetics of sentiment, which was Pascalian in its emphasis on the ineffable stirrings of the human heart. These models—classical and sentimental—for all their differences, were fundamentally linked in two distinct ways. First of all, both aesthetic theories retained reference to the truth. The role of the work of art was, at best, to illustrate that truth, which found its source in the intelligible. Secondly, both theories were individualistic,

hence revealing their modern genesis. How was the establishment of criteria settled, if the starting place was the individual? As Ferry meticulously details, the problem was handled through a reference to God. God, the supreme “satellite,” would provide the guarantee of communication between individuals otherwise locked within the solitude of their monadic fortresses. God would allow access to the intelligible. The seventeenth century exhibits a cultural tension, therefore, pulling in two directions: towards a secular, democratic future and towards a religious, ordered past. This tension would be resolved, Ferry avers, in favor of the secular and democratic only with Kant’s critical philosophy.

We might call Kantian aesthetics, at least according to Ferry’s reading, the triumph of sensibility over the intelligible. What Kant advances in the *Critique of Judgement*, for the first time in the history of Western thought, is an understanding of beauty independent of any reference to a foundational truth which would grant it meaning. It would be difficult to overestimate the significance of this elevation of sensibility to the same level as theoretical and practical truth:

The affirmation of the autonomy of the sensible means nothing less in this context than the radical, perhaps definitive, separation of the human and the divine. Even more: it implies the existence of a sphere, that of the properly human, outside all divine legislation and yet not thereby a mere imperfection, a flaw or a lack when compared to the divinity. It is a fatal blow dealt to the ancient status of the divine, an act of pride of which it is not too much to say that it is, within the realm of the intellect, comparable to the other act of lèse-divinité constituted by the French Revolution in the realm of politics. (P. 28)

With this retreat of the divine, Ferry posits, a new figure of subjectivity appears—the finite, sensible subject, “living at some remove from God” (p. 28), confronted with the impossibility of reference to God as guarantee of “common sense.” Aesthetic consensus can now be established only through reflective intersubjectivity, that is, through discussion. But what is the communicability of the aesthetic judgement? If it is not founded on the conceptual—if, in other words, there is no truth to taste—what possible relationship to objectivity could aesthetic judgement have? What is to stop me from asserting that Madonna is aesthetically superior to Berlioz, or comic-book art to Matisse?

Kant’s solution to this “antinomy of taste” turns to what he calls *indeterminate concepts*. These are ideas of reason which are common to humanity and which are awakened by objects of beauty. In order to grasp what Kant means, think for a moment of what takes place in determinative judgement—the judgement we use in cognition. There, the universal—whether it is a rule, principle, or law—is given. All that is required is the subsumption of the particular object under the universal category. Reflective judgement, on the other hand, the kind of judgement that makes use of indeterminate concepts, proceeds from the particular and seeks out the universal. This is what takes place in aesthetic com-

munication, Kant believes, once the classical model is abandoned. The universal exists, not as a determinative concept, but as a regulative idea—a principle of reflection, a goal to be sought. The universal thus forms a horizon of expectation which we regularly encounter in matters of taste: Kant expects us to reach a general agreement, over time, that Berlioz is indeed aesthetically superior to Madonna, although this can never be proven in the same way we can prove the truths of science. There will be, in other words, a harmony of sensibilities.

Now what is clearly at issue for Ferry in *Homo Aestheticus* is less the substance of Kantian aesthetics, which, for all its genius, is quite arid, than the fundamental importance the ideas of reflective judgement and indeterminate concepts take on as a potential response to the existential predicament of modernity. Before I assess the salience of this strategy, however, let us first quickly follow the further movements of Ferry's retrieval of the history of subjectivity on the terrain of aesthetics. His next stop: Hegel.

Hegel's aesthetics, unlike Kant's, are anything but arid: they show a breathtaking, often spellbinding sensitivity to the material history of art, from antiquity to the eighteenth century. But in Ferry's account, they mark a decisive retreat from the humanistic perspective opened by Kant's third critique. With Hegel, sensibility is once again inserted within a divine framework. The humanist perspective—reflective judgement in Kant—becomes a mere moment in the inexorable unfolding of Hegel's Absolute Spirit; aesthetics once again becomes the handmaid of truth, rather than an equal partner. The space of human autonomy conquered by Kant is retaken by Hegel in a paradoxical return of aesthetic classicism—and determinative judgement in aesthetic communication—within the heart of modernity. That Hegel's classicism is thoroughly historicized changes little of what, for Ferry, is essential: "The Hegelian project is not at all one of opening philosophy up to history, *but of absorbing historicity back into the concept*, which task, until proof to the contrary, is not the same thing" (p. 147). What the Hegelian idea of Absolute Spirit rejects, in other words, is *human finitude*. This rejection, in its extension of the principle of reason to the totality of the real, was to have powerful and lasting repercussions, many of them disastrous, in the human sciences, in politics, in the destiny of men and women across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.⁴

With Nietzsche, the third major thinker Ferry explores in depth, we confront the abandonment of both reflective and determinative judgement—indeed, we confront the abandonment of reason itself, an abdication which has also balefully influenced the subsequent history of our time. What is left behind after Nietzsche's dismantling of reason is a radical historicist perspectivism, a perspectivism more radical, Ferry asserts, than any relativism previously articulated in the history of Western thought. Nietzsche, like Kant, seeks to grant autonomy to sensibility; he, too, views determinative judgement as useless in matters of taste. But the father of modern antihumanism sees no substitute for God in securing aesthetic consensus. In Nietzsche's dark vision, the retreat of

the divine shatters the subject, exposed to vertiginous forces that render ideals of autonomy and communication illusory. Instead of reflective judgement maintaining the possibility of aesthetic communication, Nietzsche forwards what Ferry refers to as an “ultraindividualism” (p. 158). Instead of a horizon of expectation aiming at universality, we are left with an endless play of interpretations. The fashionable nihilist sophistry of Derrida and his acolytes is just around the corner.⁵ Determinative and reflective judgement are thus pushed aside in favor of an unlimited perspectivism, not only in aesthetics, but in every area of human endeavor, including, importantly, the world of the social and the political. Yet as Ferry’s shaded reading of Nietzsche unmistakably shows, behind this total relativism lies, paradoxically, a “hyperclassicism”—an attempt to capture “a truth deeper than that of philosophy” (p. 30). It is no longer a truth of order and reason, however, but a truth of multiplicity and fracture. And only art can convey this deeper truth: with Nietzsche, aesthetics becomes all-important.

Nietzsche’s thought thus exhibits the dichotomy running through the twentieth century modernist avant-garde, at least up to the end of the sixties:

. . . ultraindividualism on one side, which while preserving the revolutionary values of the individual emancipation from tradition, consecrates innovation as the supreme criterion of aesthetic judgement, and thus causes the latter to fall into the sphere of historicity; the other side being a hyperclassical concern that art should be assigned a truth function, or even that it should be aligned upon science’s progress so that it may translate a reality which, unlike what was the case in the original classicism (the seventeenth century one), is no longer rational, harmonious, Euclidean, but illogical, chaotic, shapeless, and non-Euclidean. (P. 158)

From Picasso to de Kooning, the history of modernist art, for all of its variation, ultimately obeyed the same dual logic: on the one hand, to break with every norm; on the other, to pursue a truth deeper than any yet achieved.

As everyone knows, or should know by now, however, the avant-garde is dead, superseded by “postmodernity.” It is in Ferry’s understanding of the postmodern that we find the threads tying together the social and political subplots with the main theme of the history of aesthetics I have just sketched. Ferry rejects two frequently held conceptions of postmodernism. The first, associated with Jean-François Lyotard, is really more of an extension and radicalization than a break with the individualist impulse of the avant-garde. This postmodernism, which it would perhaps be better to call ultramodernism, furthers the erosion of tradition while at the same time undermining Enlightenment “grand narratives” which had been erected in the place of tradition.⁶ The second postmodernist variant, diametrically opposed to the first, would be to legitimize a return to tradition. We could call this postmodern conservatism.⁷ Ferry rejects both of these options, arguing that they form a false alternative. The first results in relativist nihilism, which Ferry is at pains to avoid, in aesthetics or

politics. The second seeks to recreate something which has passed from the world, for better or ill. Even if such a recreation were possible, Ferry somewhat implausibly maintains, a postmodern conservatism could easily lead to unacceptable coercion and the loss of the benefits, such as the extension of the franchise, of modernity. A third prospect is available, however, that would not squander the achievements of the modern era yet would at the same time take heed of the legitimate aspects of the critique of the metaphysics of subjectivity. Postmodernity would in this third view be a supersession of modernity, where modern categories—Enlightenment universalism, individual autonomy and self-expression, collective self-determination—would be thought through again without being jettisoned. It is in this context that the Kantian notions of indeterminate concepts and reflective judgement, which, as we have seen, are at the core of Kant's aesthetic theory, take on political and moral importance for Ferry. Instead of treating Enlightenment ideas like "reason," "universality," "progress," or "autonomy" as determinative concepts, these ideas can be reconceptualized as horizons of expectations—as projects to be pursued but never definitively accomplished. They become regulative ideals, to be argued about in discussion, rather than blueprints for an ideal society. The subject, in other words, can be thought of *as if* it were autonomous, all the while granting the role of unconscious forces, the fragmentation of communication, and the permanence of social and historical determination. Autonomy would not be presupposed but instead sought. The possibility of communication, rather than being foreclosed by ultraindividualism, would remain open. In the same way Kant would expect us to reach agreement on the relative aesthetic merits of Berlioz and Madonna, Ferry expects the extension of reflective judgement to the moral and political field will also result in at least temporary consensus around which human rights are to be respected, advanced, or created. The crucial problem is that of discovering or inventing forums where discussion of political and moral issues can take place in an unconstrained and open fashion: a new public square for what Ferry sees as a secularizing universe.

The final section of *Homo Aestheticus* explicitly confronts the problem of a postmodern, secular ethics. Ferry contends that there are three principal ethical paradigms at work in the postmodern world: the ideal of excellence (referring to a predemocratic ideal of a subject realizing its telos—its preordained nature), the democratic ideal of merit, and finally, the contemporary ideal of authenticity (referring to self-realization absent any preordained nature)(pp. 249–61). That these ideals coexist uneasily and are ultimately incommensurable means that the postmodern moment is fundamentally antiutopian, necessitating precarious and renegotiable balancing acts among our conflicting ideals.⁸ It is the role of reflective judgement, as reconceived by Ferry out of the tradition of Western aesthetic theory, to execute these renegotiations. There is no Hegelian synthesis which would determinatively bring our ideals into perfect accord; any attempt which proceeded under the assumption that a final agreement was possible

could only lead to violence, and at the limit, totalitarianism. But to reject determinative judgement, whether in aesthetics, ethics, or politics, and replace it with radical perspectivism—as might be found in the writings of, say, Lyotard—can only lead to fragmentation, incoherence, and at the limit, nihilist despair. There is, then, an unmistakably normative dimension to Ferry's account of reflective judgement in aesthetics. It amounts to, on the level of morality and politics, the defense of a suitably chastened reason and universality under conditions of pluralism.

What to think of all this? How helpful to our current situation is Ferry's project? What is this subject Ferry has fastened on in Kantian aesthetics? How plausible is this reading of modernity? In concluding my analysis I would like to address these questions and post a few caveats. It seems to me that Ferry's Kantian subject, the wielder of reflective judgement, is empty of content in a way that will be quite familiar to postanalytic political thinkers. It is the liberal disembodied self criticized extensively by more historically minded thinkers like Charles Taylor or John Gray, albeit from very different political standpoints. There is thus a strange sense of *déjà vu* when the reader familiar with these debates teases out the moral and political implications of Ferry's history of the subject. Ferry elsewhere describes the authentic self as "nothingness": "if man has a distinguishing feature . . . it can only lie in his ability (small difference whether we call it transcendence or freedom) to wrench himself free from every attribution of essence" (*Heidegger and Modernity*, p. 4). But recognizing that subjectivity has this dimension, this capacity, this characteristic is not to provide a sufficient argument for its defense.⁹ After all, human beings kill each other or commit heinous crimes with alarming frequency: couldn't we just as easily see this as a distinguishing feature of human nature? And why should the subject exercise this liberty if in so doing it reduces all commitments, all shared frameworks, to so many lifestyle choices? Further, how is Ferry's notion of the subject, which owes more than a little to Sartre's early existentialism, reconcilable with the former's stance on the role of the unconscious and history in making impossible any naive return to the metaphysics of subjectivity?¹⁰ There is, I would argue, a sharp tension between a Sartrean humanism and a post-metaphysical defense of subjectivity, a tension so sharp that Kantian notions of reflective judgement and intersubjectivity appear rather quixotic as a means of relief. I do not believe that Ferry is entirely without recourse in answering these questions, but they are not adequately addressed in *Homo Aestheticus* or, for that matter, anywhere else in Ferry's work. At least not yet. The problem of drawing limits to human freedom, which Ferry rightly sees as central to our present confusion, remains unanswered on the grounds where Ferry has sought an answer.

My first major difficulty with Ferry's project, then, is this thin notion of the subject, the ghostly self, without substantive attachments, passions, nationality, or history. My second difficulty is related to the first: Ferry's exceedingly thin

notion of pluralism. Ferry's pluralism is the pluralism of university professors, and thus thoroughly secular. A true pluralism, one that recognized the real meaning of the term, would have to acknowledge the legitimacy and prevalence of religiously based norms. The democratic revolution, while it has transformed our lives in myriad and remarkable ways, has not, thankfully, eradicated the religious impulse, nor has it completely disrupted the continuity of certain traditions. All one needs to do, as the sociologist Peter Berger has persuasively argued, is look to the Islamic world, where modernity has led to a reaffirmation of religion, or, for that matter, to the United States, where more Americans than ever before regularly go to religious services and describe themselves as holding strong religious beliefs, in order to disabuse oneself of the notion that the City of Man has thoroughly defeated the City of God.¹¹ Recent pluralists like Gray, Stephen Macedo, and John Kekes have shown an encouraging tendency to appreciate the depth of the pluralism in modern Western societies; Ferry's secularist pluralism is tone deaf to religion in a way that actually minimizes some of the dilemmas, but also some of the possibilities, of our current condition.

Thus, my third difficulty with Ferry's work is its unnuanced vision of modernity (or postmodernity). This is an ironic charge to direct against Ferry, for he himself criticizes Heidegger and Leo Strauss for falling prey to a reductive interpretation of modern times. But I believe the charge sticks. The way many people, even within the most modern sectors of modern societies, confront existential and normative (although probably not aesthetic) dilemmas is not all that different from the way such problems have always been dealt with—through tradition or through recourse to a transcendent system of religious beliefs. What is different about the contemporary context is the pressures on strongly held beliefs, pressures both scientific and moral, that are the product of cultural confrontation and the ubiquity of technology. When many different religious world-views share the same civic space with an ample number of secularized individuals, and modern technology is added to the mix, one has a recipe for both cultural conflict and cognitive dissonance. This is not quite the same thing, however, as the loss of shared horizons lamented by Ferry. It is closer to an overabundance of horizons that refuse to gel into a singular, coherent world-view. There is the threat of nihilism, and it is prominent among the media, the political class, and educators—people who often exist outside the existing frameworks, jumping from one framework to another without ever experiencing a sense of rootedness—but to say that modernity has resulted in a complete secularization and that the only direction open to us is the establishment of a communicative framework on a secularized basis, frankly seems counterintuitive, even if it were feasible, which I seriously doubt.

I think that Ferry's problems—the thin theory of the subject, the thin conception of pluralism, the onesided reading of modernity—are ultimately rooted in the author's French intellectual context. As the historian Tony Judt has re-

cently shown, the status of liberalism, with the notable exceptions of Raymond Aron and Bertrand De Jouvenal, has always been uncertain in France.¹² Ferry is thus defending a naive rationalist liberal position that has largely been undermined in Anglo-American thought. As for Ferry's secular pluralism, it, too, is a product of a French setting where the cleavages between faith and Enlightenment cut more deeply than in other locales.

These are substantive criticisms, granted. But it is essential to note that Ferry is an exceptionally contemplative philosopher. He is a representative of an important shift in the status and quality of French theory. Along with Alain Renaut, Gilles Lipovetsky, Marcel Gauchet, Pierre Manent, and many other philosophers, social scientists, and historians, French intellectual life is undergoing a renewal that is having significant and hopefully permanent results. Much of this work remains regrettably untranslated, while every piece of ephemera written by modern-day sophists Derrida, Deleuze, and even, still, Althusser spews forth to be consumed by unsuspecting English-speaking students. Ferry's sober humanism, for all of its antinomies and aporias, reconciles itself, however uneasily, with the universe of capitalist liberal modernity. There is much to be said for this seriousness in a French philosopher. *Homo Aestheticus* is the author's best work to date, and it deserves wide readership and much discussion. It provides a superb introduction to the often dense writings of the major European philosophers on aesthetics and has the distinct virtue of revealing the limits of a certain kind of liberalism, a liberalism which may be in its waning days.

NOTES

1. See Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut, *Heidegger and Modernity*, trans. F. Philip (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), pp. 81–82.

2. Gilles Lipovetsky has made the exploration of this problematic in all of its dimensions the principal focus of his work. See, for example, *L'Ere du vide* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983).

3. The classic account can be found in Martin Heidegger, *The Question of Technology and Other Essays* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977).

4. Charles Taylor's magisterial *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975) examines this legacy with typical depth and nuance. See also Ferry's *Political Philosophy 2: The System of Philosophies of History*, trans. F. Philip (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

5. See Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut, *French Philosophy of the Sixties: An Essay on Antihumanism*, trans. M.S. Cattani (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990), for a sustained polemic against French Nietzscheanism. Or, more recently, *Pourquoi nous ne sommes pas nietzschéens*, ed. Ferry and Renaut (Paris: Grasset, 1993). Ferry's explicit rejection of Nietzscheanism makes Arthur Danto's recent error-filled review of *Homo Aestheticus*, "Beauty and the Beast," in *The New Republic*, May 16, 1994, all the more bizarre: Danto has managed to misunderstand Ferry's entire project completely.

6. The famous work of Lyotard should be consulted on this topic: *The Postmodern Condition*, trans. G. Bennington and B. Massumi (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

7. One could describe the British political theorist John Gray as a postmodern conservative in this sense. See his original and thought-provoking collection *Post-Liberalism* (London: Routledge, 1993).
8. The most powerful exponent of the incommensurability of ultimate values is, of course, Isaiah Berlin. See his most recent book, *The Magus of the North: J.G. Hamann and the Origins of Modern Irrationalism* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1994), for a restatement of some of his major themes.
9. For a development of this argument see Daniel Barbiero, "From Nothingness to No-Thingness: The Roots of Ferry and Renaut's Humanism," *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, vol. 16, no. 3 (1991), pp. 179–92.
10. On the connection to Sartre, see Ferry's sometime partner Alain Renaut's new book, *Sartre, le dernier philosophe* (Paris: Grasset, 1993).
11. Peter L. Berger, *A Far Glory: The Quest for Faith in an Age of Credulity* (New York: The Free Press, 1992), pp. 25–46. For a profound reflection on the modern "difference" see the new book by Pierre Manent, *La Cité de l'homme* (Paris: Fayard, 1994).
12. Tony Judt, *Past Imperfect* (California: University of California Press, 1993).