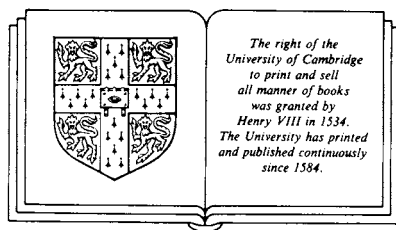


Justus Möser and the German Enlightenment

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Justus Möser in the German Enlightenment

For more than three decades, Justus Möser was the dominant cultural, political, and administrative figure in the bishopric of Osnabrück. Made secretary to the noble Estate (the *Ritterschaft*) in 1742, while still a student, he began to gather offices and incomes in the fashion typical of institutional life in the old regime: he was appointed *advocatus patriae*, the government's legal representative in foreign and domestic affairs (in 1747); syndic of the *Ritterschaft* (in 1755); justiciary in the criminal court (in 1756); and chief local administrator of the bishopric, its *Geheim Referendar*, during the absentee regency of its English bishop, Frederick of York (de facto in 1763 and formally in 1768). He was thus responsible – in fact, if not always in name – for Osnabrück's economic recovery after the Seven Years War and for its continued social and economic stability in the era before the French Revolution.¹

Möser could enjoy such political and administrative preeminence because the prince-bishopric (*Fürstbistum*) of Osnabrück, like a number of other small ecclesiastical states in northwestern Germany, had neither a resident prince-bishop nor a resident court, and this gave its administrators significant power. Through his numerous offices, Möser mediated between the semiautonomous Estates – nobility, towns, and cathedral chapter – and the Hanoverian chancellery in Hanover and London. Accepting the political system, he attempted to reconcile the various entrenched interests and pasted over areas of real and potential conflict. In the process, he gave new life to Osnabrück's moribund institutions and brought about reforms in the spirit of the European Enlightenment.

Normally, such a figure would remain the stuff of local history. What made Möser, then and now, of more than parochial interest were his literary skills and his original synthesis of administrative practice and Enlightenment that emerged in his essays, memoranda, and history of Osnabrück. In these works he reflected on the economic origins of the political system of Estates, described agrarian

¹ See Chapter 2.

society with an unusual wealth of detail and insight, and analyzed the varied demographic and economic pressures that threatened Osnabrück's survival. Moreover, he did not present his views in a straightforward manner, nor did he usually make clear recommendations in his own voice. His many offices provided him entry into Osnabrück's institutions at different and often antagonistic points, and he expressed these various perspectives by becoming, in turn, the advocate for one or another of the numerous entrenched interests – sovereign, nobility, legal notability, peasantry, artisanate. This perspectivism emerged as fundamental to his character. He became a spokesman for the coexistence of opposites, a political foe of administrative centralization, the advocate of social and economic "facts," and the skeptical critic of all systems.

Möser's significance in the German Enlightenment rests in his years of political primacy in Osnabrück, his enormous economic and legal expertise, and his intellectual resistance to all dogmatic solutions. These in combination with unusual gifts as a writer ensured his appeal to many different audiences – to the ruling interests in Osnabrück and the absentee powers in London and Hanover, to his enlightened contemporaries, to the young Turks of the *Sturm und Drang*, and to reform-minded conservatives and classical liberals in the early nineteenth century. As we will see, his broad appeal was rooted in the conscious ambiguity of his prose – an ambiguity that made it possible to assimilate his views to a variety of intellectual positions. Such ambiguity mirrored the conflicting impulses in the German Enlightenment after midcentury. As the configuration of the German Enlightenment altered over the last half of the eighteenth century, so too did Möser's appeal. The social and political crisis of the 1780s and 1790s caused ideas and values from the earlier decades to become more inflexibly attached to particular ideological positions. Enlightenment became more readily associated with revolution and antirevolutionary attitudes with anti-Enlightenment. The Enlightenment and the figures of Möser's generation came, retrospectively, to acquire a more strictly dogmatic meaning that closed off essential dimensions of the movement. Yet the historical Enlightenment of the earlier period was in fact far murkier, since it comprised both the latent and manifest tendencies common to every complex cultural movement. In other words, it still remained open to an indeterminate future.

Justus Möser is significant to the historian of this entire period because, although his earlier career and writings reflect the reform aspirations of the mid-century Enlightenment, he lived until 1794, long enough to participate in the changing public mood of the 1780s and 1790s. Indeed, in these later years he reexamined his beliefs to such an extent that he became linked to the counter-Enlightenment. Our basic purpose in this study, then, must be to consider how the antiphonal structure of Möser's own thought recapitulated that of the wider culture. In this chapter, however, we must emphasize certain cultural particularities of the German Enlightenment after midcentury if we are to appreciate Möser's place in the developments.

CORPORATIST ENLIGHTENMENT

Though many aspects of eighteenth-century German social and economic history remain to be explored, the contours of the German Enlightenment as an intellectual movement have become increasingly clear. Among other points, we see that its course paralleled intellectual developments elsewhere on the continent and in England. Similar ideals, values, and cultural institutions emerged in Germany at approximately the same time as elsewhere.² For this reason, we should resist efforts to see Germany's "break with the West" as originating in uniquely German ideas developed during these years.³ As evidence, we can point to Gottfried Leibniz, Samuel Pufendorf, Christian Thomasius, Christian Wolff, Johann Gottsched, Georg Lichtenberg, Gotthold Lessing, and Moses Mendelssohn – each of whom was a figure of European significance within the broader history of the Enlightenment.

² On the general pattern of the Enlightenment in Germany, see the remarks by Werner Krauss in "Zur Konstellation der deutschen Aufklärung," in his *Perspektiven und Probleme* (Neuwied, 1965), 143–65. Other useful interpretive essays are two on the Protestant and Catholic Enlightenments by Joachim Whaley and T. C. W. Blanning in *The Enlightenment in National Context*, ed. Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich (Cambridge, 1981), 106–26. For recent work with valuable bibliographies, see Rolf Grimminger, ed., *Deutsche Aufklärung bis zur Französischen Revolution 1680–1789*, vol. 3 in 2 parts of *Hansers Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur* (Munich, 1980), and Franklin Kopitzsch, ed., *Aufklärung, Absolutismus und Bürgertum in Deutschland* (Munich, 1976). Of the older general works, still valuable are Hermann Hettner, *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur im achtzehnten Jahrhundert*, 4 vols. in 1 (Leipzig, 1928); Rudolf Unger, *Hamann und die deutsche Aufklärung* 2 vols. (4th ed.; Darmstadt, 1968), 1:4–111; Fritz Valjavec, *Die Entstehung der politischen Strömungen in Deutschland*, afterword by Jörn Garber (reprint 1951 ed.; Düsseldorf, 1978), 1–145; Frederick Hertz, *The Development of the German Public Mind*, vol. 2: *The Age of the Enlightenment* (New York, 1962); Leo Balet and E. Gerhard, *Die Verbürgerlichung der deutschen Kunst, Literatur und Musik im 18. Jahrhundert* (reprint 1936 ed.; Frankfurt, 1972); Hans M. Wolff, *Die Weltanschauung der deutschen Aufklärung in geschichtlicher Entwicklung* (2nd ed.; Bern and Munich, 1963); Henri Brunschwig, *Enlightenment and Romanticism in Eighteenth-Century Prussia*, trans. Frank Jelinek (Chicago, 1974), 5–98. Regarding the early Enlightenment, Eduard Winter corrects Krauss's views and generally writes with greater subtlety on the pluralistic social origins of the German Enlightenment; see his *Frühenaufklärung* (Berlin, 1966), 47–106. Also relevant is the more specialized study of Herbert Schöffler, *Deutsches Geistesleben zwischen Reformation und Aufklärung* (2nd ed.; Frankfurt, 1956). For a discussion of the Catholic regions, see Max Braubach, "Träger und Vermittler romanischer Kultur in Deutschland des 18. Jahrhunderts," reprinted in his *Diplomatie und geistiges Leben im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert*, in *Bonner Historische Forschungen*, 33 (Bonn, 1969), 519–29; also Richard van Dülmen, "Zum Strukturwandel der Aufklärung in Bayern," *ZBLG*, 36 (1973):662–79, and Ludwig Hammermeyer, "Die Aufklärung in Wissenschaft und Gesellschaft," *Handbuch der bayerischen Geschichte*, ed. Max Spindler, 4 vols. in 6 (Munich, 1966–75), 2, esp. 986–8.

³ The older view is summarized, with literature, in T. C. W. Blanning, *Reform and Revolution in Mainz 1743–1803* (Cambridge, 1974), 15–21. Against Blanning's belief that "in political philosophy at least the breach had occurred a great deal earlier" (p. 15), see the essay by Hans Thieme, "Die Zeit des späteren Naturrechts. Eine privatrechtsgeschichtliche Studie," *ZSRG (germ)*, 56 (1936):208 and throughout. See also the important works by Diethelm Klippel, *Politische Freiheit und Freiheitsrechte im deutschen Naturrecht des 18. Jahrhunderts*, in *Rechts- und Staatswissenschaftliche Veröffentlichungen der Görres-Gesellschaft*, n.s., 23 (Paderborn, 1976); Gerd Kleinheyer, *Staat und Bürger im Recht. Die Vorträge des Carl Gottlieb Svarez vor dem preußischen Kronprinzen (1791–2)*, in *Bonner Rechtswissenschaftliche Abhandlungen*, 47 (Bonn, 1959), esp. 21–51, 143–51; Jürgen Schlumbohm, *Freiheit. Die Anfänge des bürgerlichen Emanzipationsbewegung in Deutschland im Spiegel ihres Leitwortes*, in *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*, 12 (Düsseldorf, 1975), 86–146.

Because the German Enlightenment was well integrated into the European movement, we should also resist the recent tendency to adopt Germanisms such as *Aufklärung* (Enlightenment) and *Aufklärer* (enlightener) to distance the German movement from that of Western Europe.⁴ The features that distinguished the German Enlightenment from other national variants rested not so much in the ideas produced as in the ideas not produced and in the social and political context of enlightened culture. Though it is possible to find individuals who held radical views,⁵ the German Enlightenment lacked the extremes – of materialism, atheism, radical republicanism, and utopian socialism. This was because its corporate institutions remained relatively vital and because its intellectuals were not concentrated in a few urban centers but were spread throughout the large land mass of the Empire. Both factors muted the cultural impact of Enlightenment ideas and forced Germany's intellectuals into a far greater compromise with the aristocratically dominated social and political order. The German Enlightenment expressed this compromise as a form of corporatist or estatist Enlightenment (*ständische Aufklärung*), and it is in this context that Möser is significant.

The Enlightenment had begun chiefly as a reaction of educated Europeans to the bloodshed and persecution of the wars of the seventeenth century. The configuration of ideas that had emerged – of tolerance, individual rights, public order, work, and self-discipline – had gathered strength earliest in England and the Netherlands, partly because political events had made it possible for minorities to survive in these countries and partly because sufficient numbers of humanists were able to support themselves in London, Amsterdam, and Rotterdam. In these cities educated men and women were first able to discuss views, influence policy, and even set the public tone. Although similar ideas of religious toleration, public right, and ethical asceticism developed almost simultaneously in Central Europe, there was no equivalent urban setting where German humanists could gather.⁶ With their intelligentsia spread among more than seventy-two urban sites in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Germans were never able

⁴ Thus, I resist adopting this stylistic tendency that, it seems to me, abandons the eighteenth-century dialogue among national and regional variants and becomes committed to national uniqueness. For examples, see the otherwise different works by T. C. W. Blanning, *Reform and Revolution in Mainz*, e.g., 34–7, and Peter Hanns Reill, *The German Enlightenment and the Rise of Historicism* (Berkeley, 1975), 1–3 and throughout for his reasoning.

⁵ Fritz Mauthner, *Der Atheismus und seine Geschichte im Abendland*, 4 vols (Berlin, 1920–3), 3:161–390, 4:1–86; Valjavec, *Entstehung der politischen Strömungen*, 135–46; A. W. Gulyga, *Der deutsche Materialismus am Ausgang des 18. Jahrhunderts*, trans. from Russian by Ileana Bauer and Gertraud Korf (Berlin, 1966); Gerhard Steiner, *Franz Heinrich Ziegenhagen und seine Verhältnislehre* (Berlin, 1962); Emil Adler, *Herder und die deutsche Aufklärung*, trans. from Polish by Irena Fischer (Vienna, 1968), 238–50.

⁶ Winter, *Frühaufklärung*, 47–106. See also Carl Hinrichs, *Preußentum und Pietismus* (Göttingen, 1971), 352–441; Gerhard Oestreich, *Neostoicism and the Early Modern State*, ed. Brigitta Oestreich and H. G. Koenigsberger, trans. David McLintock (Cambridge, 1982), 1–9, 135–54; Wolff, *Weltanschauung der deutschen Aufklärung*, 13–96; Marc Raeff, *The Well-Ordered Police State* (New Haven, Conn.: 1983), 11–42.

to reproduce the same intellectual subculture.⁷ Thus, although Germans felt an intellectual kinship with the Enlightenment as it unfolded in England, in the Netherlands, and later in France, they remained relatively more isolated and were forced to maintain intellectual ties through extensive correspondence and to write for a much more widely dispersed audience.⁸

This situation resulted from the regional nature of Germany's development in the hundred years after the Treaty of Westphalia.⁹ The Westphalian Peace had guaranteed political and religious pluralism: the secular and ecclesiastical small states, free cities, and class of imperial knights had largely survived absorption or secularization in 1648, achieving political parity at the expense of a central monarchy, strong central institutions, and the creation of a capital city that might have acted as a magnet for intellectual life. The three major religious denominations – Reformed Protestantism, Evangelical Protestantism, and Roman Catholicism – had also been guaranteed their legal existence in the Empire, thus bringing the open warfare of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation to a close.

Both decisions contributed to Germany's uneven recovery from the effects of the Thirty Years War. The lack of a strong central monarchy and effective central institutions left economic recovery exclusively to the individual states and to the relatively ineffective regional institutions of the empire, the imperial circles, which were often in economic competition with one another. This lengthened the time it took to develop the necessary entrepreneurial energy in the regions and urban areas to carry the new secular movement. The religious guarantees further contributed to the cultural fragmentation and fostered a watchful and suspicious attitude by the ecclesiastical and secular authorities toward the intellectuals, thus inhibiting the emergence of new ideas, particularly in Catholic areas such as electoral Bavaria.¹⁰ In this environment the traditional educational institutions, the Latin schools and the universities, continued to organize and control intellectual life. The Germans were slow to break with the older Latin curriculum. Although publication of books in the vernacular had passed that of

⁷ For the problem of urbanization and the unfolding of the Enlightenment, see Roger Emerson, "The Enlightenment and Social Structures," in *City and Society in the 18th Century*, ed. Paul Fritz and David Williams (Toronto, 1973), 99–124. For Germany, see Reiner Wild, "Stadtkultur, Bildungswesen und Aufklärungsgesellschaften," in Grimmiger, ed., *Hansers Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur*, 3/1:103–32; also the introduction and literature cited by Kopitzsch in his *Aufklärung, Absolutismus und Bürgertum in Deutschland*, esp. 27–41, 61–2.

⁸ Erich Trunz, "Der deutsche Späthumanismus als Standeskultur," *Deutsche Barockforschung*, ed. Richard Alewyn (Cologne, 1965), 147–81.

⁹ See the balanced account, with literature, by Rudolf Vierhaus, *Deutschland im Zeitalter des Absolutismus* (Göttingen, 1978), 12–36. The older essay by Hans Erich Feine, "Zur Verfassungsentwicklung des Heil. Röm. Reiches seit dem Westfälischen Frieden," *ZSRG (germ)*, 52 (1932):67–70, 79–83, 91, is also valuable, as are Karl Otmar Freiherr von Aretin, *Heiliges Römisches Reich 1786–1806*, 2 vols., in *Veröffentlichungen des Instituts für europäische Geschichte Mainz*, 38 (Wiesbaden, 1967), 1:26–31, 105, and Oestreich, *Neostoicism and the Modern State*, 241–57.

¹⁰ See, for instance, Richard van Dülmen, "Antijesuitismus und katholische Aufklärung in Deutschland," *Historisches Jahrbuch*, 89 (1969):54–64.

books in Latin by the end of the seventeenth century, Latin remained the dominant language of scholarly discourse until the mid-eighteenth century.¹¹ Latin humanism remained the principal framework within which Enlightenment ideas were assimilated even as Germans increasingly wrote in the vernacular; this pattern is particularly apparent in areas like law, philosophy, theology, and history, where the Enlightenment began to penetrate with particular vigor after the mid-eighteenth century.¹²

These conditions promoted a certain intellectual eclecticism in Germany. The large number of princely courts, where aristocratic culture fell under the sway of foreign patrons – the Dutch, English, French, or the Catholic Church – left German culture open to diverse influences from other areas of Europe. One of the special characteristics of the German Enlightenment was its tendency to absorb and assimilate. This was Germany's intellectual strength, as is clear from the number of foreign works read, commented upon, and translated during the eighteenth century.¹³ But it also meant that the Germans developed an eclectic and syncretistic attitude toward the various traditions and tendencies in the wider Enlightenment.

Indeed, though Leibniz, Thomasius, Wolff, and Gottsched each had a significant influence on intellectual tastes during the first half of the eighteenth century, no single strand within the Enlightenment dominated in Germany during Justus Möser's lifetime.¹⁴ As a result, it is difficult to date with any

¹¹ Albert Ward, *Book Production, Fiction and the German Reading Public 1740–1800* (Oxford, 1974), 30–4, 164–5. Ward's book is based on the valuable older study by Rudolf Jentsch, *Der deutsch-lateinische Büchermarkt nach den Leipziger Ostermeß-Katalogen von 1740, 1770 und 1800 in seiner Gliederung und Wandlung* (Leipzig, 1912).

¹² See, for example, Norker Hammerstein, "Zur Geschichte der deutschen Universität im Zeitalter der Aufklärung," in *Universität und Gelehrtenstand, 1400–1800*, ed. Hellmuth Rössler and Günther Franz (Limburg/Lahn, 1970), 145–82; and the same author's *Jus und Historie* (Göttingen, 1972), 17–42; Hans Maier, "Die Lehre der Politik an den älteren deutschen Universitäten," in his *Politische Wissenschaft in Deutschland* (Munich, 1969), 15–52. For statistics regarding continued scholarly publication in Latin, see Ward, *Book Production, Fiction and the German Reading Public*, 164–5.

¹³ Translations from French and English predominated, though works were also translated from Dutch, Italian, Spanish, Greek, and Latin; for a detailed analysis by language, see the tables in Helmut Kiesel and Paul Münch, *Gesellschaft und Literatur im 18. Jahrhundert* (Munich, 1977), 193–99; Ward, *Book Production, Fiction and the German Reading Public*, 37, 86; Kenneth Carpenter, *Dialogues in Political Economy. Translations from and into German in the 18th Century* (Boston, 1977); Bernhard Fabian, "English Books and their Eighteenth-Century German Readers," in Paul Korshin, ed., *The Widening Circle: Essays on the Circulation of Literature in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (Philadelphia, 1969), 117–96.

¹⁴ For an overview, see Lewis White Beck, *Early German Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1969), 196–339, and Max Wundt, *Die deutsche Schulphilosophie im Zeitalter der Aufklärung*, in *Heidelberger Abhandlungen zur Philosophie und ihrer Geschichte*, 32 (Tübingen, 1945). Leibniz's relations to the German Enlightenment were complex, based on the late publication of basic texts, the reworking by Gottsched and Wolff of basic ideas, and the consequent recovery later in the century by Lessing, Herder, and Fichte. On Leibniz, see Kurt Huber, *Leibniz* (Munich, 1951), 12, 283–97, and brief remarks in Hans Heinz Holz, *Leibniz* (Stuttgart, 1958), 133–7. On Thomasius, see Ernst Bloch, "Christian Thomasius, ein deutscher Gelehrte ohne Misere," reprinted in his *Naturrecht und menschliche Würde* (Frankfurt/Main, 1961); Hinrich Rüping, *Die Naturrechtslehre des Christian Thomasius und ihre Fortbildung in der Thomasius Schule* (Ph.D. diss., Bonn, 1968); Max

precision the diffusion of the Enlightenment in Germany. We can only speak of gradual expansion, modest fermentation, and relatively rapid contraction over the period from the 1740s through the 1790s. There was a general but apolitical spread of enlightened ideas through the end of the Seven Years War; in this phase the Enlightenment was active in the areas of pedagogy, domestic ethics as expressed in the moral weeklies, and natural science as supported by the various academies. After peace was made in 1763, the pace of public life quickened. These years saw substantial changes in public taste – as, for example, in the slow death of the moral weekly after 1760 or in the works of imaginative literature that began to flood the book market. They also saw an enormous increase in the number of books printed and of magazines and journals started. Furthermore, the Enlightenment spread into areas of social, economic, and religious life that had remained off limits until then. Most of the reform plans for the economy and society in these years were triggered by the depredations of the Seven Years War and the fiscal crisis brought on by the inflationary war economy. In the Catholic areas of Germany there was, in addition, intensified agitation for and against the Jesuit order that resulted in Clement IV's dissolution decree in 1773. The increasingly secular and mildly radical tone of the postwar years continued until the 1780s, when a religious and political counteroffensive began to splinter the common front. In the Austrian core lands the counteroffensive was launched by the Josephinian reforms; in Bavaria it was started by the elector's ban on the Illuminati; and in Prussia it can be said to have begun with the death of Friedrich II in 1786.¹⁵

Fleischmann, *Christian Thomasius. Leben und Lebenswerk* (Halle, 1931); and Rüping, "Thomasius und seine Schüler im brandenburgischen Staat," in *Humanismus und Naturrecht in Berlin-Brandenburg-Preußen*, in *Veröffentlichungen der Historischen Kommission zu Berlin*, 48 (Berlin, 1979), 76–89. On Wolff and his influence, see the contemporary account by Carl Günther Ludovici, *Ausführlicher Entwurf einer vollständigen Historie der Wolffischen Philosophie*, 3 vols. (Leipzig, 1737–8); Wundt, *Deutsche Schulphilosophie*, 122–99; the essays by Norcker Hammerstein and Norbert Hinske in the recent collection *Christian Wolff 1679–1754*, ed. Werner Schneiders, in *Studien zum achtzehnten Jahrhundert*, 4 (Hamburg, 1983), 266–306; and the brief comments on Wolff's language in Eric A. Blackall, *The Emergence of German as a Literary Language* (Cambridge, 1959), 19–48. On Gottsched see Werner Rieck, *Johann Christoph Gottsched. Eine kritische Würdigung seines Werkes* (Berlin, 1972).

¹⁵ For various attempts to delineate phases within the German Enlightenment using political criteria, see Rudolf Vierhaus, "Politisches Bewußtsein in Deutschland vor 1789," *Der Staat*, 6 (1967):175–96; Fritz Valjavec, "Die Entstehung des europäischen Konservatismus," in his *Ausgewählte Aufsätze*, ed. Karl August Fischer and Mathias Bernath (Munich, 1963), 343–62; Richard van Dülmen, *Der Geheimbund der Illuminaten* (Stuttgart, 1975), 15–21; Schlumbohm, *Freiheit*, 39–42. Using criteria internal to Catholic Germany, see Richard van Dülmen, "Antijesuitismus und katholische Aufklärung in Deutschland," 54, 78–9; also idem, "Der Geheimbund der Illuminaten," *ZBLG*, 36 (1973):793–833; and idem, "Die Aufklärungsgesellschaften in Deutschland als Forschungsproblem," *Francia*, 5 (1977):251–75. For the Austrian core lands, see the excellent work by Leslie Bodi, *Tauwetter in Wien. Zur Prosa der österreichischen Aufklärung* (Frankfurt, 1977), esp. 34–116. For dating in terms of book production and the spread of literature, see Wolfgang von Ungern-Sternberg, "Schriftsteller und literarischer Markt," in Grimmiger, ed., *Hansers Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur*, 3/1:133–85; see similar arguments in Ward, *Book Production, Fiction and the German Reading Public*. For dating in terms of the development of philosophy, see Wundt, *ibid.*, 1–18.

Thus the Enlightenment appears to have developed in a slower and less homogeneous fashion in Germany than among its neighbors to the West. As a broad cultural front, it emerged only in the 1760s and was faced with significant resistance by the early 1780s. In the years after 1763 the German Enlightenment received its special character from its conciliatory and even defensive relation to the established order. After midcentury the German public continuously searched for the ethical and political limits to their beliefs; they sought to define norms, establish the limits of social criticism, and locate boundaries between thought and social practice. Of course, this statement can be applied to varying degrees to every European society, since the number of those willing to compromise was everywhere in the majority, and there were also more radical movements in Germany during these years such as the Illuminati (suppressed in 1785). But, in general, the German situation differed from that elsewhere in Western Europe because the legal, social, and political institutions of the Estates remained largely intact. Estatist or corporatist language continued to predominate in the 1760s and 1770s, whereas the legal and political vision of the Enlightenment began to be articulated only in the late 1780s and 1790s. Thus the great legal codifications of the German Enlightenment, begun at midcentury in Prussia, the Austrian core lands, and Bavaria, gathered force only in the 1780s and 1790s.¹⁶ Moreover, except for Hamburg, there was no large city like London or Amsterdam to erode the economic domination of the landed aristocracy or to cause rapid demographic and material change.¹⁷ For these reasons, the language and material relations that we associate with the terms "civil society" and "representative government" were assimilated only very slowly, even at the level of thought.¹⁸ As a consequence, when the Germans began to discuss political life,

¹⁶ The Bavarian legal codification and commentaries were completed between 1751 and 1771 by Freiherr von Kreittmayr, but this summary in the service of bureaucratic centralization and the older erudite tradition of law did not occur in the spirit of the Enlightenment; nor did those codifications begun by Samuel von Cocceji in Prussia between 1749 and 1751 or those begun under Maria Theresa in the Austrian core lands. Reform, as carried by enlightened legal reformers, did not begin in Prussia or Austria until the 1780s and 1790s. See the brief comments by Ludwig Hammermeyer, "Staatliche Herrschaftsordnung und altständische Repräsentation," *Handbuch der bayerischen Geschichte*, 2: 1074–5; and for a longer overview, see Franz Wieacker, *Privatrechtsgeschichte der Neuzeit* (2nd ed.; Göttingen, 1967), 322–47, and Reinhart Koselleck, *Preußen zwischen Reform und Revolution* (2nd ed.; Stuttgart, 1975), 23–51, as well as the older study by R. Stintzing and Ernst Landsberg, *Geschichte der deutschen Rechtswissenschaft*, vol. 2 in 2 parts (Munich, 1898), 2/ 1:214–27, 465–76, 519–28.

¹⁷ See the comments by Kopitzsch in his edited volume *Aufklärung, Absolutismus und Bürgertum in Deutschland*, 27–41. See also the author's *Grundzüge einer Sozialgeschichte der Aufklärung in Hamburg und Altona* (Ph.D. diss., Hamburg, 1978), 22–39; and Percy Ernst Schramm, *Neun Generationen*, 2 vols. (Göttingen, 1963–4), 1:74–348. Compare to the English case, as described in E. A. Wrigley, "A Simple Model of London's Importance in Changing English Society and Economy 1650–1750," *Past and Present*, no. 37 (1967):44–70.

¹⁸ Ursula A. J. Becher, *Politische Gesellschaft. Studien zur Genese bürgerlicher Öffentlichkeit in Deutschland*, in *Veröffentlichungen des Max-Planck-Instituts für Geschichte*, 59 (Göttingen, 1978), 11–28, 146–52; also Diethild Meyring, *Politische Weltweisheit. Studien zur deutschen politischen Philosophie des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Ph.D. diss., Münster, 1965); and Schlumbohm, *Freiheit*, 42–57, 67–82.

they tended to treat questions in an abstract ethical language that never became as fully political as it did in Anglo-America or France, or they still continued to argue in the language of corporatism and the Estates. There was almost no concrete political and organizational writing in the press during these years. It is typical of political argument in the Germanies that neither the political pamphlet literature of the American war of independence nor the constitutions themselves were translated and printed before the outbreak of the French Revolution.¹⁹

To understand the German Enlightenment and Möser's place in it, we must realize that the distinctive shift from estate to civil society, which we so often associate with the historical model of Enlightenment, did not mark the Enlightenment in Germany during these years. I mean by this shift the move toward a juridical or de facto separation of church and state, the replacement of corporatism as a social system by the open, competitive model of civil society, and the replacement of aristocratic monarchic autocracy by a constitutional system of representative government. It is no exaggeration to say that until the 1780s the German Enlightenment was still readying itself to discuss categories that elsewhere had been long articulated and to some extent made concrete. Thus the German Enlightenment remained archaic from the perspective of modern political ideologies and incomplete with regard to an Anglo-French model of Enlightenment. In E. J. Hobsbawm's terms, the German Enlightenment stayed a traditional or "prepolitical" movement in the period before the outbreak of the French Revolution.²⁰ The majority of enlightened philosophers, publicists, and administrators in Germany were caught between stools, since they believed in a limited, evolutionary reform that would not disrupt the oligarchic institutions of estate society.

Any of a number of texts from these years might be used to illustrate the balance between the corporate order and the Enlightenment – from the commentaries to the Bavarian legal code by Freiherr von Kreittmayr to the essays on "true" and "false" Enlightenment written in the 1770s, 1780s, and 1790s.²¹ I have chosen the noted essay on the Enlightenment (1784) by Möser's contemporary, Moses Mendelssohn (1729–86), because it reveals the pattern of restraint, conciliation, and self-discipline with exceptional clarity. "What does it mean to enlighten?" he asked.

¹⁹ Horst Dippel, *Germany and the American Revolution, 1770–1800* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1977), 28–9, 35–7.

²⁰ E. J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels* (New York, 1959), 2–3; see also Valjavec, *Entstehung der politischen Strömungen*, 7–11.

²¹ See the thoughtful work by Werner Schneiders, *Die wahre Aufklärung* (Freiburg, 1974); also the interpretive essays by Gerhard Sauder, "Verhältnismäßige Aufklärung. Zur bürgerlichen Ideologie am Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts," *Jahrbuch der Jean Paul Gesellschaft*, 9 (1974):102–26; idem, "Aufklärung des Vorurteils – Vorurteil der Aufklärung, *DVLG*, 57 (1983):esp. 264–73; Dieter Narr, "Fragen der Volksbildung in der späteren Aufklärung," reprinted in his *Studien zur Spätaufklärung im deutschen Südwesten*, in *Veröffentlichungen der Kommission für geschichtliche Landeskunde in Baden-Württemberg*, series B research, 93 (Stuttgart, 1979), 182–208.

The words Enlightenment, Culture, and Cultivation [*Aufklärung*, *Kultur*, and *Bildung*] are new arrivals in our language. They belong clearly to the language of books. . . . Cultivation divides itself into culture and Enlightenment. The former appears to be more directed toward the Practical. . . . Enlightenment, on the other hand, appears to be more directed toward the Theoretical – toward intelligent perception (objective) and experience in intelligent reflection (subj[ective]) about the concerns of human life according to their significance and influence in determining man's nature and purpose. . . . Enlightenment is related to Culture as Theory is to Practice; Epistemology to Morality; Criticism to Virtuosity.²²

Mendelssohn's definition presupposed the traditional philosophical division between theoretical and practical knowledge, and in this essay he argued without hesitation that Enlightenment emphasized theoretical reflection on man's nature and purpose. The division between Enlightenment and Culture was grounded in a twofold division in man's essential being. Man has both a spiritual and a social or institutional side; thus one must consider both his needs as man and his needs as citizen. "The Enlightenment which concerns man as man is *universal*," he wrote, "without regard to differences of estate; [however,] the Enlightenment of man when he is viewed as a citizen modifies itself according to *estate* and *occupation*."²³ Mendelssohn never went beyond this formulation to criticize corporate society or its institutions. Like others in the German Enlightenment he accepted the social barriers separating the orders and suborders of society. It was also typical of his gradualist spirit that he did not establish, as did Kant or Rousseau, the relation between intellect and institutions as one of necessary opposition and unremitting struggle.²⁴ Instead he expressed the regret of the unarmed prophet: though it may happen that "individual Enlightenment and Enlightenment of the citizen can come into conflict," at those points one can only

²² Mendelssohn, "Über die Frage: was heißt aufklären?" *Berlinische Monatsschrift*, 4 (1784):193–4, readily available in Erhard Bahr, ed., *Was ist Aufklärung?* (Stuttgart, 1974), 6 – all references to this edition. See also the excellent essays by Alexander Altmann, "Moses Mendelssohn über Naturrecht und Naturzustand," in *Ich handle mit Vernunft*, ed. Norbert Hinske (Hamburg, 1981), 45–84; and his *Prinzipien politischer Theorie bei Mendelssohn und Kant*, in *Trierer Universitätsreden*, 9 (Trier, 1981).

²³ Mendelssohn, "Was heißt aufklären?", 7. The same ideas appear in Johann Ludwig Ewald, *Ueber Volksaufklärung; Ihre Gränzen und Vortheile* (Berlin, 1790), 14, 18, 23. See the works cited in footnote 21 and Wolfgang Ruppert, "Volksaufklärung im späten 18. Jahrhundert," in *Hansers Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur* 3/1:341–61. In France these views were commonplace; see Harry Payne, *The Philosophes and the People* (New Haven, Conn., 1976); and Harvey Chisick, *The Limits of Reform in the Enlightenment* (Princeton, N.J., 1980).

²⁴ Though Mendelssohn had translated the *Second Discourse on Inequality* in 1756, he did not adopt Rousseau's interpretation of this antagonism in order to show how estate and occupation constricted individual enlightenment. Nor did he refer optimistically, as did Kant, to man's "unsociable sociability" as the mainspring of culture and progress. See Mendelssohn's criticism of Rousseau in the public letter addressed to Lessing published with the 1756 translation: "Sendschreiben an den Herrn Magister Lessing in Leipzig," in Mendelssohn, *Gesammelte Schriften. Jubiläums Ausgabe*, ed. Fritz Bamberger et al. (Berlin, 1929–), 2:83–109. Compare with Immanuel Kant, "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose," *Political Writings*, ed. Hans Reiss and trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge, 1970), 44–5; German ed., Kant, *Werke*, ed. Wilhelm Weischedel, 6 vols. (Darmstadt, 1966–70), 6:37–9.

retreat, since "the ethically committed man of Enlightenment must proceed with care and caution and rather tolerate prejudice than also drive away the truth concealed with it."²⁵ Mendelssohn concluded his essay on Enlightenment in the spirit of restraint, warning that "abuse of Enlightenment weakens moral sense, and leads to rigidity, egoism, irreligion, and anarchy."²⁶

Mendelssohn's hesitation to render political judgments may well have sprung from his isolation as a Jewish philosopher within a readily hostile Christian society and from fear of being distracted from his self-chosen task of mediating between the two cultures. Nevertheless, his essay reveals the ideas common to the prevalent style of thought: the division between the theoretical and the practical correlated with Enlightenment and social change, the emphasis on the Enlightenment as a theoretical movement, and the tendency to protect corporate institutions and values from the full force of enlightened criticism.

In essence, then, the German advocacy of Enlightenment ethical, religious, and pedagogic ideals remained confined within the institutions of the old regime, and the German Enlightenment of this period retained its special character because of this fact. I have called this phenomenon "corporatist" or "estatist" Enlightenment – an English translation of the more readily understandable phrase *ständische Aufklärung*²⁷ – in order to draw attention to the careful balancing act practiced by Möser and his contemporaries. The term refers to the political and social values of the Enlightenment thinkers active between midcentury and the outbreak of the French Revolution. The pairing of corporatism and Enlightenment reflects both the legal and social reality of the order of estates and the fact that this reality continued to be preserved within the thought of the German Enlightenment. Indeed, we can distinguish political, economic, and social sub-

²⁵ Mendelssohn, "Was heißt aufklären?", 7.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ In using the terms "estatism" or "corporatism," I am rendering into English the German term *Stand* to refer to the social and political system of estates as it flourished in the *Ständestaat* from the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries. I do not use the term statically, since it is clear that corporatism and the system of Estates changed substantially in these centuries. But it is also clear that for the eighteenth century the historian must treat this phenomenon as more than a survival of anachronistic institutions and values. For a conceptual orientation, see Ferdinand Tönnies, "Estates and Classes," in Reinhard Bendix and Seymour Martin Lipset, eds., *Class, Status and Power* (Glencoe, Ill., 1953), 49–63; Max Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*, 2 vols. (Cologne, 1964), 2:809–31; Heinz Reif, *Westfälischer Adel 1770–1860*, in *Kritische Studien zur Geschichtswissenschaft* 35 (Göttingen, 1979), 24–40. For a historical orientation, see Robert R. Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution*, 2 vols. (Princeton, N.J., 1959–64), 1:27–82; C. B. A. Behrens, "Government and Society," in *The Cambridge Economic History*, 7 vols. in 9 (2nd ed.; London, 1966–78), 5:549–60; Otto Brunner, "Die Freiheitsrechte in der altständischen Gesellschaft," in his *Neue Wege der Verfassungs- und Sozialgeschichte* (2nd rev. ed.; Göttingen, 1968), 187–98; and Dietrich Gerhard, "Regionalismus und ständisches Wesen als ein Grundthema europäischer Geschichte," in his *Alte und neue Welt in vergleichender Geschichtsbetrachtung*, in *Veröffentlichungen des Max-Planck-Instituts für Geschichte*, 10 (Göttingen, 1962), 13–39; Gerhard Oestreich, *Neostoicism and the Early Modern State*, 166–98; and, with I. Auerbach, the same author's "Ständische Verfassung," in *Sowjetsystem und Demokratische Gesellschaft*, ed. C. D. Kernig, 6 vols (Freiburg, 1966–72), 6:211–35.