

prose, in the field not only of philosophy, but of the natural sciences, history, politics and novels, and can honestly promise that my work will come up to all expectations, for few can be as well equipped for the task as I am. [*Ger. Br.*, 1978, 366 f.]

Although the idea of translating Hume's writings on natural religion into German as an introduction to his own philosophy and, more generally, as a counterblast to the philosophical systems and religious ideas then current in Germany was never realised, Schopenhauer did go so far as to write (in German) a 'Preface to [the proposed] Translation of Hume's Works':

I scarcely venture to lay before the enlightened philosophical public of our day this new German rendering of Hume's popular philosophical writings, because this public stands upon an eminence from which it not only looks down upon the once famous French philosophers — such as D'Alembert, Diderot, Voltaire, Rousseau — with evident contempt, as narrow and obstinate, but ranks the English philosophers of recent centuries little higher.

Neither can there be any doubt that Hume would have spared himself the trouble of setting forth, in lengthy discussions and dialogues, sceptical arguments against the chief truths of natural religion, and then of conducting their defence; wearily weighing reasons and counter-reasons, and thus constructing a firm foundation for the belief in these truths — he would have spared himself this trouble, if the brilliant philosophical discovery of our day had already been made in his time. I mean the important discovery that understanding comes from perceiving, and especially from perceiving revelations of the transcendent and god-like, which dispenses with the necessity of all reflection and reasoning on such subjects. Therefore I acknowledge that I lay this translation before my philosophic contemporaries not as a book for instruction, but as a means for better measuring their own greatness and the loftiness of their own standpoint, that they may the more perfectly appreciate the same.

Zu sehen wie vor uns ein Mann gedacht,  
Und wie wir's denn zuletzt so herrlich weit gebracht.

The same holds good with regard to his diction. Had Hume had the good fortune to live till our present philosophic period, he would have improved his style; he would doubtless have cast aside that terseness, lucidity, precision, and attractive liveliness which are natural to him, and endeavoured to spread a mysterious obscurity over his writings. By means of heavy involved periods, out-of-the-way expressions, and made-up words, he would first have puzzled his readers, and then, as they continued their perusal, would have made them wonder how it was possible to read so much without gleaning one single idea. This must make them feel that the less the text makes them think, the more the author must have thought. Therefore in this respect, too, the philosophic reader of our time will have the satisfaction of looking back with gratified pride on this Coryphaeus of a past period.

As to what has called me to this little work, it is merely this, that since my stay in England as a boy the English language has come very easily to me, and I have a great deal of spare time since I consider myself excused from working out my own thoughts for communication, for experience has verified what I foresaw and predicted — that they would find no readers among my contemporaries.<sup>4</sup>

However amusing, and however revealing, the irony here is unlikely to have done much to help the project come to fruition. At one stage one thinks of Hoffmann's literary tomcat, Murr, who goes so far as to inscribe a deep work of which he understands not a word. This brings us back to metaphysics in general and German metaphysics in particular.

'Must I plunge into metaphysics? Alas, I cannot see in the dark; nature has not furnished me with the optics of a cat.'<sup>5</sup> Thomas Gray's attitude, voiced in 1736, is typical of the 'English' distrust of metaphysics, in which German metaphysics commonly pass as the *non plus ultra*, for 'when anyone in England wishes to describe something as very obscure or indeed as totally unintelligible, he says it is like German metaphysics' (*P&P*, 'On Philosophy at the Universities'; Schopenhauer's English italicised). By the time these words appeared in 1851, the idea of the unintelligibility or so-called mysticism of German metaphysics — particularly of the Kantian variety — had become fairly widely accepted in England. The idea was first voiced by Hazlitt, who wrote in the *Edinburgh Review* in August 1817, 'As