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## VOLTAIRE AND THE LIMITS OF REASON

There are, generally speaking, two opposite viewpoints concerning the extent to which we are still beholden to an ideology derived from the Enlightenment. According to one viewpoint, the Enlightenment project is still valid and, though its aspirations are yet to be realized, its goals are still worthy of guiding our thinking and our actions. The other viewpoint holds that the project is no longer relevant because the terms within which it was conceived are hardly applicable in the context of present-day concerns and insights. According to this perspective, attempts to implement such an ideology can only lead to various forms of delusion and the result is at best a pretense masking the play of power and privilege that sustains contemporary socio-economic systems. In this light, it becomes apparent that the value system we have inherited from the eighteenth century is an abstraction that is no longer sustained by the faith in humanity and its destiny that gave the system its legitimacy in the eighteenth century. As David Hiley points out, "Our problem in the twentieth century is that we have inherited the Enlightenment conception of the connection between the growth of knowledge and the improvement of ourselves and society, as well as the Enlightenment conceptions of reason, autonomy, and hope for ourselves and the future, yet we have rejected the metaphysical structure and teleological conception of history that made the Enlightenment view plausible."<sup>1</sup> Paradoxically, it may well be the very success of the Enlightenment project that is responsible for its own downfall. As we saw earlier, such fundamental categories as Reason and Nature have lost much of their

credibility; thus the critical thrust of the ideas spawned by the Enlightenment ended up invalidating the very foundations that made them possible. Lawrence Cahoon proposes the following explanation:

The interpretive categories that have shepherded modernity's achievements have succeeded so well that they have shattered the interpretive context that was essential to early modernity. The result is that in the twentieth century modernity has suffered a *de-contextualization* of its basic interpretive categories. The beliefs and modes of interpretation that once provided a context and a source of mediation for modernity's fundamental conceptions of subjectivity and objectivity have been delegitimized. This loss of context and mediation has affected the conceptions of subjectivity and objectivity themselves. Without a medium of relation their nature is drastically changed.<sup>2</sup>

For eighteenth-century philosophers, the two principal conceptual categories used as guides for thought were reason and nature. While these concepts were to become absolute and take the place, in effect, of a Divine principle, the uses to which reason in particular was put in the eighteenth century were sufficiently tinged with skepticism to make them comparable to present-day postmodern approaches—as I have already argued elsewhere.<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of the present study, what needs to be ascertained more precisely is the functioning of reason in light of the distinction made earlier between philosophies seeking to guarantee knowledge of reality and those questioning it. To do this, I return once more to Voltaire, the most eminent spokesperson for the Age of Reason. The contexts I have chosen for highlighting the uses and conceptualization of reason in Voltaire are the themes of *pays* and *dépaysement*: that is, I wish to contrast the positive notion of belonging, of being circumscribed by one's provincial locale to the negative idea of uprooting, of estrangement.

In a similar manner, Voltairean reason also partakes of two general aspects—one positive, the other negative. On the positive side, reason is to be understood as the ordering principle that makes us feel at home in the universe. Voltaire's intellectual activity implies the postulate of a rational order ruling the universe: it is an order outside history, founded in nature, and is the basis for

Voltaire's optimistic or melioristic outlook. This faith in reason manifests itself as an intuitive certitude: "God has implanted in us a principle of reason that is universal, as he has given feathers to birds and skins to bears; and this principle is so immutable that it subsists in spite of all the passions which oppose it, in spite of those tyrants who would drown it in blood, in spite of the impostors who want to annihilate it through superstition."<sup>4</sup> Reason is thus one of those principles that is necessary to make sense of the world. The trouble is that the world and human actions frequently do not make sense—it is in this regard that reason acquires a critical responsibility and is used as a defense mechanism against everything that threatens a rational conceptualization of the world. For Voltaire then, as Didier Masseur explains, "there is an ethics of reason: seen as a shared demand of sense and unity, it provides a defense against enthusiasm, passions that divide, and the spirit of domination. It prevents recourse to the irrational when confronted by the inexplicable, because the impotence of human reason does not necessarily summon the supernatural."<sup>5</sup> Reason thus understood is aware of its own limitations and achieves its privilege and preeminence only by dint of this fundamental modesty it displays whenever it gauges its own potential and capacity. It is this fluctuation between certitude and doubt that marks the functioning of reason as it is revealed in the travels of the characters of Voltaire's philosophical tales.

The heroes of Voltaire's *Contes*, as we well know, are committed to traveling.<sup>6</sup> These travels may begin unexpectedly and are often undertaken unwillingly: Candide is sent forth "with great kicks in the behind"; Zadig has to flee from home because his life is in danger; the Princess of Babylon, following a misunderstanding, pursues her lover over the lands of three continents; Micromégas, banished from the court of Syrius after he publishes a controversial book, undertakes to visit other planets "to complete his education of mind and heart" (132). Though unwilling to leave home at first, Voltaire's voyagers end up recognizing the formative importance of their peregrinations. Candide, reflecting on the dramatic difference between Eldorado and his native Westphalia is certain that Pangloss would not have thought the castle of Thunder-ten-tronckh to be the best place on earth had he seen Eldorado and adds, as an afterthought, "It is clear that one should travel" (218). Zadig, who is already endowed with a philosophical disposition before his travels begin, is made even wiser by the experience they provide.

Even the Babylonian Princesses' lover, Amazan—who comes from a country where liberty, equality, cleanliness, abundance, and tolerance reign—discovers that other cultures may be superior to his in certain regards. Having received a map from an English geographer, he is surprised to see the world represented on a piece of paper and recognizes that “the Albionian, who had given him a gift of the universe in an abbreviated version, was not at all wrong in claiming that people were a thousand times better educated on the shores of the Thames than on those of the Nile, the Euphrates, or the Ganges” (490).

Thus, although they are driven to travel by circumstances outside their control, Voltaire's heroes are wanderers by nature and assimilate quite readily the lessons of their peripatetic experiences. Their outlook is often marked by restlessness, by a disposition to feel unsatisfied with their own country and culture. As a result, as Cacambo remarks, “When we don't have what we need in one world, we find it in another. It's a great pleasure to see and do new things” (207). This desire to travel for the pure pleasure of discovering new and different vistas is most evident in the case of l'Ingénu, in whom love of travel is inseparable from an inherent spontaneity of character. Relating to his newfound French friends the circumstances in which he came to England, he explains, very simply, “I have, by nature, a passion for seeing new places” (325).

The connection between character and travel is thus given in Voltaire's philosophical tales. Consequently, there are evident parallels between physical displacement and intellectual movement and the change of scenery brings about a corresponding change on a psychological as well as a philosophical level. Which is to say that the most significant events taking place during the course of the travels undertaken by the principal characters of the *Contes* take place on an intellectual level. After Micromégas has become acquainted with the secretary of the Academy of Saturn, we are told that “they decide to take a little philosophical trip together” (136). Indeed, all of these voyages are first and foremost philosophical, as many commentators of Voltaire's *Contes* have already pointed out. It is also on this level that the reader is invited to take part in the adventures of Voltaire's heroes. The *dépaysement* experienced by the characters is a philosophical lesson that invites the reader to leave the comfort of his or her intellectual home and to consider other, different, sometimes strange and disquieting vistas that propose alternatives to ingrained habits of thought.

What is at stake in these travels, in the most general sense, is Reason. Reason, it could be argued, is both the vehicle and the object of the voyages. Voltaire uses Reason or, to put it differently, he appeals to certain standards of common sense and understanding while aiming to effectuate certain changes in our understanding and appreciation of this most universal of vehicles for thought. Noteworthy, as well, is the dual strategy adopted by Voltaire as he explores the ways of human understanding and rationalization: Reason acquires both a negative-critical and a positive-constructive thrust in its application. The critical force of Reason serves to diminish human vanity and brings out its own limitations by highlighting the deficiencies of human understanding. Voltaire's purpose, in this regard, is to place humans and their concerns in an appropriately philosophical perspective by demonstrating that the encounter with different forms of thought will inevitably contribute to break up limited views of the world. Communication, exchanges with others, therefore constitute an essential component for the process of intellectual *dépaysement* achieved by Voltaire's tales. In *Les Oreilles du comte de Chesterfield et le chapelain Goudman* (Count Chesterfield's Ears and the Chaplain Goudman), the surgeon Sidrac tells the priest Goudman, inviting him to dinner, "We will chat, and your thinking faculty will have the pleasure of communicating with mine by means of the spoken word, which is a marvelous thing humans don't admire enough" (674). Similarly, as they return to Europe, Candide and Martin pass the time by conversing: "They did not stop arguing for fifteen days, and at the end of fifteen days they were no further along than on the first. But at least they talked, they exchanged ideas, they consoled one another" (227).

Paradoxically then, communication does not necessarily lead to greater understanding but only ends up revealing the shortcomings of this essentially human faculty of reasoning. When Sidrac declares confidently that "we are in a century of reason; we find easily what appears as truth to us, and we dare say it," Goudman retorts: "I am afraid this truth may not be very much," and that while clear progress has been achieved in a field such as mathematics, the only thing endless discussions of metaphysical themes have uncovered is "our ignorance" (676). Likewise, when asked about the intellectual activities of earthlings, a philosopher informs Micromégas: "We dissect flies, . . . we measure lines, we assemble numbers, we agree on two or three points that we understand, and we argue about two or three thousand that we don't understand" (145).

The disproportion between the little that can be known with any confidence and the vast realm of the unknown and the unknowable is, of course, one of Voltaire's favorite themes. Thus the hermit reminds Zadig that "humans were wrong to pass judgment on a whole of which they could only see the smallest part" and that humans "judge everything without knowing anything" (80, 82). The mark of wisdom then is the Socratic capacity for recognizing and admitting one's ignorance. Micromégas and his traveling companion decide to go exploring the universe "after they had shared the little they knew and much of what they did not know" (135-36). In the tale *Le Taureau blanc* (The white bull), the wise old Mambrès, having lived thirteen hundred years, can only come to a pessimistic conclusion about the sum of his experiences: "I am very old, I have studied all my life, but I see a quantity of incompatibilities that I cannot reconcile. . . . All in all, I am beginning to suspect that this world is made up of contradictions" (577-78).

At the same time, it is at the point where ignorance is accepted as an incontrovertible fact of human existence that Reason acquires a positive force. This comes as a result of an ironic truth marking the human condition: the ultimate goal of traveling, the result of the process of *dépaysement* is the realization that one must still recognize a particular corner of the universe as one's own, as the ultimate destination for one's travels—a place which, in some cases, turns out to be the starting point. For Voltaire's heroes, following their multiple adventures and misadventures a certain sense of order is restored—"tout rentre dans l'ordre," as it were. What is achieved, in addition, is a sense of seeing the order of things in a different light. Such, for example, is the outcome of *Jeannot et Colin*. At the conclusion of the tale, Colin generously welcomes his friend back to the village after the latter's ambition to achieve success in Paris has ended in dismal failure: "You will return with me to our native land," Colin tells Jeannot. "I will teach you the business, it isn't very difficult; I will make you a partner, and we will live happily in the corner of this earth where we were born" (290). We recognize, in this invitation, the famous admonition to cultivate one's garden. It expresses the wisdom Candide only achieves at the end of his travels, although already in Eldorado, the king pointed out to him that one must necessarily settle somewhere and that he was foolish to leave: "I realize my country isn't much," the king remarks, "but, when one is tolerably well somewhere, one should stay there" (220). In *Le Monde comme*

*il va* (The way things are in this world), the genie Ituriel, having decided to heed Babouc's recommendation that Persépolis not be annihilated, also concludes that it is futile to aspire to impossible ideals and that, in this world, "if everything is not right, everything is tolerable" (108).

The wisdom leading to a *pays* one can call one's own also enables the traveler to discover a certain universality of human needs and aspirations. After many travels through space Micromégas admits that, while he has seen many beings that are superior in terms of physical capability, "I saw none who did not have more desires than true needs, and more needs than satisfaction" (134). A kind of existential anguish or dissatisfaction thus is recognized as the common trait marking all forms of existence in the universe. Once one understands that it is not possible to assuage this anguish no matter how far or wide one travels, one is ready to live life on its own terms by simply accepting its unpredictability and vicissitudes. Following the ruin of dreams and illusions, there remains the resolve to make the best of the existing situation by concentrating on the practical and tangible aspects of life. The experience of *dépaysement* thus helps the travelers achieve what could be called a *dénuement*, a state of intellectual and moral lucidity that is only possible after delusions have dissipated and all pretenses have been cast aside. Once disabused of the false promises of life, the characters can develop fully their human potential. Hardship and disappointments are the most effective paths leading to these transformations. One place that is particularly conducive to a spiritual *dénuement* is prison, as demonstrated by l'Ingénu's experience. The visitor from North America takes advantage of his incarceration to complete his education. The time spent in prison is particularly profitable because l'Ingénu is an ideal student: free of prejudices, his mind is like Locke's *tabula rasa*, ready to assimilate the lessons of the books he reads and of the conversations he has with his cell-mate, the reformed Jansenist Gordon. As Voltaire points out, "Things entered his brain without a cloud" (332). l'Ingénu's education even proves beneficial to Gordon, who acquires a new, critical perspective on his own formation. Under the influence of this unexpected contact and example, the old Jansenist undergoes a gradual transformation, "the harshness of his former opinions left his heart; he was changed into a man, as was the Huron" (371). "What!" exclaims Gordon, struck by a disquieting realization, "I have spent fifty years educating myself and I fear

that I will not be able to attain the natural good sense of this almost wild child! I am afraid I have diligently fortified prejudices; he only listens to simple nature" (354).

The meaning of nature is clearly paradoxical in this regard: nature does not represent a return to a more primitive state but stands for a precondition that gives access to a higher level of intelligence and awareness. It is a condition that permits the effective deployment and application of Reason. Zadig is a model for this ideal because he is a man, Voltaire tells us, "born with a beautiful natural disposition fortified by education" (30). Education is then the fulfillment of what is natural in humans. As Voltaire remarks about *L'Homme aux quarante écus* (The man with forty Ecus), "How much has monsieur André's good sense been fortified since he acquired a library!" (437). The *dénuement* achieved through this valorization of nature does not lead to ignorance but enhances one's capacity for enlightenment. After the various pretenses sustaining the vanity of ethnocentrism and the blindness of superstitions have been dissipated, natural Reason can truly develop to its full potential, it becomes capable of illuminating the forces and conditions that serve to fortify prejudice and ignorance. The development of a natural common sense allows one to reject whatever is incomprehensible or claims to explain the unknowable. As the chaplain Goudman remarks, "It is, when you think about it, ridiculous to utter words one doesn't understand, and to believe in beings one cannot know in the slightest" (676). History teaches us that entire nations can be kept in a state of barbarism and ignorance when an obsession with metaphysical themes passes for wisdom: "Everything was subverted when discussions were about unintelligible things: everything fell into place again as soon as such considerations were scorned," explains a member of parliament as he relates the history of England to Amazan (488).

Reason can thus provide a critical perspective on the world. By developing an unaffected commonsensical approach, one can discern the incoherence and folly of human ways. On sighting the coast of England, Candide asks Martin, "Are they as crazy there as in France?" To which Martin replies, "It's another kind of madness" (237). No matter what the country, human existence is distorted by a very human propensity to lie about everything, to misrepresent reality. The noble Venetian Pococuranté observes: "It is beautiful to write what one believes; this is the privilege of humanity. In all of Italy, we only write what we don't believe; those



who live in the country of the Caesars and Antonines dare not have a single idea without the permission of a Jacobin" (245). Similarly, in England, freedom of expression is vitiated by "partisan passion and spirit" (245). But it is the French and their institutions that provide Voltaire with the most striking examples of incoherence—of barbaric mores parading under the pretense of civilized refinement. Shortly after their arrival in France, Martin tells Candide: "Imagine all possible contradictions, all incompatibilities, you will see them in the government, in the tribunals, in the churches, in the spectacles of this weird nation" (231). The natural reason of Voltaire's heroes helps bring out the contradictions. Having learned by heart the sacred text that provides Europeans with the moral guidelines for living, l'Ingénu is forced to come to a simple conclusion: "I notice every day that people do here an infinite number of things that aren't in your book, and none of the things it tells them to do" (338). By presenting civilized refinement from the perspective of a natural rationality, Voltaire achieves a reversal of values; thus, l'Ingénu concludes, "My American compatriots would never have treated me with the barbarism I have experienced; they cannot imagine it. They are called *savages*; they are indeed uncouth, but the people in this country are refined scoundrels" (349).

Voltaire's satire of his compatriots is particularly savage in *La princesse de Babylone*. The princess observes that social and cultural life in Paris is determined by a fundamental distinction between the two social categories of the "oisifs" and the "occupés." While the idlers are preoccupied with the arts and entertainment the capital has to offer, the busy ones ensure the functioning of the governing institutions of the country. What stands out, as a result, is the contrast between the two groups and, "the more the idlers were polite, pleasant, and likable, the more one could note a sad contrast between them and the assemblies of the busy ones" (495). Prominent among the latter is "a troop of somber fanatics, half-absurd, half-crooked," as well as a number of "guardians of ancient barbaric customs." Because of a blind adherence to ancient barbaric customs, "there was no proportion between crimes and punishment" and, notes the princess, "in the city of pleasure, there still existed horrible customs." Whenever injustice occurs or atrocities are committed in the name of justice, the idlers are momentarily concerned but quickly return to their favorite activities: "They made shrill noises but the next day they no longer thought of it and only spoke of the latest fashions" (496).

It is thus a society in which everything has been turned upside down: ignorance is wisdom and social status is reflected in one's parasitic existence, not in one's usefulness. When he arrives in Paris, Jeannot receives his first lesson in life from an author described as a "pleasant ignoramus" and who proposes a fundamental truth to his pupil, namely that "respectable people (I mean those who are very rich) know everything without having learned anything." This is because "in the long run, they learn to evaluate everything they order and pay for" (286). Jeannot learns very quickly and in no time "acquired the art of speaking without understanding himself and perfected the habit of being good for nothing" (287). Thus, while the hedonism of the idlers thrives under the cover of literary and artistic brilliance, it is actually underwritten by ignorance, since it is wealth that determines the value of anything. This brilliant but empty-headed society legitimates itself by means of a circular logic. When a conviction becomes entrenched, it becomes a prejudice that is self-perpetuating because it accepts "what is" as a law that suffices unto itself and rejects any evidence that might undermine the security of apodictic truths. That is why the promotion of a natural Reason is so important. As Sétoc suggests bitterly to Zadig, "Is there anything more respectable than an ancient outrage?" To which Zadig simply replies, "Reason is more ancient still" (57).

At the same time, while Voltaire posits reason as a basic nature that determines human capacity for thought, he does not deem it to be the infallible instrument that it was for Descartes, for example. In a dialogue between a philosopher and nature, Voltaire has the philosopher emit the following supposition: "There must be an eternal geometer who guides you, a supreme intelligence presiding over your operations." To which, nature replies: "You are right; I am water, earth, fire, atmosphere, metal, mineral, stone, vegetation, animal. I do sense there is an intelligence in me; you have one too, you don't see it. I don't see mine either; I feel this invisible power, I cannot know it: how could you, you who are but a small part of me, know what I don't know?" The point at which one has to arrive before applying reason effectively then, is the understanding of its fundamental deficiency and limitations. That is because the lack inherent in human reason is not a motive for despair or apathy but a most powerful incentive for action. We find this attitude exemplified by the restless spirit of the heroes of Voltaire's *Contes*, who relate each experience to a whole context of

prejudices and expectations that is both posited and questioned in the process. They are thus able to remain alert to the gap separating the known from the unknown and themselves from the world. The themes expressing this context—the place of humans in society or in the universe, the laws ordering the universe—whatever their initial configuration, gradually become modified with the new understanding each experience brings.

One way to reconcile ourselves with the world then is to spin tales about it. As "le bon vieillard Mambres" observes, "It is only by telling tales that one succeeds in this world" (581). But fables can be of various sorts and can be told for various purposes. Having read a number of books on ancient history, *l'Ingénu* is able to establish the following preferences: "I like the fables of philosophers, I laugh at those of children, and I hate those of impostors" (353). These distinctions are revealing. Children's fables exorcise the unknown by eliciting imaginary realms of magic and wonder. The fables of impostors are fabrications claiming the status of truth in order to maintain established areas of privilege and to preserve the comforts of conventional convictions. They are not be simply despised or ignored, however; to deconstruct their capacity for obscuring people's minds, they need to be retold from the perspective of more enlightening horizons provided by the experience of the world. It is this recasting that constitutes the critical power of Voltaire's narrative, in which, as René Pomeau remarks, "as soon as they are enunciated, the pretenses of humans submerge into ridicule" (128).

As for the fables of the philosophers, especially of the genre inaugurated by Voltaire, their merit is to make us realize that the process of understanding our place in the world is never-ending. Voltaire's procedure, in this regard, can properly be viewed as a hermeneutical one. It is guided by the realization that our understanding is not subject to immutable laws so much as it is molded by a long development of historical antecedents. That is why we can never rise above or escape the conditions that have given shape to our thought but must strive to remain constantly open to a universe that is properly hermeneutical in nature. As Hans-Georg Gadamer explains, since reason exists for us only in concrete, historical terms, "the finite nature of one's own understanding is the manner in which reality, resistance, the absurd, and the unintelligible assert themselves." Consequently, present-day theoreticians of hermeneutics, just as Voltaire's heroes, find that a permanent

state of dissatisfaction, of inauthenticity is the signal mark of such an opening to the world. Heidegger calls this condition *Unheimlichkeit*, a sense of not-being-at-home in the world. It is a sense of alienation that impels us to seek a reconciliation between our existence and the unknown around us and to confront what we think we know with the evidence provided by our experience. An awareness of the *décalage* separating these two kinds of evidence gives rise to new insights. As Paul Ricoeur explains, interpretation takes place "at the hinge between linguistics and nonlinguistics, between language and lived experience."<sup>9</sup> The insights that we discover fail to provide definitive answers, of course. And Gadamer reminds us that "our desire and capacity to understand always go beyond any statement we can make."<sup>10</sup> But this lack is also what gives fiction its powers of conviction. Voltaire's tales clearly speak of such a desire and reflect a creative capacity for suggesting more than can be said. While bringing into question the limits of our capacity for establishing securely the meaning of our existence, Voltaire's ironic treatment of civilization's shortcomings thus underlines an attitude akin to our own postmodern sensibilities. Voltaire's purpose was to promote a rationality that would be guided and tested by the practical demands of the world. He understood, at the same time, that the practices that make up the social world are not necessarily guided by the rationality that governs discourses.

In other important ways, of course, Voltaire's thought epitomizes the modernist aspirations of his age. As he combated the evils caused by human ignorance and superstition, Voltaire hoped to clear the way for a rational social order, conceptualized in accordance with a transcendent notion of an orderly and rational universe. He was thus helping to set in place the principles that eventually became entrenched in modern social thought.

With time, and following the imperceptible transformation of the sociohistoric conditions that gave rise to these notions, the truths that were self-evident have turned into free-floating abstractions. They have undergone the common fate of discursive constructs that have forgotten their nondiscursive corollaries. Voltaire's well-meaning attempt at promoting a rational outlook on life in society has produced what one critic of Western civilization identifies as "Voltaire's bastards": these are "the central concepts upon which we operate [and that] were long ago severed from their roots and changed into formal rhetoric. They have no meaning. They are used wildly or administratively as masks."<sup>11</sup>

The principal shortcoming of Voltaire's philosophical undertaking is to be found in the premise on which he based it. In this regard, Voltaire's procedure could be considered as belonging to a long and respectable philosophical tradition. Thus, when we examine the history of philosophy, we can see that "to get out of difficulty, philosophers generally have recourse to a sovereign expedient, which is to postulate that the universe in which humans evolve is simple and orderly."<sup>12</sup> Likewise, for Voltaire, the world was basically uncomplicated—though largely unknowable—and he trusted Reason to justify this conviction. While he recognized the shortcomings of Reason, it could be argued that his skepticism did not take him far enough. What Voltaire did not recognize was Reason's more nihilistic side, which is its power to negate itself. It has become evident, for example, that Reason cannot both be ethical and instrumental: it cannot be, at the same time, a human nature or ethical essence *and* a capacity for shaping nature or the world. The more Reason places means of control and domination in the hands of humans, the more they tend to valorize and legitimate ethically these means. As a result, the system of domination tends to acquire a life of its own, frequently negating whatever justification Reason provided it at the outset.

But then, Voltaire can hardly be blamed for failing to anticipate developments that were to take place in the following century. While, eventually, the world of experience will fail to live up to the Enlightenment standard of Reason and Western philosophy will come to a point where, according to Joan Stambaugh, it "seems to have exhausted its capacity to produce a new vision of reality," the problems Voltaire faced seemed real enough and the reason he conceptualized adequate for the critical purposes he thought important.<sup>13</sup> As discrepancies between Reality and Reason became more apparent, Voltaire's tempered skepticism inevitably gave way to more radical ways of questioning the reasons behind Reason and its ways of representing the world.