work towards the provisionally terminal form that is man? By the fact that it has abandoned on the way thousands of forms that provide us with a picture of the rudimentary model. How many fossils are there, for man's car, or skull, or sexual parts, like so many plaster statues, fashioned one day and dropped the next in favour of a more perfected form?

The species that resembles the human heart, and for that reason is named Anthropocardite ... is worthy of particular attention. Its sub-stance is flint inside. The form of a heart is imitated as perfectly as pos-sible. One can distinguish in it the stump of the vena cava, together with a portion of its two cross-sections. One can also see the stump of the great artery emerging from the left ventricle, together with its lower or descending branch [59].

The fossil, with its mixed animal and mineral nature, is the privileged locus of a resemblance required by the historian of the continuum, whereas the space of the taxinomia decomposed it with rigour.

The monster and the fossil both play a very precise role in this con-figuration. On the basis of the power of the continuum held by nature, the monster ensures the emergence of difference. This difference is still without law and without any well-defined structure; the monster is the root-stock of specification, but it is only a sub-species itself in the stub-bornly slow stream of history. The fossil is what permits resemblances to subsist throughout all the deviations traversed by nature; it functions as 156

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a distant and approximative form of identity; it marks a quasi-character in the shift of time. And this is because the monster and the fossil are merely the backward projection of those differences and those identities that provide taxinomia first with structure, then with character. Between table and continuum they form. a shady, mobile, wavering region in which what analysis is to define as identity is still only mute analogy; and what it will define as assignable and constant difference is still only free and random variation. But, in truth, it is so impossible for natural history to conceive of the history of nature, the epistemological arrangement delineated by the table and the continuum is so fundamental, that becom-ing can occupy nothing but an intermediary place measured out for it solely by the requirements of the whole. This is why it occurs only in order to bring about the necessary passage from one to the other - either as a totality of destructive events alien to living beings and occurring only from outside them, or as a movement ceaselessly being outlined, then halted as soon as sketched, and perceptible only on the fringes of the table, in its unconsidered margins. Thus, against the background of the continuum, the monster provides an account, as though in caricature, of the genesis of differences, and the fossil recalls, in the uncertainty of its resemblances, the first buddings of identity.

VII THE DISCOURSE OF NATURE

The theory of natural history cannot be dissociated from that of language. And yet it is not a question of a transference of method, from one to the other; nor of a
communication of concepts; nor of the prestige of a model which, because it has 'succeeded' in one field, has been tried out in the one next to it. Nor is it a question of a more general rationality imposing identical forms upon grammatical thinking and upon taxinomia. Rather, it concerns a fundamental arrangement of knowledge, which orders the knowledge of beings so as to make it possible to represent them in a system of names. There were doubtless, in this region we now term life, many inquiries other than attempts at classification, many kinds of analysis other than that of identities and differences. But they all rested upon a sort of historical a priori, which authorized them in their dispersion and in their singular and divergent projects, and rendered equally possible all the differences of opinion of which they were the source. This a priori does not consist of a set of constant problems uninterruptedly presented to men's curiosity by concrete phenomena as so many enigmas; nor is it 157

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made up of a certain state of acquired knowledge laid down in the course of the preceding ages and providing a ground for the more or less irregular, more or less rapid, progress of rationality; it is doubtless not even determined by what is called the mentality or the 'framework of thought' of any given period, if we are to understand by that the historical outline of the speculative interests, beliefs, or broad theoretical options of the time. This a priori is what, in a given period, delimits in the totality of experience a field of knowledge, defines the mode of being of the objects that appear in that field, provides man's everyday perception with theoretical powers, and defines the conditions in which he can sustain a discourse about things that is recognized to be true. In the eighteenth century, the historical a priori that provided the basis for inquiry into or controversy about the existence of genera, the stability of species, and the transmission of characters from generation to generation, was the existence of a natural history: the organization of a certain visible existence as a domain of knowledge, the definition of the four variables of description, the constitution of an area of adjacencies in which any individual being whatever can find its place. Natural history in the Classical age is not merely the discovery of a new object of curiosity; it covers a series of complex operations that introduce the possibility of a constant order into a totality of representations. It constitutes a whole domain of empiricity as at the same time describable and orderable. What makes it akin to theories of language also distinguishes it from what we have understood, since the nineteenth century, by biology, and causes it to play a certain critical role in Classical thought.

Natural history is contemporaneous with language: it is on the same level as the spontaneous play that analyses representations in the memory, determines their common elements, establishes signs upon the basis of those elements, and finally imposes names. Classification and speech have their place of origin in the same space that representation opens up within itself because it is consecrated to time, to memory, to reflection, to contiguity. But natural history cannot and should not exist as a language independent of all other languages unless it is a well-constructed language - and a universally valid one. In spontaneous and 'badly constructed' language, the four elements (proposition, articulation, designation, de-ivation) leave interstices open between them: individual experiences, needs or passions, habits, prejudices, a more or less awakened concentration, have established hundreds of different languages -
languages that differ from one another not only in the form of their words, but above all 158

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in the way in which those words pattern representation. Natural history can be a well-constructed language only if the amount of play in it is enclosed: if its descriptive exactitude makes every proposition into an invariable pattern of reality (if one can always attribute to the representa-tion what is articulated in it) and if the designation of each being indicates clearly the place it occupies in the general arrangement of the whole. In language, the function of the verb is universal and void; it merely pre-scribes the most general form of the proposition; and it is within the latter that the names bring their system of articulation into play; natural history regroups these two functions into the unity of the structure, which articulates together all the variables that can be attributed to a being. And whereas in language the designation, in its individual functioning, is exposed to the hazard of derivations, which endow the common names with their scope and extension, the character, as established by natural history, makes it possible both to indicate the individual and to situate it in a space of generalities that fit inside one another. So that above the ordinary, everyday words (and by means of them, since it is of course necessary to use them for the initial descriptions) there is raised the edifice of a language in the second degree in which the exact Names of things finally rule:

The method, the soul of science, designates at first sight any body in nature in such a way that the body in question expresses the name that is proper to it, and that this name recalls all the knowledge that may, in the course of time, have been acquired about the body thus named: so that in the midst of extreme confusion there is revealed the sovereign order of nature [60].

But this essential nomination - this transition from the visible structure to the taxonomic character - leads back to a costly requirement. In order to fulfil and enclose the figure that proceeds from the monotonous function of the verb to be to derivation and traversal of rhetorical space, spontaneous language had no need of anything but the play of imagina-tion: that is, of immediate resemblances. For taxonomy to be possible, on the other hand, nature must be truly continuous, and in all its plenitude. Where language required the similarity of impressions, classification requires the principle of the smallest possible difference between things. Now, this continuum, which appears therefore at the very basis of nomination, in the opening left between description and arrangement, is presupposed well before language, as its condition. And not only because 159

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it can provide the basis for a well-constructed language, but because it accounts for all language in general. It is without doubt the continuity of nature that gives memory the opportunity of exercising itself, as when a representation, through some confused and ill-perceived identity, recalls another and makes it possible to apply to both the arbitrary sign of a common name. What was presented in the imagination as a blind similitude was merely the blurred and unreflected trace of the great uninterrupted fabric of
identities and differences. Imagination (which, by making comparison possible, justifies language) formed, without its then being known, the ambiguous locus in which the shattered but insistent continuity of nature was united with the empty but attentive continuity of consciousness. It would not have been possible to speak, there would have been no place for even the merest name, if nature, in the very depth of things, before all representation, had not been con- tinuous. To establish the great, unflawed table of the species, genera, and classes, natural history had to employ, criticize, and finally reconstitute at new expense a language whose condition of possibility resided pre-cisely in that continuum. Things and words are very strictly interwoven:

nature is posited only through the grid of denominations, and - though without such names it would remain mute and invisible - it glimmers far off beyond them, continuously present on the far side of this grid, which nevertheless presents it to our knowledge and renders it visible only when wholly spanned by language.

This, no doubt, is why natural history, in the Classical period, cannot be established as biology. Up to the end of the eighteenth century, in fact, life does not exist: only living beings. These beings form one class, or rather several classes, in the series of all the things in the world; and if it is possible to speak of life it is only as of one character - in the taxonomic sense of that word - in the universal distribution of beings. It is usual to divide the things in nature into three classes: minerals, which are recognized as capable of growth, but not of movement or feeling;

vegetables, which are capable of growth and susceptible to sensation; and animals, which are capable of spontaneous movement [61]. As for life and the threshold it establishes, these can be made to slide from one end of the scale to the other, according to the criteria one adopts. If, with Maupertuis, one defines life by the mobility and relations of affinity that draw elements towards one another and keep them together, then one must conceive of life as residing in the simplest particles of matter. But one must situate it much higher in the series if one defines it by means of 160

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a crowded and complex character, as Linnaeus did when he set up as his criteria birth (by seed or bud), nutrition (by intussusception), ageing, exterior movement, internal propulsion of fluids, diseases, death, and presence of vessels, glands, epiderms, and utricles [62]. Life does not con- stitute an obvious threshold beyond which entirely new forms of knowledge are required. It is a category of classification, relative, like all the other categories, to the criteria one adopts. And also, like them, subject to certain imprecisions as soon as the question of deciding its frontiers arises. Just as the zoophyte stands on the ambiguous frontier between animals and plants, so the fossils, as well as the metals, reside in that uncertain frontier region where one does not know whether one ought to speak of life or not. But the dividing-line between the living and the non-living is never a decisive problem [63]. As Linnaeus says, the naturalist - whom he calls Historiens naturalis - ‘distinguishes the parts of natural bodies with his eyes, describes them appropriately according to their number, form, position, and proportion, and he names them’[64]. The naturalist is the man concerned with the structure of the visible world and its denomination according to characters. Not with life.
We must therefore not connect natural history, as it was manifested during the Classical period, with a philosophy of life, albeit an obscure and still faltering one. In reality, it is interwoven with a theory of words. Natural history is situated both before and after language; it decomposes the language of everyday life, but in order to recompose it and discover what has made it possible through the blind resemblances of imagination; it criticizes language, but in order to reveal its foundation. If natural history reworks language and attempts to perfect it, this is because it also delves down into the origin of language. It leaps over the everyday vocabulary that provides it with its immediate ground, and beyond that ground it searches for that which could have constituted its raison d’etre; but, inversely, it resides in its entirety in the area of language, since it is essentially a concerted use of names and since its ultimate aim is to give things their true denomination. Between language and the theory of nature there exists therefore a relation that is of a critical type; to know nature is, in fact, to build upon the basis of language a true language, one that will reveal the conditions in which all language is possible and the limits within which it can have a domain of validity. The critical question did exist in the eighteenth century, but linked to the form of a determinate knowledge. For this reason it could not acquire either autonomy or the value of radical questioning: it prowled endlessly through a region 161

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where what mattered was resemblance, the strength of the imagination, nature and human nature, and the value of general and abstract ideas - in short, the relations between the perception of similitude and the validity of the concept. In the Classical age - Locke and Linnaeus, Buffon and Hume are our evidence of this - the critical question concerned the basis for resemblance and the existence of the genus.

In the late eighteenth century, a new configuration was to appear that would definitively blur the old space of natural history for modern eyes. On the one hand, we see criticism displacing itself and detaching itself from the ground where it had first arisen. Whereas Hume made the problem of causality one case in the general interrogation of resemblances [65], Kant, by isolating causality, reverses the question; whereas before it was a question of establishing relations of identity or difference against the continuous background of similitudes, Kant brings into prominence the inverse problem of the synthesis of the diverse. This simultaneously transfers the critical question from the concept to the judgement, from the existence of the genus (obtained by the analysis of representations) to the possibility of linking representations together, from the right to name to the basis for attribution, from nominal articulation to the proposition itself, and to the verb to be that establishes it. Whereupon it becomes absolutely generalized. Instead of having validity solely when applied to the relations of nature and human nature, it questions the very possibility of all knowledge.

On the other hand, however, and during the same period, life assumes its autonomy in relation to the concepts of classification. It escapes from that critical relation which, in the eighteenth century, was constitutive of the knowledge of nature. It escapes - which means two things: life becomes one object of knowledge among others, and is
answerable, in this respect, to all criticism in general; but it also resists this critical juris-diction, which it takes over on its own account and brings to bear, in its own name, on all possible knowledge. So that throughout the nine-teenth century, from Kant to Dilthey and to Bergson, critical forms of thought and philosophies of life find themselves in a position of reciprocal borrowing and contestation.

NOTES


[4] Linnaeus, Systema naturae, p. 214. On the limited usefulness of the microscope, cf. ibid, pp. 220-1. (We have retained throughout the author's references to the French editions of the works of Linne (Linnaeus) - translator's note.)


[10] Linnaeus (op. cit., section 331) lists the parts of the body that can be used as archetypes, whether for dimensions or, above all, for forms: hair, nails, thumbs, palms, eyes, ears, fingers, navel, penis, vulva, breasts.


[18] Ibid., section 193.
[20] Linnaeus, Philosophie botanique, section 77.
[22] 'The natural character of the species is its description' (Linnaeus, Philo-sophic botanique, section 193).
[23] Toumefort, Elements de botanique, p. 27.
[26] Linnaeus, Philosophie botanique, section 212.
[27] Ibid., section 284.
[28] Ibid., section 151. These two functions, which are guaranteed by the character, correspond exactly to the functions of designation and derivation performed in language by the common noun.
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[33] Linnaeus, Philosophic botanique, section 105.
[34] Ibid., section 94.
[36] Cf. p. 113 above.
[37] Linnaeus, Philosophic botanique, section 156.
[38] Ibid., section 169.

[40] ?. Bonnet, Contemplation de la nature, lere partie (CEuvres completes,t. IV, pp. 35-0).

[41] Linnaeus, Philosophie botanique.

[42] Adanson, Cours d'histoire naturelle, 1845 edn., pp. 4-5.


[47] Pallas, Elenchus Zoophylorum (1786).


[49] C. Bonnet, Contemplation de la nature, lere partie (CEuvres completes, t. IV, p. 34 et seq.).


[53] Benolt de Maillet, Telliamed ou les entretiens d'un philosophc chinois avec un missionnaire francais (Amsterdam, 1748, p. 142).


[57] Ibid., p. 198.


[61] Cf, for example, Linnaeus, Systema naturae, p. 215.

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[62] Linnaeus, Philosophie botanique, section 133. Cf. also Systeme sexuel des vegetaux, p. I.

[63] Bonnet accepted a quadripartite division in nature: unstructured brute beings, inanimate structured beings (vegetables), animate structured beings (animals), animate structured and reasoning beings (men). Cf. Contemplation de la nature, II ieme partie, chap. I.

[64] Linnaeus, Systema naturae, p. 215.


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CHAPTER 6
Exchanging
I THE ANALYSIS OF WEALTH

There is no life in the Classical period, nor any science of life; nor any philology either. But there is natural history, and general grammar. In the same way, there is no political economy, because, in the order of knowledge, production does not exist. On the other hand, there does exist in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries a notion that is still familiar to us today, though it has lost its essential precision for us. But 'notion' is not really the word we should apply to it, since it does not occur within an interplay of economic concepts that it might displace to some slight extent by taking over a little of their meaning or eating into their sphere of application. It is more a question of a general domain: a very coherent and very well-stratified layer that comprises and contains, like so many partial objects, the notions of value, price, trade, circulation, income, interest. This domain, the ground and object of 'economy' in the Classical age, is that of wealth. It is useless to apply to it questions deriving from a different type of economics - one organized around production or work, for example; useless also to analyse its various concepts (even, and above all, if their names have been perpetuated in succeeding ages with somewhat analogous meanings), without taking into account the system from which they draw their positivity. One might as well try to analyse the Linnaean genus outside the domain of natural history, or Bauzee's theory of tenses.