

Of these three periods the last interests us at this moment. As mentioned above, its representatives took the word "criticism" in the widest sense, and it may be said that in length of duration it has far exceeded any earlier critical period. It has now lasted more than a century, and we cannot say that we have yet emerged from it. The critical movements of former times were quickly followed by renewed creative activity, by novel constructive efforts, by the dogmatism of new systems and schools of thought.<sup>1</sup> It is true that the critical movement so splendidly represented in Germany by Lessing (1729-81) and Kant (1724-1804) was followed by the great productive era of classical literature and a brilliant succession of speculative systems of philosophy which for the greater part of half a century forced into the background the workings of the critical spirit. These workings, nevertheless, proceeded without interruption, and became so much the more evident and effective when the productive powers of German poetry, literature, and philosophy had exhausted themselves. Although therefore the beginning of the great critical movement in Germany may be placed in the middle of the eighteenth century, its full effect upon the whole of German thought and culture did not become evident before the middle of the nineteenth century. Since then it has reigned supreme, leaving almost the whole of the constructive work of thought to the workers in the fields of

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew Arnold, in the Essay quoted above (p. 97 note 3), looked in this manner upon the critical spirit as paving the way for the creative spirit. This statement is borne out by the experience of

former periods of criticism, but, as I mentioned in the text, the critical movement which still prevails has not as yet shown any signs of making room for a creative era of thought.