

PREFACE TO THE PRINCETON PAPERBACK EDITION

REMBRANDT'S "Large Self-Portrait" in the Vienna art museum cast a spell on me when I first saw it. But it spoke to me even more when I saw it again in 1962 after three weeks in Poland. In Warsaw I had virtually smelled the blood of the Jews killed there in 1943, and I had also spent an afternoon in Auschwitz. The portrait looked more powerful than ever after these experiences. Rembrandt had been twelve when the Thirty Years War began, and this painting was done four years after the devastation of Europe had ended. In those days there was no market for Rembrandt's many self-portraits. They were not painted for clients nor with any hope of a sale. Here was integrity incarnate. But how could one pass the muster of these eyes? One has to do something for a living, especially if one has a family, but I felt that I wanted to write only in the spirit in which Rembrandt had painted himself, without regard for what might pay or advance my career. And whenever I think about the millions killed during the second World War and ask myself what I have done with the life granted to me but not to so many others, the books I have written spell some small comfort.

Critique of Religion and Philosophy is very different from most scholarly books. Perhaps others felt like Dwight MacDonald who told me before he actually read it that he had seen it at somebody's house and it had struck him as "really crazy." It certainly did not fail to impede my career, but I have never regretted writing and publishing it. What keeps surprising me is how many people, including even reviewers,

understood and appreciated it. Yet the immediate reception of a book, whether it is ignored or wins a great deal of praise, means little. The true test is whether it endures.

The survival of a human being creates no presumption whatsoever in his favor. Many of the finest die early. It is different with books and works of art. Most die in their infancy, and there is no good reason to feel ambivalent about the survival of one's works. I feel unalloyed gratitude to the publisher for keeping *Critique* in print more than twenty years after it first appeared.

The reader has a right to ask why I have not revised and updated it like my first book, *Nietzsche*. The nature of *Critique* did not make this feasible. It is a voyage of discovery in which the author comes to grips with a multitude of points of view that seemed to call for a response. It would not do to doctor the log and insert additional ports of call; the less so because the book also has the kind of unity that one associates with works of art. One cannot expect a painter to update his paintings, least of all a self-portrait. Of course, *Critique* is nowhere near that personal, and I have continued my researches into some of the questions broached here. But the results have appeared in other books; notably in *The Faith of a Heretic* (1961, reprinted with a new preface in 1978), in *Religions in Four Dimensions* (1976), and in *Man's Lot: A Trilogy* (1978). The trilogy consists of *Life at the Limits*, *Time Is an Artist*, and *What is Man?* It is even more unconventional than *Critique* and contains more than 330 color photographs as well as many in black and white.

Looking back on *Critique* now, I find that today I would do countless things differently. There are some ports at which I would no longer stop at all—because of what I discovered when I called there. And that information may still be worth sharing. The aspect of the book about which I don't have any second thoughts at all is that I feel more than ever that humanists should be concerned less with the opinions of their peers and elders than with the challenge of Rembrandt's eyes.