In 1904 an influential book on contemporary philosophy\(^1\) declared it to be essentially nothing else but the philosophy of culture, *Kulturphilosophie*. The name of its author, Rudolf Eucken, will hardly be widely recognised today though actually he was the first philosopher ever to receive the Nobel Prize. And his extravagant-sounding statement did not express merely a personal idiosyncrasy. A similar view is implied – to refer now to some more familiar names – when for example H. Rickert and W. Dilthey define philosophy as *Weltanschauungslehre*. For it is world-view, *Weltanschauung*, which constitutes in a sense the epitome of a historical culture. Philosophy conceived as *Weltanschauungslehre* is essentially a philosophy of culture.

Around the turn of the century *Kulturphilosophie* emerges in Germany with the claim, if not to exhaust the whole domain of philosophical inquiry, then at least to be its

founded discipline. It is certainly not alone with such a claim. It stands in this respect in a complex relationship – partly competition, partly fusion – with epistemology, on the one hand, and philosophical anthropology, on the other. But while these latter two have undoubtedly succeeded (philosophical anthropology leastways in Germany) to establish themselves at least as well defined and broadly accepted philosophical “disciplines,” philosophy of culture failed to become even a recognisable topic in contemporary philosophy. Characteristically Ernst Cassirer, the last great representative of this tradition, already in the late 1930s complained of its lack of clear demarcation and therefore of its questionable legitimacy. ² Though Kulturphilosophie still has a marginal existence in Germany, for the broader community of philosophers the very meaning of such an enterprise has been lost.

It is the story of the rise and fall of philosophy of culture – the schematic outline of the conditions and putative reasons of its emergence, the internal difficulties of some of its representative realisations and the possible causes of its decline – that constitutes the topic of this paper. In this sense it aims at a reconstruction rather in terms of history of ideas, though hopefully not without some philosophical relevance.

The modern concept and conception of “culture” – though the term itself can be traced back to Cicero – is the product and invention of Enlightenment. From the very time of its origin this notion was burdened by fundamental ambiguities: the term seems to possess quite unrelated meanings that cannot be brought to any systematic unity and nevertheless are inseparable from each other. “Culture” served to replace the idea of a binding tradition – it designated and designates all those human achievements and accomplishments which, as historically accumulated and inheritable material and ideal objectivations, constitute the storehouse of human possibilities that can be put selectively and creatively to use for meeting the ever new exigencies of a dynamically changing life. But to this broad (anthropological) notion of culture stands opposed its narrow (“value-marked”) sense: culture as high