

# 1 / BEGINNING

A genuine Transcendence is more than a limit concept: it is a *presence* which brings about a true revolution in the theory of subjectivity. It introduces into it a radically new dimension, the *poetic* dimension. At least such limit concepts complete the determination of a freedom which is human and *not* divine, of a freedom which does not posit itself absolutely because it is *not* Transcendence. To will is not to create.

— PAUL RICOEUR, *Philosophie de la volonté*<sup>1</sup>

Initium . . . ut esset, creatus est homo, ante quem nullus fuit.

— AUGUSTINE, *City of God* 12.20<sup>2</sup>

## I The Freedom of the Maker

How free is the artist in making? And why is the artist, at least in Western culture, but surely in some others as well, a figure of freedom? How is it that artists create their own rules, and how might such self-legislation serve humankind in other spheres of life? When we consider these perennial questions, we are confronted with a pair of inevitable, interwoven, truths: first, freedom is necessary for making—at least for making anything that is actualized beyond mere repetition—and second, freedom is both inalienable to human life and itself something that we make or actualize.

To begin to think about freedom is to think about causality, for if nature is the outcome of an endless series of causal forces, our human being is only partially bound by such natural laws. Even the most cursory review of the intellectual history of the idea of freedom reveals a concept continually shaped within the tension between natural law and human will. In the *Nicomachean Ethics* (3.6), for example, Aristotle suggests that whereas the nonhuman universe is ruled by material and teleological necessity, human events are contingent and underdetermined. Further, he holds that the ends we place in store for our