

Alan Richardson, History Sacred and Profane, ~~XXXXX~~

Bampton Lectures for 1962, London: SCM, 1964

12 To the revolution in scientific thinking achieved in the seventeenth century, there has been added the revolution in historical thinking, which took place during the nineteenth century; it completely ~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~ transformed men's ways of looking at the past by introducing a new quality of historical-mindedness.

... noting how in the nineteenth century (despite the new historical-mindedness) classical notions of the possibility of scientific history tended to predominate, whereas in the twentieth century there has developed an increasing recognition of the possibility of human self-understanding through involvement in the challenges of history.

32 We should never forget that it was one and the same movement of critical enquiry which first culminated in the seventeenth-century scientific achievement and later in the emergence of the fully developed historical critical method of the ~~19th~~ nineteenth century. The critical ~~is~~ faculty once awakened could not rest satisfied with the successful exploration of the realm of nature; it was bound to go on from there to the critical investigation of the more intractable region of human nature, and, when the idea of development was fully understood, to seek to understand scientifically how, in fact, man and his institutions, have come to be what they are. Since the nineteenth century it has been an axiom of Western thinking that men and their institutions cannot be understood apart from their history, or that to know what a thing is, it is necessary to give an account of its past. This is part, at least, and a very important part of the meaning of the statement that we nowadays live in an historically-minded age. The historical revolution in human thinking, which was accomplished in the nineteenth century, is just as important as the scientific revolution of two centuries earlier. But they are not two separate revolutions; // 33 // they are aspects of the one great transitional movement from the mediaeval to the modern way of looking at things.

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58 It thus came about that modern classical-rationalist historians, believing that history is a science which searches for regularities as do the natural sciences, hailed the Greeks as innovators in the sphere of historiography, but failed to observe the genuine historical-mindedness of the Hebrews. By historical-mindedness is meant: having a lively sense of real change and development in history, an awareness of successive ages are genuinely different from one another. In our modern age this historical attitude developed out of a new sense of progress in history, which emerged towards the end of the eighteenth century (or perhaps it was vice versa: the ~~is~~ discussion is of the hen-and-egg variety). In ancient Israel historical-mindedness was the result of the prophetic awareness of the inevitable accomplishment of a divine purpose in history; this was not dependent upon or measurable by any secular standards of progress (such as the spread of democracy, literacy, etc.), and indeed the general Hebraic attitude towards historical development was that 'things will worse before they get better.' The belief in a divine purpose in history made it impossible for the Hebrews to accept the unhistorical, naturalistic attitude of other ancient peoples, for whom history was a repetitive process comparable to the rhythm of nature; the perpetuation of this naturalistic attitude amongst the Greeks explains why the so-called Greek 'Enlightenment' did not lead to the emergence of a genuine historical-mindedness and why Herodotus and Thucydides led nowhere. Rationalism in all its forms is fundamentally unhistorical. It looks to history not as itself a source of knowledge, not as the locus of insights into our own existential condition, but as something secondary, a means of corroborating or illustrating generalizations about human nature which have been derived from other sources (e.g. in modern times the social sciences and psychology). The basic difference between the Greek and the Hebrew view is that the Hebrews regarded history as the locus of man's knowledge of himself and of // 59 // God in a way in which the Greeks did not. The triumph of the Hebraic-Christian view over the classical, achieved by the time of St Augustine, made possible the ultimate emergence, after many centuries, of modern scientific historiography. To put the matter in another way, it was only

in Christian civilization, more than two thousand years afterwards, that a great and dedicated international company of scholars was able to take up in a systematic way the enquiry (historia) which Herodotus began into the reason why men fight and behave as they do.

78 n 1: G. N. Clark, The Seventeenth Century, 273: 'It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that the ~~sixteenth~~ sixteenth century writers had no idea of change, no idea that one age was different from another. Just as Shakespeare's Romans wore the dress of his own day, so the Renaissance historians did not know that men and events are made what they are by the character of the age to which they belong.' Also Herbert Butterfield, Man on his Past, 17: 'One is tempted to ~~say~~ feel that this (historical-mindedness) is almost a new dimension added to our thinking -- there is such a remarkable lack of it in the Renaissance and even in much of the eighteenth century.'

268 n 1: G. Barraclough, 'Universal History,' in Approaches to History (ed. H. P. R. Finberg) 96: 'The fact remains, however, that this gradual and stumbling approach to world-history... has been in all essential ways an achievement of the European peoples, and so far as it has found its way into the Orient, it has been the result of Western influences and largely the result of a Western-educated intelligentsia. Interest in history, belief in the value of history, even the tendency to view events in historical context and historical perspective, which is so natural to us that we are rarely conscious of the extent to which we do it, is a western attitude which has no exact counterpart in China or India. China indeed has preserved excellent annals and chronological lists, which provide at least the bare bones of history; but India before the European invasions has little that, by modern standards, can be called history at all, and both countries have shown very little concern for the preservation of historical records.'