

### 5. The Possibility of a Critical History.

A first step towards a critical history would be the renunciation by the critical historian of the artistic, ethical, apologetic, prophetic, and existential functions of narrative history.

In other words, the critical historian is equipped to deal with a determinate range of questions, namely, the questions that are ~~determined~~ settled decisively by assembling the historical data that bear on the issue.

On the other hand, to assume the artistic, ethical, apologetic, prophetic, and existential functions of narrative history is to assume the function either of carrying on a tradition or of dismantling a tradition and putting another in its place.

To undertake these functions is to undertake more than the specialized methods of critical history equip one to perform in a professional manner.

In the past critical history has been liberal and secularist history to a notable extent. It has been busy dismantling the Catholic tradition and putting in its place the perspectives that could make sense to a liberal or a secularist. Gadamer, who is of Hegelian tendencies, put his finger on a basic issue when he denounced in *Historismus and the Enlightenment* a "Vorurteil gegen die Vorurteile überhaupt und damit die Entmachtung der Überlieferung." *Wahrheit und Methode*, p. 255.

The meaning, then, of this first step is (1) a sharp distinction between narrative and critical history, ~~and~~ (2) the restriction of critical history to the precise issues that historical methods and techniques settle decisively, and (3) the acknowledgement of narrative history as a distinct category calling for a distinct and larger set of qualifications and receiving a quite different mode of evaluation and acceptance.

complex/ of/ A second step towards a critical history would be the resolution <sup>olu</sup> of questions into their distinct components.

Thus, the truth of Christianity is not independent of concrete and particular matters of historical fact. But the truth of Christianity is not an issue that can be dealt with adequately by the methods and techniques of specialized, critical history.

Again, what is true or false in the human sciences, is not independent of historical facts. Very quickly, any question in these sciences can become a set of historical questions about what really happened on a series of occasions. For these sciences are empirical, and human facts are mostly past facts. On the other hand, the methods of specialized history are not competent to resolve all questions in the human sciences; on the contrary, questions in the human sciences are general questions, and correct answers to those questions will be competent to deal with any ~~human~~ particular facts, past, present, or future.

Thirdly, every question and every answer has philosophic presuppositions and implications. These issues are not dealt with competently by the specialized methods and techniques of critical history. No doubt, philosophic issues can easily be transposed into historical issues by appealing to authority explicitly or implicitly or, alternatively, to prejudice. But this does not mean that the methods of specialized history are going to solve the philosophic issue.

## 5. A Methodical Classification of Historical Studies.

A basic step is to distinguish the different manners in which a consideration of the human past enters into human knowledge.

Without such distinctions, one is apt to think of history as a single subject with a single method, and so to reduce a living and complex manifold to a monolithic and insoluble problem.

The distinctions we offer have a methodological basis; they distinguish fields or departments by the types of operation involved.

Common

### a) ~~General~~ Historical Research.

It has at its disposal (1) contemporary instances of common sense, (2) their potential development of a participation in the common sense of the past, and (3) a set of specialized methods and techniques that regard the discovery, collection, classification, dating, editing, analysis, evaluation of sources, the determination of elementary matters of fact (Did Brutus kill Caesar?), the determination of elementary interdependences, the determination of elementary developments.

"Elementary" = what may unhesitatingly be left to common sense and its acquisition of the common sense of the past; what does not touch upon the issues raised in the following departments.

### b) Historical Essays.

The historical essay is concerned, not with explaining, but with understanding.

Because it is not concerned with explaining, it is not explicitly scientific, philosophic, theological.

Because it is concerned with understanding, it is concerned with the singular and the concrete, with what escapes the generality of science, philosophy, theology.

Its type is, then, common sense understanding, the development of a habitual core of insights such that by adding a few more insights one masters the ~~issue~~ singular, concrete issue.

It presupposes common historical research, but it goes beyond it by leaving the elementary level: it raises issues that cannot be left to any instance of common sense, that demand exceptional development and refinement in one or more directions, such as the arts, languages, technics, psychology, religion, literature