

CHAPTER NINEHISTORY AND HISTORIANS

Normally historians are content to write history without raising any questions about the nature of historical knowledge.¹ Nor is this surprising. For historical knowledge is reached by an adaptation of the every-day procedures of human understanding and, while the adaptation itself has to be learnt, the underlying procedures are too intimate, too spontaneous, too elusive to be objectified and described without a protracted and, indeed, highly specialized effort.² So even a great innovator, such as Leopold von Ranke, explained that his practice arose by a sort of necessity, in its own way, and not from an attempt to imitate the practice of his pioneering predecessor, Barthold Niebuhr.³

1) The Varieties of History: From Voltaire to the Present, Edited, selected, and introduced by Fritz Stern, New York (Meridian Books) 1956, p. 14.

2) On commonsense understanding and judgment, see Insight pp. 173-181 and 280-299.

3) G.P. Gooch, History and Historians in the Nineteenth Century, London (Longmans) 1952, p. 75.

At times, however, historians are impelled to do more than just write history. They may be teaching it. They may feel obliged to defend their practice against encroaching error. They may be led to state in part or in whole just what they are doing when doing history. Then, whether they wish it or not, they are using some more or less adequate or inadequate cognitional theory, and easily they become involved in some philosophic undertow that they cannot quite master.

This dialectic can be highly instructive provided, of course, that one is not a mere logician testing the clarity of terms, the coherence of statements, the rigor of inferences. For what the historian has to offer is not a coherent cognitional theory but an awareness of the nature of his craft and an ability to describe it in the concrete and lively fashion that only a practitioner can manage.

1. Three Handbooks

Handbooks on the method of history have gone out of fashion. But in the latter part of the nineteenth century they were common and influential. I shall select three that represent different tendencies, and I shall compare them on a single, but, I believe, significant issue, namely the relationship between historical facts and their intelligible interconnections, their Zusammenhang.

For twenty-five (Johann Gustav Droysen (1808-1884) constantly revised his lectures on the encyclopedia and methodology of history. As well, he composed a Grundriss der Historik which appeared as Manuskriptdruck in 1858 and 1862

and in full-fledged editions in 1868, 1875, 1882. Interest in his work continues, for an edition combining both the 1882 version of the lectures and the Grundriss with all its variants reached a fourth printing in 1960.⁴

Droysen divided the historian's task into four parts. Heuristic uncovered the relevant remains, monuments, accounts. Criticism evaluated their reliability. Interpretation brought to light the realities of history in the fulness of their conditions and the process of their emergence. Presentation, finally, made an account of the past a real influence in the present on the future.⁵

Now in one important respect Droysen's division differed from that of his predecessors and his contemporaries. He limited criticism to ascertaining the reliability of sources. They extended it ^{to} determining the occurrence of the facts of history. Their position, Droysen felt, was due to mere inertia. Their model for historical criticism had been the textual criticism of the philologists. But textual criticism is one

4) J.G. Droysen, Historische Vorlesungen über die Enzyklopädie und Methodologie der Geschichte, hrsg. von Rudolf Hübner, München 1960.

5) For an outline of Droysen's position, see P. Hünermann, Der Durchbruch geschichtlichen Denkens im 19. Jahrhundert, Freiburg - Basel - Wien (Herder) 1967, pp. 111-128.

thing and historical criticism is another. The textual critic ascertains objective facts, namely, the original state of the text. But the facts of history resemble, not a text, but the meaning of a text. They are like battles, councils, rebellions. They are complex unities that result from manifold actions and interactions of individuals. They extend over space and over time. They cannot be singled out and observed in some single act of perception. They have to be put together by assembling a manifold of particular events into a single interpretative unity.⁶

For Droysen, then, the historian does not first determine the facts and then discover their interconnections. On the contrary, facts and interconnections form a single piece, a garment without seam. Together they constitute historical reality in the fulness of its conditions and the process of its emergence. They are discovered in an interpretative process guided by the watchword, forschend verstehen, advance through research to understanding. The research was directed to four areas: first, to the course of events, say, in a military campaign; secondly, to the conditions forming the context of the events; thirdly, to the character of the participants; and fourthly, to the purposes and ideas that were being realized.⁷ So historical interpretation moves towards historical reality, grasping the series of events, first in their inner connections,

6) Ibid., pp. 112 ff.

7) Ibid., pp. 118 ff.

next in their dependence on the situation, thirdly in the light of the character or psychology of the agents, and finally, as a realization of purposes and ideas. Only through this fourfold grasp of meaning and significance do the events stand revealed in their proper reality.

Droysen did not prevail. In Ernst Bernheim's monumental Lehrbuch der historischen Methode und der Geschichtsphilosophie there may be discerned a similar fourfold division of the historian's task. But now criticism is divided into outer and inner.⁸ Outer criticism determines whether single sources are reliable historical witnesses.⁹ Inner criticism has to settle the factuality of the events witnessed by several sources taken together.¹⁰ So it would seem that the historical facts are settled, before there begins the work of interpretation, which Bernheim names the Auffassung and defines as the determination of the interconnections (Zusammenhang) of the events.¹¹

It remains, however, that if Bernheim assigned to inner criticism the determination of events, still he did not consider this determination to be independent of the way in which historians apprehended interconnections. On the contrary, he taught explicitly that the determination of events and the

8) E. Bernheim, Lehrbuch der historischen Methode, Munich 1905, p. 294.

9) Ibid., p. 300.

10) Ibid., p. 429.

11) Ibid., p. 522.

apprehension of their interconnections are interdependent and inseparable. He even added that, without an objective apprehension of interconnections, one cannot even ascertain in proper fashion the sources relevant to one's inquiry.¹²

Still further removed from Droysen's position is the Introduction aux études historiques composed by C. Langlois and C. Seignobos and published in Paris in 1898.¹³ This manual is divided into three parts or books. Book I deals with preliminary studies. Book II deals with analytical operations. Book III deals with synthetic operations. The analytical operations divide into external and internal criticism. External criticism yields critical editions of texts, ascertains their authors, and classifies historical sources. Internal criticism proceeds by the analogies of general psychology to reproduce the successive mental states of the document's author. It determines (1) what he meant, (2) whether he believed what he said, and (3) whether his belief was justified.

This last step was considered to bring the document to the point where it resembled the data of the "objective" sciences. Thereby it became the equivalent of an observation, and it was to be utilized in the same manner as were the observations of natural scientists.¹⁴ But in the natural sciences facts are

12) Ibid., p. 701.

13) My reference will be to the English translation by G.G. Berry (New York, Henry Holt, 1925).

14) Langlois and Seignobos, Introduction, p. 67.

asserted, not as the result of single observations, but only when corroborated by several independent observations. So far from being exempt from this principle, history with its imperfect sources of information must be subjected to it all the more rigorously. There followed the necessity of independent and mutually supporting testimonies for the determination of historical facts.¹⁵

The implications of such analysis were not overlooked. For it removed the facts from their original context, isolated them from one another, reduced them, as it were, to a powder.¹⁶ Accordingly, the analytical operations of Book II had to be complemented by the synthetic operations of Book III. These were described under such rubrics as classifying, question and answer, analogy, grouping, inference, working out general formulae. But all of these risked numerous aberrations, against which warnings were sounded continuously. Indeed, so many were the pitfalls that M. Langlois himself in later life, instead of writing history, was content to reproduce selected documents.¹⁷

With Langlois and Seignobos, then, there emerges a clear-cut distinction and separation between the determination of historical facts and the determination of their interconnections.

15) Ibid., p. 195 f.

16) Ibid., pp. 211 and 214.

17) H.I. Marrou, The Meaning of History, Baltimore - Dublin (Helicon) 1966, p. 17.

This distinction and separation has its ground, it would seem, in notions of natural science current in nineteenth-century positivist and empiricist circles.¹⁸ But in those very circles there were bound to arise the further question. Why add to the facts? Must not any addition that is not obvious to everyone be merely subjective? Why not let the facts speak for themselves?

2. Data and Facts.

At this point it may be well to insert a clarification, for data are one thing, and facts are another.

There are the data of sense and the data of consciousness. Common to both is that they are or may be given. They may or may not be attended to, investigated, understood, conceived, invoked as evidence in judgment. If they are not, then they are merely given. But in so far as they are investigated then they are not merely given but also entering into combination with other components in human cognitional activity.

In contrast, historical facts are known events. The events that are known pertain to the historian's past. The knowledge of the events is in the historian's present. More -

18) On this movement see Bernheim, Lehrbuch, pp. 648-667; Stern, Varieties, pp. 16, 20, 120-137, 209-223, 314-328; P. Gardiner, Theories of History, New York (Free Press) 1959, excerpts from Buckle, Mill, Comte; B. Mazlish, The Riddle of History, New York (Harper & Row) 1966, chapter on Comte.

over, this knowledge is human knowledge. It is not some single activity but a compound of activities that occur on three different levels. So a historical fact will have the concreteness of an object of external or internal experience. It will have the precision of an object of understanding and conception. It will have the stubbornness of what has been grasped as (approximating the) virtually unconditioned and so as something (probably) independent of the knowing subject.¹⁹

Now as an investigation proceeds, insights accumulate and oversights diminish. This ongoing process, while it does not affect data inasmuch as they are or may be given, does affect enormously data inasmuch as they are sought out, attended to, combined now this way and now that in ever larger and more complex structures. On the other hand, it is only as the structures take definite shape, as the process of asking further questions begins to dry up, that there commence to emerge the facts. For the facts emerge, not before the data are understood, but only after they have been understood satisfactorily and thoroughly.

There is a further complication in critical history, for there, there occur two distinct, though interdependent, processes from data to facts. In a first process, the data are here and now perceptible monuments, remains, accounts; from them one endeavors to ascertain the genesis and evaluate the reliability of the information they convey; the facts *ff* ✓

19) On data, see Insight, pp. 73 f.; on fact, ibid., pp. 331, 347, 366, 411 ff.

at which the first process terminates are a series of statements obtained from the sources and marked with an index of greater or less reliability. In so far as they are reliable, they yield information about the past. But the information they yield is, as a general rule, not historical knowledge but historical experience. It regards the fragments, the bits and pieces, that have caught the attention of diarists, letter-writers, chroniclers, newsmen, commentators. It is not the rounded view of what was going forward at a given time and place for, in general, contemporaries have not at their disposal the means necessary for forming such a rounded view. It follows that the facts ascertained in the critical process are, not historical facts, but just data for the discovery of historical facts. The critical process has to be followed by an interpretative process, in which the historian pieces together the fragments of information that he has gathered and critically evaluated. Only when this interpretative process of reconstruction is terminated do there emerge what may properly be called the historical facts.

3. Three Historians

In a celebrated address, read twice before learned societies in 1926 but published only posthumously, Carl Becker recalled that he had been told by an eminent and honored historian that a historian had nothing to do but "present all the facts and let them speak for themselves". He then proceeded to repeat what he had been teaching for twenty years "that this

notion is preposterous; first, because it is impossible to present all the facts; and second, because even if you could present all the facts the miserable things wouldn't say anything, would just say nothing at all".²⁰

Becker was not content to attack what he considered one of the fondest illusions of the nineteenth-century historians.²¹ Sixteen years previously, in an article in the Atlantic Monthly for October 1910, he had described with considerable skill the process that has to occur if the card cases, containing the results of historical criticism, are to lead the historian to an apprehension of the historical course of events.

"As he goes over his cards, some aspects of the reality recorded there interest him more, others less; some are retained, others forgotten; some have power to start a new train of thought; some appear to be causally connected; some logically connected; some are without perceptible connection of any sort. And the reason is simple; some facts strike the mind as interesting or suggestive, have a meaning of some sort, lead to some desirable end, because they associate themselves with ideas already in mind; they fit in somehow to the ordered experience of the historian. This original synthesis -- not

20) Carl Becker, Detachment and the Writing of History, Essays and Letters edited by Phil Snyder, Ithaca N.Y. (Cornell) 1958, p. 54.

21) Ibid., p. 53.

to be confused with the making of a book for the printer, a very different matter -- is only half deliberate. It is accomplished almost automatically. The mind will select and discriminate from the very beginning. It is the whole 'apperceiving mass' that does the business, seizing upon this or that new impression and building it up into its own growing content. As new facts are taken in, the old ideas and concepts, it is true, are modified, distinguished, destroyed even; but the modified ideas become new centers of attraction. And so the process is continued, for years it may be. The final synthesis is doubtless composed of facts unique, causally connected, revealing unique change; but the unique fact, selected because of its importance, was in every case selected because of its importance for some already in possession of the field." ²²

idea

I have quoted this rather long passage because in it a historian reveals the activities that occur subsequently to the tasks of historical criticism and prior to the work of historical composition. It cannot be claimed that Becker was a successful cognitional theorist: there cannot be assembled from his writings an exact and coherent theory of the genesis of historical knowledge. ²³ None the less, he was not a man to be taken in by current clichés, and he was sufficiently alert and

22) Ibid., pp. 24 f.

23) The point is made by B.T. Wilkins, Carl Becker, Cambridge (M.I.T. and Harvard) 1961, pp. 189-209.

articulate to have written a happy description of what I would call the gradual accumulation of insights, each complementing or qualifying or correcting those that went before, until -- perhaps years later -- the stream of further questions has dried up and the historian's information on past historical experience has been promoted to historical knowledge.

The issues that concerned Carl Becker in the United States also concerned R.G. Collingwood in England. Both insisted on the constructive activities of the historian. Both attacked what above I named the principle of the empty head. But the epitome of the position Becker attacked was the view that the historian had merely to present all the facts and then let them speak for themselves. Collingwood attacks the same position under the name of "scissors-and-paste history".²⁴ It is a naive view of history in terms of memory, testimony, credibility.²⁵ It gathers statements from sources, decides whether they are to be regarded as true or false, pastes true statements in a scrap-book later to be worked up into a narrative, while it consigns false statements to the waste-basket.²⁶ It was the type of history alone known in the ancient world and in the middle ages.²⁷ It has been on the wane since the days of Vico.²⁸ While Collingwood would not venture to say that it has totally disappeared, he does assert that *any* history written today on such principles is at least a century out of date.²⁹

24) R.G. Collingwood, The Idea of History, Oxford (Clarendon) 1946, pp. 257-263, 269 f., 274-282.

25) Ibid., p. 234.

26) Ibid., p. 259.

There has been, then, a Copernican revolution²⁹ in the study of history inasmuch as history has become both critical and constructive.³⁰ This process is ascribed to the historical imagination³¹ and, again, to a logic in which questions are more fundamental than answers.³² The two ascriptions are far from incompatible. The historian starts out from statements he finds in his sources. The attempt to represent imaginatively their meaning gives rise to questions that lead on to further statements in the sources. Eventually he will have stretched a web of imaginative construction linking together the fixed points supplied by the statements in the sources.³³ However, these so-called fixed points are fixed not absolutely but relatively.³⁴ In his present inquiry the historian has decided to assume them as fixed. But, in fact, their being fixed is just the fruit of earlier historical inquiry. If the statements from which the

27) Ibid., p. 258.

28) Ibid., p. 260.

29) Ibid., pp. 236, 240.

30) Ibid., p. 240.

31) Ibid., pp. 241 ff.

32) Ibid., pp. 269-274.

33) Ibid., p. 242.

34) Ibid., p. 243.

35) Ibid., p. 244.

historian proceeds are to be found in Thucydides, still it is historical knowledge that enables the historian to go beyond mere odd marks on paper to a recognition of the Greek alphabet, to meanings in the Attic dialect, to the authenticity of the passages, to the judgment that on these occasions Thucydides knew what he was talking about and was trying to tell the truth. ³⁵

It follows that, if history is considered not in this or that work but as a totality, then, it is an autonomous discipline. It depends upon data, on the remains of the past perceptible in the present. But it is not a matter of believing authorities, and it is not a matter of inferring from authorities. Critical procedures decide in what manner and measure sources will be used.³⁶ Constructive procedures arrive at results that may not have been known by the authors of the sources. Hence "... so far from relying on an authority other than himself, to whose statements his thought must conform, the historian is his own authority and his thought autonomous, self-authorizing, possessed of a criterion to which his so-called authorities must conform and by reference to which they are criticized."³⁷

Such is the Copernican revolution Collingwood recognized in modern history. It is a view that cannot be assimilated on naive realist or empiricist premisses. As

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³⁶) Ibid., p. 238.

³⁷) Ibid., p. 236; see p. 249; also Marrou, Meaning of History, pp. 307-310.

presented by Collingwood, unfortunately it is contained in an idealist context. But by introducing a satisfactory theory of objectivity and of judgment, the idealism can be removed without dropping the substance of what Collingwood taught about the historical imagination, historical evidence, and the logic of question and answer.

Issues raised in the United States and in England also were raised in France. In 1938 Raymond Aron portrayed the historical thought of Dilthey, Rickert, Simmel, and Max Weber³⁸ and, as well, in another volume set forth his own developments of German Verstehen that in French was named compréhension.³⁹ My present concern, however, is not with theorists of history but with professional historians, and so I turn to Henri-Irénée Marrou who was invited to occupy the Chaire Cardinal Mercier at Louvain in 1953, and used this opportunity to discuss the nature of historical knowledge.

The following year there appeared his De la connaissance historique.⁴⁰ It is concerned, not with theoretical issues,

38) R. Aron, La philosophie critique de la histoire, Paris (Vrin) 1950.

39) R. Aron, Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire, Paris (Gallimard) 1948.

40) My references are to the English translation, The Meaning of History, Baltimore and Dublin (Helicon) 1966.

but rather with making a systematic inventory, a reasonable and balanced synopsis, of conclusions that historians had reached on the nature of their task.⁴¹ The nature of that task, he felt, was as well established as had been the theory of experiment in the days of John Stuart Mill and Claude Bernard.⁴² So it is that M. Marrou treated all the general issues of historical investigation and did so both with a grasp of theoretical opinions and with all the sensitivity of a Pieter Geyl to the endless complexity of historical reality.⁴³

Out of this abundance, for the moment, we are concerned only with the relationship between fact and theory, analysis and synthesis, criticism and construction. M. Marrou treats the two in successive chapters. His views on criticism, he feels, would make his old positivist teachers turn over in their graves. Where they urged a relentlessly critical spirit, he calls for sympathy and understanding.⁴⁴ The negative critical approach, concerned with the honesty, competence, and accuracy of authors, was well adapted to specialist work on the

41) Marrou, Meaning of History, p. 25.

42) Later Marrou had to confess that agreement was less than he had anticipated. See the appendix to Meaning of History, pp. 301-316.

43) Complexity is a recurrent theme in Pieter Geyl's Debates with Historians, New York (Meridian Books) 1965.

44) Marrou, Meaning of History, pp. 103 ff.

political and ecclesiastical history of western Europe in the middle ages, where there was a rash of second-hand chronicles, forged charters and decretals, and antedated lives of saints.⁴⁵ But the historian's task is not limited to eliminating errors and deceptions. Documents can be used in a great variety of manners, and the historian's proper task is to understand his documents thoroughly, grasp exactly what they reveal directly or indirectly,⁴⁶ and so use them intelligently.

As M. Marrou calls for a shift from mere criticism of documents to their comprehension, so too he stresses the continuity and interdependence of coming to understand the relevant documents and coming to understand the course of events. The historian begins by determining a topic, assembling a file of relevant documents, annotating each on its credibility.⁴⁷ Still this is a merely abstract scheme. One advances in knowledge along a spiral. As knowledge of events increases, new light is thrown on the character of the documents. The original question is recast. Documents, that seemed irrelevant, now acquire relevance. New facts come to light. So the historian gradually comes to master the area under investigation, to acquire confidence in his grasp of the meaning, scope, worth of his documents, and to apprehend the course of events that the documents once concealed and now reveal.

45) Ibid., pp. 112 f.

46) Ibid., pp. 113 f. Cf. Collingwood, Idea of History, pp. 247, 259 f.; Becker, Detachment, pp. 46 f.

47) Marrou, Meaning of History, pp. 131 f.

4. Verstehen

Already I have mentioned Droysen's notion of historical investigation as forschend verstehen, and Raymond Aron's introduction of German historical reflection into the French milieu. To that reflection we have now to revert, for it was empirical without being empiricist. It was empirical, for it was closely associated with the work of the German historical school, and that school's charter was its protest against Hegel's a priori construction of the meaning of history. It was not empiricist, for it was fully aware that historical knowledge was not just a matter of taking a good look, that, on the contrary, it involved some mysterious, divinatory process in which the historian came to understand.

This need for understanding appeared in two manners. First, there was the hermeneutic circle. For instance, one grasps the meaning of a sentence by understanding the words, but one understands the words properly only in the light of the sentence as a whole. Sentences stand in a *similar* relationship to paragraphs, paragraphs to chapters, chapters to books, books to an author's situation and intentions. Now this cumulative network of reciprocal dependence is not to be mastered by any conceptual set of procedures. What is needed is the self-correcting process of learning, in which preconceptual insights accumulate to complement, qualify, correct one another.

Secondly, the need for understanding appeared again in the irrelevance of the universal or general. The more creative the artist, the more original the thinker, the greater the genius, the less can his achievement be subsumed under universal

principles or general rules. If anything, he is the source of new rules and, while the new rules will be followed by others, still they are not followed in exactly the manner of the master. Even lesser lights have their originality, while servile imitation is the work not of mind but of the machine. Now this high degree of individuality found in artists, thinkers, writers, though beyond the reach of general rules or universal principles, is within easy reach of understanding. For what in the first instance is understood is what is given to sense or consciousness or, again, what is represented in images, words, symbols, signs. What is so given or represented is individual. What is grasped by understanding is the intelligibility of the individual. Apart from failures to control properly one's use of language, generalization is a later step and, in works of interpretation, usually a superfluous step. There is only one Divina commedia, only one Hamlet by Shakespeare, only one two-part Faust by Goethe.

The scope of understanding, the range of its significance, was gradually extended. To the grammatical interpretation of texts, Schleiermacher (1768-1834) added a psychological interpretation that aimed at understanding persons, and especially at ⁴⁸divining the basic moment in a creative writer's inspiration. August Boeckh (1785-1867) a pupil of Fr. Wolf's as well as of Fr. Schleiermacher's, extended the scope of understanding to the whole range of the philological sciences. In his Enzyklopädie und Methodologie der philologischen Wissenschaften the idea of philology was conceived as the

48) H.G. Gadamer, Wahrheit und Methode, pp. 172-185;

R.E. Palmer, Hermeneutics, Evanston (Northwestern) 1969, pp. 84-97.

interpretative reconstruction of the constructions of the human spirit.⁴⁹ What Boeckh did for philology, Droysen would do for history. He moved the notion of understanding from a context of aesthetics and psychology to the broader context of history by (1) assigning expression as the object of understanding and (2) noting that not only individuals but also such groups as families, peoples, states, religions express themselves.⁵⁰

With Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) there is a further broadening of the horizon. He discovered that the German historical school, while it appealed to historical fact against a priori idealist construction, none the less in its actual procedures was far closer to idealist than to empiricist ideas and norms.⁵¹ With remarkable astuteness he recognized that the success of the historical school, like the earlier success of natural science, constituted a new datum for cognitional theory. On that new datum he proposed to build. Just as Kant had asked how a priori universal principles were possible, Dilthey set himself the question of the possibility of historical knowledge and, more generally, of the human sciences conceived as Geisteswissenschaften.⁵²

49) Hünerman, Durchbruch, p. 64; pp. 63-69 outline Boeckh's thought.

50) Ibid., pp. 106 ff.; Gadamer, Wahrheit, pp. 199-205.

51) Gadamer, Wahrheit, p. 205.

52) Ibid., p. 52; Palmer, Hermeneutics, pp. 100 ff.

Dilthey's basic step may be conceived as a transposition of Hegelian thought from idealist Geist to human Leben. Hegel's objective spirit returns, but now it is just the integral of the objectification effected in concrete human living. Living expresses itself. In the expression there is present the expressed. So the data of human studies are not just given; by themselves, prior to any interpretation, they are expressions, manifestations, objectifications of human living. Further, when they are understood by an interpreter, there also is understood the living that is expressed, manifested, objectified.⁵³ Finally, just as an interpretation expresses and communicates an interpreter's understanding, so too the objectifications of living are living's own interpretation of itself. Das Leben selbst legt sich aus.⁵⁴

35/ In the concrete physical, chemical, vital reality of human living, then, there also is meaning. It is at once inward and outward, inward as expressing, outward as expressed. It manifests need and satisfaction. It responds to values. It intends goals. It orders means to ends. It constitutes social system and endows them with cultural significance. It transforms environing nature.

The many expressions of individual living are linked together by an intelligible web. To reach that intelligible

53) Gadamer, Wahrheit, pp. 211, 214.

54) Ibid., p. 213; Palmer, pp. 103-114.

connectedness is not just a matter of assembling all the expressions of a lifetime. Rather, there is a developing whole that is present in the parts, articulating under each new set of circumstances the values it prizes and the goals it pursues, and thereby achieving its own individuality and distinctiveness. Just as human consciousness is not confined to the moment but rises on cumulative memories and proceeds in accord with preference schedules towards its hierarchy of goals, so too its expressions not only together but even singly have the capacity to reveal the direction and momentum of a life. ⁵⁵

As there is intelligibility in the life of the individual, so too is there intelligibility in the common meanings, common values, common purposes, common and complementary activities of groups. As these can be common or complementary, so too they can differ, be opposed, conflict. Therewith, in principle, the possibility of historical understanding is reached. For if we can understand singly our own lives and the lives of others, so too we can understand them in their interconnections and interdependence. ⁵⁶

Moreover, just as the historian can narrate an intelligible course of events, so too human scientists can proceed to the analysis of recurring or developing structures and processes

55) Gadamer, Wahrheit, pp. 212 f.

56) Wilhelm Dilthey, Pattern and Meaning in History, Edited and Introduced by H.P. Rickman, New York (Harper & Row) 1962; London (Allen & Unwin) 1961. Chapters V and VI.

in individual and group living. So far from being opposed, history and the human sciences will be interdependent. The human scientist will have to view his data within their appropriate historical context; and the historian can fully master his materials only if he also masters the relevant human sciences.⁵⁷

It can be said, I think, that Dilthey did much to meet his specific problem. Decisively he drew the distinction between natural science and human studies. Clearly he conceived the possibility of historical knowledge that conformed neither to the a priori constructions of idealism nor to the procedures of natural science. However, he did not resolve the more basic problem of getting beyond both empiricist and idealist suppositions. His Lebensphilosophie has empiricist leanings. His history and human science based on Verstehen cannot be assimilated by an empiricist.⁵⁸

Two advances on Dilthey's position have since developed and may be treated briefly. First, Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) by his painstaking analysis of intentionality made it evident that human thinking and judging are not just psychological events but always and intrinsically intend, refer to, mean objects distinct from themselves.⁵⁹ Secondly, where Dilthey conceived expression as manifestation of life, Martin Heidegger (1889-) conceives all human projects to be products of

57) Ibid., p. 123.

58) Gadamer, Wahrheit, pp. 218-228.

59) Ibid., p. 230 f.

understanding; in this fashion Verstehen is Dasein in so far as the latter is man's ability to be.⁶⁰ There follows the universality of hermeneutic structure: just as interpretation proceeds from the understanding of an expression, so this expression itself proceeds from an understanding of what it can be to be a man.

A few comments are now in order. First, our use of the terms, insights, understanding, both is more precise and has a broader range than the connotation and denotation of Verstehen. Insight occurs in all human knowledge, in mathematics, natural science, common sense, philosophy, human science, history, theology. It occurs (1) in response to inquiry, (2) with respect to sensible presentations or representations including words and symbols of all kinds. It consists in a grasp of intelligible unity or relation in the data or image or symbol. It is the active ground whence proceed conception, definition, hypothesis, theory, system. This proceeding, which is not merely intelligible but intelligent, provided the human model for Thomist and Augustinian trinitarian theory.⁶¹ Finally, the simple and clear-cut proof of the preconceptual character of insight is ^{had} and from the modern reformulation of Euclidean

60) Gadamer, Wahrheit, p. 245.

61) This is the thesis in my Verbum: Word and Idea in Aquinas, London (Darton, Longman & Todd) and Notre Dame (University Press) 1967

62 geometry. Euclid's Elements depends on insights that were not acknowledged in his definitions, axioms, and postulates, that easily occur, that ground the validity of his conclusions, that cannot be expressed in a strictly Euclidean vocabulary.⁶³

Secondly, experience and understanding taken together yield not knowledge but only thought. To advance from thinking to knowing there must be added a reflective grasp of the virtually unconditioned and its rational consequent, judgment. There is an insufficient awareness of this third level of cognitional activity in the authors we have been mentioning and a resultant failure to break away cleanly and coherently from both empiricism and idealism.

62) See, for example, H.G. Forder, The Foundations of Euclidean Geometry, Cambridge (Cambridge University Press) 1927.

63) For example, Euclid solves the problem of constructing an equilateral triangle by drawing two circles that intersect; but there is no Euclidean proof that the circles must intersect. Again, he proves the theorem that the exterior angle of a triangle is greater than the interior opposite angle by constructing within the exterior angle an angle equal to the interior opposite; but there is no Euclidean proof that this constructed angle must lie within the exterior angle. However, the must can be grasped by an insight that has no Euclidean formulation.

Thirdly, over and above a clear-headed grasp of cognitional fact, the break from both empiricism and idealism involves the elimination of cognitional myth. There are notions of knowledge and of reality that are formed in childhood, that are in terms of seeing and of what's there to be seen, that down the centuries have provided the unshakable foundations of materialism, empiricism, positivism, sensism, phenomenism, behaviorism, pragmatism, and that at the same time constitute the notions of knowledge and reality that idealists know to be nonsense.

5. Perspectivism

In 1932 Karl Heussi published a small book with the title, Die Krisis des Historismus. The first twenty-one pages reviewed the various meanings of the term, Historismus. Out of many candidates Heussi selected, as the Historismus undergoing a crisis, the views on history current among historians about the year 1900. These views involved four main elements: (1) a determinate but simple-minded stand on the nature of objectivity; (2) the interconnectedness of all historical objects; (3) a universal process of development; and (4) the confinement of historical concern to the world of experience.⁶⁴

Of these four elements, it was the first that occasioned the crisis.⁶⁵ Around 1900, historians, while they emphasized

64) Karl Heussi, Die Krisis des Historismus, Tübingen 1932 p. 20.

65) Ibid., pp. 37, 103.

the danger of subjective bias, assumed that the object of history was stably given and unequivocally structured. Men's opinions about the past may keep changing but the past itself remains what it was. In contrast, Heussi himself held that the structures were only in the minds of men, that similar structures were reached when investigations proceeded from the same standpoint, that historical reality, so far from being unequivocally structured, was rather an inexhaustible incentive to ever fresh historical interpretations.⁶⁶

While this statement has idealist implications, at least Heussi did not wish it to be interpreted too strictly. He immediately added that there are many constants in human living, and that unequivocally determined structures are not rare. What is problematic is the insertion of these constants and structures into larger wholes. The fewer and the narrower the contexts to which a person, a group, a movement belongs, the less the likelihood that subsequent developments will involve a revision of earlier history.⁶⁷ On the other hand, where different world-views and values are involved, one can expect agreement on single incidents and single complexes, but disagreement on larger issues and broader interconnections.⁶⁸

There is, however, a more fundamental qualification to be added. Heussi's basic point is that historical reality is

66) Ibid., pp. 56.

67) Ibid., pp. 57 f.

68) Ibid., p. 58.

far too complicated for an exhaustively complete description ever to occur. No one is ever going to relate everything that happened at the battle of Leipzig from the 16th to the 19th of October, 1813. Inevitably the historian selects what he thinks of moment and omits what he considers unimportant. This selection to some extent goes forward spontaneously in virtue of some mysterious capacity that can determine what is to be expected, that groups and constructs, that possesses the tact needed to evaluate and refine, that proceeds as though in one's mind there were some governing and controlling law of perspective so that, granted the historian's standpoint, his milieu, his presuppositions, his training, there must result just the structures and the emphases and the selection that do result. Finally, this result cannot be described as a mere rehandling of old materials; it is something new. It does not correspond to the inexhaustible complexity of historical reality. But by selecting what from a given standpoint is significant or important, it does purport to mean and portray historical reality in some incomplete and approximate fashion.⁶⁹

69) Ibid., p. 47 f. The passage is an excellent description of accumulating insights, though Heussi himself is of the opinion (op. cit., p. 60) that Verstehen regards only the larger constructive steps and not the basic constitution of historical knowledge. On selection history see Marrou, Meaning of History, p. 200; also Charlotte W. Smith, Carl Becker: On History and the Climate of Opinion, Ithaca, N.Y. (Cornell University Press) 1956, pp. 125-130.

25/ It is this incomplete and approximate character of historical narrative that explains why history is rewritten for each new generation. Historical experience is promoted to historical knowledge only if the historian is asking questions. Questions can be asked only by introducing linguistic categories. Such categories carry with them their host of presuppositions and implications. They are colored by a retinue of concern, interests, tastes, feelings, suggestions, evocations. Inevitably the historian operates under the influence of his language, his education, his milieu, and these with the passage of time inevitably change⁷⁰ to give rise to a demand for and supply of rewritten history. So excellent historical works, composed in the final decades of the nineteenth century, had lost all appeal by the nineteen thirties, even among readers that happened to be in full agreement with the religious, theological, political, and social views of the older authors.⁷¹

The reason why the historian cannot escape his time and place is that the development of historical understanding does not admit systematic objectification. Mathematicians submit to the rigor of formalization to be certain that they are not using unacknowledged insights. Scientists define their terms systematically, formulate their hypotheses precisely, work out rigorously the suppositions and implications of the hypotheses, and carry out elaborate programs of observational or experimental verification. Philosophers can have resort to trans-

70) Heussi, Krisis, pp. 52-56.

71) Ibid., p. 71.

cendental method. But the historian finds his way in the complexity of historical reality by the same type and mode of developing understanding, as the rest of us employ in day-to-day living. The starting-point is not some set of postulates or some generally accepted theory but all that the historian already knows and believes. The more intelligent and the more cultivated he is, the broader his experience, the more open he is to all human values, the more competent and rigorous his training, the greater is his capacity to discover the past.⁷² When an investigation is succeeding, his insights are so numerous, their coalescence so spontaneous, the manner in which they complement or qualify or correct one another is so immediate and so deft, that the historian can objectify, not every twist and turn in the genesis of his discovery, but only the broad lines of the picture at which eventually he arrives.⁷³

In saying that the historian cannot escape his background, I am not suggesting that he cannot overcome individual, group, or general bias,⁷⁴ or that he cannot undergo intellectual, moral, or religious conversion. Again, I am not retracting in any way what previously I said about the "ecstatic" character of developing historical insight, about the historian's ability to move out of the viewpoint of his place and time and come to understand and appreciate the mentality and the values of another place and time. Finally, I am not implying that historians with different backgrounds cannot come to understand

72) Marrou, Meaning of History, p. 247.

73) Ibid., pp. 292 f.; cf. Smith, Carl Becker, pp. 128, 130.

74) On bias, see Insight, pp. 218-242.

one another and so move on from diverging to converging views
on the past.⁷⁵

The point I have been endeavoring to make is what is called perspectivism. Where relativism has lost hope about the attainment of truth, perspectivism stresses the complexity of what the historian is writing about and, as well, the specific difference of historical from mathematical, scientific, and philosophic knowledge. It does not lock historians up in their backgrounds, confine them to their biases, deny them access to development and openness. But it does point out that historians with different backgrounds will rid themselves of biases, undergo conversions, come to understand the quite different mentalities of other places and times, and even move towards understanding one another, each in his own distinctive fashion. They may investigate the same area, but they ask different questions. Where the questions are similar, the implicit, defining contexts of suppositions and implications are not identical. Some may take for granted what others labor to prove. Discoveries can be equivalent, yet approached from different sets of previous questions, expressed in different terms, and so leading to different sequences of further questions. Even where results are much the same, still the reports will be written for different readers, and each historian has to devote special attention to what his readers would easily overlook or misesteem.

Such is perspectivism. In a broad sense the term may be used to refer to any case in which different historians treat

75) Marrou, Meaning of History, p. 235.

the same matter differently. But its proper meaning is quite specific. It does not refer to differences arising from human fallibility, from mistaken judgments of possibility, probability, fact or value. It does not refer to differences arising from personal inadequacy, from obtuseness, oversights, a lack of skill or thoroughness. It does not refer to history as an ongoing process, to that gradual conquest that discovers ever new ways to make potential evidence into formal and eventually actual evidence.⁷⁶

In its proper and specific meaning, perspectivism results from three factors. First, the historian is finite; his information is incomplete; his understanding does not master all the data within his reach; not all his judgments are certain. Were his information complete, his understanding all-comprehensive, his every judgment certain, then there would be room neither for selection nor for perspectivism. Then historical reality would be known in its fixity and its unequivocal structures.

Secondly, the historian selects. The process of selecting has its main element in a commonsense, spontaneous development of understanding that can be objectified in its results but not in its actual occurrence. In turn, this process is conditioned by the whole earlier process of the historian's development and attainments; and this development is not an object of complete information and complete explanation. In brief, the process of selection is not ~~the~~ subject to objectified controls either in itself or in its initial conditions.

76) Collingwood, Idea of History, p. 247; Marrou, p. 291.

Thirdly, we can expect processes of selection and their initial conditions to be variables. For historians are historical beings, immersed in the ongoing process in which situations change and meanings shift and different individuals respond each in his own way.

In brief, the historical process itself and, within it, the personal development of the historian give rise to a series of different standpoints. The different standpoints give rise to different selective processes. The different selective processes give rise to different histories that are (1) not contradictory, (2) not complete information and not complete explanation, but (3) incomplete and approximate portrayals of an enormously complex reality.

Is then history not a science but an art? Collingwood has pointed out three differences between historical narrative and literary fiction. The historical narrative regards events located in space and dated in time; in a novel places and dates may be and largely are fictitious. Secondly, all historical narratives have to be compatible with one another and tend to form a single view. Thirdly, the historical narrative at every step is justified by evidence; the novel either makes no appeal to evidence or, if it does, the appeal normally is part of the fiction. ⁷⁷

On the other hand, history differs from natural science, for its object is in part constituted by meaning and value,

77) Collingwood, Idea, p. 246.

while the objects of the natural sciences are not. Again, it differs from both the natural and the human sciences, for its results are descriptions and narratives about particular persons, actions, things, while their results aim at being universally valid. Finally, while it can be said that history is a science in the sense that it is guided by a method, that that method yields univocal answers when identical questions are put, and that the results of historical investigations are cumulative, still it has to be acknowledged that these properties of method are not realized in the same manner in history and in the natural and the human sciences.

All discovery is a cumulation of insights. But in the sciences this cumulation is expressed in some well-defined system, while in history it is expressed in a description and narrative about particulars. The scientific system can be checked in endless different manners, but the description and narrative, while it can come under suspicion in various ways, is really checked only by repeating the initial investigation. Scientific advance is constructing a better system, but historical advance is a fuller and more penetrating understanding of more particulars. Finally, the scientist can aim at a full explanation of all phenomena, because his explanations are laws and structures that can cover countless instances; but the historian that aimed at a full explanation of all history would need more information than is available and then countless explanations.

Let us now revert, for a moment, to the view of history commonly entertained at the beginning of this century.

From what has just been said it is plain that its error was not precisely where Karl Heussi placed it. The past is fixed and its intelligible structures are unequivocal; but the past that is so fixed and unequivocal is the enormously complex past that historians know only incompletely and approximately. It is incomplete and approximate knowledge of the past that gives rise to perspectivism.

Finally, to affirm perspectivism is once more to reject the view that the historian has only to narrate all the facts and let them speak for themselves. It is once more to deplore the scissors-and-paste conception of history. It is once more to lament with M. Marrou the havoc wrought by positivist theories of "scientific" history.⁷⁸ But it also adds a new moment. It reveals that history speaks not only of the past but also of the present. Historians go out of fashion only to be rediscovered. The rediscovery finds them, if anything, more out of date than ever. But the significance of the rediscovery lies, not in the past that the historian wrote about, but in the historian's own self-revelation. Now his account is prized because it incarnates so much of its author's humanity, because it offers a first-rate witness on the historian, his milieu, his times.⁷⁹

78) Marrou, Meaning of History, pp. 10 f., 23, 54, 138, 161 f., 231.

79) Ibid., p. 296.

6. Horizons

Sir Lewis Namier has described a historical sense as "an intuitive understanding of how things do not happen."⁸⁰ He was referring, of course, to the case in which such intuitive understanding is the fruit of historical study, but our present concern with horizons directs our attention to the prior understanding that the historian derives not from historical study but from other sources.

On this matter Carl Becker dwelt in a paper read at Cornell in 1937 and at Princeton in 1938. His topic was Bernheim's rule that a fact can be established by the testimony of at least two independent witnesses not self-deceived. While he went over each term in the rule, his interest centered on the question whether historians considered witnesses to be self-deceived, not because they were known to be excited or emotionally involved or of poor memory, but simply because of the historian's own view on what was possible and what was impossible. His answer was affirmative. When the historian is convinced that an event is impossible, he will always say that the witnesses were self-deceived, whether there were just two or as many as two hundred. In other words, historians have their preconceptions, if not about what must have happened, at least about what could not have happened. Such preconceptions are derived, not from the study of history, but from the climate

80) See Stern, Varieties, p. 375.

of opinion in which the historian lives and from which he unconsciously acquires certain fixed convictions about the nature of man and of the world. Once such convictions are established, it is easier for him to believe that any number of witnesses are self-deceived than for him to admit that the impossible has actually occurred.⁸¹

This open acknowledgement -- that historians have preconceived ideas and that these ideas modify their writing of history -- is quite in accord, not only with what we have already recounted of Becker's views, but also with what we ourselves have said about horizons and about meaning. Each of us lives in a world mediated by meaning, a world constructed over the years by the sum total of our conscious, intentional activities. Such a world is a matter not merely of details but also of basic options. Once such options are taken and built upon, they have to be maintained, or else one must go back, tear down, reconstruct. So radical a procedure is not easily undertaken; it is not comfortably performed; it is not quickly completed. It can be comparable to major surgery, and most of us grasp the knife gingerly and wield it clumsily.

Now the historian is engaged in extending his world mediated by meaning, in enriching it with regard to the human, the past, the particular. His historical questions, in great part, regard matters of detail. But even they can involve

81) Smith, Carl Becker, pp. 89-90.

questions of principle, issues that set basic options. Can miracles happen? If the historian has constructed his world on the view that miracles are impossible, what is he going to do about witnesses testifying to miracles as matters of fact? Obviously, either he has to go back and reconstruct his world on new lines, or else has to find these witnesses either incompetent or dishonest or self-deceived. Becker was quite right in saying that the latter is the easier course. He was quite right in saying that the number of witnesses is not the issue. The real point is that the witnesses, whether few or many, can exist in that historian's world only if they are pronounced incompetent or dishonest or at least self-deceived.

More than a quarter of a century earlier in his essay on "Detachment and the Writing of History" Becker was fully aware that whatever detachment historians exhibited, they were not detached from the dominant ideas of their own age.⁸² They knew quite well that no amount of testimony can establish about the past what is not found in the present.⁸³ Hume's argument did not really prove that no miracles had ever occurred. Its real thrust was that the historian cannot deal intelligently with the past when the past is permitted to be unintelligible to him.⁸⁴ Miracles are excluded because they are contrary to the laws of

82) Becker, Detachment and the Writing of History, p. 25.

83) Ibid., p. 12.

84) Ibid., p. 13.

nature that in his generation are regarded as established; but if scientists come to find a place for them in experience, there will be historians to restore them to history.⁸⁵

What holds for questions of fact, also holds for questions of interpretation. Religion remains in the twentieth century, but it no longer explains medieval asceticism. So monasteries are associated less with the salvation of souls and more with sheltering travellers and reclaiming marsh land. St. Simeon Stylites is not a physical impossibility; he can fit, along with one-eyed monsters and knights-errant, into a child's world; but his motives lie outside current adult experience and so, most conveniently, they are pronounced pathological.⁸⁶

Becker's contention that historians operate in the light of preconceived ideas implies a rejection of the Enlightenment and Romantic ideal of presuppositionless history.⁸⁷ That ideal, of course, has the advantage of excluding from the start all the errors that the historian has picked up from his parents and teachers and, as well, all that he has generated by his own lack of attention, his obtuseness, his poor judgments. But the fact remains that, while mathematicians, scientists, and philosophers all operate on presuppositions that they can

85) Ibid., p. 13 f.

86) Ibid., p. 22 f.

87) Cf. Gadamer, Wahrheit, pp. 256 ff.

explicitly acknowledge, the historian operates in the light of his whole personal development, and that development does not admit complete and explicit formulation and acknowledgement.⁸⁸ To say that the historian should operate without presuppositions is to assert ~~that~~ the principle of the empty head, to urge that the historian should be uneducated, to claim that he should be exempted from the process variously named socialization and acculturation,⁸⁹ to strip him of historicity. For the historian's presuppositions are not just his but also the living on in him of developments that human society and culture have slowly accumulated over the centuries.⁹⁰

It was Newman who remarked, a propos of Descartes' methodic doubt, that it would be better to believe everything than to doubt everything. For universal doubt leaves one with no basis for advance, while universal belief may contain some truth that in time may gradually drive out the errors. In somewhat similar vein, I think, we must be content to allow historians to be educated, socialized, acculturated, historical beings, even though this will involve them in some error. We must allow them to write their histories in the light of all they happen to know or think they know and of all they unconsciously take for granted: they cannot do otherwise

88) See Insight, p. 175.

89) See P. Berger and T. Luckmann, The Social Construction of Reality, Garden City, N.Y. (Doubleday) 1966.

90) Gadamer, Wahrheit, p. 261.

and a pluralist society lets them do what they can. But we need not proclaim that they are writing presuppositionsless history, when that is something no one can do. We have to recognize that the admission of history written in the light of pre-conceived ideas may result in different notions of history, different methods of historical investigation, incompatible standpoints, and irreconcilable histories.⁹¹ Finally, we have to seek methods that will help historians from the start to avoid incoherent assumptions and procedures, and we have to develop further methods that will serve to iron out differences once incompatible histories have been written.

But the mere acknowledgement of these needs is all that can be achieved in the present section. To meet them pertains, not to the functional specialty, history, but to the later specialties, dialectic and foundations. For any notable change of horizon is done, not on the basis of that horizon, but by envisaging a quite different and, at first sight, incomprehensible alternative and then undergoing a conversion.

7. Heuristic Structures

Has the historian philosophic commitments? Does he employ analogies, use ideal types, follow some theory of history? Does he explain, investigate causes, determine laws? Is he devoted to social and cultural goals, subject to bias, detached

91) In contrast, perspectivism (as we understand the term) accounts for different but not for incompatible histories.

from bias? Is history value-free, or is it concerned with values? Do historians know or do they believe?

Such questions are asked. They not merely regard the historian's notion of history but also have a bearing on his practice of historical investigation and historical writing. Different answers, accordingly, would modify this or that heuristic structure,⁹² that is, this or that element in historical method.

First, then, the historian need not concern himself at all with philosophy in a common but excessively general sense that denotes the contents of all books and courses purporting to be philosophic. Through that labyrinth there is no reason why a historian should try to find his way.

There is, however, a very real connection between the historian and philosophy, when "philosophy" is understood in an extremely restricted sense, namely, the set of real conditions of the possibility of historical inquiry. Those real conditions are the human race, remains and traces from its past, the community of historians with their traditions and instruments, their conscious and intentional operations especially in so far as they occur in historical investigation. It is to be noted that the relevant conditions are conditions of possibility and not the far larger and quite determinate set that in each

92) On heuristic structures, see *Insight*, Index s.v. Heuristic. Note that heuristic has the same root as Eureka.

instance condition historical investigation.

In brief, then, history is related to philosophy, as historical method is related to transcendental method or, again, as theological method is related to transcendental method. The historian may or may not know of this relationship. If he does, that is all to the good. If he does not, then, he still can be an excellent historian, just as M. Jourdain might speak excellent French without knowing that his talk was prose. But while he can be an excellent historian, it is not likely that he will be able to speak about the proper procedures in historical investigation without falling into the traps that in this chapter we have been illustrating.

Secondly, it is plain that the historian has to employ something like an analogy when he proceeds from the present to the past. The trouble is that the term covers quite different procedures from the extremely reliable to the fallacious. Distinctions accordingly must be drawn.

In general, the present and the past are said to be analogous when they are partly similar and partly dissimilar. Again, in general, the past is to be assumed similar to the present, except in so far as there is evidence of dissimilarity. Finally, in so far as evidence is produced for dissimilarity, the historian is talking history; but in so far as he asserts that there must be similarity or that there cannot be dissimilarity, then he is drawing upon the climate of opinion in which he lives or else he is representing some philosophic position.

Next, it is not to be assumed that the present is known completely and in its entirety. On the contrary, we have been arguing all along that the rounded view of a historical period is to be expected not from contemporaries but from historians. Moreover, while the historian has to construct his analogies in the first instance by drawing on his knowledge of the present, still he can learn history in this fashion and then construct further history on the analogy of the known past.

Further, nature is uniform, but social arrangements and cultural interpretations are subject to change. There exist at the present time extremely different societies and cultures. There is available evidence for still more differences to be brought to light by historical methods. One hears at times that the past has to conform to present experience, but on that opinion Collingwood commented quite tartly. The ancient Greeks and Romans controlled the size of their populations by exposing new-born infants. The fact is not rendered doubtful because it lies outside the current experience of the contributors to the Cambridge Ancient History.⁹³

Again, while the possibility and the occurrence of miracles are topics, not for the methodologist, but for the theologian, I may remark that the uniformity of nature is conceived differently at different times. In the nineteenth century natural laws were thought to express necessity, and Leplace's view on the possibility in theory of deducing the

93) Collingwood, Idea of History, p. 240.

whole course of events from some given stage of the process was taken seriously. Now laws of the classical type are considered not necessary but just verified possibilities; they are generalized on the principle that similars are similarly understood; they are a basis for prediction or deduction, not by themselves, but only when combined into schemes of recurrence; such schemes function concretely, not absolutely, but only if other things are equal; and whether other things are equal, is a matter of statistical frequencies.⁹⁴ Evidently the scientific case concerning miracles has weakened.

Finally, while each historian has to work on the analogy of what he knows of the present and has learnt of the past, still the dialectical confrontation of contradictory histories needs a basis that is generally accessible. The basis we would offer would be transcendental method extended into the methods of theology and history by constructs derived from transcendental method itself. In other words, it would be the sort of thing we have been working out in these chapters. No doubt, those with different philosophic positions would propose alternatives. But such alternatives would only serve to clarify further the dialectic of diverging research, interpretation, and history.

94) For this notion of science, See Insight, chapters two, three and four.

Thirdly, do historians use ideal-types? I may note at once that the notion and use of the ideal-type commonly are associated with the name of the German sociologist, Max Weber, but they have been discussed in a strictly historical context, among others, by M. Marrou.

The ideal-type, then, is not a description of reality or a hypothesis about reality. It is a theoretical construct in which possible events are intelligibly related to constitute an internally coherent system. Its utility is both heuristic and expository, that is, it can be useful inasmuch as it suggests and helps formulate hypotheses and, again, when a concrete situation approximates to the theoretical construct, it can guide an analysis of the situation and promote a clear understanding of it.⁹⁵

M. Marrou took Fustel de Coulanges' La cité antique as an ideal type. The city state is conceived as a confederation of the great patriarchal families, assembled in phratries and then in tribes, consolidated by cults regarding ancestors or heroes and practised around a common center. Now such a structure is based, not by selecting what is common to all instances of the ancient city, not by taking what is common to most instances, but by concentrating on the most favorable instances, namely, those offering more intelligibility and explanatory power. The use of such an ideal-type is twofold.

95) Max Weber, The Methodology of the Social Sciences, New York (Free Press) 1949, pp. 89 ff.

In so far as the historical situation satisfies the conditions of the ideal-type, the situation is illuminated. In so far as the historical situation does not satisfy the conditions of the ideal-type, it brings to light precise differences that otherwise would go unnoticed, and it sets questions that otherwise might not be asked.⁹⁶

M. Marrou approves the use of ideal-types in historical investigation, but he issues two warnings. First, they are just theoretical constructs: one must resist the temptation of the enthusiast that mistakes them for descriptions of reality; even when they do hit off main features of a historical reality, one must not easily be content with them, gloss over inadequacies, reduce history to what essentially is an abstract scheme. Secondly, there is the difficulty of working out appropriate ideal-types: the richer and the more illuminating the construct, the greater the difficulty of applying it; the thinner and looser the construct, the less is it able to contribute much to history.⁹⁷

Finally, I would like to suggest that Arnold Toynbee's Study of History might be regarded as a source-book of ideal-types. Toynbee himself has granted that his work was not quite as empirical as he once thought it. At the same time so resolute a critic as Pieter Geyl⁹⁸ has found the work immensely stimulating

96) Marrou, Meaning of History, pp. 167 ff.

97) Ibid., pp. 170 ff.

98) See his criticisms in his Debates with Historians.

and has confessed that such daring and imaginative spirits as Toynbee have an essential function to fulfill.⁹⁹ That function is, I suggest, to provide the materials from which carefully formulated ideal-types might be derived.

Fourthly, does the historian follow some theory of history? By a theory of history I do not mean the application to history of a theory established scientifically, philosophically, or theologically. Such theories have their proper mode of validation; they are to be judged on their own merits; they broaden the historian's knowledge and make his apprehensions more precise; they do not constitute historical knowledge but facilitate its development.

By a theory of history I understand a theory that goes beyond its scientific, philosophic, or theological basis to make statements about the actual course of human events. Such theories are set forth, for instance, by Bruce Mazlish in his discussion of the great speculators from Vico to Freud.¹⁰⁰ They have to be criticized in the light of their scientific, philosophic, or theological basis. In so far as they survive such criticism, they possess the utility of grand-scale ideal-types,¹⁰¹ and may be employed under the precautions

99) P. Gardiner, Theories of History, p. 319.

100) In his The Riddle of History, New York (Harper & Row) 1966.

101) See B. Mazlish, op.cit., p. 447

already indicated for the use of ideal-types. But they never grasp the full complexity of historical reality, and consequently they tend to throw in high relief certain aspects and connections and to disregard others that may be of equal or greater importance. In M. Marrou's phrase "... the most ingenious hypothesis ... underlines in red pencil certain lines lost in a diagram whose thousand curves cross one another in every direction." ¹⁰² General hypotheses, though they have their uses, easily become "... big anti-comprehension machines." ¹⁰³

Fifthly, does the historian explain? On the German distinction between erklären and verstehen, natural scientists explain but historians only understand. However, this distinction is somewhat artificial. Both scientists and historians understand; both communicate the intelligibility that they grasp. The difference lies in the kind of intelligibility grasped and in the manner in which it develops. Scientific intelligibility aims at being an internally coherent system or structure valid in any of a specified set or series of instances. It is expressed in a technical vocabulary, constantly tested by confronting its every implication with data, and adjusted or superseded when it fails to meet the tests. In contrast, historical intelligibility is like the intelligibility reached by common sense. It is the content of a habitual accumulation of insights that, by themselves, are incomplete; they are never applied in any situation without the pause that grasps how

102) Marrou, Meaning of History, p. 200.

103) Ibid., p. 201.

relevant they are and, if need be, adds a few more insights derived from the situation in hand. Such commonsense understanding is like a many purpose adjustable tool, where the number of purposes is enormous, and the adjustment is based on the precise task in hand. Hence, common sense thinks and speaks, proposes and acts, with respect, not to the general, but to the particular and concrete. Its generalities are not principles, relevant to every possible instance, but proverbs saying what may be useful to bear in mind, and commonly rounded out by a contradictory piece of advice. Look before you leap! He who hesitates is lost! ¹⁰⁴

Historical explanation is a sophisticated extension of commonsense understanding. Its aim is an intelligent reconstruction of the past, not in its routines, but in each of its departures from the previous routine, in the interlocked consequences of each departure, in the unfolding of a process that theoretically might but in all probability never will be repeated.

Sixthly, does the historian investigate causes and determine laws? The historian does not determine laws, for the determination of laws is the work of the natural or human scientist. Again, the historian does not investigate causes, where "cause" is taken in a technical sense developed through the advance of the sciences. However, if "cause" is understood in the ordinary language meaning of "Because", then the

104) See Insight, pp. 173-181.

historian does investigate causes; for ordinary language is just the language of common sense, and historical explanation is the expression of the commonsense type of developing understanding. Finally, the problems concerning historical explanation that currently are discussed seem to arise from a failure to grasp the differences between scientific and commonsense developments of human intelligence.¹⁰⁵

Seventhly, is the historian devoted to social and cultural goals, is he subject to bias, is he detached from bias?

The historian may well be devoted to social and cultural goals, but in so far as he is practising the functional specialty, history, his devotion is not proximate but remote. His immediate purpose is to settle what was going forward in the past. If he does his job properly, he will supply the materials which may be employed for promoting social and cultural goals. But he is not likely to do his job properly, if in performing his tasks he is influenced not only by their immanent exigences but also by ulterior motives and purposes.

Accordingly, we are setting up a distinction, parallel in some fashion to Max Weber's distinction between social science and social policy.¹⁰⁶ Social science is an empirical discipline organizing the evidence on group behavior.

105) Mathematical and scientific growth in insight is treated in Insight, chapters one to five; common sense growth in chapters six and seven.

106) Max Weber, Methodology of the Social Sciences, pp. 51 ff.

It has to be pursued in the first instance for its own sake. Only when it has reached its proper term, can it usefully be employed in the construction of effective policies for the attainment of social ends. In somewhat similar fashion our two phases of theology keep apart our encounter with the religious past and, on the other hand, our action in the present on the future.

Next, all men are subject to bias, for a bias is a block or distortion of intellectual development, and such blocks or distortions occur in four principal manners. There is the bias of unconscious motivation brought to light by depth psychology. There is the bias of individual egoism, and the more powerful and blinder bias of group egoism. Finally, there is the general bias of common sense, which is a specialization of intelligence in the particular and concrete, but usually considers itself omniscient. On all of these I have expanded elsewhere, and I may not repeat myself here. ¹⁰⁷

Further, the historian should be detached from all bias. Indeed, he has greater need of such detachment than the scientist, for scientific work is adequately objectified and publicly controlled, but the historian's discoveries accumulate in the manner of the development of common sense, and the only adequate positive control is to have another historian go over the same evidence.

Just how one conceives the achievement of such detachment depends on one's theory of knowledge and of morals. Our

107) Insight, pp. 191-206; pp. 218-244.

formula is a continuous and ever more exacting application of the transcendental precepts, Be attentive, Be intelligent, Be reasonable, Be responsible. However, nineteenth-century empiricists conceived objectivity as a matter of seeing all that's there to be seen and seeing nothing that's not there. Accordingly, they demanded of the historian a pure receptivity that admitted impressions from phenomena but excluded any subjective activity. This is the view that Becker was attacking in his "Detachment and the Writing of History" and again in his "What are Historical Facts?"¹⁰⁸ Later in life, when he had seen relativism at work in its crudest forms, he attacked it and insisted on the pursuit of truth as the primary value.¹⁰⁹ But, as I have noted already, Becker did not work out a complete theory.

Eighthly, is history value-free? History, as a functional specialty, is value-free in the sense already outlined: it is not directly concerned to promote social and cultural goals. It pertains to the first phase of theology which aims at an encounter with the past; the more adequate that encounter, the more fruitful it can prove to be; but one is not pursuing a specialty, when one attempts to do it and something quite different at the same time. Further, social and cultural goals are incarnated values; they are subject to the distortions of bias; and so concern for social and cultural goals can exercise not only a disturbing but even a distorting influence on historical investigation.

108) Becker, Detachment, pp. 3-28; pp. 41-64.

109) Smith, Carl Becker, p. 117.

Further, history is value-free in the further sense that it is a functional specialty that aims at settling matters of fact by appealing to empirical evidence. Now value-judgments neither settle matters of fact nor constitute empirical evidence. In that respect, then, history once more is value-free.

Finally, history is not value-free in the sense that the historian refrains from all value-judgments. For the functional specialties, while they concentrate on the end proper to one of the four levels of conscious and intentional activity, none the less are the achievement of operations on all four levels. The historian ascertains matters of fact, not by ignoring data, by failing to understand, by omitting judgments of value, but by doing all of these for the purpose of settling matters of fact.¹¹⁰

In fact, the historian's value-judgments are precisely the means that make his work a selection of things that are worth knowing, that, in Meinecke's phrase, enables history to be "the content, the wisdom, and the signposts of our lives."¹¹¹ Nor is this influence of value-judgments an intrusion of subjectivity. There are true and there are false value-judgments. The former are objective in the sense that they result from a moral self-transcendence. The latter are subjective in the sense that they represent a failure to effect moral self-transcendence. False value-judgments are an intrusion of subjectivity. True value-judgments are the achievement of a moral objectivity, of an objectivity that,

110) See Meinecke's essay in Stern, Varieties, pp. 267-288.

111) Ibid., p. 272.

so far from being opposed to the objectivity of true judgments of fact, presupposes them and completes them by adding to mere cognitional self-transcendence a moral self-transcendence.

However, if the historian makes value-judgments, still that is not his specialty. The task of passing judgments on the values and disvalues offered us by the past pertains to the further specialties of dialectic and foundations.

Finally, do historians believe? They do not believe in the sense that critical history is not a compilation of testimonies regarded as credible. But they believe in the sense that they cannot experiment with the past as natural scientists can experiment on natural objects. They believe in the sense that they cannot have before their eyes the realities of which they speak. They believe in the sense that they depend on one another's critically evaluated work and participate in an ongoing collaboration for the advance of knowledge.

8. Science and Scholarship

I wish to propose a convention. Let the term, science, be reserved for knowledge that is contained in principles and laws and either is verified universally or else is revised. Let the term, scholarship, be employed to denote the learning that consists in a commonsense grasp of the commonsense thought, speech, action of distant places and/or times. Men of letters, linguists, exegetes, historians generally would be named, not scientists, but scholars. It would be understood, however,

that a man might be both a scientist and scholar. He might apply contemporary science to an understanding of ancient history, or he might draw on historical knowledge to enrich contemporary theory.