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5 Perspectivism

The point to perspectivism is that the historian never reproduces the total interconnections of events as they occur. Any history and every history always will be incomplete and approximate. Because of the finitude of the historian's information, the probable character of his interconnections, the limitations of his approach and so on, you are going to have the same thing rehandled in different fashion by different historians. Those differences are not the sort of differences that the discovery of further data is going to remove. It is the permanent limitation of history. On that, there are various turns and aspects to it, but that is the fundamental point in this section. The point to it is, of course, not to be surprised that the tastes in history writing change. Does this show that the historians are wrong? No. You can give two accounts from different perspectives and neither contradicts the other. It is something distinct from relativism.

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 the many canditates 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.

Of these four elements, it was the first that occasioned the crisis. Around 1900, historians, while they emphasized the danger of subjective bias, assumed that the object of history was stably given and unequivocally structured. Man's opinions about the past may keep changing but the past itself remains what it was. In contrast, Heussi himself

[1] 23 June 1970, part 2; audio may be found at 60500A0E070.

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.

While this statement has idealist implications, at least Heussi did not wish it to be interpreted too strictly. I am pointing to these philosophic difficulties in the earlier writers and on the present occasion and also later, because it is important to grasp that you can't work out a method of history independently of any philosophy; it is always going to be there, a right one or a wrong one. Don't listen to anyone say: well, let's do what we do. Just doing that has revealed that you need philosophy to correct the errors clearly.

Heussi 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. On the other hand, where different worldviews and values are involved, one can expect agreement on single incidents and single complexes, but disagreement on larger issues and broader interconnections.

There is, however, a more fundamental qualification to be added. Heussi's basic point is that historical reality is 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 October 16-19, 1813, what happened in four days. Inevitably the historian selects what he thinks of moment and omits what he considers unimportant. This is very similar to the passage I quoted from Becker; it is not a quote but a paraphrase. 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. So: what are the historians doing?

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 concerns, 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 change to give rise to a demand for and a supply of rewritten history. So excellent historical works, composed in the final decades of the nineteenth century, had lost all appeal by the 1930s, even among readers that happened to be in full agreement with the religious, theological, political, and social views of the older authors. There is the change with time.

The reason why the historian cannot escape his time and place is that the development of historical understanding does not admit systematic objectification. You can set down precisely what is meant by the periodic table, or what is meant by quantum theory, and every term is precisely defined. But you can't do that with the whole mentality that the historian has developed in his whole lifetime, which is what he is using when he is writing history. 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 transcendental 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. We don't objectify the assumptions guiding us in day-to-day living. We just live them. 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. 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.

I remember when I was doing my thesis the first chapter I brought along to the director he remarked: one cannot go up and down all the staircases that one comes across in an investigation.

In saying that the historian cannot escape his background, I am not suggesting that he cannot overcome individual, group, or general bias, 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 own 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 one another and so move on from diverging to converging views on the past. 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 philosophical knowledge. It does not lock historians up in their backgrounds, confine them to their biases, deny them access to developments 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 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 on ongoing process, to that gradual conquest that discovers ever new ways to make potential evidence into formal and eventually actual evidence. 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. The historian is making intelligible within his horizon a segment of the past, but what his horizon is in all its details we do not know and never will know; even if he wrote an autobiography we wouldn't get a complete report on all his life and all the influences on it. If we did we wouldn't be able to do anything much about it or with it. In brief, the process of selection is not subject to objectified controls either in itself or in its initial conditions.

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, and (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. It is said of *Wuthering Heights* that the place names are English but the scene is laid in Hell. Secondly, all historical narratives have to be compatible with one another and tend to form a single view. Novels need not be compatible and do not

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.

On the other hand, history differs from natural science, for its object is in part constituted by meaning and value, 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, according to all the implications of the system, 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, not just one, or a few, or a system.

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. We still have them with us. They are trying to make the historians do sociology and establish general laws. 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 then 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. As one historian said, if we only knew Tacitus's sources we would know so much about Tacitus.

6 Horizons

This is the question whether the historian operates in the light of a priori views, quite independent of historical evidence, that guide what he will consider evidence.

Sir Lewis Namier has described a historical sense as 'an intuitive understanding of how things do not happen.' 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. This witness says that there occurred a miracle, miracles can't happen, therefore he must have been either emotionally excited or of poor memory, or self-deceived. 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. The witnesses don't count.

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 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. That is Charlotte Smith's book, *Carl Becker: On History and the Climate of Opinion*. The climate of opinion provides the historian with his preconceptions. 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.

This open acknowledgment 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.

You will notice, then, that this business of the historian's horizon opens the way to a dialectic in which we discuss historians and their preconceptions in the next section.

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, refashion

oneself, convert. 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; he already has a world mediated by meaning, and his historical study is extending that world. His historical questions, in great part, regard matters of detail. But even they can involve 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. There was no detachment there. They knew quite well that no amount of testimony can establish about the past what is not found in the present. 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. If intelligibility for you means that there can't be miracles, that natural laws are necessities that cannot be violated, then a past containing miracles is an impossibility. Miracles are excluded because they are contrary to the laws of nature that in this 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. And he mentions Arthur ? who was

interested in the spiritualist phenomena at the time – no, it was the British man concerned with archaeology – anyway he was interested in spiritism and if they wrote of spirits in his world. But this is Becker. He can think things out very clearly although he was not a theorist of knowledge.

What holds for question of fact, also holds for questions of interpretation. People will interpret things in a way that makes them intelligible. Religion remains in the twentieth century, he remarks, but it no longer explains medieval asceticism. So monasteries are associated less with the salvation of souls and more with sheltering travelers 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.

So the mentality of the historian affects not only what he can regard as fact, possibility, but also his interpretations.

Becker's contention that historians operate in the light of preconceived ideas implies a rejection of the Enlightenment and Romantic ideal of presuppositionless history. On that point also Gadamer in his *Wahrheit und Methode*. 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 explicitly acknowledge, the historian operates in the light of his whole personal development, and that development does not admit complete and explicit formulation and acknowledgment. To say that the historian should operate without presuppositions is to assert 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, to strip him of his 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.

It was Newman who remarked, apropos of Descartes's 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, and a pluralist society lets them do what they can. But we need not proclaim that they are writing presuppositionless history, when that is something no one can do. We have to recognize that the admission of history written in the light of preconceived ideas may result in different notions of history, different methods of historical investigation, incompatible standpoints, and irreconcilable histories.

In other words, historical work leads on to a further functional specialty, dialectic, in which you deal with these preconceptions, insofar as is possible.

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 further differences once incompatible histories have been written.

But the mere acknowledgment 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.

Perspectivism, then, reveals that you have different histories not from any error on anyone's part but simply because any history is incomplete and approximate. But horizons bring us to the total mentality of the historian as something that is not under

control and yet does govern the acknowledgment of facts and the interpretations given to facts.

7 Heuristic Structures

In this final section entitled ‘Heuristic Structures,’ we raise a series of particular questions. 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 from bias? Is history value-free, or is it concerned with values? Do historians know or do they believe? These are a whole series of questions that can be discussed at some length, and we will say something on each one.

Such questions are asked. They not only 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, 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 insofar as they occur in historical investigation. It is to be noted that the relevant conditions are conditions of possibility and that the far larger and quite determinate set that in each instance conditions actual 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, with regard to analogy, it is plain that the historian has to employ something like 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 insofar as there is evidence for dissimilarity. Finally, insofar as evidence is produced for dissimilarity, the historian is talking history; but insofar 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*.

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 Laplace's view on the possibility in theory of deducing the 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. 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 acceptable. The basis we would offer would be the 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.

Thirdly, do historians use ideal types? I may note at once that the notion and use of the ideal type or model 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.

M. Marrou took Fustel de Coulanges's *La cité antique* as an ideal type. The city state is conceived as a confederation of the great patriarchial families, assembled in phratries and then in tribes, consolidated by cults regarding ancestors or heroes and practiced 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. Insofar as the historical situation satisfies the conditions of the ideal type, the situation is illuminated. Insofar 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.

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 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.

Incidentally, I would like to suggest that Arnold Toynbee's *A Study of History*, while it is not empirical as Toynbee once thought and later admitted it wasn't, can be

regarded as a source-book for ideal types or for working out more accurate ideal types. Even a person like Peter Geyl, who criticized Toynbee no end, admitted that the work was immensely stimulating and confessed that such daring and imaginative spirits as Toynbee has an essential function to fulfill. What is it? They supply ideal types.

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's *The Riddle of History*, in his discussion of the great speculators from Vico to Freud. They have been criticized in the light of their scientific, philosophic, or theological basis. Insofar as they survive such criticism, they possess the utility of grand-scale ideal types, and may be employed under the precautions 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.' General hypotheses, though they have their uses, easily become '… big anti-comprehension machines,' means to prevent you from understanding anything.

Fifthly, does the historian explain? There is a distinction beginning with Droysen and developed by Dilthey between *erklären*, explain, and *verstehen*, understand, and it was said that while natural science explained, *erklären*, the historian only understood.

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 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 – both good common sense.

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 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 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 – for example, in Patrick Gardiner's *Theories of History* – seem to arise from a failure to grasp the difference between scientific and commonsense developments of human intelligence: the only manifestation of human intelligence is in natural science, so you have to do history as though it were a natural science.

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 insofar as he is practicing 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. Social science is an empirical discipline organizing the evidence on group behavior. 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 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: 'no one in

the group is against it.' Finally, there is the general bias of common sense, which is a specialization of intelligence in the particular and concrete, but usually considers itself omnicompetent. On all of these I have expanded elsewhere, *Insight* chapters 6 and 7.

Further, the historian above all should be detached from all bias. 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 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?' 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. But, as I have noted already, Becker did not work out a complete theory.

I think I had better stop; I'm getting tired. Are there questions?

Question 67: We have been raising the question whether history is a human science in the same way as theology is, that is, with eight functional specializations or is it related to the human sciences more like mathematics is related to the natural sciences, since mathematics itself is not a natural science?

Lonergan: History differs from the sciences insofar as its results are particular; it is a narrative about particular places, persons, times. Scientists give you general laws, system;

that is obvious in the natural sciences. The human sciences, insofar as they imitate the natural sciences, are quite distinct from history. But insofar as your human sciences start being based on notions like meaning, value, and so on, they have philosophic presuppositions; they get sucked into a philosophy. The weakness of the German *Geisteswissenschaften*, which insist on all this, and are something totally different from the behaviorists – what is cognate to the German *Geisteswissenschaften* is The New School of Social Research or the phenomenological influence you have at Northwestern. There you are being involved in philosophy, and you can very easily be involved in philosophic mistakes, so the scientific tendency is away from it. On the other hand, it is a far richer approach, and it is content to say that there are no real laws in history, that history is an ongoing process and that you get laws only when you get a culture that is totally static. Now, history as a functional specialty in theology is using the techniques of history within the work of a theologian. The big problem in theology, in this century, is this development of history in the 19th Century, as applied to scripture study, patristic study, medieval study, and so on. Prior to that invasion of theology by historical techniques, the dogmatic theologian was supposed to establish his theses from the Old Testament and the New, and the Fathers, and the Scholastics, and so on, as though it were possible to be competent in all these areas; the development of history has destroyed that possibility and demanded that this theology rethink its business. That is why we are finding out, setting down clearly, just what history is so that the theologian will be able to do his own historical work in the light of a philosophic criticism. Because history as it is presented generally: as I quoted Ebeling, there is no theoretically acceptable account of critical history, critical historical method. Well, we have to have one if we are going to admit history into theology, and that is what we are concerned with.

Question 68: It seems that things like a Catholic sociology, psychology, would also be human sciences in the same way that theology is a science and that in some way history would be a functional specialty in that structure?

Lonergan: Certainly, certainly: If the sociologist is not going to be content with the present moment he is going to be doing some sort of history. With the psychologists there are case histories.

Question 69: If one regards history as being human science in the same way as that, then you have the problem: history as a functional specialty within history of the human sciences?

Lonergan: We can distinguish. There is basic history that sets up your chronology; there is special history, particular movements, such-and-such a movement: cultural movements, social movements, political movements – the study of the special histories; and then there is the total view which incorporates all the special histories somehow into the basic history. Now the use of history in theology will presuppose the basic history; it won't do that work; it is concerned with special histories but it has to have some sort of general view insofar as it is going to place this religion in relation to other religions and religion generally in human history. But it won't do that general thing; it may influence it; it will have to influence it to have room for itself in it.

Question 70: Would you comment on the distinction between *Verstehen* and insight as you use it?

Lonergan: *Verstehen* is understanding meaning, understanding expressions, understanding a human life, understanding a person's psychology, understanding a group, where the group is heading; it is understanding human affairs. It isn't clearly distinguished from judgment because in Kant you have *Verstand*, the faculty of judgment; as a matter of fact, in Aristotle, his *compositio* and *divisio* is not a satisfactory account of judgment. So in the Aristotelian and Kantian tradition you have an inadequate

account of judgment, of judgment as positing, not as synthesis, but as positing a synthesis, and, consequently, the problems that arise from that.

Insight, as we use the term, is something that is a grasp of a possibly relevant unity or relation in the data. And whether it actually is relevant is a further question that has to be settled by a judgment, a grasp of the unconditioned. So it is not the faculty of judgment; it is grasp of synthesis. And it is this ongoing grasp of synthesis that you have to have if you are to understand either human development or the development of human history or the development of interpretation: that is the key thing.