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CHAPTER EIGHT

HISTORY

The word, history, is employed in two senses. There is history (1) that is written about, and there is history (2) that is written. History (2) aims at expressing knowledge of history (1).

The precise object of historical inquiry and the precise nature of historical investigation are matters of not a little obscurity. This is not because there are no good historians. It is not because good historians have not by and large learnt what to do. It is mainly because historical knowledge is an instance of knowledge, and few people are in possession of a satisfactory cognitional theory.[1]

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1) A similar view has been expressed by Gerhard Ebeling. He considers it unquestionable that modern historical science is still a long way from being able to offer a theoretically unobjectionable account of the critical historical method, and that it needs the cooperation of philosophy to reach that goal. Word and Faith, London: SCM, 1963, p. 49. Originally, "Die Bedeutung der historisch-kritischen Methode," Zschr. f. Theol. u. Kirche, 47(1950), 34.

A more concrete illustration of the matter may be had by reading the Epilegomena in R.G. Collingwood, The Idea of History, Oxford: Clarendon, 1946. The first three sections on Nature and History, The Historical Imagination, and Historical Evidence, are right on the point. The fourth on History as

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1. Nature and History

A first step will be to set forth the basic differences between history and natural science, and we shall begin from a few reflections on time.

One can think of time in connection with such questions as what is the time, what is the date, how soon, how long ago. On that basis one arrives at the Aristotelian definition that time is the number or measure determined by the successive equal stages of a local movement. It is a number when one answers three o'clock or January 26, 1969. It is a measure when one answers three hours or 1969 years. One can push this line of thought further by asking whether there is just one time for the universe or, on the other hand, there are as many distinct times as there are distinct local movements. Now on the Ptolemaic system there did exist a single standard time for the universe, since the outmost of the celestial spheres, the primum mobile, contained the material universe and was the first source of all local movement. With the acceptance of the Copernican theory, there vanished the primum mobile, but there remained a single standard time, a survival Newton explained by distinguishing true and apparent motion and by conceiving true motion as relative to absolute space and absolute time. Finally, with Einstein, Newton's absolute time vanished, and there

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Re-enactment is complicated by the problems of idealism.

See ibid., Editor's Preface, pp. vii-xx. See also Alan Donagan, The Later Philosophy of R. G. Collingwood, Oxford: Clarendon, 1962.

emerged as many standard times as there are inertial reference frames that are in relative motion.[2]

Now the foregoing notion of time certainly is of great importance to the historian, for he has to date his events. It is not, however, an adequate account of what time is, for it is limited to counting, measuring, and relating to one another in a comprehensive view all possible instances of such counting and measuring. Moreover, it is this aspect of time that suggests the image of time as a raceway of indivisible instants, an image that little accords with our experience of time.

Fortunately, besides questions about time that are answered by numbers and measurements, there is a further different set concerned with "now". Aristotle asked whether there is a succession of "now's" or just a single "now". He answered with a comparison. Just as "time" is the measure of the movement, so the "now" corresponds to the body that is moving. In so far as there is succession, there is difference in the "now". But underpinning such differences is the identity of the substratum.[3]

Now this advertence to the identity of the substratum, to the body that is moving, removes from one's notion of time the total extrinsicism of each moment from the next. No doubt,

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2) More on this topic in Insight, pp. 155-158.

3) Aristotle, Physics, V, II, 219b 12.

each successive moment is different, but in the difference there is also an identity.

With this clue we may advance to our experience of time. There is succession in the flow of conscious and intentional acts; there is identity in the conscious subject of the acts; there may be either identity or succession in the object intended by the acts. Analysis may reveal that what actually is visible is a succession of different profiles; but experience reveals that what is perceived is the synthesis (Gestalt) of the profiles into a single object. Analysis may reveal that the sounds produced are a succession of notes and chords; but experience reveals that what is heard is their synthesis into a melody. There results what is called the psychological present, which is not an instant, a mathematical point, but a time-span, so that our experience of time is, not of a raceway of instants, but a now leisurely, a now rapid succession of overlapping time-spans. The time of experience is slow and dull, when the objects of experience change slowly and in expected ways. But time becomes a whirligig, when the objects of experience change rapidly and in novel and unexpected ways.

Whether slow and broad or rapid and short, the psychological present reaches into its past by memories and into its future by anticipations. Anticipations are not merely of the prospective objects of our fears and our desires but also the shrewd estimate of the man of experience or the rigorously calculated forecast of applied science. Again, besides the memories of each individual, there are the pooled memories of

the group, their celebration in song and story, their preservation in written narratives, in coins and monuments and every other trace of the group's words and deeds left to posterity. Such is the field of historical investigation.

Now the peculiarity of this field resides in the nature of individual and group action. It has both a conscious and an unconscious side. Apart from neurosis and psychosis the conscious side is in control. But the conscious side consists in the flow of conscious and intentional acts that we have been speaking of since our first chapter. What differentiates each of these acts from the others lies in the manifold meanings of meaning set forth in chapter three. Meaning, then, is a constitutive element in the conscious flow that is the normally controlling side of human action. It is this constitutive role of meaning in the controlling side of human action that grounds the peculiarity of the historical field of investigation.

Now meaning may regard the general or the universal, but most human thought and speech and action are concerned with the particular and the concrete. Again, there are structural and material invariants to meaning, but there also are changes that affect the manner in which the carriers of meaning are employed, the elements of meaning are combined, the functions of meaning are distinguished and developed, the realms of meaning are extended, the stages of meaning blossom forth, meet resistance, compromise, collapse. Finally, there are the further vicissitudes of meaning as common meaning. For

meaning is common in the measure that community exists and functions, in the measure that there is a common field of experience, common and complementary understanding, common judgments or at least an agreement to disagree, common and complementary commitments. But people can get out of touch, misunderstand one another, hold radically opposed views, commit themselves to conflicting goals. Then common meaning contracts, becomes confined to banalities, moves towards ideological warfare.

It is in this field of meaningful speech and action that the historian is engaged. It is not, of course, the historian's but the exegete's task to determine what was meant. The historian envisages a quite different object. He is not content to understand what people meant. He wants to grasp what was going forward in particular groups at particular places and times. By "going forward" I mean to exclude the mere repetition of a routine. I mean the change that originated the routine and its dissemination. I mean process and development but, no less, decline and collapse. When things turn out unexpectedly, pious people say, "Man proposes but God disposes". The historian is concerned to see how God disposed the matter, not by theological speculation, not by some world-historical dialectic, but through particular human agents. In literary terms history is concerned with the drama of life, with what results through the characters, their decisions, their actions, and not only because of them but also because of their defects, their oversights, their failures to act. In military terms history is concerned, not just with the opposing commanders'

plans of the battle, not just with the experiences of the battle had by each soldier and officer, but with the actual course of the battle as the resultant of conflicting plans now successfully and now unsuccessfully executed. In brief, where exegesis is concerned to determine what a particular person meant, history is concerned to determine what, in most cases, contemporaries do not know. For, in most cases, contemporaries do not know what is going forward, first, because experience is individual while the data for history lie in the experiences of many, secondly, because the actual course of events results not only from what people intend but also from their oversights, mistakes, failures to act, thirdly, because history does not predict what will happen but reaches its conclusions from what has happened and, fourthly, because history is not merely a matter of gathering and testing all available evidence but also involves a number of interlocking discoveries that bring to light the significant issues and operative factors.

So the study of history differs from the study of physical, chemical, biological nature. There is a difference in their objects, for the objects of physics, chemistry, biology are not in part constituted by acts of meaning. There is similarity inasmuch as both types of study consist in an ongoing process of cumulative discoveries, that is, of original insights, of original acts of understanding, where by "insight", "act of understanding" is meant a prepropositional, preverbal, preconceptual event, in the sense that propositions, words, concepts express the content of the event and so do not precede

it but follow from it. There is, however, a difference in the expression of the respective sets of discoveries. The discoveries of physics, chemistry, biology are expressed in universal systems and are refuted if they are found to be incompatible with a relevant particular instance. But the discoveries of the historian are expressed in narratives and descriptions that regard particular persons, places, and times. They have no claim to universality: they could, of course, be relevant to the understanding of other persons, places, times; but whether in fact they are relevant, and just how relevant they are, can be settled only by a historical investigation of the other persons, places, and times. Finally, because they have no claim to universality, the discoveries of the historians are not verifiable in the fashion proper to the natural sciences; in history verification is parallel to the procedures by which an interpretation is judged correct.

Let us now turn to such human sciences as psychology and sociology. Two cases arise. These sciences may be modelled on the procedures of the natural sciences. In so far as this approach is carried out rigorously, meaning in human speech and action is ignored, and the science regards only the unconscious side of human process. In this case the relations between history and human science are much the same as the relations between history and natural science. However, there is much psychology and sociology that does recognize meaning as a constitutive and normally controlling element in human action. To their study the historian leaves all that is

the repetition of routine in human speech and action and all that is universal in the genesis, development, breakdown of routines. Moreover, the more psychology and sociology the historian knows, the more he will increase his interpretative powers. Conversely, the greater the achievements of historians, the broader will be the field of evidence on human speech and action that has been opened up for psychological and sociological investigation.[4]

2. Historical Experience and Historical Knowledge

I conceive human knowing to be, not just experiencing, but a compound of experiencing, understanding, and judging. Hence if there is historical knowledge, there must be historical experience, historical understanding, and historical judging. Our present aim is to say something about historical experience and then something about the thought process from historical experience to written history.

Already there has been described the subject in time. He is identical, ever himself. But his conscious and intentional acts keep shifting in one way or another to make his "now" slip

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4) For an extensive anthology and a twenty-page bibliography on the foregoing and related topics, see Patrick Gardiner, editor, Theories of History, New York: Free Press, and London: Collier Macmillan, 1959. Where authors there diverge from the present approach, I think the reader will find the root difference to lie in cognitional theory.

out of the past and into the future, while the field of objects that engage his attention may change greatly or slightly, rapidly or slowly. Not only is the subject's psychological present not an instant but a time-span but in it the subject may be reaching into the past by memories, stories, history and into the future by anticipations, estimates, forecasts.

Now it is sometimes said that man is a historical being. The meaning of the statement may be grasped most vividly by a thought experiment. Suppose a man suffers total amnesia. He no longer knows who he is, fails to recognize relatives and friends, does not recall his commitments or his lawful expectations, does not know where he works or how he makes his living, and has lost even the information needed to perform his once customary tasks. Obviously, if he is to live, either the amnesia has to be cured, or else he must start all over. For our pasts have made us whatever we are and on that capital we have to live or else we must begin afresh. Not only is the individual an historical entity, living off his past, but the same holds for the group. For, if we suppose that all members in the group suffer total amnesia, there will be as total a collapse of all group functioning as there is in each individual in the group. Groups too live on their past, and their past, so to speak, lives on in them. The present functioning of the good of order is what it is mostly because of past functioning and only slightly because of the minor efforts now needed to keep things going and, when possible, improve them. To start completely afresh would be to revert to a very distant age.

Now I am not offering a medical account of amnesia. I am simply attempting to portray the significance of the past in the present and, thereby, to communicate what is meant by saying that man is a historical being. But being historical is the history that is written about. It may be named, if considered interiorly, an existential history — the living tradition which formed us and thereby brought us to the point where we began forming ourselves.[5] This tradition includes at least individual and group memories of the past, stories of exploits and legends about heroes, in brief, enough of history for the group to have an identity as a group and for individuals to make their several contributions towards maintaining and promoting the common good of order. But from this rudimentary history, contained in any existential history, any living tradition, we must now attempt to indicate the series of steps by which one may, in thought, move towards the notion of scientific history.[6]

In general it is a process of objectification, and we

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5) For a contemporary reaction against the destructive aspects of the Enlightenment and a rehabilitation of tradition as the condition of the possibility of an interpretation, see H.G. Gadamer, Wahrheit und Methode, pp. 250-290.

6) It is from the vécu to the thématique, from the existenziell to the existenzial, from exercite to signate, from the fragmentarily experienced to the methodically known.

shall begin from the simpler instances of autobiography and biography before going on to the more complex matter of history which regards groups.

Towards an autobiography, a first step is a diary. Day by day one records, not every event that occurred -- one has other things to do—but what seems important, significant, exceptional, new. So one selects, abbreviates, sketches, alludes. One omits most of what is too familiar to be noticed, too obvious to be mentioned, too recurrent to be thought worth recording.

Now as the years pass and the diary swells, retrospect lengthens. What once were merely remote possibilities, now have been realized. Earlier events, thought insignificant, prove to have been quite important, while others, thought important, turn out to have been quite minor. Omitted earlier events have to be recalled and inserted both to supply the omitted context of the earlier period and to make later events more intelligible. Earlier judgments, finally, have to be complemented, qualified, corrected. But if all this is attempted, one has shifted from keeping a diary to writing one's memoirs. One enlarges one's sources from the diary to add to the diary all the letters and other material one can acquire. One ransacks one's memory. One asks questions and to meet them one starts reconstructing one's past in one's imagination, depicting to oneself now this now that former Sitz im Leben, to find answers and then ask the further questions that arise from these answers. As in interpretation, so here too there gradually are built up contexts, limited nests of questions

and answers, each bearing on some multi-faceted but determinate topic. In this fashion the old, day-by-day,organization of the diary becomes quite irrelevant. Much that had been overlooked now has been restored. What had merely been juxtaposed now is connected. What had been dimly felt and remembered now stands in sharp relief within perhaps hitherto unsuspected perspectives. There has emerged a new organization that distinguishes periods by broad differences in one's mode of living, in one's dominant concern, in one's tasks and problems, and in each period distinguishes contexts, that is, nests of questions and answers bearing on distinct but related topics. The periods determine the sections, the topics determine the chapters of one's autobiography.

Biography aims at much the same goal but has to follow a different route. The autobiographer recounts what "I saw, heard, remembered, anticipated, imagined, felt, gathered, judged, decided, did...." In the biography, statements shift to the third person. Instead of stating what is remembered or has been recalled, the biographer has to do research, gather evidence, reconstruct in imagination each successive Sitz im Leben, ask determinate concrete questions, and so build up his set of periods each containing a larger or smaller set of related contexts. In the main there are three main differences between autobiography and biography. The biographer is free from the embarrassment that may trouble an autobiographer in his self-revelation. The biographer may appeal to later events that put in a new light the judgments, decisions, deeds of his subject,

Note for printer: I shall henceforth let the second hyphen stand; it means that the hyphen remains even when the word is not divided.

to reveal him to be more or less profound, wise, far-sighted, astute than one otherwise would have thought. Finally, since the biographer has to make his subject intelligible to a later generation, he has to write not just a "life" but rather a "life and times".

While in biography the "times" are a subordinate clarification of the "life", in history this perspective is reversed. Attention is centered on the common field that, in part, is explored in each of the biographies that are or might be written. Still this common field is not just an area in which biographies might overlap. There is social and cultural process. It is not just a sum of individual words and deeds. There exists a developing and/or deteriorating unity constituted by cooperations, by institutions, by personal relations, by a functioning and/or malfunctioning good of order, by a communal realization of originating and terminal values and disvalues. With such processes we live out our lives. About them each of us ordinarily is content to learn enough to attend to his own affairs and perform his public duties. To seek a view of the actual functioning of the whole or of a notable part over a significant period of time is the task of the historian.

As the biographer, so too the historian proceeds ~~from~~ (1) from the data made available by research, (2) through imaginative reconstruction and cumulative questioning and answering, (3) towards related sets of limited contexts. But now the material basis is far larger in extent, far more

complex, more roundabout in relevance. The center of interest has shifted from the individual to the group, from private to public life, from the course of a single life to the course of the affairs of a community. The range of relevant topics has increased enormously and, on many, specialized knowledge may be a necessary prerequisite to undertaking historical investigation. Finally, history itself becomes a specialty; historians become a professional class; the field of historical investigation is divided and subdivided; and the results of investigations are communicated in congresses and accumulated in periodicals and books.

3. Critical History

A first step towards understanding critical history lies in an account of precritical history. For it, then, the community is the conspicuous community, one's own. Its vehicle is narrative, an ordered recital of events. It recounts who did what, when, where, under what circumstances, from what motives, with what results. Its function is practical: a group can function as a group only by possessing an identity, knowing itself and devoting itself to the cause, at worst, of its survival, at best, of its betterment. The function of precritical history is to promote such knowledge and devotion. So it is never just a narrative of bald facts. It is artistic: it selects, orders, describes; it would awaken the reader's interest and sustain it; it would persuade and convince. Again, it is ethical: it not only narrates but also apportions praise

and blame. It is explanatory: it accounts for existing institutions by telling of their origins and development and by contrasting them with alternative institutions found in other lands. It is apologetic, correcting false or tendentious accounts of the people's past, and refuting the calumnies of neighboring peoples. Finally, it is prophetic: to hindsight about the past there is joined foresight on the future and there are added the recommendations of a man of wide reading and modest wisdom.

Now such precritical history, even purged of its defects, though it might well meet very real needs in the functional specialty, communications, at least does not qualify as the functional specialty, history. For that specialty, while it operates on the four levels of experiencing, understanding, judging, and deciding, still operates on the other three with a principal concern for judging, for settling matters of fact. It is not concerned with the highly important educational task of communicating to fellow citizens or fellow churchmen a proper appreciation of their heritage and a proper devotion to its preservation, development, dissemination. It is concerned to set forth what really happened or, in Ranke's perpetually quoted phrase, wie es eigentlich gewesen. Finally, unless this work is done in detachment, quite apart from political or apologetic aims, it is attempting to serve two masters and usually suffers the evangelical consequences.[7]

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7) See, for example, G.P. Gooch, History and Historians in the Nineteenth Century, London: Longmans, [1]1913, [2]1952, Chapter Eight on the Prussian School.

Next, this work is not just a matter of finding testimonies, checking them for credibility, and stringing together what has been found credible. It is not just that, because historical experience is one thing and historical knowledge is quite another. The string of credible testimonies merely re-edits historical experience. It does not advance to historical knowledge which grasps what was going forward, what, for the most part, contemporaries did not know. Many early Christians may have had a fragmentary experience of the manner in which the elements in the synoptic gospels were formed; but Rudolf Bultmann was concerned to set forth the process as a whole and, while he found his evidence in the synoptic gospels, still that evidence did not presuppose belief in the truth of the evangelists' statements.[8]

Thirdly, only a series of discoveries can advance the historian from the fragmentary experiences, that are the source of his data, to knowledge of a process as a whole. Like a detective confronted with a set of clues that at first leave him baffled, the historian has to discover in the clues, piece by piece, the evidence that will yield a convincing account of what happened.

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8) R. Bultmann, Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht (4) 1958. The first edition was in 1921. On the same topic, I. de la Potterie, (ed.) De Jésus aux Évangiles, Gembloux: Duculot, 1967, where Formgeschichte plays an intermediate role between Traditionsgeschichte and Redaktionsgeschichte.

Since the evidence has to be discovered, a distinction has to be drawn between potential, formal, and actual evidence. Potential evidence is any datum, here and now perceptible. Formal evidence is such a datum in so far as it is used in asking and answering a question for historical intelligence. Actual evidence is a formal evidence invoked in arriving at a historical judgment. In other words, data as perceptible are potential evidence; data as perceptible and understood are formal evidence; data as perceptible, as understood, and as grounding a reasonable judgment are actual evidence.

What starts the process is the question for historical intelligence. With regard to some defined situation in the past one wants to understand what was going forward. Clearly, any such question presupposes some historical knowledge. Without it, one would not know of the situation in question, nor would one know what was meant by "going forward". History, then, grows out of history. Critical history was a leap forward from precritical history. Precritical history was a leap forward from stories and legends. Inversely, the more history one knows, the more data lie in one's purview, the more questions one can ask, and the more intelligently one can ask them.

The question for historical intelligence is put in the light of previous knowledge and with respect to some particular datum. It may or may not lead to an insight into that datum. If it does not, one moves on to a different question. If it does, the insight is expressed in a surmise, the surmise is represented imaginatively, and the image leads to a further related question. This process may or may not be recurrent. If it is not, one has

come a dead end and must try another approach. If it is recurrent, and all one attains is a series of surmises, then one is following a false trail and once more must try another approach. But if one's surmises are coincident with further data or approximate to them, one is on the right track. The data are ceasing to be merely potential evidence; they are becoming formal evidence; one is discovering what the evidence might be.

Now if one is on the right track long enough, there occurs a shift in the manner of one's questioning for, more and more, the further questions come from the data rather than from images based on surmises. One still has to do the questioning. One still has to be alert. But one has moved out of the assumptions and perspectives one had prior to one's investigation. One has attained sufficient insight into the object of one's inquiry to grasp something of the assumptions and perspectives proper to that object. And this grasp makes one's approach to further data so much more congenial that the further data suggest the further questions to be put. To describe this feature of historical investigation, let us say that the cumulative process of datum, question, insight, surmise, image, formal evidence, is ecstatic. It is not the hot ecstasy of the devotee but the cool one of growing insight. It takes one out of oneself. It sets aside earlier assumptions and perspectives by bringing to light the assumptions and perspectives proper to the object under investigation.

The same process is selective, constructive, and critical. It is selective: not all data are promoted from the

status of potential evidence to the status of formal evidence. It is constructive: for the selected data are related to one another through an interconnected set of questions and answers or, expressed alternatively, by a series of insights that complement one another, correct one another, and eventually coalesce into a single view of a whole. Finally, it is critical: for insights not only are direct but also inverse. By direct insight one grasps how things fit together, and one murmurs one's "Eureka". By inverse insight one is prompted to exclaim, How could I have been so stupid as to take for granted.... One sees that things are not going to fit and, eventually, by a direct insight one grasps that some item fits not in this context but in some other. So a text is discovered to have been interpolated or mutilated. So the pseudo-Dionysius is extradited from the first century and relocated at the end of the fifth: he quoted Proclus. So an esteemed writer comes under suspicion: the source of his information has been discovered; in whole or in part, without independent confirmation, he is used not as evidence for what he narrates but in the roundabout fashion that rests on his narrating — his intentions, readers, methods, omissions, mistakes.[9]

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9) Note that word, critical, has two quite different meanings. In precritical history it means that one has tested the credibility of one's authorities before believing them. In critical history it means that one has shifted data from one field of relevance to another. On this topic R.G. Collingwood is brilliant and convincing. See his two studies, "The

Now I have been attributing to a single process of developing understanding a whole series of different functions. It is heuristic, for it brings to light the relevant data. It is ecstatic, for it leads the inquirer out of his original perspectives and into the perspectives proper to his object. It is selective, for out of a totality of data it selects those relevant to the understanding achieved. It is critical, for it removes from one use or context to another the data that might otherwise be thought relevant to present tasks. It is constructive, for the data that are selected are knotted together by the vast and intricate web of interconnecting links that cumulatively came to light as one's understanding progressed.

Now it is the distinguishing mark of critical history that this process occurs twice. In the first instance one is coming to understand one's sources. In the second instance one is using one's understood sources intelligently to come to understand the object to which they are relevant. In both cases the development of understanding is heuristic, ecstatic, selective, critical, constructive. But in the first case one is identifying authors, locating them and their work in place and time, studying the milieu, ascertaining their purposes in writing and their prospective readers, investigating their sources of information and the use they made of them. In a previous section on Interpretation we spoke of understanding the author, but there the ulterior aim was to understand what

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Historical Imagination" and "Historical Evidence", in The Idea of History, Oxford: Clarendon, 1946, pp. 231-282.

he meant. In history we also seek to understand the authors of sources, but now the ulterior aim is to understand what they were up to and how they did it. It is this understanding that grounds the critical use of sources, the fine discrimination that distinguishes an author's strength and weaknesses and uses him accordingly. Once this is achieved, one is able to shift one's attention to one's main objective, namely, to understanding the process referred to in one's sources. Where before one's developing understanding was heuristic, ecstatic, selective, critical, constructive in determining what authors were up to, now it is heuristic, ecstatic, selective, critical, and constructive in determining what was going forward in the community.

Needless to say, the two developments are interdependent. Not only does understanding the authors contribute to understanding the historical events, but in coming to understand the events there arise questions that may lead to a revision of one's understanding of the authors and, consequently, to a revision of one's use of them.

Again, while each new insight uncovers evidence, moves one away from previous perspectives, selects or rejects data as relevant or irrelevant, and adds to the picture that is being constructed, still what gains attention is, not each single insight, but the final insight in each cumulative series. It is such final insights that are called discoveries. With them the full force of the cumulative series breaks forth and, as the cumulation has a specific direction and meaning, discoveries

now are of the new evidence, now of a new perspective, now of a different selection or critical rejection in the data, now of ever more complicated structures.

So far we have been thinking of structuring as the intelligible pattern grasped in the data and relating the data to one another. But there is a further aspect to the matter. For what is grasped by understanding in data, also is expressed by understanding in concepts and words. So from the intelligible pattern grasped in the data, one moves to the intelligible pattern expressed in the narrative. At first, the narrative is simply the inquirer mumbling his surmises to himself. As surmises less and less are mere surmises, as more and more they lead to the uncovering of further evidence, there begin to emerge trails, linkages, interconnected wholes. As the spirit of inquiry catches every failure to understand, as it brings to attention what is not yet understood and, as a result, is so easily overlooked, one of the interconnected wholes will advance to the role of a dominant theme running through other interconnected wholes that thereby become subordinate themes. As the investigation progresses and the field of data coming under control broadens, not only will the organization in terms of dominant and subordinate themes keep extending, but also there will emerge ever higher levels of organization. So among dominant themes there will emerge dominant topics to leave other dominant themes just subordinate topics; and the fate of dominant themes awaits most of the dominant topics, as the process of organization keeps moving, not only over more territory, but up to ever higher levels of organization.

It is not to be thought that this process of advancing organization is a single uniform progress. There occur discoveries that complement and correct previous discoveries and so, as understanding changes, the organization also must change. Themes and topics become more exactly conceived and more happily expressed. The range of their dominance may be extended or curtailed. Items once thought of major interest can slip back to less prominent roles and, inversely, other items can mount from relative obscurity to notable significance.

The exact conception and happy expression of themes and topics are matters of no small moment. For they shape the further questions that one will ask and it is those further questions that lead to further discoveries. Nor is this all. Part by part, historical investigations come to a term. They do so when there have been reached the set of insights that hit all nails squarely on the head. They are known to do so when the stream of further questions on a determinate theme or topic gradually diminishes and finally dries up. The danger of inaccurate or unhappy conception and formulation is that either the stream of questions may dry up prematurely or else that it may keep flowing when really there are no further relevant questions.

It follows that the cumulative process of developing understanding not only is heuristic, ecstatic, selective, critical, and constructive but also is reflective and judicial. The understanding that has been achieved on a determinate point can be complemented, corrected, revised, only if further discoveries on that very point can be made. Such discoveries

can be made only if further relevant questions arise. If, in fact, there are no further relevant questions then, in fact, a certain judgment would be true. If, in the light of the historians' knowledge, there are no further relevant questions, then the historian can say that, as far as he knows, the question is closed.

There is, then, a criterion for historical judgment, and so there is a point where formal evidence becomes actual evidence. Such judgments occur repeatedly throughout an investigation, as each minor and then each major portion of the work is completed. But as in natural science, so too in critical history the positive content of judgment aspires to be no more than the best available opinion. This is evident as long as an historical investigation is in process, for later discoveries may force a correction and revision of earlier ones. But what is true of investigations in process, has to be extended to investigations that to all intents and purposes are completed.

For, in the first place, one cannot exclude the possibility that new sources of information will be uncovered and that they will affect subsequent understanding and judgment. So archeological investigations of the ancient Near East complement Old Testament study, the caves of Qumran have yielded documents with a bearing on New Testament studies, while the unpublished writings found at Kenoboskion restrain pronouncements on Gnosticism.

But there is, as well, another source of revision.

It is the occurrence of later events that place earlier events in a new perspective. The outcome of a battle fixes the perspective in which the successive stages of the battle are viewed; military victory in a war reveals the significance of the successive battles that were fought; the social and cultural consequences of the victory and the defeat are the measure of the effects of the war. So, in general, history is an ongoing process. As the process advances, the context within which events are to be understood keeps enlarging. As the context enlarges, perspectives shift.

However, neither of these sources of revision will simply invalidate earlier work competently done. New documents fill out the picture; they illuminate what before was obscure; they shift perspectives; they refute what was venturesome or speculative; they do not simply dissolve the whole network of questions and answers that made the original set of data massive evidence for the earlier account. Again, history is an ongoing process, and so the historical context keeps enlarging. But the effects of this enlargement are neither universal nor uniform. For persons and events have their place in history through one or more contexts, and these contexts may be narrow and brief or broad and enduring with any variety of intermediates. Only inasmuch as a context is still open, or can be opened or extended, do later events throw new light on earlier persons, events, processes. As Karl Heussi put it, it is easier to understand Frederick William III of Prussia than to understand Schleiermacher and, while Nero will

always be Nero, we cannot as yet say the same for Luther.[10]

Besides the judgments reached by a historian in his investigation, there are the judgments passed upon his work by his peers and his successors. Such judgments constitute critical history at the second degree. For they are not mere wholesale judgments of belief or disbelief. They are based on an understanding of how the work was done. Just as the historian, first, with respect to his sources and, then, with respect to the object of his inquiry, undergoes a development of understanding that at once is heuristic, ecstatic, selective, critical, constructive and, in the limit, judicial, so the critics of a historical work undergo a similar development with respect to the work itself. They do so all the more easily and all the more competently, the more the historian has been at pains not to conceal his tracks but to lay all his cards on the table, and the more the critics already are familiar with the field or, at least, with neighboring fields.

The result of such critical understanding of a critical history is, of course, that one can make an intelligent and discriminating use of the criticized historian. One learns where he has worked well. One has spotted his limitations and his weaknesses. One can say where, to the best of present knowledge, he can be relied on, where he must be revised, where he may have to be revised. Just as historians make an intelligent and discriminating use of their sources, so too the professional

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10) Karl Heussi, Die Krisis des Historismus, Tübingen: Mohr, 1932, p. 58.

historical community makes a discriminating use of the works of its own historians.

Early in this section we noted that asking historical questions presupposed historical knowledge and, the greater that knowledge, the more the data in one's purview, the more questions one could ask, and the more intelligently one could ask them. Our consideration has now come full circle, for we have arrived at an account of that presupposed historical knowledge. It is critical history of the second degree. It consists basically in the cumulative works of historians. But it consists actually, not in mere belief in those works, but in a critical appreciation of them. Such critical appreciation is generated by critical book reviews, by the critiques that professors communicate to their students and justify by their explanations and arguments, by informal discussions in common rooms and more formal discussions at congresses.

Critical history of the second degree is a compound. At its base are historical articles and books. On a second level there are critical writings that compare and evaluate the historical writings: these may vary from brief reviews to long studies right up to such a history of the historiography of an issue as Herbert Butterfield's George III & the Historians.[11] Finally, there are the considered opinions of professional historians on historians and their critics—opinions that influence their teaching, their remarks in discussions, their procedures in writing on related topics.

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11) London: Collins, 1957. For a variety of views on the

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Before concluding this section it will be well to recall what precisely has been our aim and concern. Explicitly, it has been limited to the functional specialty, history. There has been excluded all that pertains to the functional specialty, communications. I have no doubt that historical knowledge has to be communicated, not merely to professional historians, but in some measure to all members of the historical community. But before that need can be met, historical knowledge has to be acquired and kept up to date. The present section has been concerned with the prior task. It has been concerned to indicate what set and sequence of operations secure the fulfilment of that task. If it is commonly thought that such a task is all the more likely to be performed well if one comes to it without an axe to grind, at least that has not been my main reason for distinguishing between the functional specialties, history and communications. My main reason has been that they name different tasks performed in quite different manners and, unless their distinction is acknowledged and maintained, there is just no possibility of arriving at an exact understanding of either task.

Again, it is a commonplace for theorists of history

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3 history of historiography, see Carl Becker, "What is Historiography?" The American Historical Review, 44(1938), 20-28; reprinted in Phil L Snyder, (ed.), Detachment and the Writing of History, Essays and Letters of Carl L. Becker, Cornell University Press, 1958.

to struggle with the problems of historical relativism, to note the influence exerted on historical writing by the historian's views on possibility, by his value-judgments, by his Weltanschauung or Fragestellung or Standpunkt. I have omitted any consideration of this matter, not because it is not extremely important, but because it is brought under control, not by the techniques of critical history, but by the techniques of our fourth specialty, dialectic.

The concern, then, of the present section has been strictly limited. It presupposed the historian knew how to do his research and how to interpret the meaning of documents. It left to later specialties certain aspects of the problem of relativism and the great task of revealing the bearing of historical knowledge on contemporary policy and action. It was confined to formulating the set of procedures that, caeteris paribus, yield historical knowledge, to explaining how that knowledge arises, in what it consists, what are its inherent limitations.

If I have been led to adopt the view that the techniques of critical history are unequal to the task of eliminating historical relativism totally, I affirm all the more strongly that they can and do effect a partial elimination. I have contended that critical history is not a matter of believing credible testimonies but of discovering what hitherto had been experienced but not properly known. In that process of discovery I have recognized not only its heuristic, selective, critical, constructive, and judicial aspects, but also an

ecstatic aspect that eliminates previously entertained perspectives and opinions to replace them with the perspectives and views that emerge from the cumulative interplay of data, inquiry, insight, surmise, image, evidence. It is in this manner that critical history of itself moves to objective knowledge of the past, though it may be impeded by such factors as mistaken views on possibility, by mistaken or misleading value-judgments, by an inadequate world-view or standpoint or state of the question.

In brief, this section has been attempting to bring to light the set of procedures that lead historians in various manners to affirm the possibility of objective historical knowledge. Carl Becker, for instance, agreed he was a relativist in the sense that Weltanschauung influences the historian's work, but at the same time maintained that a considerable and indeed increasing body of knowledge was objectively ascertainable.[12] Erich Rothacker correlated Wahrheit with Weltanschauung, granted that they influenced historical thought, but at the same time affirmed the existence of a correctness (Richtigkeit) attached to critical procedures and proper inferences.[13] In a similar

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12) Quoted from Carl Becker, "Review of Maurice Mendelbaum's The Problem of Historical Knowledge," Philosophic Review, 49(1940), 363, by C.W. Smith, Carl Becker: On History and the Climate of Opinion, Cornell University Press, 1956, p. 97.

13) Erich Rothacker, Logik und Systematik der Geisteswissenschaften (Handbuch der Philosophie), Munich and Berlin, 1927, Bonn, 1947, p. 144.

vein Karl Heussi held that philosophic views would not affect critical procedures though they might well have an influence on the way the history was composed;[14] and he advanced that while the relatively simple form, in which the historian organizes his materials, resides not in the enormously complex courses of events but only in the historian's mind, still different historians operating from the same standpoint arrive at the same organization.[15] In like manner, Rudolf Bultmann held that, granted a Fragestellung, critical method led to univocal results.[16] These writers are speaking in various manners of the same reality. They mean, I believe, that there exist procedures that, caeteris paribus, lead to historical knowledge. Our aim and concern in this section has been to indicate the nature of those procedures.

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14) Karl Heussi, Die Krisis des Historismus, Tübingen: Mohr, 1932, p. 63.

15) Ibid., p. 56.

16) Rudolf Bultmann, "Das Problem der Hermeneutik", Zschr. f. Theol. u. Kirche, 47(1950), 64; also Glauben und Verstehen, II, Tübingen: Mohr, 1961, p. 229.