THE IDEA OF HISTORY

R. G. COLLINGWOOD

Revised Edition

WITH

Lectures 1926–1928

EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

JAN VAN DER DUSSEN

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PREFACE

The Idea of History is undoubtedly Collingwood's best-known book. From its appearance in 1946 it has aroused much attention, and in the subsequent discussions on the philosophy of history, as they have developed since the Second World War, it has in fact never failed to play a crucial role. One could even say that its appearance has been a major factor in the revival of the interest in the philosophy of history, a subject formerly usually associated with German philosophers around the turn of the century like Dilthey, Windelband, and Rickert. The many reprints and translations of *The Idea of History* are another indication of its permanent influence.

In this revised edition of *The Idea of History* the original text remains intact. To this has been added, however, new material from Collingwood's unpublished manuscripts, which have only recently become available. In this way it will be possible to study Collingwood's views on the philosophy of history within the context of his main work on the subject.

The original edition of *The Idea of History* had been edited posthumously by his pupil T. M. Knox. The latter added to it a preface in which Collingwood's philosophy of history was put into the wider context of his philosophical views and their development. Subsequent research on Collingwood's philosophy, however, has brought out some important inadequacies of the interpretations given by Knox in his preface. A new introduction was therefore needed, taking into account the research on Collingwood's philosophy of history as it has developed during the subsequent decades.

In this new introduction I explain how the publication of *The Idea of History* has taken shape and also assess the way the book was edited by Knox. This is followed by a short exposition of the reception of *The Idea of History*. Since for a proper assessment of Collingwood's philosophy of history it is necessary to put it into an appropriate context, the development of his ideas on the subject must be considered. In this connection I have also made an attempt to assess the nature of the newly added manuscripts of 1926, 1927, and 1928.

The new and somewhat lengthy introduction to this revised

stands, in such a context, not for a man but for a theory, reigning during a certain period of scientific thought. It is only in so far as Einstein knows that theory, as a fact in the history of science, that he can make an advance upon it. Newton thus lives in Einstein in the way in which any past experience lives in the mind of the historian, as a past experience known as past—as the point from which the development with which he is concerned started—but re-enacted here and now together with a development of itself that is partly constructive or positive and partly critical or negative.

Similarly with any other progress. If we want to abolish capitalism or war, and in doing so not only to destroy them but to bring into existence something better, we must begin by understanding them: seeing what the problems are which our economic or international system succeeds in solving, and how the solution of these is related to the other problems which it fails to solve. This understanding of the system we set out to supersede is a thing which we must retain throughout the work of superseding it, as a knowledge of the past conditioning our creation of the future. It may be impossible to do this; our hatred of the thing we are destroying may prevent us from understanding it, and we may love it so much that we cannot destroy it unless we are blinded by such hatred. But if that is so, there will once more, as so often in the past, be change but no progress; we shall have lost our hold on one group of problems in our anxiety to solve the next. And we ought by now to realize that no kindly law of nature will save us from the fruits of our ignorance.

PRELIMINARY DISCUSSION

THE IDEA OF A PHILOSOPHY OF SOMETHING, AND, IN PARTICULAR, A PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY (1927)[1]

WHEN we speak of the *philosophy of something* (e.g. of art, of religion, of history) we mean to designate a body of thoughts which arise in us when we think about that thing. These thoughts must be philosophical; that is, they must be universal and necessary. A fortuitous association of ideas—for instance, the association of framed canvasses with the thought of art—is not philosophy; no thoughts can claim to be the philosophy of a subject unless they arise universally and necessarily in the mind of everyone who thinks about that subject.

For this reason, we must exclude from the philosophy of a subject not only fortuitous associations, but thoughts of the peculiar kind which are called scientific, in the sense in which scientific thought is distinguished from philosophical. A scientific thought is universal only in the sense that it is universally applicable to a limited sphere; it is empirically universal, not absolutely universal; it applies to all the facts that make up the field of an inquiry, but not to all facts whatever, on the contrary, were it applicable to all facts, it would cease to be a scientific law and would become a philosophical; and this

The source document can be found in the Bodleian Library Collingwood Papers, dep. 14.

[1] After the title is written by Collingwood: 'added April 1927'. Collingwood wrote this essay while staying in Rome with his friend the Italian philosopher de Ruggiero. It was meant as an additional introduction to the Lectures on the Philosophy of History, written in 1926. A note subsequently added to the title-page reads: 'Written in Rome, by fits and starts, April 1927. I haven't read it since, but from my recollection of the frame or frames of mind in which it was composed I suspect it of being chaotic and practically valueless. Die, April 1928.'

Collingwood added the note while on vacation in the country-house Le Martouret, Die, France, during April 1928. It was there that he wrote his Outlines of a Philosophy of History (mentioned in *An Autobiography*, p. 107). Despite Collingwood's own negative assessment of this 'Preliminary Discussion' it is nevertheless valuable as an illustration of his thinking at that time on the nature of the philosophy of history.

is what has happened to mathematics in the opinion of the mathematical logicians, who wrongly think that mathematics is applicable to all facts whatever.

The philosophy of a subject must, therefore, include nothing arbitrary or hypothetical. It cannot consist of, or even include, classifications of its subject-matter; for every classification is so far arbitrary that, so long as it is merely a classification, it is capable of being set aside, or replaced by another. Thus the classification of arts into arts of sight and arts of hearing, or arts in space and arts in time, can have no place in the philosophy of art; the classification of documents into written and unwritten can have no place in the philosophy of history. Such classifications can only claim a position in the philosophy of a subject if they can be shown to be more than classifications: if they can be shown to be universal and necessary thoughts arising inevitably in the mind of everyone who thinks about art and history. As long as they are *mere* classifications, that is, convenient and useful ways of dividing the field of inquiry, they are non-philosophical.

Similarly, there cannot be anything hypothetical in a philosophical study. We cannot, in such studies, consider the hypothetical case of a perfect specimen of its kind—a perfectly beautiful painting or a perfectly true or exhaustive history. The reason for this is that the philosophy of art or history is concerned to investigate the idea of aesthetic or historical perfection; it consists of an attempt to elucidate and define this idea: and therefore it is illegitimate to proceed by assuming that we already know what such perfection is or would be. For example, Plato proceeds to philosophize about politics by constructing a hypothetical picture of a perfect state. This is an error in method. The idea of a perfect πόλις, considered in abstraction from the particular historical conditions under which alone political institutions exist, falsifies the realities of political life and leaves us with a political theory whose value—for it has very great value—is due to the fact that Plato has not strictly carried out his own programme, and is describing, not the abstract idea of the state, but the actual Greek state, modified by the introduction of a few bold, perhaps overbold, reforms. A genuine philosophical inquiry is an inquiry into actual facts, not into hypotheses; the political philosopher ought to describe not

the best possible state but the actual life of the actual state, and if he does this faithfully he will find that the actual *is* the best possible—in the circumstances. This differentiates political philosophy from sociology, which is not philosophical but scientific, and is concerned with hypothetical entities very much as medicine is concerned with the hypothetical entity of an accurately typical case of typhoid, or geometry with the hypothetical entity of an exactly straight line.

The philosophy of history, then, will consist of thoughts arising universally and necessarily in the mind of everyone who thinks about history; and these thoughts will not be concerned with classifications or hypothetical entities, but with the actual concrete facts of which history is the collective name. These facts must exist, in order that the philosophy of history may arise; and at every step in our philosophical inquiry we must keep our eye on them, in the sure conviction that if we let our vision of them grow dim our philosophical inquiry will evaporate into nothing.

The facts whose collective name is history consist of a certain type of human activities which may be conveniently denominated as historical studies. In a specialized form these studies are pursued by specialized persons called historians; and in this form history constitutes a class of activity, whose distinction from others is effected by a classificatory logic like that which distinguishes mammals from reptiles. We have already seen that this classificatory kind of distinction is foreign to the nature of philosophical thinking. The logic of philosophy distinguishes, but it does not classify: the distinctions which it recognizes are not classificatory distinctions but distinctions of a different type. What is this type?

If we reflect on the distinction asserted by formal logic, between affirmative and negative judgements, we shall see that in the first instance it presents itself as a classificatory distinction: some judgements are affirmative, others are negative. But under closer scrutiny it appears in a wholly different light. We now find that every judgement, regarded as merely affirmative, is indefinite or ambiguous in significance: it only becomes precise when to its affirmative element we add a negative element. Thus, a man says 'I am a Liberal', and this statement only conveys a precise meaning—if indeed it does so at all—

because we understand it as expressing not only his acceptance of certain principles but his rejection of others; and if we did not know what he was rejecting, we should not really know what he meant by calling himself a Liberal. Similarly, if we are told that twice two is four, we do not understand this statement until we are able to say: 'I see, twice two couldn't make three or five or six or anything else except four'. The negation provides a background against which the affirmation stands out in relief; without this background, it is the mere outline of a possible judgement, not a judgement actually grasped and judged. And it is even easier to see that a mere negation has no real meaning unless in making it we also make an affirmation, not of course necessarily expressed in words, which finds in the negation a background.

Affirmation and negation are thus not classes of judgements but elements distinguishable within one and the same judgement. Every judgement must possess both elements; and therefore the conceptions of affirmation and negation are universal and necessary concepts arising within us whenever we think about judgement. They belong, that is to say, to the philosophy of judgement, or logic considered as a philosophical science. This gives us an example of the way in which the philosophy of a subject makes its distinctions. It does so by analysing the facts which it is studying into their universal and necessary elements, and every element so detected will of necessity appear in any and every instance of the subject studied.

But how are we to know that the elements found in this particular fact will reappear in others? How are we to know that the results of our analysis are of universal validity?

The answer may be discovered by considering the familiar solution of the same problem in the case of mathematics. We propound the theorem that the square on the hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the squares on the other two sides, and we prove this by taking a case, the case of a particular triangle having sides of (say) 3, 4, and 5 inches long and being drawn in pencil on white paper. Now granted that our proof works for this case, how do we know it will work for every other case? The answer is that in proving our theorem we appealed to those characteristics of our triangle, and only those, which made it a right-angled triangle: all other characteristics we

ignored: and therefore our proof is unaffected by variations in these other characteristics. Similarly, then, our analysis of judgement will be universally valid if and so far as we confine ourselves to those characteristics in a judgement which make it a judgement: our analysis of history, if it is confined to those characteristics of history in virtue of which it is history, etc.

But how do we know what those characteristics are? May not the essential nature of judgement, history, etc. be entirely hidden from us? And is not the view I have expounded based on the ridiculous (or at any rate exceedingly bold) claim that we actually know what it is that makes any given thing what it is?

Certainly it is based on such a claim. Just as the mathematician, in order to take a single step in mathematics, must commit himself irrevocably to the assertion that he knows what makes a triangle triangular—namely, the possession of three straight sides—so the philosopher must commit himself to the assertion that he knows the essence of judgement, history, moral action, etc. Now we are in general ready to admit the reasonableness of the mathematician's claim; is there any ground for regarding that of the philosopher as any more daring?

There would be no such ground, if philosophy were as hypothetical as mathematics. The reason why we find no difficulty about the mathematician's claim to know the essence of a triangle is because we recognize that the mathematician is only claiming to tell us what a triangle would essentially be, if such a thing as a triangle existed; and the fact that the triangle is a merely hypothetical entity justifies him in laying down the law about it. He says, in effect, let us suppose triangles, and by that I mean, let us suppose three-sided rectilinear figures, and see what happens. Here the essence, as distinct from the consequent properties, of the triangle, is fixed by the initial act of supposition; and that act does not claim to be or to involve a profound insight into the nature of things.

But when the philosopher claims to know what it is that makes a judgement a judgement, he is assuming that judgements really exist, and that their real nature is such that what he calls their essence is the thing about them which it is most important for us to know. This, clearly, is a bold and paradoxical claim; so bold and paradoxical, that whole schools of

thought have recoiled from it and attempted to construct a theory of philosophical method which should avoid the necessity of making it. These schools of thought are, broadly speaking, the empiricist schools, which attempt to treat philosophy as if it were science and to explain its logic as a hypothetical and classificatory logic. The failure of all such attempts is inevitable, and is due to the fact that their very existence is a standing refutation of their own doctrines. For they consist of judgements; whether these judgements are categorical or hypothetical, they are actually judged: and that being so, it cannot be an open question whether there are any judgements. Geometry studies the properties of triangles, and treats them as hypothetical entities; this it can reasonably do, because geometry is not itself a triangle. If geometry were a triangle, then so long as geometry existed it could not be doubted whether triangles existed. But logic studies the properties of judgements: and logic is itself a judgement or assemblage of judgements: therefore the existence of logic guarantees the actual reality of its own subject-matter, for it is a subject-matter to itself.

Let us recapitulate. Our difficulty is this: how can we claim such insight into the essential nature of actual things as is involved in saying that we know what constitutes the essence of a judgement? We cannot resolve the difficulty by copying the procedure of the mathematician, because his procedure is based on the unreality of his object, whereas our object becomes real because by thinking about it we are creating an instance of it. The fact that we create the instance is the source of the whole difficulty. Strangely enough, it is also the key to the solution of the difficulty. For though, if we merely found a certain kind of object such as an elephant existing in an external world, we could never know its real essence, a thing which we create must be a thing whose essence we understand at least so far as is necessary in order to decide whether or no what we have created is really the thing we take it for. Thus, if I say, I have made a theory, I am claiming in that assertion to know what a theory is; not only in the sense that I can recognize a theory (like an elephant) when I see one, but in the far profounder sense that while I am making the theory I know what it ought to be like, and am trying to make it more what it

ought to be; that is, I claim to have insight into the real essence of a theory, to understand what it is that makes a theory a theory. Hence, while I recognize an elephant by marks which may be quite accidental and superficial, I recognize a theory by my insight into its essence: and that applies to everything which I create by a conscious and rational effort, by an activity working according to criteria.

Granted, then, that the historian's business may be described as constructing a narrative (and here the word narrative means not a fictitious narrative, but a true narrative; or rather, not a narrative intended to be fictitious but a narrative intended to be true), it follows that the essence of all historical narratives as such is an essence present to the historian's mind as a criterion or ideal during the whole time that he is carrying on his business. He knows what he is trying to do; he knows what desiderata his narrative ought to satisfy, and actually does satisfy so far as it succeeds in being history; and it is for him to judge whether or not it does succeed. Obviously, he must be competent to judge; for if the historian cannot tell the difference between good history and bad history, no one can; and if that were so, no one would be capable of judging whether the work of a particular historian is well done or ill done; that is, there could be no such thing as historical criticism. Because historical criticism actually exists, the people who pursue it must be possessed of standards enabling them to distinguish good history from bad; but this means distinguishing that which really is history—that which possesses the essential attributes of history—from that which possesses only its accidental attributes and is therefore in essence not history at all.

Now the question may be raised, whether the standards which the critic has been proved to possess may not be false standards. Surely it is common knowledge that critics often judge by wrong standards, calling that good history which satisfies some non-historical test, because for the moment, or habitually, they substitute this for the truly historical test. This is perfectly true. But anyone who says that this or that critic is judging by a wrong standard is in effect claiming to be himself possessed of the right, or at any rate a better, standard. This is sometimes denied. People sometimes point out that we

can know a certain account of a matter to be false without knowing what account of it is true: for instance, I know that Lord Bacon did not write the Letters of Junius, but I do not know who did. Therefore, they argue, I may know that a certain critical standard is false and yet not be possessed of a standard which I regard as true.

This argument, though plausible, is a confused piece of thinking. It is my positive knowledge of the style and contents of the letters of Junius that prevents my ascribing them to Bacon; that is, it is because I know what they *are* that I know what they are *not*. Similarly, it can only be my knowledge of what history *is* that enables me to reject false accounts of its essence and say that it is *not* this or that. Further, there is a confusion between possessing a criterion, as the historical critic possesses it, and stating it in speculative terms, which is the business of the philosopher. The historical critic, as such, need not philosophize; the speculative statement of principles is not his business, and if asked to state them he may confess without shame that he cannot. But he absolutely must possess these principles, and use them in his actual work; they must control his work in the way in which our bones control the movements of our limbs; they must be immanent in his critical thinking, even if he never disentangles them from the concrete criticism, never treats them as independent and self-contained entities. If he can truthfully say that, even in this immanent sense, he possesses no positive standards, it only proves him incapable of doing that particular kind of critical work.

The essence of history, therefore, is an open secret in the sense that every historical critic believes himself, rightly or wrongly, to possess it, to grasp it as an immanent criterion in his everyday work. And the terms historical critic and historian are for this purpose synonymous; since the term historical critic only means a person able to distinguish between good and bad history, and this is a power which every historian possesses in so far as he refrains from propounding one version of a narrative and propounds another instead because he thinks it historically preferable.

But this still leaves us confronted with the question, how are we to know whether we are right or wrong in believing that

our own standards are the right ones? Granted that some people join their faith to false standards, false criteria, by what criterion can the falseness of these criteria be demonstrated? It is an important question because, if it cannot be answered, my philosophy of history will become a mere account of the principles on which I personally work at what I personally call history; and thus all universality and necessity vanish. Nor can it be answered by appeal to the fact that people agree pretty widely as to what should be called history: for that fact is explicable on the hypothesis that such agreement, like the widespread agreement about the rules of Association football, is an acquiescence in something fundamentally arbitrary.

As stated, the problem is insoluble; for it presupposes the possibility that two people might work on genuinely different principles, according to criteria fundamentally incompatible, and yet think that they were trying to do the same thing. That is to say, it presupposes the *im*possibility of their communicating with one another or of studying one another's activities in such a way as to recognize the fundamental diversity of their criteria and therefore of their tasks. This is solipsism; and though it would be entirely false to say that solipsism is unanswerable, it is true enough that it cannot be answered until it is recognized for what it is, and the principles underlying it brought to light.

Here, in this special case, solipsism consists in the assertion of a necessary and irreducible misunderstanding between two persons, each thinking that because *he* is doing something therefore the other is doing it too, which he is not. Now if A misunderstands B's action, A is a bad historian of B's action; and if his historical principles compel him to misunderstand it, his historical principles are really anti-historical principles, principles not of historical truth but of historical error. Therefore in asserting our difficulty we were tacitly assuming that both A and B were in a condition, not only of error, but of invincible error; and certainly, if they *are* in invincible error, they *are* in invincible error; if we begin by assuming it, we must not be surprised if its results follow necessarily from the assumption.

Suppose, on the contrary, that their error was not invincible. It follows that when A uses a false (i.e. non-historical) standard in his study of B, and as a result condemns as false

the perhaps sound historical thought of B, he does not necessarily persist in using the term historical to describe his own thinking; recognizing that there is a difference of kind between his thought and B's, he may have the intelligence to agree with B upon a difference of terminology and find a new name for the principles which led to a result which, though bad history, may be good art or psychology, or the like.

In saying this, we are assuming that a principle which leads to bad history is not merely a non-historical principle, not merely a principle of historical error, but has also a positive value in relation to some other field of thought. And this assumption is perfectly sound. Any principle must have some positive or constructive side; it cannot be simply negative, it must be somehow affirmative too. This may be illustrated by an example from morals: the principle of always cheating when you can is not a moral principle; it is an immoral principle; but to call it immoral is to say what it is *not*, not what it *is*; and it has a positive or constructive character of its own, as a principle of consistent self-enrichment, in addition to its negative or destructive character as a principle fatal to sound morality. This is not a peculiarity of this principle or of any special kind of principles: it is a matter of general logic that a negation must have a positive side, and it is true of every negation. Hence standards which are bad and false in history must, if they are standards at all and not sheer confusions of thought, be good and true somewhere else; and the misunderstanding between two people who pin their faith to different historical criteria is always capable of removal by the discovery that they have been at cross-purposes, each asserting what the other was not in reality concerned to deny.

And clearly this must be the case if, as we began by saying, the philosophy of history is composed of universal and necessary thoughts about history. For that statement implies that nobody who thinks about the subject at all can wholly miss the truth, and that therefore philosophical error consists not in believing something purely and absolutely false but in the application of principles with a legitimate sphere of their own to spheres where they are illegitimate. And this is a true account of error in all its forms; indeed, we can see that it *must* be true, if we reflect that, just as there must be what is called a

'motive' for a crime, so there must be a 'reason' for an error. The 'motive' of a crime is a positive principle such as that of self-gratification, self-enrichment, the maintenance of one's own life or that of one's dependants; in the light of these principles the crime is seen not solely as a bad act but as a kind of good act and this goodness gives it a motive. The 'reason' for an error lies in the fact that the erring person is applying a positive principle, whose value he appreciates, to the case in hand; and it is important to recognize that what makes his error an error is not his application of this positive principle but his failure to apply also some further principle. It is not untrue that this crime will enrich me; it is perfectly true; but I ought not to be thinking only about that; I ought also to judge it by the standards of political or ethical conduct. Similarly it is not untrue that scientific methods can be applied to the subject-matter of philosophical problems; it is perfectly true; but the error of those who advocate this application consists in forgetting that, so far as the problem in hand is a *philosophical* problem, it cannot be solved except by appealing to principles and methods strictly philosophical.

It is at this point that the necessity of a philosophy of history becomes apparent. If two people A and B are using different and incompatible principles in their critical or constructive historical labours, then one of the two, to say the least, is producing bad history; he is being misled by false principles very much as an immoral man is misled by false principles when he sets out to gratify his desires instead of doing what is right. Now A cannot be convicted of a fundamental error of principle by appeal to the fact that his history comes out different from B's; on the contrary, he will regard this as a merit, and B will conversely regard it as a merit in *his* history that it should be unlike A's. Suppose for instance that A is a historical materialist of the school of Karl Marx, and believes that the forces which ultimately determine all historical events are economic forces. The result of this will be that historical narrative, as produced by A, will be a narrative of economic events, a materialistic narrative. But you cannot convert A from his principles by saying to him 'see how materialistic history becomes on your view'; he will reply 'that is what I want it to be'. And if B is attached to an opposite

school of thought, B will regard it as a merit in his own history that it says little about economics, which is precisely what A considers to be B's defect as an historian.

What, in this state of things, is one to do? Only two courses are open. Either we may solve by an appeal to blind caprice a problem whose rational solution we have renounced, and say, some people like their history materialistic and others don't; or we may decide to think out a genuine solution of the problem by stating in a philosophical form the principles at stake, and subjecting them to a philosophical criticism. By stating them in a philosophical form I mean merely stating them as general principles, instead of being content to be guided by them in the actual work of historical thought. Thus the materialistic historian resolves all non-economic, or apparently non-economic, facts into results of economic forces; this habit of mind implies principles which, when stated, take the shape of a materialistic philosophy; and the question whether it is good history or bad history to resolve everything into terms of economics can only be settled by stating and criticizing this materialistic philosophy.

The philosophy of history, so understood, means bringing to light the principles used in historical thinking, and criticizing them; its function is to criticize and regulate these principles, with the object of making history truer and historically better. It thus arises by an absolute necessity out of the practice of historical thinking, and the historian can evade the necessity of engaging in the philosophy of history only so long as he can evade entangling himself in the problems of methodology; that is, the problems of how he ought to handle historical materials and what kind of result he ought to aim at attaining. (This conception of philosophical inquiry as having a utility beyond itself, of assisting towards the development of something which is not itself philosophy, is a scandal to various people who, trying to keep the various interests of human life in watertight compartments, insist that philosophy serves no purpose except that of supplying academic answers to academic questions; but human life is not really divided into watertight compartments, and it is a very foolish method of combating utilitarianism to say that the things in which utilitarianism sees *only* utility really possess *no* utility.)

The philosophy of history, so understood, is the methodology of history. Arising spontaneously in an unsystematic form out of actual historical work, it cannot ever be expressed in the form of a completed doctrine; it must consist of topics raised and discussed in the shape given them by the peculiar circumstances in which they arise, and the natural method of treating it is by isolated and self-contained discussions. As instances of themes to be discussed in this way, one might mention such questions as the following. Ought history to pay special attention to any one side of human life, such as (according to Marx) economics, or (according to the present Regius Professor) politics? Is it possible, or desirable, to write separate histories of art, of religion, of warfare, of constitutional law, and the like; or do these things, by being separated from their historical environment, become unintelligible in their development? Is the ideal of history a single universal history, a history of the world, or a number of separate histories, and if the latter, how ought they to be divided up? Is it possible to produce good history by portioning out different parts of the subject to different authors after the Cambridge fashion, and if not, why not? Ought history to aim at biographical form, at presenting the reader with individual portraits, or ought it to suppress the biographical element and describe movements whose magnitude transcends the individual? Ought it to admit an imaginary element, a conjecture as to what may have happened when evidence fails as to what did happen; or ought it to state nothing but what, on the available evidence, is certain? Ought the historian to write with an eye to his own times, and to see the past in the light of the present, as Grote saw Athenian democracy in the light of nineteenth-century radicalism, or ought he to leave behind as profane all interest in the present when he enters the temple of Clio? Ought the historian to pass moral judgements on his characters? Ought he to take sides in the conflicts whose history he narrates? Ought he to ascribe their issue to necessity, or to chance, or to the agency of human wills? Questions like these are concerned with the historian's duty in matters where, at least to all appearances, a choice is open to him; but there are others, no less urgent, which begin not with the word *ought* but with the word *can*. Thus, can history exist in the absence of written records? Can

there be a history, in the proper sense of the word, concerning the Bronze Age, for example? Can the historian determine why things happened, or only what it was that happened? Can he appreciate the motives of his characters, or do their actions necessarily remain for him mere opaque facts? Within what limits, if at all, can the historian go behind his sources and criticize and correct them? and if at all, on what principles?

To enumerate such questions is to discover that their number is infinite; and as one turns them over in one's mind, one gradually perceives two facts standing out more and more clearly. The first is, that all these questions revolve round one central question, the question of the fundamental nature, meaning, purpose, and value of history: the question: what *is* history? is it a genuine form of knowledge, or is it an illusion? can it really make good its claim to be a mental discipline and an approach to reality, or is it a confused mass of heterogeneous and half-developed tendencies of thought? If it is a genuine form of knowledge, what place has it in knowledge as a whole, and how is it related to other forms? I say that this is one question, though it seems many; but it is one in the sense that any answer to any one of the many involves an answer to all the others, and any alteration in the answer given to one involves an alteration in the answers given to all the others. But, further, a properly thought-out answer to the central question 'what *is* history?' provides a point of view from which the various methodological questions to which I have referred can be approached and solved; for these infinite methodological questions have this in common, that they all involve the application of a concept of history to some particular case or type of case; and the possession of a properly thought-out concept of history is therefore an indispensable condition of their solution.

The second fact which emerges is that these various questions bring us face to face with problems from every department of philosophy. We cannot, for instance, decide whether the historian ought to ascribe historical events to necessity, chance, or human will, without raising, and settling as best we can, the problem of human freedom and necessity. We cannot say whether it is best to write a separate history of art or to include it in a general history of civilization, without discussing the question in what sense art is a separate thing, a

self-contained part of human life. Thus the methodological problems of history lead us not simply to a specialized philosophy of history but to a perfectly general or universal philosophy, to philosophy as a whole.

There are thus three aspects of the philosophy of history. First, as a complex of particular methodological problems growing immediately out of historical thinking. Secondly, as the attempt to answer the question, what is history? Thirdly, as identical with philosophy in general. Now clearly, these three aspects are in no sense three distinct departments of the subject. They are bound up together in such a way that neither can exist without the others. The first is the *matter* of the philosophy of history; the second and third together make up its *form*. The matter is a mere plurality of particular philosophical problems, in themselves chaotic, shapeless, capable of enumeration to infinity; the form is a unity which brings unity into this matter by relating its parts to one another in the light of a whole which is the form itself. When I know what history is, then and then only I can see a rational necessity and a rational answer for the various questions of methodology which beset me when I try to write it; and on the other hand, it is only in this concrete experience of historical work and its difficulties that I can be said to know what history is at all. Take away the matter, and the form becomes an empty and worthless formula. The form makes the matter intelligible, the matter makes the form actual.

Now the form has two elements or aspects, corresponding to the two elements in the phrase philosophy of history. First, to take them in their logical order, the philosophy of history must be *philosophy*; and to call it philosophy means that it is universal and necessary and that it is not a part of philosophy, but the whole of it, a whole in which every part *is* the whole because every part is necessary to the whole and no part can be understood except in the light thrown upon it by every other. Secondly, it must be *of history*; which means that we are dealing not with pure philosophy—if that were conceivable—but with philosophy approached from a certain angle, seen under a particular aspect: philosophy with its problems focused at a particular point, namely the concept of history. Thus the concept of history forms the immediate object of our

philosophical reflexion, and the other concepts which make up the whole body of philosophy are thought of as mediated through this; we think of them so far and in such a way as to elucidate the concept of history, and in no other way.

The philosophy of history thus means philosophy in general seen from the point of view of history; that is, philosophy in general with the conception of history in the foreground and the rest in the background. And it is worth noticing that whenever we think of any complex whole we always see it with a foreground and a background in this way. If I say $x = y$, I may appear to have before me a whole of two parts, x and y, with a reciprocal relation between them, standing (so to speak) equidistant from me and on a perfect equality; but this is never really the case; when I say $x = y$, I am always in actual fact bringing one term up to another with which I am comparing it, so that one figures as a comparatively stable background, a standard of comparison, while the other is superimposed upon this background to be compared with it. The reciprocity of x and y is only a potential reciprocity, arising out of the fact that we recognize, when we say $x = y$, that we might legitimately have said $y = x$. The propositions $x = y$ and $y = x$ are no more, though no less, synonymous than the propositions 'Dr. Grundy agrees with Thucydides' and 'Thucydides agrees with Dr. Grundy'. Similarly, the mass of interrelated conceptions which we call philosophy must be grasped somewhere; we cannot have every part of it before our minds with the same degree of immediacy or directness at one and the same time; and therefore we must necessarily individualize some one aspect of it, to be treated as the immediate problem in hand, while keeping its other aspects as a background or framework of reference, a body of concepts which we either have worked out or hope to work out, and to which we can therefore refer particular points in our present inquiry for actual or possible solution. Thus in discussing ethical problems we come up against metaphysical difficulties, and say either 'we know from our metaphysical inquiries that the answer to this question is so-and-so, and therefore we can put in this answer and go ahead', or else 'we have not yet solved this metaphysical difficulty, so we must postpone that point for the present'.

This conception of philosophy as an articulated whole, which is present to the mind as a whole or not at all, but must be presented in some particular position, with some part of itself in the foreground of thought and the rest in the background, is the only conception which can explain at once the unity of philosophy and the distinction within it of various philosophical disciplines or sciences such as logic, ethics, and so forth. But one must bear in mind that the idea of philosophy as a complete whole, to be turned this way and that in order to contemplate it from different angles, is so far misleading that it never is complete; we turn it this way and that not in order to contemplate the perfections of a finished article, but in order to continue the work of bringing it into existence. The side from which we are contemplating it is the side which we are actively engaged in constructing; and while we are constructing one side, the other sides are present to our minds only as principles exemplified in the object of our present thought, not as independent objects.

Subject to this qualification, then, we may continue to speak of philosophy as a whole of parts, each part being a concept, and each concept being capable of becoming the immediate centre or focus of philosophical thought, the rest serving as background and elucidating it. Now the question at once arises, whether every concept forms a part of the body of philosophy, or whether some do and others do not. If the former, there is a philosophy of teacups and of bald-headed stationmasters; these are concepts, and therefore they have an equal right to a philosophy of their own with any other concepts. If the latter, how do we know that history is not one of those concepts that must be banished from the body of philosophy, and on what principles are we to decide?

The answer to the question follows naturally from our original description of the philosophical as the universal and necessary. A philosophical concept is universal in the sense that it arises necessarily whenever anybody thinks about a subject, as we said; but the word subject here means concept, and therefore our phrase, if regarded as a definition, was a circular definition. To escape the circle, we must insist that the subject itself must be a philosophical, or universal, concept; and that can only mean a concept applicable to everything that exists.

It is a familiar idea in philosophy that there are such concepts; in scholastic terminology they are called transcendentals, and you will find, in Spinoza for instance, that *ens*, *res*, and *unum* are given as examples of transcendentals. It was this conception of a transcendental that set the problem and created the terminology of Kant's philosophy. The Transcendental Aesthetic is the theory of those transcendentals, *ubi* and *quando*, which apply to everything *qua* object of sense; the Transcendental Logic is the theory of those transcendentals, unity, reality and the like, which apply to everything *qua* object of thought; and Transcendental Idealism means the idealism of transcendentals, that is, the theory that transcendentals have no existence apart from the mind. The view which I am putting forward, then, is that the concepts which compose the body of philosophy are transcendentals. Philosophy has nothing to say about teacups, because there are things which are not teacups; the concept of teacup is an empirical or non-transcendental concept, a concept applicable only to a certain class of things but not to others. But philosophy has something to say about thought, because everything that can be talked about at all is, so far as we talk about it, an object of thought; it has something to say about action, because everything affords a field or opportunity for action; it has something to say about art, because everything is a legitimate object of aesthetic contemplation, about science, because everything is a legitimate object of scientific investigation, and about history, because everything that exists is an historical fact.

Now the discovery of Kant was that these transcendentals formed a single whole, such that, in spite of apparent antitheses between one of them and another, they were all necessary to each other. Thus unity and plurality seem to contradict one another; yet everything that exists is both one and manifold; and this is not the least irrational or unintelligible; on the contrary, we all understand perfectly well that nothing could be a unity unless it were also a manifold, nothing a manifold unless it were *a* manifold, *one* manifold, that is, a unity. Similarly, the artistic attitude towards things is not only different from the scientific, but opposed to it; and therefore if the world is so constituted as to be a legitimate object of aesthetic contemplation, one would suppose that it cannot also be a legitimate

object of scientific inquiry. And we do frequently make this supposition in all good faith, and impale ourselves on the horns of a dilemma by arguing that *either* the artistic attitude towards reality is the right one and the scientific the wrong, *or* the scientific is right and the artistic wrong; where *right* or *wrong* means justified or unjustified by the unalterable character of reality itself. But the answer to the dilemma is that both are right, and that each is wrong if it claims to exclude or supersede the other; because the opposition between them is like the opposition of unity and plurality—an opposition in which each term is necessary to the other. As unity and plurality are categories or transcendentals of pure logic, which means that any object of logical thought must necessarily be thought of as both one and manifold, so art and science are categories or transcendentals of the mind, which means that any activity or operation of the mind must have the characteristics of art and also the characteristics of science.

This means that we are all of us artists and scientists, not in shifts or by turns, but during the whole of our life, so far as that life is a mental and not a merely physiological life. The professional artist is not the only artist; his professional life consists in a specialized performance of functions common to all mankind, and this is the reason why his work appeals to an audience of more than one. Here lies the explanation of a certain tendency to cross-purposes apparent in almost any discussion of art carried on between a philosopher and an artist. For the philosopher, art is a transcendental concept; what he is investigating under that name is something equally apparent in every operation of the mind. For the artist, art is an empirical concept; what he is investigating under that name is something present in, say, the design of Blenheim Palace and absent from, say, the design of the Randolph Hotel; because in trying to be an artist he is trying to produce good works of art and to avoid producing bad ones, and he sees that the phrases *work of art* and *good work of art* must be synonymous, and that a bad work of art, so far as it is bad, is to that extent *not* a work of art. The philosopher has to reply that the Randolph Hotel is at least *trying* to be a work of art, and that such an attempt cannot conceivably be an unmitigated failure; therefore the Randolph Hotel, paradoxical as this statement may appear,

must be, within certain limits, both a work of art and a good work of art. At this point in the discussion the artist will probably leave the room, banging the door; and the moral of the discussion is that art must be regarded not merely as a concept indifferently exemplified in every operation or creation of the mind, as might appear from calling it a transcendental, nor merely as an empirical concept exemplified in some things and not in others; but as a concept exemplified indeed everywhere but only revealing itself in any given case to a mind capable of recognizing the peculiar and unique form under which it appears on this particular occasion. The universal is not indifferently and identically present in particulars whose distinction from one another is due to merely material or numerical difference: there are no merely material or numerical differences; what we call such are really differences whose qualitative character we choose to ignore. The universal itself is differentiated in the different particulars: different works of art represent not different embodiments of one and the same beauty but different beauties, different ways of being beautiful. It might almost be said, though I do not say it because it suggests a false antithesis, that there are as many different senses of the word beauty as there are beautiful things. But that would be untrue because it would suggest that the connexion between these various senses was merely verbal, whereas it is in fact real and necessary, and there is nothing capricious about it. The distinction between the various things which I am here calling senses of the word beauty is really the articulation of the artistic activity of the mind, a necessary articulation in the sense that the oneness of all art must be correlative to a certain manifoldness, so that if all art is one, every form of art must also be unique and different from every other.

From this it follows that, just as every operation of the mind must display the characteristics both of art and of science, so every work of art (that is, every operation of the mind *qua* work of art) must display a number of different characteristics which are the transcendentals or categories of art. I do not at the moment pause to enumerate any of these; I only wish to point out that the distinction between them lies at the root of those divergences of ideal which cause the quarrels between various schools of art—naturalistic and formal, classical and romantic, and so on; and that the individuality of a work of art, in the aesthetic sense of the word individuality, consists not in its purely material difference from any other work, but in its embodying an idea of its own, a form of beauty never before realized as a conscious and deliberately chosen end. This new form of beauty must have been present as an element in previous works of art, indeed in *all* previous works of art; but what makes the new work original is that which previously existed only as an implicit, partial, or subordinate element now comes into the foreground and determines the explicit character of the whole, as the central motive in the mind of the artist. This central motive is called the *subject* of the work of art; and the individual work of art may be defined as a particular subject raised to the level of beauty, or beauty—all the beauty in the universe—expressing itself in the form of a particular subject. Thus the relation between the particular work of art and art in general is parallel to that between a particular philosophy such as the philosophy of history and philosophy in general.

The question which we now have to consider is, therefore, whether history is a transcendental or an empirical concept; whether, that is, there can be a philosophy of history at all. We are now ready to ask this question, because we have considered the general nature of transcendental concepts.

History is a kind of inquiry, that is, a kind of mental activity; but the question is, whether it is a mere species of activity, like long division or reading a novel, or a necessary and universal form of activity which is present, explicitly or implicitly, wherever there is mental activity of any kind whatever.

Clearly, history is an empirical conception if it means that activity which distinguishes persons called historians from others called scientists, trombone-players, or ophthalmic surgeons. History in this sense, as an empirical concept, means the investigation of certain arbitrarily defined problems known as historical problems. Consider for instance what is involved in the fact that a book 350 pages long may be called 'History of England'. It implies either that everything which has ever happened in England can be discussed in 350 pages, which is absurd, or that everything known to the author about

what has happened in England can be stated in 350 pages, which is equally absurd, or else that there are certain quite arbitrary conventions as to what ought and what ought not to be included under that title. That this is the case, everyone knows; and everyone knows that the conventions change, and that whereas once the names and dates of kings and battles were considered to form the main bulk of the History of England, that position is nowadays accorded to a description of social and economic conditions. Thus if you consult professional historians on the question what ought to be contained in books of history, you will find that they give various answers which, just because they are merely empirical, cannot be reduced to agreement, precisely as artists will differ about the proper subjects for artistic representation. They will all agree that the historian ought to select for narration that which is somehow important; but this idea of importance is necessarily indefinable, because they differ from one another precisely as to the qualities which constitute importance. And the idea of selection really gives away the empirical character of the whole doctrine; for selection implies that something is selected from a body of material; now that which is selected is *ex hypothesi* history, but the material from which it is selected is precisely history as a whole, and therefore the idea of selection implies that the historian must *first* know the whole of history and *then* select from it something to narrate. How then does he come to know the whole of history, or indeed any part of it? *Ex hypothesi* his work as an historian only begins when he already knows everything: therefore no place is left for the acquisition of knowledge, for historical investigation or inquiry.

If on the other hand history means the acquisition or possession of historical knowledge, and not merely the retailing of certain parts of it to others, it must be a transcendental conception. For the object of this knowledge is not the history of England or the history of this or that particular empirical thing, but history as such, whatever history there is, everything historically knowable; and this is a perfectly universal conception. Moreover it is a necessary conception, in the sense that it is implied as a condition in all mental activity. The scientist, in the course of his inquiries, makes use of observations and experiments which, at the moment of his using them for

scientific purposes, are historical facts historically attested. The artist, in producing a work of art, is adding a new fact to the history of art, a fact which has a necessary relation with what in that history has preceded it. Thus history is a transcendental conception, like art and science, when regarded as a pure form of activity; though it becomes, like them, an empirical conception when it is arbitrarily restricted to certain specialized embodiments of that form. If anyone says 'that isn't history, because there isn't a book about it in the historical section of this library, or because a professor of history would not bother to lecture about it, or because it never occurred to the people concerned to call it history', he is using a perfectly legitimate criterion to exclude it from history in the empirical sense, but he is not even attempting to deny that it is history in the transcendental sense: that is to say, that it contains those characteristics which, in a more conspicuous degree or form, confer the name of history upon the things generally so designated. For the empirical concept is nothing but the *prima facie* application of the transcendental concept. Any fool can see that what we call history-books are examples of history, but it takes rather more analysis to see that the scientist's use of statistics is also history: and this degree of obviousness is the one and only ground for giving the name in the former case and withholding it in the latter.

The philosophy of history, then, is the exposition of the transcendental concept of history, the study of history as a universal and necessary form of mental activity. A person who did not understand the idea of a transcendental conception might think it reasonable to ask that this study should begin with a definition of history; but to do that would be to betray a confusion between transcendental and empirical concepts. An empirical concept must be defined, because it is neither universal nor necessary: therefore we must be shown how to frame it before we can go on to discuss it. But a transcendental concept *need* not be defined, because we are all possessed of it so far as we think at all; nor *can* it be defined, because, being necessary to all thought, it is necessarily presupposed in its own definition and the definition thus becomes circular. Let anyone try to define the transcendentals I quoted from Spinoza (*ens*, *res*, *unum*) and he will see not only that it cannot

be done but that the reason why it cannot be done is not that he is ignorant of their meaning but that he recognizes their meaning to be of a kind which makes definition impossible. Definition, in short, is an operation peculiar to empirical conceptions. Hence if anyone objects to my procedure because I do not, either now or later, offer any definition of history, I shall not apologize; and if the omission genuinely puzzles him, I shall reply that there can only be two reasons for his puzzlement: either he has not enough experience of historical studies to connect my remarks with his personal experiences, and therefore has got hold of the wrong end of the stick and thinks I am discussing an empirical concept instead of a transcendental; or else he is ignorant of the English language and confronted with merely verbal difficulties.

LECTURES ON THE PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY (1926)[1]

THE purpose of these lectures is to raise and, as far as I can do so, to answer certain questions relating to the study of history and to the object, called history, which in that study we investigate. The fundamental question is, what are we doing when we study history? and this raises three allied questions: (1) What are we doing it *for*? in other words, how does this study fit into our general view of the aims and purposes of human life? (2) What is the best way of doing it? in other words, what are the principles of method by which historical study is or ought to be guided? (3) What are we doing it *to*? in other words, what is the true nature of the thing which we call the past, which historical thought takes as its object?

I propose to begin by raising the last question. This will help us to form a general idea of what history is trying to do. I shall then go on to ask how it does it; this will mean discussing the data of historical thought and the methods by which it interprets these data. I shall then, lastly, take history as a finished product, when it has done the work of interpreting its data, and ask what the value of this finished product is.

Our tradition, in Oxford, is to combine historical with philosophical studies. In my own case, this combination has led to a constant and obstinate self-questioning as to the right methods and the ultimate value of historical studies; and my only object in thinking out the notions which I shall lay before you has been to settle accounts with myself as to why I study history and how I can do it more intelligently. To some extent I have achieved this settlement of accounts: and I am giving these lectures in the hope that some of you who may have been afflicted by the same difficulties as myself, may derive help of some kind from the flickering light of my own thoughts. Whether you regard that light as marking the entrance to harbour or the presence of rocks, I leave you to determine.

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[1] Collingwood adds to the title: 'written January, 9–13, 1926, for delivery in Hilary Term, 1926.'

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a. *Introductory: General Idea of History*

1. History in the ordinary or current sense of the word is knowledge of the past; and in order to understand its peculiarities and its special problems, we must ask what the past is. This means inquiring into the nature of time.

2. Time is generally figured or imagined to ourselves in a metaphor, as a stream or something in continuous and uniform motion. These metaphors, when we try to think them out, are very perplexing. The metaphor of a stream means nothing unless it means that the stream has banks, relatively to which it is in motion; but when we apply this to time it is impossible to say that the lapse or process of time is relative to something else which does not proceed or move: for this other thing could *ex hypothesi* only be another time, a time which remained stationary instead of moving. Nor can we strictly say that time moves, or lapses, or proceeds; for all motion presupposes time, and whereas a moving body moves in time, time itself cannot move in time, unless there are (as aforesaid) two times, and it certainly cannot move *except* in time.

3. It is so difficult to think of time itself as moving, that we are naturally tempted to give up this conception and say that it is not time that moves or changes, but events or processes that change or move *in* time. Time is, on this view, regarded as stationary while events move or change past it, as the hands of a clock move past the figures on its face. But this view is no advance: for just as nothing can move except in time, so nothing can stand still except in time, and if we say that time is stationary while events move past it we are assuming another time relatively to which what we called time stands still. Nor is this the only difficulty. For the figures on a clockface stand still in the sense that they are all there together; but clearly, one o'clock and two o'clock and three o'clock and so on are *not* all there together.

4. But we are not really better off if we drop the clock metaphor as well as the stream metaphor and concentrate on the image of a straight line. If we think of time as a line, we think of the present as one point in it, with the past on one side and the future on the other; the present, I suppose, is

imagined as travelling into the future so that what was future becomes by degrees first present and then past, and then more and more remote in the past. But this figure only seems appropriate so long as we forget that the line is really regarded as consisting of events arranged in a temporal series, and that therefore we are thinking of all events, not as *happening*, but as *existing* from eternity to eternity and merely waiting to be revealed by a kind of searchlight or pinhole called the present, when it reaches them. Unless we think of them thus, the figure of a line has no applicability whatever; for the events of the future do not really await their turn to appear, like the people in a queue at a theatre awaiting their turn at the box office: they do not yet exist at all, and they therefore cannot be grouped in any order whatever. Similarly about the events of the past; which, because they have happened, and therefore are not now happening, do not exist and therefore cannot be arranged along a line. The temporal series regarded as a line, therefore, is in reality a line consisting of one point only, the present.

5. The present alone is actual: the past and the future are ideal and nothing but ideal. It is necessary to insist upon this because our habit of 'spatializing' time, or figuring it to ourselves in terms of space, leads us to imagine that the past and future exist in some way analogous to the way in which, when we are walking up the High past Queens, Magdalen and All Souls exist.[2] This is simply an illusion, though a tenacious one; and it is necessary to eradicate it with great care before one begins to realize the true problem of history. For we commonly suppose, in our more illogical and slipshod moments, that the past still exists and lies somewhere concealed behind us, and that by using appropriate instruments and methods we can discover it and investigate its nature; and this idea is conformed by the dogmas of certain philosophies now current, which argue as follows:

That which is known must have a real existence:
The past is known in historical thought and in memory:
Therefore the past must really exist.

[2] The High refers to High Street in Oxford. Queens, Magdalen, and All Souls are colleges along this street.

Of this syllogism, I suppose the major to be true; the minor, is, however, false; not absolutely false, but false unless qualified in such a way as to make the conclusion no longer true. The past as such is not known, either in historical thought or in memory, in any kind of sense in which knowledge could guarantee real existence. The conclusion therefore falls to the ground.

6. Another attempt to bolster up the belief in the survival of the past comes from physiological or psychological theories of memory, which argue that past events are remembered by us in virtue of the permanent, or at any rate the lasting, effects which they leave on our psycho-physical organism. Now it is very likely true that an event which left no trace at all on our organism would not be remembered; but the effect and the remembering are not the same thing. Indeed psycho-analysis shows that in many cases the lack of memory is simply due to the magnitude of the effect, as when a person is driven half-mad by terror and, for that very reason, cannot remember the thing that frightened him. It is necessary to distinguish very clearly between the past event, which we remember from the present residue of that event in our organism. It is also necessary (in order to guard against another false theory of memory) to distinguish the event which we remember from other events which may accompany the remembrance. Thus: a person is annoyed by the barking of a dog. This annoyance may produce a permanent effect, namely a chronic tendency to be annoyed by dogs, a dislike of dogs. But the dislike of dogs is quite distinct from the recollection of the event which originated that dislike. Further: when he remembers that first event, he may, and very likely will, experience a certain revival of the original annoyance: he may think 'what a beastly dog that was!' But this revival of annoyance is not identical with the memory of the original incident; indeed the incident must be remembered in order that the annoyance may be, in this particular way, revived. The fallacious theories which identify memory with residual traces or revivifications of past experiences are valuable so far as they bring into prominence certain things that undoubtedly do happen when we remember: but they are wrong so far as they try to make memory consist of something that is in reality not even its inseparable concomitant, since

residual traces and revivifications of past experiences can and do occur without any memory of the original experiences. The source of these errors is the prejudice that the object of memory must be something now existing. This prejudice, which is a deduction, no doubt unconscious in the main, from the epistemological dogma that all states of consciousness must have a real object independent of themselves, prevents its victims from realizing that what we remember is the past, not the present; and that while it exists we cannot conceivably remember it. It must first cease to exist, and then for the first time it is in a position to be remembered.

7. History and memory are wholly different things, but they have this in common, that the object is in each case the past. The difference between them is that memory is subjective and immediate, history objective and mediate. By calling memory *subjective* I mean that its object is always something that has happened to ourselves or in our own circle of experience. I do not remember the Crimean War, but I do remember the Boer War; I do not remember Santa Sophia, but I do remember St Mark's. As soon as the object falls outside my personal experience, I can no longer remember it. Yet, it is important to notice, I may imagine it just as vividly and just as accurately as if I did remember it. A child who has often heard of something that happened in his family before he was born may come to imagine it quite as clearly and as veraciously as he imagines the incidents which he remembers, and this may lead him to think that he remembers what in fact he does not remember at all. For instance, I can recollect things that happened to me when I was less than two, but so dimly and vaguely that they are actually less vivid than my imagination of things which older members of my family described to me as a child and which happened before I was born. And I have no doubt that this accounts for many things that appear at first sight to be pre-natal memories. By calling memory *immediate*, I mean that we neither have, nor can have, nor can even want, any guarantee or ground for it except itself. The question 'why do you remember this?', meaning, 'what reason have you for remembering it?' is a question that can never be answered except with an irrelevant or nugatory answer, like, 'oh, I have a very good memory', or, 'it made a great impression on me', or the like. I can certainly come to realize that what I took for memory cannot be memory, as when I say that I remember posting a letter which I afterwards find in my pocket, when it becomes clear that I really imagined or dreamed that I posted it. But though I may have grounds for thinking this to be a case of memory or not a case of memory, I cannot have grounds for remembering. I simply remember, and there is an end of it.

8. History on the other hand is *objective*, by which I mean that its concern is not with my own personal past but with the past in general, the past depersonalized, the past simply as fact. And although I may be in firmer and completer possession of my own history than of anyone else's, this is not by any means necessarily the case. I may know more about the Crimean War, which I do not remember, than about the Boer War, which I do; and I may know more about the early history of my children, which I have studied with the intelligence of an adult human being, than about my own, which happened when I was too young to realize what was happening. And it is conceivable, though not very likely, that a student of retiring habits might be able to give a better and truer historical account of society and politics in ancient Athens than of the same things in his own country during his own lifetime. And when I call history *mediate* I mean that the statements which it makes are always made on grounds which the historian can state when challenged. 'Why do you believe this?', meaning 'what reasons have you for making this historical statement?', is an essentially answerable question, and in proportion as the historian knows his job he can give a reasonable and acceptable answer.

9. This answer will always take the same general form: namely, 'I find in my sources certain information which leads me to the belief'. And this answer is characteristic of history. Other kinds of thinking are mediate and can, when challenged, state their grounds; but in no other field of thought are the grounds called sources, evidences, or the like. We must therefore examine this conception and see what it implies.

b. *The Sources of History*

10. A source, authority, or document is the raw material out of which history is made. It may be itself a statement of past fact, that is to say it may be homogeneous with the finished product into which the historian tries to convert it; but it need not be. It may be a document such as a charter or deed or proclamation, which takes the form of a command; and in this case nothing is easier than to convert it into narrative by saying 'in the year x, king y gave such and such lands to such and such an abbey'; but one must bear in mind the possibilities that the command was not obeyed and that the person who gave it did not even intend it to be obeyed. For that matter, when one's documents take the form of narrative, one must bear in mind the possibility that the narrator was ignorantly, or intentionally, circulating falsehoods. The case becomes more complicated when the source is not even a command, but a mere relic of action, such as a dropped coin, or the remains of buildings and utensils. Here it becomes evident, even to the least reflective mind, that the document tells one nothing unless, by the application of principles, one can succeed in interpreting it, arguing that buildings of this kind must necessarily have been intended for a certain purpose, built at a certain time, and so forth. But what is true of these non-verbal sources is in fact true of all sources whatever. All are dumb except to a mind that can interpret them; and even a source consisting of simple narrative—a Thucydides or a Froissart—yields no historical results whatever, good or bad, till some kind of method of interpreting it has been worked out.

11. The interpretation of sources, then, is the formal element of history, counterbalancing the material element which is the source itself. Without these two elements, there is no history. And whereas the sources themselves have to be found, collected, assembled by the historian as data which limit the field of his activity, the work of interpreting them proceeds according to principles which he creates out of nothing for himself; he does not find them ready-made but has to decide upon them by an act of something like legislation. The 'receptivity' of the historian towards his sources is counterbalanced by his

'spontaneity' in respect of the principles by which he interprets them.

12. Sources, then, must be found, given to the historian ready-made. His work is to collect them, and this implies searching for them. But he cannot search for them until he has agreed with himself upon some principles of interpretation; for till that is done, he does not know what to look for. He must know what kind of document will yield results under the methods at his command; for different methods demand wholly different types of document. Hence a complete collection of sources is an impossibility, even with respect to a limited period or a particular problem within that period. For every advance in the study of the problem brings to light a new type of source. Thus, a hundred years ago, the sources for the history of the Roman Empire consisted not exclusively but almost exclusively of ancient historical writers. During the nineteenth century the importance of inscriptions, never wholly overlooked, was for the first time fully recognized, and the Corpus of Latin Inscriptions was set on foot—it is not yet complete, and it never will be—in order to collect this newly-realized source of knowledge into a form in which historians could handle it. At the end of the nineteenth century a quite new type of source was tapped, namely pottery; and others will certainly emerge as the intensive study of the period goes forward. But all we can do with sources is to recognize and interpret them; we cannot add a single fragment where it is lacking; where we draw a blank in our search for documents, we can do nothing to help ourselves. When, as a result of Lord Birkenhead's Real Property Act of 1923, title-deeds became unnecessary for the tenure of land, a systematic destruction of them, all over the country, was set on foot among the solicitors and agents in whose keeping they lay; and this destruction of unexamined and uninterpreted potential sources of medieval history has been the gravest blow that knowledge has received since the French Revolution; because such a loss of material is absolutely irreparable: there can be no possible means of recovering the information which this holocaust has put beyond our reach.

13. Where one type of source is lacking, however, the historian devises new methods of interpretation and reveals

another. Thus, medieval history is rich in written documents and in datable architecture. Anyone can learn to interpret Gothic mouldings and medieval script in a very short time, and there is any amount of them; and therefore the historian who wants to reconstruct the story of an abbey never troubles to go beyond these sources. But in the Roman Empire we find no written documents to speak of, except inscriptions, which tell one very little except personal details, and practically no datable architecture; so we are driven back on other sources, and have devised a complicated science of archaeology whose aim is to interpret chronologically the superimposed strata of an inhabited site and the objects contained in them. Archaeology in this sense does not exist for the medieval period; no living soul knows a fiftieth part about medieval pottery, for instance, that any beginner knows about Greek or Roman pottery.

14. The supply of sources is thus infinite, in the sense that no one working at any historical problem can ever have reached the end of them, and the point at which we think we have exhausted the sources is only the point at which our own principles of interpretation have exhausted the peculiar type of material to which they can be applied. But the sources actually tapped at any given point by any given student are always finite. Hence it is possible to give a list of the sources that have been used in the solution of a particular problem, but not to give a list of the sources that might be used in the solution of a problem not yet solved.

15. A student who knows the sources is called a scholar; and scholarship, or erudition, is that element—a necessary element—in history which consists in possessing the materials of history. A learned man is not necessarily an historian; but an historian must be a learned man. Yet there is a natural tendency to confuse the two conceptions and to identify history with erudition. This is a very common type of mistake. Where a distinction exists between a factor in experience which is given and one which is supplied by the experiencing mind, the very constancy of the mind's activity leads to its escaping notice, so that the whole experience is ascribed to the given factor. Thus artists who paint landscapes and other natural objects tend to think that they find their works of art ready-

made in the external world, and overlook the fact that in painting a landscape they are always performing acts of selection, adaptation, conventionalization, and idealization, without which the picture would simply not be a picture. Similarly, people often discuss the influence of environment on physique and character as if the idiosyncrasy of the person on whom the environment is supposed to act had nothing to do with its action. It is often the most active and spontaneous people who most overlook the existence of their own spontaneous activity: and it is the very ease and success with which the historian interprets his sources that lead him to fancy that he is not interpreting them at all—that they are interpreting themselves, have their meaning written large on their faces, require, to be understood, nothing but bare inspection. Hence the sources become falsely identified with the history which can be written from them; and when so misconceived, history is regarded as the simple transcription of sources. From this point of view the sources become authorities, or collections of statements which the historian accepts and transplants into his own narrative; whereas the historian's finished product is nothing but a patchwork of quotations from his authorities, more or less welded together by external literary means. Most histories that are built on a large scale and cover a considerable extent of ground show traces of this defect; the narrative seems to change its key in a curious way when one authority takes the place of another; thus every history of Greece undergoes a change of tone when Herodotus gives way to Thucydides, and it is very difficult to study the history of the early Roman Empire without falling a victim to Tacitean melodrama. The defect may even be defended, by the plea that the historian cannot go behind his sources and has no option but to accept them and believe what they tell him. But this is altogether false. The historian, even at the most rudimentary level of thought, is responsible for accepting his authorities as authorities; he believes what they say not because they say it but because he has made it a principle to believe them; he always has an option, though the alternative to accepting what he is told may be, and often is, the decision that trustworthy information on this particular question is at present unattainable. It is always a mark of stupidity to plead that one is bound

by what one's authorities say; yet it is true of the material side of historical thought, however untrue of the formal.

16. A consequence of the error which regards history as contained ready-made in its sources is the distinction between history and prehistory. From the point of view of this distinction, history is coterminous with written sources, and prehistory with the lack of such sources. It is thought that a reasonably complete and accurate narrative can only be constructed where we possess written documents out of which to construct it, and that where we have none we can only put together a loosely constructed assemblage of vague and ill-founded guesses. This is wholly untrue: written sources have no such monopoly of trustworthiness or of informativeness as is here implied, and there are very few types of problem which cannot be solved on the strength of unwritten evidence. For instance, it is often said that chronological problems absolutely require written sources for their solution; but even written chronology is often very hard to interpret, referring as it does to eras which we cannot certainly correlate with our own (e.g. the Egyptian Sothic cycle, which is a period of 1,460 years, and exposes us to the uncertainty, for all early Egyptian history, whether an event happened at one or the other of two dates 1,460 years apart), and on the other hand unwritten chronological data, like the yearly mud-deposits of the retreating glaciers at the end of the Ice Age, may at times give extraordinarily accurate results. Strictly speaking, all history is prehistory, since all historical sources are mere matter, and none are ready-made history; all require to be converted into history by the thought of the historian. And on the other hand, no history is mere prehistory, because no source or group of sources is so recalcitrant to interpretation as the sources of prehistory are thought to be.[3]

17. But at a certain level of thought the distinction between history and prehistory is of value. If we take the historian at an arrested point in his development, instead of considering him in his idea or as what he ought to be; if we take the case of the beginner in historical work, we shall find that for him, and for

[3] On the opposite page the following addition appears: 'N.B. Prehistory *may* mean history not yet formed. Cf. p. 67.' (The passage referred to is to be found on pp. 417–18 of the present volume.)

him alone, a distinction exists between crude historical material—deeds and charters, ruined buildings, coins and potsherds—and predigested historical material—ready-made narrative. The difference is that the predigested material has been already worked up into something homogeneous with that into which he is trying to convert it, whereas the crude material makes demands upon him which he is quite unable to fulfil. He does not know how to interpret deeds and potsherds: they are to him mere curiosities, things at which he stares unintelligently in museum cases; but he does know, in a sense, how to read a history-book, and it conveys something to his mind when the crude material would convey nothing. Hence the beginner in history is introduced to ready-made history-books, out of which he gets something; though his later studies show him that most of what he got was false. Still, this falsehood was a necessary stage towards the truth. And this must be borne in mind in connexion with the historical teaching of the very young. Stories of Noah, of Romulus and Remus, of King Alfred and the cakes, may be wholly untrue, but a child who has not been nourished on these, or equally fabulous, stories, has little chance of ever acquiring that healthy appetite for history which alone can supersede these stories by truer ones. The textbooks that we use in school are one or two degrees truer than Alfred and the cakes; but they too are infected with the same taint of legend, and it is a pretty safe generalization that by the time a statement has found its way into a school textbook it has been either disproved or at least gravely shaken by the advance of knowledge.

18. The relation between two types of source, the crude material and the predigested material or ready-made narrative, is parallel to the distinction between the beauty of nature and the beauty of art. When a child is learning to draw, it finds it much easier to copy a picture of something than to draw direct from the thing itself, because the picture is a predigested version of the thing; someone has already tackled the problem of how to draw the thing, and the child profits by his predecessor's experience. This is why it is easy to draw things in a conventionalized version and hard to draw them naturalistically. Similarly, it is much easier to see the beauty of a thing as interpreted and idealized in a work of art than it is when the

thing is presented to us in its natural crudity: the artist points out to other people beauties which without his help they would have failed to see. Hence it would be an absurd pedantry to insist that no one shall ever copy drawings, but always draw from nature, and equally absurd to demand that people should ignore works of art and lean always, for their aesthetic experience, on nature and their own imaginative powers. In the language of religion, this is to neglect the means of grace that are given us for the advancement of our own spiritual life, and this is to blaspheme against the spirit that provides these means in order to lead us into all truth.

19. The historian as learner, then, takes narrative as he finds it, on trust, and is as yet incompetent either to go behind it and criticize it, or (which is the same thing) construct his own narrative for himself out of crude materials. But in this stage he is only an historian *in fieri*, not an historian *in esse*. He is accepting ready-made narrative on trust, and he has not yet attained to the conception of historical truth, a truth that emerges out of criticism and can withstand criticism. He is not in a position to call the narrative which he accepts a true narrative; all he can say is that this is what he finds in his authorities. And at this stage, when as yet he has not learnt to construct narrative for himself, he is wholly dependent on ready-made narrative, and history is therefore, for him, coterminous with the totality of ready-made narratives. Where these fail him, he finds not history but prehistory, materials which he cannot with any precision and confidence interpret.

20. But even at this elementary stage in historical thought, the historian is not so passive as he thinks. He does, after all, accept his authorities, and this implies a certain principle of preference, however little recognized as such; and he does interpret them, in the sense that he reads their narratives and finds in them only what his knowledge of the language in which they are written permits him to find there. And at a very early stage he becomes aware that in reading this or that book he must make allowances for this or that idiosyncrasy or bias on the part of the writer, and must remember that the writer in his turn was limited by *his* authorities and cannot in any case have been a self-sufficient eyewitness of all that he relates. These conceptions begin to modify the uncritical

reproduction of the ready-made narrative; and they become more and more prominent as the attempt to reproduce the ready-made narrative becomes more and more consistent. As soon as the learner begins to supplement his study of one book by studying others, he finds perforce that their points of view differ and that their versions of the same narrative never entirely agree: and hence he becomes aware that his own history, the narrative which he is trying to build up in his own mind, cannot follow one authority without diverging from another. And hence he is forced to take the responsibility of choosing whom to believe.

21. This power of choosing one's authorities from a number of competing claimants is the first and most rudimentary form in which the historian becomes aware of his own freedom. But because it is a primitive stage in the development of historical freedom, it does not follow that the difficulties which it presents are easy to solve. They are not; they are in fact, at the level of thought which we have now reached, insoluble. For *ex hypothesi* any authority, however bad an authority, knows a great deal more about the events in question than the student: how then can the student decide to reject any of them? It would appear that any choice between authorities must be capricious; that we merely decide to follow A and ignore B for no reason except that we decide to do so. Or, if a reason must be given, it will be an irrelevant reason: as, that A is a better writer than B and states his version more attractively; or, that A is a source with which we have long been familiar and B's version is a newly-discovered and therefore surprising statement; or, that A's version harmonizes with our personal prejudices, political, psychological, or the like. And when we reflect on the badness of the reasons that lead us to prefer A to B, we may easily conclude that our faith in A is groundless; and this may lead to a general scepticism with regard to historical beliefs, and the conviction that all historical narrative is (as Voltaire said) a *fable convenue*,[4] and that historical inquiry is

[4] In a letter to Horace Walpole, dated 15 July 1768, Voltaire said: 'J'ai toujours pensé comme vous, monsieur, qu'il faut se défier de toutes les histoires anciennes. Fontenelle, le seul homme du siècle de Louis XIV qui fût à la fois poète philosophe et savant, disait qu'elles étaient *des fables convenues*'

(as Rousseau called it) *l'art de choisir, entre plusieurs mensonges, celui qui ressemble le plus à la vérité.*[5] This scepticism is indeed a necessary consequence of regarding history as a transcription of ready-made narratives, and people who do not sooner or later fall into it escape it only because they are too lacking in logical consistency, or too frivolous in their attitude to their own historical inquiries, ever to get so far. But historical thought does not simply end here in disaster. It is not weakness, but strength, that has brought it to this pass; if it had been feebler, it would have remained content with merely reproducing ready-made narratives; but it has become dissatisfied with that because it has recognized that even in reproducing ready-made narrative it has been exercising a free choice of authorities, and the problem now before it is to understand what is implied in this free choice. When this problem is solved, the conception of history as the transcription of authorities will disappear, and the historian will have emerged from the stage of apprenticeship into the stage of independent and self-reliant inquiry. This transition may be described as the transition from dogmatic history to critical history: dogmatic history being history as it appears to the beginner, critical history being history as it appears to the competent student. Similar transitions are found in the development of art, religion, philosophy, and indeed in every discipline: for it is always the rule that we learn to master an activity by at first accepting unquestioningly the commands of others who have mastered it before us. The place of dogmatism in human life is a necessary and permanent place, and those who would banish it wholesale only betray, by this desire, the fact that they do not yet understand human life and therefore have not yet transcended the stage of requiring dogmatism for their souls' good; but the place of dogmatism is in the school. The learner's first business is to learn what he is taught, and to do what he is told to do; if he were able by now to think for himself and to choose for himself what to do, he would not be a learner. Hence all teaching is necessarily dogmatic, and history as taught must be dogmatic history, ready-made narrative simply handed out to the pupil for him to learn and reproduce.

(*Oeuvres complètes de Voltaire*, Nouvelle édition, Correspondance générale, ix (Paris, 1822), p. 271).

Likewise in *Jeannot et Colin* Voltaire wrote: 'Toutes les histoires anciennes, comme le disait un de nos beaux esprits, ne sont que des fables convenues' (*Oeuvres complètes de Voltaire*, Nouvelle édition, Romans, ii (Paris, 1821), p. 123).

[5] J.-J. Rousseau, *Émile ou de l'éducation* (Paris, 1957), p. 283. The last words should be 'le mieux à la vérité'.

c. *The Interpretation of Sources*

22. The point in the development of historical thought which we are now considering is the point at which the historian has ceased to be contented with ready-made narrative, and asks for reasons why he should accept one version rather than another. Within the circle of dogmatic history, the answer is easy: the teacher tells him what narrative he must accept, and the acceptance therefore is a matter not of reasoning but of school discipline. But when the disciplinary motive is no longer applied, and the learner leaves school, he becomes himself responsible for his choice of an authority to follow, and, as we have seen, he cannot help discovering that any reason against following any one authority applies *mutatis mutandis* to any other, with the result that he is landed in scepticism.

23. The way out of this scepticism is found when it is realized that sources are not authorities but only sources: that the historian's attitude towards them must consist neither in acceptance nor in rejection, but in interpretation. We have seen that in some sense the acceptance of an authority always implies interpretation; but if this only means that the reader must know the language he is reading and translate it into his own, the interpretation applies only to the words of the authority and not to his thought. The point which we have now reached requires us to ask not only 'what did this writer intend to convey when he used these words?' which is a question of merely linguistic interpretation, but 'what is the historical truth that lies behind the meaning he intended to convey?' which is a question of historical interpretation in the proper sense, and assumes that the truth of which we are in search was not possessed, ready-made, by the writer whom we are studying, or at any rate not intended by him to be conveyed to us in the words he is using. In short, we are now trying to get

behind our authorities, which is exactly what, in the dogmatic stage of historical thought, we said could never be done; we are devising means of protecting ourselves against authorities who are ignorant of the facts which we are trying to learn from them, or actually intend to conceal these facts from us.

24. This is not really quite so difficult as it sounds. The only difficulty of any importance is the psychological difficulty of persuading ourselves to treat critically sources which hitherto we have been treating dogmatically. It is puzzling and rather shocking to face the fact that the writers whom one has regarded as authoritative and incorruptible channels of truth are completely misapprehending the events which they describe, or deliberately telling lies about them; and when experienced historians assure us that all sources are tainted with ignorance and mendacity, we are apt to ascribe the opinion merely to cynicism. Yet this opinion is really the most precious possession of historical thought. It is a working hypothesis without which no historian can move a single step. It is absolutely necessary, when one comes across any piece of narrative which one is trying to use as historical material, to put the narrator in the witness box and to exert all one's ingenuity in order to shake his testimony. And no one will resent this treatment who realizes the extreme difficulty of narrating facts correctly. But we are now concerned with a more advanced stage than the mere discrediting of a witness; we are by now agreed that all witnesses are discredited, in the sense that we are never justified in merely transcribing their narrative into our own without modification, and we are dealing with the question how to extract the truth from a witness who does not know it or is trying to conceal it. This is the positive or constructive stage of criticism.

25. The problem, as I have already suggested, resembles that of cross-examining a witness in court; but it differs because in this case the witness, not being present before us, cannot be made to answer questions, and therefore we cannot test the coherence of his narrative in the most convincing of all possible ways. But we can do something similar. We can study our witness's character, situation, and attitude, and this enables us to establish a kind of personal coefficient which gives at least a partial result when applied to his statements.

We find, for instance, that such and such a writer is an admirer of democracy, and will always say everything he can to its advantage and to the disadvantage of other political systems; that another writer wishes to support a contemporary political programme by the indirect method of historical narrative—for instance, to support Socialism by describing the sufferings of working men employed by capitalists; that another is powerfully affected by admiration or hatred for a central figure in his narrative, such a person perhaps as Julius Caesar or Napoleon, whose extraordinary genius makes it almost impossible to contemplate him without some kind of emotion. I am not at present raising the question whether the historian can, or ought to, hold himself aloof from these disturbing influences; I am only pointing out that they are disturbing influences, and that we cannot safely use narratives as sources without making allowance for them.

26. Now this means that we must postpone the task of determining the truth about a given event till we have determined the truth about the historian who has written about it. We have to deal not only with history itself, but with what I shall call history of the second degree, or history of history. One might be tempted to think of history of the second degree as a kind of supererogatory historical exercise, interesting to historians as being the history of their own craft, rather as the history of one's own college is interesting, but on the whole irrelevant to the pursuit of history of the first degree, an excrescence upon it, and, on the whole, a useless and trivial excrescence. But the truth is the very opposite of this. History of the second degree is an absolutely necessary element in history of the first degree; no historical problem about any past event can be settled until we have settled the problem of the history of its history. For instance, no one would dream of claiming to have solved the problems that surround the battle of Marathon until he had studied the literature of the subject and arranged it in such a way as to build up in his own mind a narrative of the history of Marathonian theory and inquiry. For a person who had solved the problem of Marathon, a history of the inquiries into that problem would no doubt be supererogatory and pointless; but that is only because a person who had solved the problem would *ex hypothesi* have passed

through all these earlier stages of inquiry in his own person, except those which were too silly to attract his attention for a moment; and to retail them in a fresh historical narrative would be merely going over old ground. A person who has solved a problem and retains the solution vividly and fully in his mind is still conscious of the articulations of thought which the problem and its solution involve: that is, he still bears in mind the various elements of apprehended truth that are enshrined in the solution, and the various possible errors between which he has succeeded in steering his course. Now the past (and *ex hypothesi* unsuccessful) inquirers into the same problem have no doubt apprehended some of these truths and avoided some of the corresponding errors; if they have not, there is no reason for mentioning them in a history of the inquiry. They have also, so far as they were in the long run unsuccessful, made ultimate shipwreck on some one error. The successful inquirer, therefore, is in a superior position to any of them and has nothing to learn from studying them; the narrative of their thought is for him, therefore, a narrative without interest. But it has great interest in either of two contingencies: first, for the hitherto unsuccessful inquirer, who wishes to solve the problem for himself: and secondly, for the successful inquirer who has ceased to be fully conscious of the import and articulations of his own discovery, and can in no way recall these better than by recalling the struggles of earlier inquirers to solve the same problem. And these two functions are the permanent justification of history of the second degree. In the first place, no problem of the first degree can be solved without a preliminary review of the history of thought on the subject, which enables the inquirer consciously to insert himself in his proper place in the succession of inquirers; in the second place, it fertilizes and revivifies the achieved solution of every problem to look back at past attempts to solve it, and without such revivification the solution hardens into a mere formula repeated, parrot-like, without intelligence.

27. But it may seem a contradiction in terms to say that every problem of the first degree demands for its solution the previous solution of a problem of the second degree. If, for instance, we cannot justly appreciate the character of Julius Caesar without first appreciating the character of Mommsen

(and that is what I have been saying), it is easy to point out that Mommsen is just as much an historical personage as Julius Caesar, and that therefore the problem of studying his character is a problem of exactly the same kind as the problem of studying Julius Caesar's, namely an historical problem of the first degree. All we have said, therefore, is that before we have solved one problem we must solve another of the same kind, which therefore, presumably, presents the same kind of difficulty and must be solved in the same kind of way—in this case, by studying the biographies and literary remains of Mommsen, and, as a preliminary to this, studying his biographers' idiosyncrasies, and so *ad infinitum*. If therefore we are to avoid the absurdity of an infinite regress, which will prevent us from ever solving any problem whatever by always presenting us with another to be solved first, we must surely reject the view I have been putting forward, and argue that history of history is not a logical antecedent, but a logical consequent, of history itself.

28. Against the contention that history of the second degree is a logical consequent of history of the first degree I have already argued that the opposite is proved by the uniform and indispensable practice of all historians. And because an ounce of practice is worth a ton of theory, a fact like this may be safely left to justify itself against difficulties of the kind just stated. But our business here is theory, and we are therefore bound to meet the difficulty by argument. This can only be done by pointing out that all history works backwards from the present. That which is prior in time is, as Aristotle would say, posterior to us. We start from ourselves, from the world in which we live; and only so far as we have a certain grasp of that can we hope to grasp the truth of anything in the past. The history of history is an easier study than history, in so far as the historians who are there the objects of our study stand closer to ourselves and are more open to our inspection than the persons about whom they write. We know Mr A personally, and this enables us to predict with some confidence the kind of prejudice that will betray itself in his books about medieval history; we know Mr B by hearsay and Mr C by a fresh and consistent tradition, and the same is true of them. The psychology of Mommsen is easier to grasp than the

psychology of Julius Caesar because, though he was not a personal acquaintance of ours, he was a modern European, a nineteenth-century German, and we know incalculably more about the kind of person he was likely to be, to judge from his environment and training, than we ever can do about Julius Caesar. But the same principle applies even to historians of the remote past. Because Thucydides and Velleius Paterculus have left us their own writings, we have far better evidence concerning the character and attitude of Thucydides and Velleius Paterculus than we can ever have concerning those of Cleon and Tiberius. Hence the history of history always presents us with easier problems than those of history of the first degree, problems for which the evidence is more voluminous and more reliable. But the difference is not exhausted by this distinction of degree. It is not merely that history of the second degree is better documented; it has a kind of directness or immediacy, by contrast with which history of the first degree is always indirect and inferential. The historian has placed himself directly before us by writing for us to read; there is only a difference of degree between our acquaintance with him and our acquaintance with people whom we meet and with whom we converse; whereas we can never have this direct acquaintance, in however slight a degree, with Alexander the Great or William the Conqueror. This makes the problems of history of the second degree not merely easier than those of history pure and simple, but actually simpler in their structure and therefore capable of solution by methods too crude for the successful treatment of the latter.

29. The critical attitude, then, recognizes that whereas our acquaintance with our sources is direct, or mediated only by linguistic interpretation, our acquaintance with the events which we are studying is always indirect, mediated through a critical interpretation of our sources. We no longer think that in reading Livy or Gibbon we are face to face with the early or late history of Rome; we realize that what we are reading is not history but only material out of which, by thinking for ourselves, we may hope to construct history. From this point of view, Livy and Gibbon are no longer authorities, but sources merely: they are not to be followed, but to be interpreted. They are now seen to be only one element in the finished

product; the other element being, not *other* sources, but our own principles of interpretation, which we have to mix with them in the same sense in which Michelangelo said that he mixed his colours with brains.

30. The interpretation of sources must proceed according to principles. It is not enough to interpret them according to the dictates of intuition, to deal with individual cases as if each was unique and unlike any other. People sometimes advocate this happy-go-lucky or intuitive method of dealing with the problems presented by moral conduct, art, science, or even philosophy under the name of dealing with every case on its merits, and support their contention by a polemic against casuistry and the tyranny of abstract rules. And certainly abstract rules are bad masters. It does not follow that they are not good servants. And it is sometimes forgotten that to deal with a case on its merits is impossible unless is has merits, that is to say unless it has recognizable points of contact with other cases whose merits are of the same general kind. It is doubtless true that every case is unique; but uniqueness does not exclude points of identity with other unique cases; and a denial of the genuineness of universals is at least no less disastrous than a denial of the uniqueness of their particulars. In point of fact, no one would dream of trying to interpret an historical document except in the light of general principles, e.g. that this kind of script is characteristic of English thirteenth-century writing, or that silver coinage suddenly becomes very rare in the early fifth century A.D., or that official documents tend to exaggerate successes and to minimize failures; and the only real question is whether we shall merely assume our principles and remain, so far as possible, unconscious of them, or bring them out into the light of full discussion. That they must exist, is undeniable.

31. Various views are, however, held as to their derivation and basis. It is sometimes held, and widely at the present time, that principles of interpretation are derived inductively from the inspection and comparison of historical sources; and that having been thus derived they are then applied to the interpretation of more difficult cases. We find by experience, it is thought, that official documents are what is called 'optimistic', by comparing them with other sources; and this enables us to

guard against being misled by their generic tendency in cases where we have no other sources with which to compare them. The strong and weak points of this view are the strong and weak points of inductive logic in general. In a psychological sense it is no doubt true that we recognize the principles by examining instances of them, and we very likely first vividly realize the optimistic tendency of official reports by coming across a case in which two combatants both officially claim decisive victories in the same battle, or the like. But from a less psychological point of view, which means a point of view less easily satisfied with the first superficial appearance of the facts, it becomes obvious that we accept the principle not because we have seen an example of it but because the principle itself proves acceptable; and that it possesses a certainty far more complete than the certainty that attaches to the fact which, we fancied, guaranteed it. The function of the instance now seems to be, rather, to reveal to us the principles which we implicitly accept, not to introduce to us principles to which till now we were strangers. And this must be the case; because what we have really done is not to find the principle of official mendacity written large upon the face of the facts, but to appeal to that principle in order to make the facts intelligible, and only afterwards to assume that the facts must have been inherently an instance of the principle, because we assume that facts must be inherently intelligible and we do not see how they could have been intelligible otherwise. Hence a little further reflexion inevitably convinces us that our principles of interpretation have their origin, not in the facts as we observe them, but in the thought which we bring to bear upon them.

32. But this discovery, true as it is, exposes us to a new confusion. If our canons of interpretation originate not in the facts but in our thought, they are merely subjective, and this appears to imply not only that they are creatures of mind but that they are creatures of caprice. On this view the individual thinker is free to select any principles that appeal to him, and construct historical narrative by their help without any attempt to show that these principles, and no others, are justifiable. If he has a bad conscience about this, he may placate it after the event by showing that the principles he has arbitrarily chosen have, after all, 'worked', or yielded a more or less

coherent narrative; but that is no proof that they are valid, for the question remains whether the narrative so constructed is true. For instance, suppose a writer were constructing a history of the Anglo-Saxon settlement. He might work on the assumption that contemporary writers were the best informed, and consequently accept everything said by Gildas as true; he might further assume that Anglo-Saxon popular tradition retained for several centuries an accurate account of the facts, and consequently accept the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle; he might also accept Nennius as trustworthy because Nennius enshrines traditions going back to the 5th century, and these, like those contained in the Chronicle, may be accurate. Having made these assumptions, he may then recognize that modern archaeological study has produced results quite incompatible with these assumptions, and this may lead him to embrace the further principle that archaeological inquiry is in the main powerless to produce historical results. Applying these principles to the problem in hand, he will get a fairly definite narrative of the main events of his period; but the question is, will his narrative be true? And that question now resolves itself into the question, are his principles satisfactory? Clearly, if his principles are the right principles, his narrative will be true, or as true as it is possible, with the evidence we possess, to make it. And we have no way of deciding whether the narrative is true except by asking whether it is legitimately derived from the evidence: it is not as if we had some independent method of establishing the truth of the narrative and so proving the validity of the principles *a posteriori*. There is no alternative except either to regard principles as a matter for capricious personal choice, in which case the resulting narrative no longer has any claim to be considered anything more than a work of imagination, or to insist that principles shall be justified *a priori*, that is, made into objects of critical study and discussion by a scientific methodology of history.

33. This methodology will be concerned with abstract or general problems connected with the various concepts used in historical thought. Because these concepts are treated abstractly, the science that deals with them will be highly fissiparous, and will issue in an indefinite number of historical sciences each concerned with the methods of handling and

interpreting one kind of evidence. For it is to be observed that the transition from dogmatic to critical history involves an immense widening of the field of evidence. Whereas dogmatic history recognizes no sources but only authorities, which must consist of ready-made narrative, critical history treats these narratives not as authorities, or history ready-made, but as sources, or evidence to be made into history by interpreting it: and this means ignoring the fact that they are narratives and treating them in a way in which they might equally have been treated had they not been narratives. The methods of critical history are therefore applicable to an indefinite variety of objects all of which become historical sources so far as historians can find ways of employing them as such. There is now no *a priori* distinction between facts that can and facts that cannot be used as the materials of history; everything depends on the ability of the historian to discover materials that he can use, and these will be of the most widely divergent kinds and the principles of their employment infinitely various. This is the *raison d'être* of such sciences as palaeography and diplomatics, epigraphy, numismatics, historical architecture, and all the ramifications of archaeology in its application to various kinds of implements and relics. All these sciences combine a theoretical side, consisting of general propositions concerning such things as the period of history at which this or that moulding or piece of ornament was used, and a practical side, consisting of general recommendations as to the search for the special kind of evidence in question. In part, these sciences can be discovered set forth in textbooks; but only in a very small part. The student who is anxious to learn them must get himself apprenticed to the trade by working in company with skilled exponents; he will find them in museums, in libraries, on the staffs of excavations, and even in universities. These bodies of skilled historical investigators, handing down by personal instruction and word of mouth a vast amount of knowledge that never finds its way into books, form one of the most interesting features of our civilization on its intellectual side. It reminds one of the medieval gild system, and it has the same strong points: it ensures, as nothing else can, a high and fairly consistent level of work, and makes it difficult for a totally incompetent or untrained person to undertake a delicate piece

of research and impose his valueless results on the public. For the fact is that sound technical training can only be provided by some such system of personal and prolonged intercourse as is given in apprenticeship: and just as a man must apprentice himself to the technique of handicraft if he is to become a sound craftsman, so he must apprentice himself to the technique of historical research if he is to become a competent historian. It is, however, worth pointing out that our habit of printing and publishing technical details is apt to mislead aspirants to historical knowledge. So much is to be found in print e.g. about numismatics by anyone who chooses to read it, that people are often tempted to imagine that they can become numismatists or even form a general impression of the extent, cogency, and historical value of numismatics by simply reading books. This is a complete mistake. The books which such a person reads are positively misleading, except to a person who has constantly handled coins in the company of people able to call his attention to their salient features; and no amount of book-learning can make up for this personal instruction and personal experience in the handling of actual objects. The fisherman who found his way home in a fog by smelling the lead, after sounding with it, was hardly more independent of book-learning than the archaeologist who rubs his thumb along the edge of a potsherd and says 'they never feel like that much after the reign of Domitian'.

34. To scientific treatment of this kind, narrative is no less amenable than any other kind of historical material. The peculiar treatment which narrative demands is generally called by such names as higher criticism, *Quellenkritik*, and so forth. A very remarkable and almost unique example is to be found in the present state of New Testament criticism, which has been undertaken with the deliberate intention of testing with the utmost possible rigour the trustworthiness of those narratives on whose truth Christianity stakes its hope of human happiness and salvation. The fact that this critical study of the New Testament has been taken in hand entirely by persons anxious to believe as much of the Christian faith as possible is an extraordinary and almost incredible testimony to the moral dignity and intellectual sincerity of our age; and the fact that, to find a perfect example of modern historical method, it is

necessary to turn to this particular field, shows that the theologians have by no means adopted a weapon which others had prepared, but have gone ahead of historians in the sphere of historical technique. It is safe to say that nowadays the average professional historian is far less critical in his attitude to Herodotus than the average professional theologian in his attitude to St Mark.

35. So far, however, we have been considering only that part of historical methodology which is empirical, or concerned with the peculiarities of different kinds of evidence. But there is another and much more important part of historical methodology, namely general or pure methodology. This is concerned with problems of method which are never absent from any piece of historical thinking. An example of such a problem is that of the argument from silence. The problem is this: can we say that a certain event did not happen because we are not told that it did? On the one side, it may be argued that we cannot, because our sources do not exhaust the whole of the events in their period, and any number of things may have happened about which they say nothing. But on the other side, it may be argued that all historians always do rely on the argument from silence when they accept a narrative based on a certain source because they have no other sources and therefore cannot check the one which they possess; thus our account of any event for which we have only one authority would certainly have to be modified if we discovered a second authority (e.g. the account of the Athenian revolution of 411, and its modification after the discovery of Aristotle's *'Αθηναίων πολίτεια*). Hence there is always an implicit argument from silence in every historical inference. And this becomes explicit when we find such arguments as this: No objects found on this site can be dated earlier than the year x or later than the year y, and therefore it was only occupied during the period xy. Here we argue directly from the fact that we have not found certain types of object. Yet no archaeologist would hesitate to use arguments of this kind. Thus on principle the argument from silence seems obviously indefensible, but in practice every historian uses it and uses it incessantly. But every now and then someone starts up in the course of a controversy and says to his opponent: 'this won't do: you are resting your case

on the argument from silence'. It is the business of pure historical methodology to settle this problem and others like it, which are concerned with the perfectly general question of the principles on which evidence must be interpreted.

36. Methodology in this general or pure part is in point of fact almost wholly neglected by historians. They live in this respect from hand to mouth, and on the rare occasions when they start thinking about the subject they are apt to conclude that all historical thought is logically indefensible, though they sometimes add a saving clause to the effect that they personally can interpret evidence pretty well because they have a mysterious intuitive *flair* for the truth, a kind of *δαιμονίον σήμειον* which informs them when their authorities are telling lies. Now this attitude is intelligible enough, because it is the attitude which most people always take up towards any philosophical problem. They are helpless when asked to think it out, and they fall back on dogmatic and almost instinctive convictions which under critical inspection are seen to shift and waver with every breath of wind. If you take for instance the attitude of an unphilosophical person towards the general problems of ethics, you will find that he can never present a coherent statement or defence of any one attitude, but that his actual position is a chaotic mixture of all the ethical theories you ever heard of, all presented as intuitively certain and guaranteed by all the sanctity of instinctive conviction. And the upshot is that they know well enough what to do, but can't explain why they do it or how they know they ought to do it. Similarly the ordinary historian can give no account of the processes by which he extracts narrative from sources; all he can say is that he succeeds in doing it somehow, that something, which he may call instinct in order to mark the fact that he does not know its real name, guides him in deciding what evidence is sound and in what direction it points.

37. But we cannot accept this account of the matter. To accept it means falling back on a merely obscurantist, because psychological and subjective, theory of interpretative principles, and the weaknesses of this theory have been already considered. No one would for a moment tolerate the suggestion that instinctive convictions may teach us the right dating of

Corinthian pottery, because, as we have seen, that suggestion reduces history to the level of fable. But exactly the same result follows if the same suggestion is applied to general or pure interpretative principles. If it is merely a *flair* that leads us to select and interpret this evidence in this way, how do we know that the resulting narrative is true? A narrative of some kind will doubtless result from any kind of interpretation; but the historian is not satisfied with any kind of narrative; he wants a true narrative; and unless he will condescend to the ignominy of seriously claiming that he has a direct intuitive perception of the difference between a true and a false narrative, like the magical cups in fairy-tales that broke when poison was poured into them, he must admit in this case what we have argued in the case of empirical principles, that the principles must be independently established *a priori* in order that the narrative constructed by their means may be known to be true.

38. There must, therefore, be a general logic of historical thought, and this must be a philosophical as opposed to an empirical science, and must establish *a priori* the pure principles on which all historical thinking is to proceed. Without the explicit and definite construction of such a philosophical methodology, the results of our historical inquiries may be true, but we cannot know them to be true: we can only hope that, this time, we have not fallen into the trap of an illicit use of the argument from silence or the like, but we cannot be sure of it. Croce, than whom no living philosopher is better qualified to discuss the problems of historical thought, even goes so far as to say that the entire task of philosophy consists in nothing but this construction of a methodology for history. I am not sure that I could follow him quite so far, but I am at any rate equally convinced of the necessity for a philosophical methodology of history, if history is to be more than an arbitrary construction of fantastic narratives out of evidence interpreted at haphazard.

d. *Narrative*

39. When we have found and interpreted our evidence, the result is history as a finished product, or narrative. I say as a

finished product, but it must be remembered that the product is never actually finished. The work of collecting sources is as endless as is the work of interpreting them, and therefore every narrative that we can at any given moment put forward is only an interim report on the progress of our historical inquiries. Finality in such a matter is absolutely impossible. We can never say 'this is how it happened', but only and always 'this is how, as at present advised, I suppose it to have happened'.

40. Because final and complete truth, with regard even to quite a small historical problem, is unattainable, it does not follow that there can be no solid advance in historical knowledge. We shall certainly never know all that we want to know about, say, the battle of Marathon; but it would be hasty to infer that all possible accounts of it are therefore equally far from the truth. It may seem paradoxical to say that one account is nearer to the truth than another while yet confessing that we do not know what the truth is; but we must face this paradox, and try to clear it up later, clinging for the moment to the obvious fact that we can and do substitute one narrative for another, not on grounds of personal preference but on wholly objective grounds, grounds whose cogency anyone would have to admit if he looked into them, while yet fully aware that our own narrative is not the whole truth and is certainly in some particulars untrue. One account of an event like the battle of Marathon is demonstrably preferable to another, although neither is wholly true.

41. If this is called scepticism, it is a very different scepticism from that which we analysed at an earlier stage of our inquiry, the scepticism which, assuming that history was to be found ready-made in our authorities, had made the discovery that no authority deserves to be taken at face value. This is a more advanced and less helpless scepticism; for it is a scepticism which only affects the absolute truth of our historical thinking, and does not touch its relative truth, that is to say, the truth of the judgement that *this* historical narrative is preferable to *that*. And if it is argued that without absolute truth this relative truth cannot exist, we shall reply, on the contrary, unless this relative truth were certain, the argument against absolute truth would fall to the ground. [For it is only

the experience of refuting this or that historical theory that leads us to believe in the ultimate refutability of all such theories; and if we are wrong in thinking that this or that theory has been genuinely refuted, there is no reason to think that all must be capable of refutation. But to refute a particular historical theory means to supersede it; for the only way in which it][6] can be refuted is by reinterpreting the evidence on which it rests, and showing that the evidence really points in a different direction. The only certainty that we can ever have in historical thinking is the certainty of having made a definite advance on previous theories. If we want more than that, we cannot have it. If we hope that by pursuing our inquiries we can come to know the past exactly as it happened, our hope is vain. This is perhaps generally recognized, but I may be pardoned for reminding you of the grounds on which we recognize it.

42. We depend, in history, on sources. We do not depend on authorities: that is, we are not at the mercy of our informants' knowledge and veracity; for we can to some extent detect and allow for their failings, and supplement their information by evidence of other kinds. But whatever kind of evidence we use, there is at any given stage in our inquiry a certain amount of it at our disposal and no more. Now we do not, as if we were inductive logicians, commit the imbecility of assuming that the unknown will resemble the known. We do not for a moment imagine that the sources which we do not possess would tell the same tale as those which we do. On the contrary, we know that they might tell a different tale, and that is why we lament their absence and do all we can to find them. But, as we have already seen, the kind of evidence that the historian can use depends on himself, not on the evidence. And therefore the totality of evidence on any given subject can never be exhausted: we always know that if we were more painstaking we could discover more evidence, and that if we

[6] Written on the opposite page is the following: 'Not right. I should have said:—For this argument depends on the principle that historical theories admit of refutation: that is to say, on the principle that criticism may be effective. But if criticism is effective, it results in the replacement of the refuted view by a less inadequate view, that is, one relatively true. For the only way in which an historical theory'. The brackets in the text are Collingwood's.

were more ingenious we could squeeze more information out of the evidence we possess. For instance, Greek history in the fifth century B.C. is a valuable study for the beginner in historical work because there are so few sources for it that the beginner can grasp them as a whole, and proceed to the work of interpreting them for himself with a remarkably small equipment of scholarship. Hence, within a few months of beginning the study of the period, he is able to form a tolerably good judgement of the merits of any theory that may be put forward. When, on the other hand, he deals with Roman history of the early Empire, he is embarrassed by the immense mass of the available sources, especially those derived from epigraphy; here, therefore, he is confronted with the opposite problem, the problem of acquiring a sound scholarship or acquaintance with the sources, and the work of interpreting them falls comparatively into the background. The student of ancient history as it is taught in this university has therefore two different problems successively before him: in his Greek history he has to exercise himself in squeezing the last drop, by subtle interpretation, out of a given body of sources, and in his Roman history he has to exercise himself in mastering a body of sources whose extent is, within the limits of time allowed him, practically inexhaustible. But this distinction between Greek and Roman history is only a *prima facie* distinction, and disappears on closer acquaintance. For one soon begins to realize that hope of real progress in Greek history is bound up with the hope of enlarging the body of available evidence by calling into play the resources of archaeology, anthropology, and so forth; and on the other hand it is possible, given more time, to master pretty completely the sources for the history of the early Empire, and then comes the task of interpreting them.

43. Both these tasks are endless, and therefore, when the historian says 'ich will nur sagen wie es eigentlich geschehen ist'[7]—I will only state what actually happened (to quote Ranke's famous programme)—he is merely making a promise that he can never redeem: unless indeed the word *will* implies

[7] Collingwood has misremembered the quotation. It should be: 'Er will bloss sagen, wie es eigentlich gewesen' (L. Ranke, *Geschichten der romanischen und germanischen Völker von 1494 bis 1535* (Leipzig, 1824), p. vi).

not a promise but a desire—not 'I will' but 'I want to', in which case the phrase is a statement of an ideal, but an unattainable ideal. For it is clear that however long the historian goes on working he will never arrive at the point at which he can say 'I have now collected all the evidence that can ever be collected, and have interpreted it as exhaustively as it can ever be interpreted.' History, regarded as knowledge of past fact, is unattainable.

44. This brings us face to face with a new problem. What is it that we are trying to do in our historical researches? We have hitherto assumed that what we are trying to do is to narrate facts as they actually happened. This, we now see, cannot be done. Now it is possible to explain this by saying that there is a discrepancy between what we are trying to do and what we succeed in doing; what we are trying to do is to know past events, what we succeed in doing is to improve on previous attempts to know them. Hence it is an illusion to think that we can ever know what really happened: but it is a necessary and beneficent illusion, in so far as it is the necessary condition of the real advance which we actually make. Similarly, we are always trying to be good in the sense of morally perfect; that we never shall be; but by trying to do the impossible we actually succeed in doing something which, without this, would itself be impossible—namely, becoming better. All true progress, it may be argued, is rendered possible only by setting before itself a goal which is unattainable.

45. There is no doubt a certain plausibility, and even a certain truth, in this. It is certainly the case that many people misunderstand the actions which they nevertheless do; and it is certain that in some cases, if we understood what we were doing, we should cease to do it. There are historical students who believe that by their researches they can discover the past *wie es eigentlich geschehen ist*;[8] indeed, that is a perfectly natural belief to hold, before one has thought carefully about the matter. And there may be some of these who, if and when they learnt the falsity of this belief, would drop their historical studies. But I am in a position to state confidently that not all would do so; for I myself have learnt the falsity of this naïve

[8] As mentioned in the previous note this quotation from Ranke is not correct.

realism, and have never for a moment been tempted to give up historical research in consequence; precisely as a modern scientist, who has learnt that the world of physics is an abstraction and not a metaphysical reality, does not therefore cease to study physics. And in general, it cannot be argued[9] that ignorance of what we are doing, even to the extent of positive misunderstanding of it, is necessary to the doing of it. We generally believe that our most successful actions are those which we most clearly think out and most completely understand. No doubt there are many things which we often call actions, such as digesting our dinner, that can be done quite unconsciously; but these cases do not really throw light on the difficulty. For although we do not operate our digestive organs in the deliberate design of digesting our dinner, we certainly do not operate them in any other deliberate purpose; we operate them, if we can be said to operate them, without any purpose at all. The action is an unconscious action, involving no purpose: and therefore it does not help to explain the peculiar relation of a purposive action, like thinking historically or acting morally, to a purpose which it sets before itself and does not achieve. In cases in which we are aiming at the achievement of some end, it seems hardly disputable that we aim most efficiently when we think most clearly of the end; and to say that a certain action is only rendered possible by our cherishing a misconception of the end seems a contradiction in terms.

46. Can we, then, give a new and improved account of historical thinking by saying that what we are really trying to do is not to know the past but to improve upon previous attempts to know it? Can we define history in terms not of the unattainable ideal but of the actually achieved progress?

We cannot. For in actual historical work the desire to go one better than other people or our own past selves is in no sense a central motive. The historian is not trying to discredit his predecessors, but to get at the facts; that is the account of the

[9] In the manuscript the passage from 'It is certainly the case' (second sentence of paragraph 45) until 'it cannot be argued' is added at a later date and written on the opposite page. In the original text at the beginning of the second sentence of paragraph 45 'But it involves the curious doctrine' is crossed out.

matter which he would always give. And further, if you say that the ideal, because it is unattainable, cannot be actually operative as an ideal, you take away the criterion by which alone the advance is known to be an advance. We can say '*this* historical work is nearer than *that* to my conception of what history ought to be', only so far as we have a conception of what history ought to be. I do not say that the separation between what is and what ought to be is in the long run metaphysically satisfactory; but I do say that it is a lesser evil than the arbitrary reduction of the dualism by denying one of its terms and trying to conceive a progress without any ideal at all except the ideal of progress itself, which is not an ideal but a term correlative to an ideal other than itself.

47. We are, therefore, left in some perplexity as to the purpose of history. We have seen that history cannot be the mere satisfaction of a detached curiosity respecting the past, because this curiosity cannot be satisfied. Nor can it be the mere expression of the pugnacious instincts of historians, for though of course historians have pugnacious instincts, they are also historians, and they want to express their pugnacious instincts through historical controversy, whose peculiar features are left unexplained if we call it a mere example of pugnacity.

48. At this point it may be suggested that the purpose of history is pragmatic: that is to say, its value consists in the moral which we can derive from it for our guidance in present action. Now I do not want to deny that history has morals of this kind. People sometimes say that it has not, because it never repeats itself, and, since the same situation never recurs, an action appropriate for one situation is not appropriate for another. But we need not suppose that it is. Surely one may be allowed to say that we learn by experience how to handle cases of influenza, without being held to the doctrine that all cases of influenza exactly resemble each other. Nobody thinks they do; but everybody thinks that they resemble each other quite enough to justify us in applying to them all certain general rules, such as keeping a feverish patient in bed in a warm room and being very careful about after-effects. These rules we have undoubtedly learnt from historical cases of influenza in our own and other people's experience, and it would be sheer folly

to pretend that the same principle does not hold good in strategy and legislation as well as in medicine. Indeed, a soldier or statesman who knew nothing of the history of war or politics would be quite unfit for his work. But this is not to say that its pragmatic value is the essence of history, the value in virtue of which it is history. On the contrary: history pragmatically conceived is conceived first as having completed its proper task of determining past facts, and then as proceeding on the strength of this to give advice concerning the present. When, therefore, it is pointed out that the past facts can never be completely determined, pragmatic history is nipped in the bud. We are raising the question 'what good is history if it can't determine past facts?' and it is no answer to reply, as the pragmatic conception does, 'the good of history is that, having determined past facts, it can tell you what to do in the present'.

49. But the pragmatic theory of history is out of date. No one preaches it now, for people generally recognize that it assumes a finality about the results of historical research which they do not possess. Its place has been taken by a new form of the same general tendency. When you realize that it is impossible first to establish the facts and then to deduce their moral, you can get over the difficulty by allowing the moral to determine the facts. For instance: you want to warn people against intoxication. You say 'Noah got drunk, and that is why negroes are black. Take warning by that awful calamity'. That is pragmatic history. But if you realize that the inebriation of Noah is a matter of serious debate among the learned, and if you are still obsessed by the moral value of history, you say: 'some people say Noah got drunk: others say he didn't, but only had a glass or two. *I* shall say he got drunk, because I am a total abstainer and I want to inculcate a horror of alcohol.' This is tendentious, as opposed to pragmatic, history: the difference being that in tendentious history the moral has got inside the process of historical thought and has played a decisive part in determining its conclusion.

50. Tendentious history, so understood, is commoner than might appear at first sight. It is normal where the historian is personally and immediately attached to one of the parties in the events he is describing; in this case he may allow his

attachment quite unconsciously to modify his view of the facts, and reject evidence that tells against his friends because he cannot believe that his friends would have done anything so discreditable; or he may deliberately, in the spirit of an advocate, state his friends' case (or, of course, his own) in a one-sided way because he knows that others have stated the opposite case. And this cannot be condemned without condemning almost all biography, and certainly all autobiography, as historically worthless; and the same applies to histories of England in which the writer obviously rejoices at her victories and laments her defeats, takes pride in her glories and feels shame at her disgraces; or to political histories written by a member of one party who wishes to explain and justify the programme for which his party stands; or to a history of the Reformation written, as we say, from a Protestant or a Catholic point of view; or the like. But further: where the historian is not personally attached to one of the actors on his own stage, he may still have an ideal attachment. Thus a modern democrat may, like Grote, write a history of Greece with the more or less deliberate purpose of vindicating ancient democracy and thus, indirectly, glorifying modern democracy; or a Mommsen may make Julius Caesar his hero because of his own political predilection for autocratic government. And we must remember that a Grote without Grote's political ideals would never have written a history of Greece at all, still less the history which we are all thankful to possess. In a sense, that is true of all historians. All history is tendentious, and if it were not tendentious nobody would write it. At least, nobody except bloodless pedants, who mistake the materials of history for history itself, and think they are historians when they are only scholars.

51. On the other hand, the ineradicable tendentiousness of history is, wherever it appears, a vice. To succumb to it means ceasing to be an historian and becoming a barrister; a good and useful member of society, in his right place, but guilty of an indictable fraud if he calls himself an historian. And therefore, though we all approach history infected with tendentiousness, our actual historical labour must consist largely in overcoming it and purifying ourselves of it, endeavouring to bring ourselves to a frame of mind which takes no sides and

rejoices in nothing but the truth. We shall not ever bring ourselves wholly to this frame of mind, and of that we can be sure when we see that people like Tacitus and Livy and Gibbon and Mommsen have never quite done so; but we must go on trying, and above all never argue, 'because Mommsen, in the long run, wrote tendentiously, I will write tendentiously: I will let myself go and write history as I want it to have been'. It is necessary to emphasize that, because at the present time there are people who argue thus. It is said, and widely believed, that history has hitherto been written by capitalists, and from a capitalist point of view. It is time, therefore, to take it out of their hands and write it deliberately from a proletarian point of view, to construct a history of the world in order to show the proletariat as the permanently oppressed hero and the capitalist as the permanent villain and tyrant of the human drama. This proposal, however strange it may seem in an Oxford lecture-room, is today a matter of practical politics; numerous people are acting on it, and are manufacturing the literature which it demands. The result is a type of history somewhat recalling the anti-religious histories of the eighteenth century—a history inspired by hatred and endeavouring to justify itself by, most anachronistically, projecting the object of that hatred, by an obsession that partakes of the nature of madness, into the whole course of human development. Similarly, there are anti-Semite histories, representing all history as a melodrama with the Jew for villain; the late war produced something like a crop of anti-Teuton histories, and for a combination of anti-Teutonism and anti-Semitism we may go to Mr Hilaire Belloc. Of such things I will here say no more than that anyone with the very faintest spark of historical consciousness in him will regard them as scientists would regard a man who, wishing to generate life in the laboratory, had deliberately refrained from sterilizing his apparatus. Such persons are the vulgar criminals of history, and with such it is useless to argue. But it is encouraging to remember that the anti-religious history of the eighteenth century did after all produce a Gibbon, warped by the prevailing vices of his generation, but an historian of the first rank. And I rather suspect that the next really great history will be an anti-capitalist history inspired by the mythology of socialism.

52. Great history, however, is never merely tendentious; Gibbon was no mere anti-religious pamphleteer, and though certainly his anti-religious passion was one of the forces that moved him to write, the force that sustained him in his work was sheer devotion to history. Now when the tendentiousness which, as I have said, is universal among true historians, has been conquered by the love of truth and impartiality, a new moral atmosphere is created in the historian's mind: he now takes sides not with any one party but with history itself, with the process of events that has generated all parties alike out of itself and has reabsorbed them into itself. History, from this point of view, ceases to be a melodrama and becomes a theodicy, the only possibly theodicy. The historical process is seen as an absolute, all-embracing whole within which all conflicts arise without disintegrating its unity, for its unity alone holds the conflicting parties face to face in their death-struggle, and these conflicting parties are nothing but embodiments of the time-spirit, created by it in order that it may through them achieve its own concrete, objective existence. The world-spirit is in history striving to objectify itself perfectly, and to this end passes through a succession of phases in each of which its true nature is partly revealed; but in each phase the conflict between the partial revelation and the unrealized ideal tears asunder the objective world that has been realized, destroys it in the creation of something new that shall supersede it and approach more closely to the ideal. Hence the conflict between Athens and Sparta is not a conflict between right on one side and wrong on the other; it is properly conceived not as a conflict *between* two forces, but as a conflict *within* one organism, namely the Hellenic world. It is a symptom of something wrong with that organism as a whole, some endemic malady which, because no cure for it has been found, breaks out in a self-destructive rage, the suicide of the civilization on which it feeds. And the new Hellenistic civilization that arises on the ruins of the Hellenic survives it because it deserves to survive, because it has diagnosed the essential malady of its predecessor and has devised a cure for it. Hellenism, in fact, succeeded because it overcame the political atomism that broke up the Hellenic world into a plurality of hostile units, and achieved political coherence, at whatever cost. Rome conquered Hellenism because Rome, the pupil of Alexander, learnt the lesson of Hellenism but added to it something more, a toughness of moral fibre, a force of character, that was lacking in the vague cosmopolitan culture of the Hellenistic period. Rome thus combines the city-state of the Hellenic world, its vivid and inspiring self-consciousness, with the political breadth and inclusiveness of the Hellenistic; and therefore Augustus succeeded where Alexander and Pericles had failed. He succeeded because he deserved to succeed, because he had solved the problem which they had failed to solve.

53. That is an example of history conceived as theodicy, Weltgeschichte als Weltgericht. Its fundamental thesis is that in every struggle—and it conceives all history as a history of struggles—the winner is he who deserves to win, because he has broken through the bounds of thought that limit his contemporaries and called into play the more potent forces of a new and superior phase in the world's history. The fittest survives; for no one survives except by solving the problems with which life presents him, and his solution of these problems is the accurate measure of his powers. God, said Napoleon, is on the side of the big battalions; and that is a true expression of this view of history, so long as we remember that it means no more than this: in a world where fighting is the rule, the better man or the better nation shows superiority and therefore fitness to survive either by fighting better than anybody else, or by finding means to abolish war and set his powers free for another occupation.

54. This conception of history has found its classical advocate in Hegel; and it is certainly true that no one has done more than Hegel to lay down the general lines on which modern thought in the last hundred years has moved. So much is that true in this particular case, that I cannot think of any considerable historian or philosopher of modern times who would not to some extent identify himself with the view I have outlined. Even Croce, who is no friend to Hegel's philosophy of history, uncompromisingly accepts this essential part of it in the doctrine which he calls the positivity of history. In history, says he, there is no such thing as a bad fact, a bad period: the historical process is not a transition from bad to good (still less from good to bad) but from good to better; what we call bad

being nothing but good itself seen in the light of the better. Hence it is not the function of the historian to pass judgement, but to explain; and to explain is always to justify, to show the rationality of that which is explained; for (he goes on) whereas the practical consciousness always looks to the future and tries to bring into existence something better than what now exists, and therefore always regards the present as bad, whereas it can regard the past as good simply because it is not real and therefore has not to be opposed and improved, the theoretical or historical consciousness, concerned simply with what is, must regard the present with an impartial eye and must therefore see in it the outcome of all the past's endeavour, and therefore better than the past. And Croce, equally with Hegel, condemns as sentimentality the conception of history as (to use Hegel's words) the shambles in which the happiness of peoples, the wisdom of states, and the virtue of individuals have been mercilessly sacrificed, and sacrificed for nothing. The terms in which Hegel describes this pessimistic view of history make it impossible to charge his own view with a shallow optimism; and indeed, if history is to be regarded as a theodicy, the world-spirit whose ways it justifies is a god no less terrible than just.

55. Such a god hardly requires our attempts to justify him. And with this reflection we may take our leave both of historical optimism and of historical pessimism. To say that the whole course of history has been a continual passage from the good to the better is true and valuable, if it means that we must look at history not with a view to criticizing it but with a view to accepting it and reconciling ourselves to it, not it to ourselves. But it is false if it means that we are called upon to pass moral judgements on its course and at the same time restricted from passing any but a favourable judgement. We are not called upon to pass moral judgements at all. Our business is simply to face the facts. To say that the Greek victory at Marathon was a good thing or the Renaissance papacy a bad thing is simply to indulge in fantasies that impede, instead of advancing, the course of historical study. The real holocaust of history is the historian's holocaust of his emotional and practical reactions towards the facts that it presents to his gaze. True history must be absolutely passionless, absolutely devoid of all judgements of value, of whatever kind.

56. This may seem a hard saying, but I appeal to everyone who has any experience of historical studies for confirmation of it. And if we find it difficult to accept, we do so, I think, because we forget what it is that in historical thought we are studying. We are studying the past. You will remember that Huckleberry Finn, when the Widow and Miss Watson undertook his belated religious education, began by being all in a sweat about Moses, till Miss Watson let out one day that Moses had been dead a considerable time: whereupon he lost interest, because, as he said, he took no stock in dead men. Now the true historian, like Huckleberry Finn, takes no stock in dead men. He does not get in a sweat about them, just because they are dead; he does not do what I suppose Huckleberry Finn to have done at first, namely pass moral judgements and take up practical or volitional attitudes towards the objects of his study. But it is easy to forget that what we are studying is the past, and to deceive ourselves into thinking that Athens and Sparta are as real as France and Germany. When we do this, we feel about them as we feel about France and Germany, that it is up to us to *do* something about it, to decide upon a course of action, or at least to make up our minds how we should act if opportunity arose to act. It will not arise; and for that very reason we may take the same kind of self-deceptive pleasure in making up our minds how we *should* act that we take in framing pungent repartees to an adversary whom we know we shall not meet. We are amusing ourselves by transplanting ourselves in imagination into a scene whose very essence, as object of historical thought, is that we are not in it and never can be in it: and this not only confuses our historical thinking but squanders in fantasies a moral energy which it is our duty to devote to the actual problems of life.

57. At the beginning of these lectures I insisted that the past, which is the object of historical thought, was not a mass of stuff existing somewhere though removed from our immediate vision by the passage of time, but consisted of events which because they have happened are not now happening and do not in any sense exist at all. The past is in no sense whatever actual. It is wholly ideal. And that is why our attitude towards it is wholly different from our attitude towards the

present, which, because it is actual, is the scene of our practical activity and the proper subject of our moral judgements. To pass moral judgements on the past is to fall into the fallacy of imagining that somewhere, behind a veil, the past is still happening; and when we so imagine it we fall into a kind of rage of thwarted activity as if the massacre of Corcyra was now being enacted in the next room and we ought to break open the door and stop it. To rescue ourselves from this state of mind we need only realize clearly that these things have been; they are over; there is nothing to be done about them; the dead must be left to bury their dead and to praise their virtues and lament their loss.

58. History, so conceived, may be called a very cold-blooded business, and I may be accused of withdrawing from it all that makes it attractive. I am not afraid of the accusation; I do not think that anyone who can so accuse me is really more interested in history or more devoted to its study than I am myself. But I may certainly be asked to explain why it is attractive, if the past can never be known as it actually happened and if we may not even use it as a catharsis for our emotions and our moral judgements. The answer is, that history is ideal; and the ideal is an abstraction from the actual and exists for the sake of the actual.

59. There is, properly speaking, only one knowable object, namely the actual—that which now exists: and every intellectual problem that can possibly be raised properly concerns our knowledge of this one object or complex of objects. And our knowledge of the actual is inseparable from our own volitional activity and emotional reaction towards it. The actual, the present, is the only possible object of our knowledge, field for our activity, and stimulus to our feelings. We cannot know the future, because it is not there to be known; we cannot know the past, because it is not there to be known. And this explains at once why it is impossible to know the past as it actually happened, and why it is impossible to take up practical or emotional attitudes towards it. Does this, then, prove that history is an illusion and that to pursue it is folly? No: because though the past has no actual existence, it is an ideal element in the present, and can therefore be studied in the same general way and to the same extent to which any abstraction may be

studied. The present is the past transformed. In knowing the present, we are knowing that into which the past has changed. The past has become the present, and therefore if we ask where the past is to be found in living and concrete actuality, the answer is, in the present. But whereas the past exists actually as the present, it exists ideally as the past—as what it was before it turned into the present. Now all knowledge proceeds by analysis and synthesis—taking a given whole to pieces, studying the pieces separately, and putting them together again. But this process is altogether an ideal process: we do not really take the whole apart, for it won't come apart; what we do is to make ideal distinctions within it and study what we have so distinguished. And the elements that we have distinguished are not real: they are only ideal. It is the object as a whole that is real; and the real whole is composed of ideal parts. If this seems difficult, if anyone thinks that a real whole must be composed of real parts, let him reflect that the qualities into which we analyse any perceptible object—its blueness, its squareness, and so forth—are not real things that can be picked up and stuck together; they are abstractions, but abstractions which together do really make up the object.[10]

60. The present is composed in this way of two ideal elements, past and future. The present *is* the future of the past, and the past of the future; it is thus both future and past in a synthesis that is actual. (Of course, any future time will, when it comes, have what is now the present as its past and a further future as its future: so any moment of time is a synthesis of past and future; but until it arrives this synthesis is not actual but only ideal.) The present is generally imagined as a mathematical point between the past and the future; but that is a false metaphor: for really it is not a point but a world, a complex of events actually going on, and instead of *its* being a mere abstraction, a mathematical point between two real extensions, *they* are mere abstractions and *it*, as actuality, contains both past and future as ideal elements within itself.

[10] The opposite page contains the following statement: 'or think of Newton's analysis of the moon's elliptical orbit into (a) a rectilinear falling movement towards the earth (b) a second rectilinear tangential movement—both wholly ideal.'

61. Our knowledge, so called, of the past, is therefore not knowledge of the past as of an actual object, and therefore not true knowledge; it is only the reconstruction of an ideal object in the interests of knowing the present. The purpose of history is to enable us to know (and therefore to act relatively to) the present: that is the truth contained in the pragmatic view of history. But the knowledge of the past must not be misconceived as knowledge of one object, the past, which when achieved serves as means to the knowledge of another object, the present. That is the error of the pragmatic view. The past and the present are not two objects: the past is an element in the present, and in studying the past we are actually coming to know the present, not coming to know something else which will lead us on to know or to manipulate the present.

62. This principle, the ideality of the past, explains both why we cannot and why we need not know the past as it actually happened. We cannot, because there is nothing to know; nothing exists to be studied: there are no past facts except so far as we reconstruct them in historical thought. And we need not, because the purpose of history is to grasp the present, and therefore any past fact which has left no visible traces on the present is not, need not be, and cannot be a real problem to historical thought. From a purely abstract point of view it would seem possible to raise the question what was the favourite wine of the maternal grandfather of the standard-bearer who jumped ashore from Caesar's ships on the coast of Kent, and it might be made a reproach to the historian that he neither knows nor cares. But the fact is that the historian does not raise problems at haphazard in this way: they raise themselves, and what he has to do is to settle them when they have done so. And an actual historian when confronted with a problem of this kind will say, if he troubles to explain his attitude towards it, 'that problem hasn't arisen in my inquiries, and I shan't attend to it till it does'. Now this attitude would be culpably subjective if the whole world of past fact were a world actually existing which it was the historian's business to discover and explore in its entirety; for in that case every fact in it, being as actual as every other, has an equal right to his attention, and to attend to one and not to others is indefensible. But all historical problems arise within present experience, and a problem that does not in any way fit into present experience and alter our attitude to that is not a genuine problem but a nonsense problem, as truly a nonsense problem as the childish puzzle of the irresistible force and the immovable post, which belongs to the realm of nonsense physics.

63. The ways in which historical problems arise are of various kinds whose differences are not altogether without interest. They all have this in common, that they are problems arising in the attempt to understand what I am and what my world is. When I ask what I am, I begin recollecting, and thinking what in my actions and experiences I have shown myself to be: and in trying to criticize and verify my recollections I build up a more or less coherent account of what, at this given moment, I find myself being. This account of myself is the necessary basis for any action which demands self-consciousness as part of its conditions. When I ask what the objective world is, recollection does not help me much; I must study the world as I now find it and reconstruct its past not immediately, as I can do in memory in the case of myself, but inferentially. And in so far as this activity of reconstructing the past becomes habitual, a new kind of present comes into being which is related to the past not merely as its consequence or the present metamorphosis of itself but as the deliberate and systematic record of it. I refer to such present realities as conversations about the past, history-books, and so forth. Now these are part of the present, but they have the curious double function of being both consequences of the past (as is everything in the present) and also expressions of thought concerning the past. They are products of the *historical* consciousness and not merely of consciousness in general, still less of the world-process in general. And this reveals the curious fact that the attempt to reconstruct the past ideally, because it is an activity going on in the present, contributes to the present a series of objective realities which give rise not only to a fresh problem of knowledge, but to a problem of a peculiar kind. History in the primary sense, history of the first degree, is the ideal reconstruction of the past as such; history of the second degree is the reconstruction of this reconstruction. Thus, the primary historical problem arises in the attempt to answer questions like, What is that ruined

building? What are these curious goings-on that happen at a coronation? Why are we wearing gowns? The secondary historical problem arises in the attempt to answer questions like, Why have people expressed such divergent views about the battle of Marathon? Why does Macaulay say what he does about the state of the currency in the late seventeenth century? and so forth. In the former case the historical problem arises out of the attempt to understand the world as it stands irrespectively of the existence of any historians: and if all historians were guillotined in a revolution and all their books burnt, it would be these problems that would ensure a speedy revival of historical studies. In the latter case historians themselves and their special products are among the elements of the problem which interests us; and in this case the problems of history may be called academic or artificial problems, which need not be discussed at all if it was not the fact that they are discussed. Hence, if I ask myself what it is in my present experience that I hope to elucidate by my historical inquiries, there are two kinds of answer: first, that it is something I find in the world of nature or of human institutions; secondly, that it is something I have read or heard in my historical studies. This distinction is of importance because if we say that the purpose of history is to make the actual world more intelligible and then have to admit that some historical investigations help only to render intelligible the statements of certain historians (which we clearly must admit), we seem involved in a circle. The way out of the circle would seem to lie in distinguishing history from the history of history.

64. Hitherto we have assumed that the only function of the history of history was to serve the methodological purpose of clearing the ground for history of the first degree. But once historical thinking is recognized as a necessary activity of the human mind—and that recognition is achieved when we recognize that the analysis of the present into past and future is a necessary stage in its comprehension—it follows that the organization and perpetuation of historical thought is a necessary part of the institutions which go to make up civilized life, and therefore the history of history is as necessary to civilized man as the history of war or the history of science. When history itself is objectified into libraries and schools of historical learning, to study in these libraries and schools automatically becomes an exercise in the history of history, and henceforth it becomes impossible to say that the problems of history are of vital interest while those of the history of history are of merely academic interest. On the contrary, as it becomes clearer that past fact as such and in its entirety cannot be known, as people progressively recognize that the only past we can know or need know is the past that has preserved recognizable traces in the present, so people must come to see more and more that all history is really history of history, that in stating what we take to be past facts we are really only and always recounting and summarizing our own and other people's investigations concerning the past. This does not mean that for the statement 'it was so' is substituted the statement 'A thinks it was thus, B thinks it was thus, C thinks it was thus; I leave the reader to take his choice'; for that is not resolving history into the history of history but merely shirking the whole problem. The real formula will run: 'A thinks it was thus; B thinks it was thus; C thinks it was thus; *and I*, having diligently studied their views and all other evidence, *think it was thus*'. Here the history of history culminates where it ought to culminate, in the present. For a history that stops short of the present is a truncated history, a fragment of circumference without a centre.

65. History of the first degree and history of the second degree are thus the two sides of history itself, the immediate or objective side in which the mind is turned towards the past event, and the reflective or subjective side in which it is turned towards its own attempts to grasp that event: and these two converge and unite in a present act of thought which is at once history, 'it was so', and history of history 'I think it was so'. When we say 'it was so', we are in reality talking not about the past but about the present, because we cannot ever say what the past in itself truly was, but only what the evidence now at our disposal enables us to say that it was; and, as we have seen, it is quite certain that this evidence is always fragmentary and inadequate. The past which we reconstruct in historical thought is not the real past (if there were a real past, which there is not); it is the past that can be disentangled from the present objective world by the present act of thinking. Hence the subjective present tense in '*I think* it was so' ought to be

balanced by an objective present tense, turning 'it was so' into 'the evidence now to hand indicates that it was so'. And these two judgements are synonymous. History and the history of history turn out to be identical. The present or actual reality, as we find it in and for the historical consciousness, is not a mere world or a mere mind, but a mind knowing its world or a world being known by a mind; and it is impossible for the mind to know its world without at the same time knowing itself. This is intended not as a generic statement about all kinds of cognition, but as a specific statement about historical thought. No one, for instance, would wish to maintain that perception involved as a necessary part of itself the perception of perception; but we have shown that history does so involve the history of history.

66. The present, I said, is a concrete reality analysable into two elements, past and future. I recur to that statement in order to guard against a possible misconception. It might be argued that if one of these ideal elements, the past, can be made the object of historical thought, the future also ought to be the object of a kind of anticipatory historical thought. Now clearly this is not the case. Yet *ought* it not to be the case, on our view? For we are not in a position to refute it as some people would refute it, by pleading that the past is real and the future unreal. On that view, the present is essentially a moment of creation, in which things are brought into being out of nothing: having been created, they stay created, and so the universe is constantly becoming fuller and fuller of facts. It never gets positively clogged with facts because it goes on somehow expanding to make room for them. Now we have dismissed this idea of the past as a kind of silt or sediment of facts, on the ground that the past really consists of events that are not happening, that is to say of unrealities. But we may in passing point out that the whole idea of a perpetual creative process which creates without destroying is a sheer confusion of thought. If the present is conceived as creative, then what it creates must either be conserved, which means continuing to be a present reality, or not be conserved, which means passing by, becoming past and therefore becoming non-existent. But the conception has at least this merit, that it makes a distinction of principle between past and future, and does not conceive them as the same kind of thing. And our own contention that the past and future are both ideal, or abstractions, does not compel us to hold that they are abstractions of the same kind. To take a case which we took before: the shape and the colour of a triangle are abstractions; but it does not follow that because the science of geometry gives us an *a priori* account of its shape, therefore geometry or indeed any other science can give us an *a priori* account of its colour.

67. Past and future, then, are heterogeneous; they are not the same kind of thing, even though they are both ideal. Mr Bertrand Russell, failing to recognize this and deceived by the idea of time as a continuous line whose segments are necessarily homogeneous with each other, says that 'it is a mere accident that we have no memory of the future; for future events are just as determined as past, in the sense that they will be what they will be', and goes on to say that there is no philosophical reason for scepticism with regard to the claim, which some people make, to a power of foretelling the future (*Our Knowledge of the External World*; quoted from memory).[11] The answer to this is easy. To call the absence of 'forward memory' a mere accident is to admit that it is a fact and to add that one's own philosophy is impotent to give any account of it; to admit that some people can perhaps foretell the future is to retract the first admission and to assert that memory of the future does exist, though rarely; and to leave it an open question whether their claims are justified is to confess that they are not justified, because no one can regard it as an open question whether or not we remember the past. Further: because we remember the past and thus have an immediate awareness of it, we can build up on this foundation the entire structure of critical history, which starts from memory but goes far beyond it. If even a few people really possessed a forward memory or immediate vision of the future it would be possible to construct on that basis a critical history of the future, having

[11] The passage referred to by Collingwood runs as follows: 'It is a mere accident that we have no memory of the future. We might—as in the pretended visions of seers—see future events immediately, in the way in which we see past events. They certainly will be what they will be, and are in this sense just as determined as the past' (Bertrand Russell, *Our Knowledge of the External World* (London, 1914), p. 238).

methods and results similar in principle to that of the past. But this cannot be done, and nobody really thinks it can. No one can possibly forecast the course of European history, even in the next ten years, with anything approaching the certainty and precision with which even the least competent historian can reconstruct its course in the last ten or even in the last ten thousand. We can certainly anticipate the future, but all our anticipations are guesses, or mere statements of what so far as we can see may happen, whereas our reconstructions of the past are never guesses, but always statements of what, so far as we can see, must have happened. And this applies even to the most systematic and satisfactory of our predictions, namely the astronomical anticipations which are elaborately set forth in the Nautical Almanack. These are not cases of forward-looking history. They are one and all hypothetical: they are statements of what will happen if no disturbing element arises, as it always may arise, to upset our calculations. But, it may be said, our statements about the past are hypothetical too: they state what happened subject to the hypothesis that the evidence we possess is reliable. This is, however, not a true parallel. We reconstruct the past, it is true, only so far as the present state of things permits us to do so; and we also forecast the future as far as the present permits us to do so. But the shortage of evidence and our liability to misinterpret it, which affect both kinds of thinking, are a drawback different in kind from the possibility of disturbing influences, which is a quite fresh difficulty affecting our forecast of the future and not our reconstruction of the past. It may be said that an ideally perfect astronomy would be able to eradicate this difficulty. But we are discussing not what we might be able to do under ideal (that is, impossible) conditions, but what we actually do; and however far astronomy progresses it will always operate under actual conditions, never under ideal conditions.

68. The difference, then, between the past and the future is that the past can be, within the limits imposed by present circumstances, critically reconstructed as it must have been; the future, still within the same limits, can only be guessed at or described in hypothetical propositions. Stating this difference in logical terms, we get this result: the present is the actual: the past is the necessary: the future is the possible. Necessity and possibility are the two abstract elements which together make up actuality. The present both may be and must be what it is; the past must, but cannot, be what it is; the future may, but need not, be what it is. Hence the past, in spite of its unreality, can be the object of critical and rigorous inferential thinking, for everything that it contains it contains necessarily, and there is in the study of it no room for imagination or caprice or any kind of assertion which cannot justify itself by the production of valid reasons. The future, on the other hand, is the contingent, the indeterminate, that which can only be described by saying 'if A happens, then x will follow; if B happens, then y will follow; but though it may be wise to assume that A will happen and B will not, we cannot give valid reasons for the assumption.' Of course, the future will be what it will be; but that only means that when it happens it will be the present, and will have all the actuality of the present. It is not lying somewhere ready formed, waiting to happen, which is what Mr Russell evidently thinks is meant by the phrase it will be what it will be.

69. The conception of the ideality of the past has further consequences. When we think of the past as a limitless reservoir of facts all existing side by side in a closely-packed mass and awaiting our inspection, we are bound to distinguish the actual characteristics which these facts possess in themselves from the adventitious and subjective characteristics which we bestow upon them for our own purposes in the course of our historical labours. Thus, for example, we distinguish ancient history from modern history, and this distinction obviously inheres not in the facts themselves but in our own point of view towards them; we regard as modern those facts which we recognize as continuous with those of the world in which we live, and as ancient those which belong to an order of things that has by now disappeared. If, then, the past is an actual object or complex of objects, and if our study of it is an attempt to apprehend it in its actuality, the distinction between ancient and modern history must be banished from our minds as an illusion incidental to our point of view. But if, as we have seen to be the case, the past is ideal and has being only as an object of historical thought, its relation to our point

of view is its very essence, and whatever is necessarily implied in our point of view is a real and legitimate element in its own nature. Now the distinction between ancient and modern history *is* necessarily implied in our point of view towards history. For the past is that which has turned into the present; but every past time was a present when it existed, and is now thought of by the historian as an ideal present, having its own past; and therefore all historical thought necessarily generates a distinction between the past and the past of the past. But the past, or recent past, must have a different character from the past of the past, or remote past; for the recent past is that which has turned into the present, and the remote past, if it had resembled the recent past, would have turned into the present too, and not, as it actually did, into the recent past. Hence it follows from the purely logical structure of the time-series as an ideal construction that there must be a broad general difference of character between two parts of history, modern history, regarded as that which has immediately produced the present, and ancient history, regarded as that which produced the recent or modern past and therefore produced the present mediately. But the subdivision of the past cannot end here. Within the recent past and the remote past similar distinctions will reappear, so that these two main periods will reveal an internal structure reduplicating in principle their relation to each other. If this search for distinctions were pushed *ad infinitum*, the result would be a homogeneous flow of time-units, each following the one before it and preceding the one after it; and the events happening at these times would lose all their special character of ancient, modern and so forth and would be reduced to a dead-level of pastness. But we cannot in fact ever push it *ad infinitum*; we have no time to do so, and there would be no point in doing so. We are concerned with history as actually studied by actual historians, not with the ideal of history as it would be studied by a calculating-machine. For a calculating-machine, there would be no necessity to bring the past into relation with the present; and therefore a calculating-machine would not need to divide up the past according as its relation to the present was immediate or mediate. But then, the past is only ideal; it is only generated by historical thought in order to bring it into relation with the

present; and therefore, where this need has vanished, the past has vanished too.[12]

70. So long, therefore, as we think of the past at all, we must think of it as possessing that kind of determinate structure which consists in a sequence of more or less clearly-defined periods having characteristics of their own and each possessing precisely those characteristics which would necessitate their turning into the next, and so on. We must, that is to say, find in history a pattern or scheme which makes it a self-contained and logically-articulated whole. And we can determine this structure *a priori*. The actuality of history is the present; its ideality is the past; and the past is either recent or remote according as we conceive it as turning directly or indirectly into the present. Now that which turns into something else is by definition *not* that something; hence the recent past is always conceived as different from the present, a contrast with it, but a contrast of such a kind as to necessitate a change into that with which it is a contrast. The recent past, therefore, is necessarily conceived as a state of things in unstable equilibrium, containing within itself the seeds of change into its own opposite. And every period, as the recent past of that which is to follow it, must be conceived in this general way. But when it is said that every period changes into its own opposite, this does not mean that history is an alternation of A, not-A, A, not-A, and so on *ad infinitum*. If that were so, the present would have happened already an infinite number of times; and this is absurd, because the present is what is happening now, and it cannot also have happened in the past. Ancient and modern are

[12] On the opposite page Collingwood later wrote the following notes: 'Problem of Historical Phases and Cycles. Theological, Metaphysical, Positive (Comte), Organic and Critical (recurring) St Simon. Platonic Cycle—36,000 solar years. Aristotle agrees. "This doctrine of recurrence is not popular today: but whether we like it or not, no other view of the macrocosm is even tenable." Inge, Outspoken Essays II 160. (he means, *physically* speaking.) Goethe quoted as a believer in cycles, but he is vague.

Cycle versus progress—theme of Inge's superficial lecture. He holds with cycles and denies progress.

Cycle theory cannot be taken literally. The present is now only: it must be somehow distinct from all its opposite numbers in the past, even if in some ways indistinguishable. Otherwise we would not be able to use a plural of the word cycle.'

opposites which together make up the past, and past and present are opposites; thus when the recent or modern past changes into the present what happens is not that the modern has changed into its own opposite, which would be the ancient, but that modern and ancient together, the past as a whole, has changed into its opposite. Hence the formula for the structure of history is that A changes into its opposite not-A, and the complex period composed of A and not-A together changes into a new period B, which is its opposite. Every period is thus the opposite of all that has gone before, not merely of its last phase; which is self-evident, for the present is the opposite not of the immediate past but of the past.[13]

This formula gives the necessary structure of all historical narrative. So far as the narrative shows this formula, so far it is well-written, well-thought out, intelligible as history. And where this pattern is not visible we have not history at all, but

[13] Page 65 ends here in the manuscript. Inserted—between p. 65 and p. 66—at a later date is a separate page with the heading 'insert after 65 [summary of what I said on this in 1927]', which reads as follows: 'All history is divided into ancient and modern in this way. It is not a distinction expressible in years; the idea of stating a date at which ancient history ends and modern history begins is absurd. It is a distinction inherent in the historian's point of view. However wide or however narrow his chronological range, whether he embraces a period of 10 or 100 or 100,000 years in his backward view, he necessarily discriminates within this view a *past* (modern history) and a *past of the past* (ancient history). And the past will always be his own opposite, the past of the past the opposite of his own opposite and therefore at bottom akin to or somehow felt as identical with himself. A culture which feels the Victorian Age as its own immediate past, and therefore repulsive, feels the previctorian age (perhaps the 18th century) as akin to itself: its cultural history only goes back as far as that; if it went further, the distinction between ancient and modern would fall in a different place. *Nostalgia for the ancient* has here its logical basis and is inevitable,—Golden Ages, sense of the heroic character of origins (felt as heroic *because* they are felt as origins i.e. ancient), returns to paganism, etc., are all based on the fact that history is a cycle; not a series of cycles, but *one* cycle, therefore the past, however much or little of it we know, necessarily appearing to us as *one* vast cycle with a single rhythm of ancient–modern–present. Yet within this cycle, the primary cycle, we can find an infinity of epicycles at any point on its circumference, because any point we take becomes an ideal present and therefore acquires an ideal history—modern history and ancient history—of its own. But these epicycles shift and change as we move our microscope over the field of history: they are all *ἀγώνισματα ἐς τὸ παραχρῆμα*—the great cycle of all known history is a *κτῆμα ἐς ἀεί*.'

at best a mass of chronological detail or other material out of which history is to be constructed.

71. But having deduced the formula, we must make a few observations on it. Just as you cannot think scientifically by taking any kind of stuff that passes itself off as thought and forcing it into the shape of a syllogism, so you cannot think historically by playing games with any formulae, however good they are. The formula which we have laid down is to be found growing wild in all historical narrative; where it does not grow of itself, it cannot be introduced; and in stating it we are not (God forbid) suggesting to historians that they should import it forcibly into their work, or bang it out with one finger as a bad pianist bangs out the theme of a fugue. Further: this formula will not help anyone to determine any historical fact. Historical facts cannot be deduced from formulae like the fourth term in a rule-of-three sum; that is just the difference between history and mathematics. Unless you have evidence in your hand and the skill to interpret it, you cannot move a step in historical thought; and if you know anything about history, you will not try. It is idle to protest that a formula like this involves an attempt to construct history *a priori* instead of by legitimate historical methods. You might as well argue that any statement of the principles of logic involves an attempt to construct science *a priori* instead of by observation and experiment. Anyone who feels that a formula of this kind is an offence to his sensitive historical conscience is merely confessing his inability to understand its meaning.

72. It is well known that Hegel discovered the presence of this structure in all history, and that his exposition of it has been generally rejected as unsatisfactory. The reasons for this rejection are, I think, wholly bound up with the positivistic view of history as a crude lump or magma of existing fact, a real and therefore structureless past whose elements can be studied by the historian but not, without a dangerous concession to subjectivity, arranged in any kind of pattern. This theory of the real past underlies, so far as I can see, all the objections to Hegel's main idea. Thus, it is pointed out that Hegel succeeded in arranging the past quite neatly according to his formula although his historical knowledge was, compared to ours, very small; and because his facts were so incom-

plete his pattern ought to have showed gaps, which it did not do. But to argue thus is to forget that Hegel was talking not about the past as known to us but about the past as known to him; and that because the past is altogether ideal, Hegel had a perfect right to treat his knowledge of the past as exhausting what there was to know. Again, it is pointed out that Hegel deliberately left outside his pattern the history of the Far East and indeed all history except that of Europe and the near East; and this is held to show that, in order to make his pattern work, he had to restrict it to a quite small portion of history at large. But this is to forget that the pattern is a telescope-pattern, and goes on in any direction as far as you choose to take it; Hegel was devoting one course of lectures to the subject, and bit off as much of history as he thought he could, in the time, profitably chew. I do not deny that Hegel does rather thump out the theme of his fugue; and I wish he had spent more time on explaining what it was that he was doing, and less on doing it; but to wish that is only to wish that he had written for our generation instead of his own.

73. To speak of the past as presenting a definite pattern implies not only that it has a necessary structure, but that this structure culminates in or centres round the present; and this means that the past is conceived as existing for the purpose of leading up to the present, to be the means of which the present is the end. It is certainly the case that when we think of the past we do all of us tend so to think of it; we think, even while we blame ourselves for our ridiculous egotism in thinking it, that the whole past has been so ordered by some providence as to create for us a world in which to live. If the past is real, this is obviously an illusion, for it exists not for our sake but for its own. But if the past is ideal, we are right to think of it as informed by a providential purpose: for this purpose is precisely our own purpose; it is we who create the past in order that we may understand the present, and therefore it is true, though not in the sense in which we naïvely believe it, that the present is the goal of all past history. Similarly the future, if we could tell what it would be, would be necessarily regarded as the goal of the present; but it cannot be so regarded because we cannot tell what it will be.

74. Another question that is answered by the conception of

the ideality of the past is the question of the possibility of universal history in the sense of a history of the world. With regard to this question the theory of the past as real lands us in an unpleasant dilemma. The business of the historian is to ascertain past fact; his business is not done until he has ascertained the whole of it. But past fact is infinite in amount and in complexity; and however much of it the historian discovers, the infinite quantity that remains to be discovered is undiminished. And this becomes even worse when, as every historian must do, he recognizes that no historical fact can be truly ascertained until we have ascertained its relations with its context. The so-called theory of external relations, which lays down that the relations subsisting between A and B are irrelevant to the essential nature both of A and of B, is a true account of the relations that are found in mathematics, but a wholly false account of those that are found in history. It is absolutely impossible to say anything at all about any historical event, even its date, which is the most abstract thing you can say about it, except in relation to other events; and all history consists of nothing whatever but narrative, which is not an enumeration of distinct events but a statement of their relations or articulations. Hence the presence of an uninvestigated context infects with uncertainty and misconception that part of history that has been investigated: a truth which is familiar to every historical student who has got beyond the schoolroom stage. Now if all past facts are real, and exist in a solid block for us to study, the number that can be ascertained is infinitely outweighed by those on which we can get no evidence whatever, and therefore our historical knowledge, however far we push it, remains not only infinitely short of completion but, even within its narrow compass, infinitely short of certainty. Hence the dilemma, that either the historian must know the whole past, which he can never do because to know it consists in enumerating an infinity of facts, or he must only know a part of it, which he can never do because his knowledge of the part is vitiated by his ignorance of the whole. If he aspires to write the history of the world, the result will be a merely ludicrous assemblage of facts chosen at haphazard, getting scantier and scantier as the history becomes more and more remote till at last it fails entirely and is bolstered up by vague

speculations concerning the origins of man, of life, of the earth: no more a history of the world than the *Golden Treasury* is English literature. But if he aspires to write a monograph on the Peasants' Revolt he is no better off, for not only is there an infinity of facts concerning the Peasants' Revolt that simply cannot now be discovered, but even if they could, the Peasants' Revolt would remain unintelligible when torn from its context in the history of the world.

What, then, ought we to aim at doing—to widen our historical knowledge or to deepen it? Both, if the past is real, are futile. But if the past is ideal, both are possible, and possible together.

75. All history is an attempt to understand the present by reconstructing its determining conditions. It is clear that this is an endless task, not because its conditions are a regress of efficient causes which, however far back we trace them, still hang in the air at the further extremity, but because the present is a concrete reality and therefore inexhaustible by analysis. When we have analysed it as far as we can, the residue is not outside our grasp; it is here and now, it is immediately present to us as actual fact; unanalysed and uncomprehended, but not unperceived. Hence, when we have traced the course of history back into the remotest past which our plummet can sound, and find ourselves compelled to call that the beginning of history; and when the question is raised, 'how did this beginning happen, and what right have you to assume at the very start of your history, as you must do, the world as a going concern?' the answer is 'what I am assuming as the presupposition of my history is precisely that part of the world, as I now find it, of whose historical origin I can give no account'. Thus, the saying that nature has no history means that nature is our name for that whose origin we have not hitherto been able to trace, and therefore it is a presupposition of history in the sense in which a hitherto unsolved problem is the presupposition of any attempt to solve it. The present world, as we apprehend it in perception, is the starting-point of history: history attempts to explain this present world by tracing its origins; that part of it whose origins we cannot trace remains unexplained, is left on our hands at the end of the inquiry, and is therefore posited at the opening of our narrative. All history is therefore universal history in the sense that it is an attempt to give an account, as complete as possible, of the present world; but because the present world is inexhaustible in its content, the account can never be complete and all history has to begin somewhere, to take something for granted, to specialize on some particular problem to the exclusion of others. Every history is in fact an historical monograph, a discussion of a limited historical problem: and this is true even of so-called histories of the world, which are always written from some particular point of view and deal with some particular subject or group of subjects to the exclusion of others; but because the writer of a history of the world is apt to deceive himself into thinking that there is such a thing as history as a whole, and that he is simply relating the whole of it, his subject and purpose are apt to be insufficiently or mistakenly defined in his own thought, and the result is apt to be a disjointed series of amateurish monographs, each an object of ridicule to a person who has patiently inquired into the problems it presents. But a genuine and competent historical monograph is really a universal history or history of the world, in the sense that its writer has been driven to write it by the way in which the world now presents itself to him. Among the mass of things which present themselves to his gaze and compete for his attention there is one thing which stands out as especially demanding that he, and very likely nobody else, should try to understand it: partly because it is a matter of general importance to the world that it should be understood, partly because his special temperament and training make him the right man to investigate it. If the first motive alone is operative, his work will be valuable on account of its popularity, but deficient in skill; if the second, it will be a good piece of work in itself but of mainly academic interest. But in either case, he is tackling the problem of understanding the present world at the point where, for him, its centre of intelligibility lies. And therefore his work will be a real history of the world as being the history of that part of the world whose history is for him, here and now, capable of being written. There is therefore no real conflict between the idea of a history of the world and that of a discussion of some special historical problem. Because the past is ideal, the history which we, to the best

of our ability, investigate, is all the history there is. And this does not mean that when we have written our monograph we have exhausted all the history there is; for, unless we are very bad historians, the monograph itself will create for us a whole crop of new historical problems.

76. I have spoken of historical books and monographs as if such things were the chief outcome of historical thought; and this may suggest that history is mainly the concern of professional persons called historians. That is the last suggestion that I should wish to make. History is nothing but the attempt to understand the present by analysing it into its logical components of necessity, or the past, and possibility, or the future; and this is an attempt that is made by everybody and at all times. Nobody ever attempts to do a job of plumbing or to ride a motor bicycle without historically reconstructing the preconditions of the situation with which he is faced, and there is no difference in principle, only a difference in degree, between the historical thinking done by a bricklayer in the exercise of his craft and that done by a Gibbon or a Grote. The problem is the same, the categories of thought involved are the same, and the solution is the same. History is one of the necessary and transcendental modes of mind's activity, and the common property of all minds.

77. In conclusion, I may be expected to say something of the relation between history and philosophy. In a very real sense they are and must be the same. For their problem is the same. There is and can be only one problem for any conceivable kind of thought—the problem of understanding reality, of discovering what the world is. And there is only one world, namely that which actually exists. This world is present in the immediacy of sensation to every mind, and in that immediacy it presents itself as that which is not yet understood, the problem, the eternal Sphinx which in its visible bodily presence confronts the eternal Oedipus of mind, bidding it solve the riddle or perish. And this riddle is not only presented to the civilized and educated man; it presents itself with at least equal urgency to the child, the savage, and the lunatic. Nor is its solution a matter of disinterested intellectual satisfaction; it is a wholly practical matter, and failure means suffering, disease, misery, and death. For it is certainly true that if we could

fully understand the world we should be as gods, enjoying an immortal blessedness. As men, we understand it by various expedients to this extent, that we can tame the Sphinx for a time, make it fetch and carry for us, call it by its name and compel it to obey us. But sooner or later our understanding of it breaks down, and it frees itself from our grasp and stands over against us once more with the menace of its immediate sensible externality, and that is death. This is the law under which every man lives.

Now our struggle to understand the world is carried on by various devices of our own invention, worked out by us in our struggle for existence. Of these devices we can distinguish a few which are so universal, so inevitable, that we can hardly help ascribing them to causes that are permanently operative. Those which, for my own part, I find to be thus universal are what we call art, religion, and thought. By art I understand the creation of an imaginary world within ourselves, intelligible just because we create it and find it in the act of creating it transparent to our own eyes. This world is the world of beauty, and its function is to practise our mental powers, as it were in a self-imposed athletic exercise, for grappling with the real world that lies beyond it. And this it truly does; but it only brings us to the threshold of the real problem. By religion I understand the realization that what we have imagined in art is a symbol or shadow of the real, and that therefore the real world is at bottom akin to the world of art—a world that has a creative spirit at its core and is peopled by beings that exist only in and for that spirit's consciousness. And here, too, we have made progress and advanced towards the solution of our problem; but we have not achieved it: for our conception of this creative spirit is only a dim and oblique vision, distorted by the mists of the imaginative symbols that express it. By thought I understand the direct approach to reality as it really is, a setting aside of the imaginary and symbolic and a grappling with the substance instead of the shadow. But here again I find permanent and necessary distinctions. The first, simplest, and least adequate form of thought is that in which we truly grasp real properties of the real, but try to understand these by taking them singly, in abstraction from the rest, hoping that each, just because it is a fair sample of the real world,

will reveal the secret of the real world. And so, in a sense, it does; but the secret has now been broken up into small change, and we are offered instead an endless plurality of secrets, all genuine, all valuable, but all leaving untouched the central secret, which is the bond that holds them together. This way of thought I call science. The second way is to analyse the real into elements, but to recognize that these elements are ideal, and not to think that they contain the secret of the world in themselves, but that they show the *why* of things in abstraction from their actual existence. This is history. History understands, as science does not, that the abstract is merely ideal and not real: for while science thinks that its substances and attributes are real and knowable, history understands that its past events are past, are ideal, and that the present, the actual, is analysable not into real parts but only into ideal parts. But history tries to understand the real by analysing it into ideals, and the concrete cannot be exhausted by analysing it into abstractions; hence, however far history goes, it always leaves a residue of immediacy, of unanalysed and uncomprehended actuality. Philosophy is that form of thought which makes it its business to overcome all abstractions, whether the real abstraction of science or the ideal abstraction of history, and to see the abstract only in its place in the concrete. It is thus the only form of thought which even attempts to apprehend reality as it really is, in its entirety, instead of confining itself to the apprehension of something else, something which it has itself created and substituted for reality as an object of study. Hence philosophy goes a step further than history towards answering the riddle of knowledge. But of all other forms of thought, history is that which stands nearest to philosophy and most shares its spirit. Most of the difficulties which people find in studying philosophy are due to the fact that they have been accustomed to practise themselves in science and in no other form of thought; and these difficulties would be almost wholly overcome if they approached philosophy after a thorough training in history. But philosophy is nothing at all without a constant fertilization from all the forms of consciousness that I have enumerated. It has its own problems and its own methods, and demands a very rigorous and conscientious training—more so, in fact,

than any other form of mental labour; but without a supply of material from the immediate world of experience philosophy collapses into a mere bag of tricks. This material, originally supplied from crude sensation, reaches philosophy as progressively transformed by the work of art, religion, science, and history. And therefore history is the immediate and direct source of all philosophical problems. Destroy history, and you destroy the nourishment on which philosophy feeds; foster and develop a sound historical consciousness, and you have under your hand all, except its own methods, that philosophy needs. All philosophy is the philosophy of history.

OUTLINES OF A PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY (1928)[1]

PREFACE

THIS essay deals with what appear to the writer the most important questions in the theory of history. They are arranged under four heads, which, out of compliment to the Kantian critiques, are called Quality, Quantity, Relation, and Modality. Under Quality, the question is raised whether history is real, and if so in what sense; and the answer to this question is the conception hereinafter called the ideality of history. This comes first because it is fundamental: all the other questions raised are solved by reference to it or deduced from it. Under Quantity, the question raised is that of universality *versus* particularity: the question whether history is properly conceived as a single universal world-history, or a plurality of particular histories. The answer is that, from the point of view of the ideality of history, the distinction disappears: and we are left with the conception of historical thought as the attempt to solve an historical problem, which is particular because it is always a fresh and different problem, but universal because, being the only problem in the historian's mind, it is for him, at the moment, the only historical problem there is. Under Relation, the question raised is that of the inner structure of historical fact. Granted the conception of the monograph in its universality and particularity, already arrived at under Quantity, we now find that the first condition of such a monograph is unity of subject; the second is orderly sequence of events; and the third is the completeness with which the events expound the subject, so as to form a complete whole of reciprocally explanatory parts. From this point of view it is possible to explain the precise meaning of progress. Under Modality, the question of the certainty or logical status of history is dealt with. Granted the ideality of history, the scepticism which denies the scientific value of

The source document can be found in the Bodleian Library Collingwood Papers, dep. 12.

[1] On the title-page is written 'April 1928'.

history can be conclusively answered: and we can show how, by the empirical methodology of archaeological science and the pure methodology of philosophy, the historian is enabled, not indeed to 'know' the past as it actually happened, which he neither can do nor wants to do, but to solve with accuracy and certainty the particular historical problems which present themselves to his mind, in terms of the evidence at his disposal.

The whole essay is, as it stands, a skeleton or sketch of what might be more easily written at greater length, with illustrations, criticisms, and alternative statements inserted. In its present form it is certain to mislead a reader, because its argument appears to rest on a single point—the ideality of history—and to be developed deductively from that. The reader who wants to destroy the argument will therefore naturally concentrate his attention on the ideality of history and try to undermine that proposition, thinking that when it falls the whole argument will fall with it. But he will be mistaken. The various points made in the course of the argument are in point of fact observations made in the course of historical studies pursued with a special eye to problems of method. Not one of them has been reached deductively from the conception of the ideality of history. On the contrary, the idea of considering them in the light of that conception only occurred to the writer very late in the day, after most of them had been long familiar to him as the fruits of experience in historical research. Therefore, when they are set out as they are here, in the form of a single chain of argument, the reader is asked to remember that the position of each link in the chain is guaranteed not simply by its relation to the first link but by cross-bearings from experience of historical inquiry. The principle of the ideality of history is not the ground of the objections brought, in the second section, against the conceptions of merely universal and merely particular history; those are objections whose force is obvious to anyone who will think them over, and is already familiar to all thoughtful historians; all that the principle of the ideality of history can do in this case, is to provide a point of view from which these objections may be answered and the ordinary procedure of historians vindicated.

In adopting the four Kantian headings, the writer no doubt courts hostility by seeming to endorse the architectonic pedantries of a bygone day. It is thought nowadays that any system is worse than no system, and that the attempt to arrange a series of problems in their natural order, instead of merely putting them down in the order in which they occurred to the writer's mind, is a mark not only of pedantry but of a barren mind. But perhaps current fashion goes a little too far in its reaction against systems. Certainly no system is more than a temporary resting-place for thought, the momentary crystallization of something that will dissolve again very soon; and certainly, no system can wholly satisfy any two minds, any more than it can wholly satisfy the same mind at different times. But if anyone takes this for an argument against systematic thinking, he ought to be reminded of the servant who refused to clean his master's boots because they would be dirty again next day. To think systematically means to think in a clear and tidy manner, to cast up one's accounts in the business of thinking so as to show where one stands and how one's trade is going. A statement of accounts is not intended to describe the state of one's business for ever; still less to act as a substitute for the daily work of the shop; but a person who refrains from casting up his accounts because of these facts is merely showing that he does not understand business, and incidentally providing his neighbours with an excellent reason for not giving him credit. In the same way a philosopher who, out of deference to the rapid advance of his own thought, refrains from the attempt to express what he now thinks in a systematic form, gives his neighbours reason to believe that what is going on in his mind is not an advance—which must be an advance from somewhere definite to somewhere else—but a confusion. Some system, then, is necessary wherever a statement is made: and for the present purpose, the old fourfold distinction of Quality, Quantity, Relation, and Modality has proved a convenient form for the materials demanding expression.

One problem which the reader might expect to be formally discussed at the outset has been left wholly on one side: that of the relation between history *a parte subjecti*, historical thought, and history *a parte objecti*, historical fact. Implicitly,

this problem is discussed and solved by the doctrine of the ideality of history: for that doctrine lays it down that historical fact, as known to the historian, is essentially relative to the thought that knows it. But it may be proper in this preface to consider a certain aspect of this problem: namely the question whether the philosophy of history is a theory of historical thinking or a theory of historical fact; in other words, whether it is methodological or metaphysical in its purpose.

The philosophy of history, in the eighteenth-century sense of the phrase, was a metaphysical philosophy. It attempted to construct a theory of the nature and structure of historical fact, and to show that this, regarded as a special kind of reality, had special characteristics, contained in itself special kinds of sequence, recurrence, or progress, and the like. Even in the hands of Hegel, the last great exponent—and by far the most profound—of the old conception, the metaphysical aspect of the philosophy of history remained uppermost, and in his successors, such as Comte and Marx and Spencer, the idea of a metaphysical philosophy of history reigned unopposed.

It was not until the turn of the century that this idea was destroyed. Before that, the conception of a philosophical theory of historical thought, as a special branch of logic or theory of knowledge, had already made considerable progress; but it was not until Croce's work on the subject that the metaphysical philosophy of history was systematically replaced by the methodological. This was the first really decisive step forward that the philosophy of history had made since Hegel.

But when the methodological view of the philosophy of history is combined with the doctrine of the ideality of history, all objection to a metaphysical philosophy of history vanishes. For the necessary forms and conditions of historical thought are now seen to determine the necessary forms and conditions of its object. Everything that is said about history *a parte subjecti* can therefore be repeated, *mutatis mutandis*, about history *a parte objecti*.

This is the point of view adopted in the present essay. The gulf which, on an empiricist or positivistic philosophy, separates historical thought from historical fact, has disappeared. Historical thought and its object are seen to be inseparable, the latter having only an ideal existence in and for the former;

and therefore a methodological theory of the necessary forms of historical thought is also a metaphysical theory of the necessary forms of historical fact.[2]

[2] The preface ends with: 'April 1928. Le Martouret, Die, Drôme'. Le Martouret is the name of a country-house, near the little town of Die, in the department Drôme, in south-east France. It is referred to by Collingwood in his *Autobiography*, p. 107.

Introductory Lecture[3]

1. The phrase *Philosophy of History*, in the title of these lectures, is used in a sense analogous to that of the phrases philosophy of art, philosophy of religion. In these cases the expression means that art or religion is a specific form of human activity, a specific form of knowledge or conduct or both, which for some reason deserves or demands special study by philosophers.

For *what* reason? The answer is, that art or religion is a universal and necessary form of human activity: not an accidental or optional form, which may in certain circumstances be dispensed with, but a form which is and must be present throughout the range of human experience. If one thinks that art (e.g.) is in this sense universal and necessary; if one thinks that every human being at every moment of his conscious life is an artist, and that the artistic activity is among the essential constituents of our experience, then one thinks that there is or ought to be a philosophy of art, that is, a philosophical science dealing with human experience as a whole considered in this aesthetic aspect.

On the other hand, if one thinks that art is not in this sense universal and necessary: if one thinks that some people are artists and others not, and that those who are artists are artists at certain times and not at others, then one thinks that there is and can be no philosophy of art but only an empirical or psychological science of art as a particular contingent type of experience.

Now there is one sense in which art really is a universal and necessary element in all experience, a sense in which we are all and always artists. This is the most profound and true meaning of the word art. And in this sense the science of art is a philosophical science. But there is also a sense—a relatively shallow and unimportant sense—in which some people are artists and others not: and in this sense there is room for an empirical or psychological science of art side by side with the philosophy of art. Similarly, there is a sense of the word religion in which religion is coextensive with human experience,

[3] In the manuscript is added: 'May 1–1928'.

of which it forms a universal and necessary element: a sense in which everyone has a religion. In that sense, the science of religion is a philosophical science. But there is also a sense in which we speak of a person as abandoning all religion, being irreligious, having no religious feelings, and so forth: this is the empirical sense of the word religion, and in this sense the science of religion is an empirical science, a psychological study of the varieties and idiosyncrasies of religious experience.

The philosophy of religion or art, then, means the theory of religion or art regarded as universal and necessary forms, aspects, or constituents of human experience. Similarly, in these lectures, the philosophy of history means the theory of history as a necessary form of human experience: a thing not peculiar to certain persons called historians, but common to all thinking beings at all times.

2. It is necessary to make this clear at the outset because the phrase has long been used in a different sense. It came into use in the eighteenth century, and was first used by Voltaire; after him it was taken up by numerous writers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and in the mouths of all these writers it had a meaning quite other than that which I have defined.

Voltaire was anxious to give a new direction to historical studies. Before his time they had devoted their attention in part to the uncritical and credulous repetition of improbable stories concerning remote antiquity, in part to the narration of military affairs and the biographies of kings and queens. He wished to jettison the greater part of ancient history, on the ground that it consisted of old wives' tales which no enlightened and critical mind could believe: and to concentrate the attention of historians upon the history of arts and crafts, manners and customs, and what we should call social and economic questions. To this reformed history he gave the name of the philosophy of history: where philosophy only meant systematic and critical thinking. By using the word in this sense he meant that history, so treated, would become in the wide sense of the word a science: a subject worthy of the attention and credence of minds trained in accurate and methodical thought.

Voltaire's lead was followed. Ancient history was not indeed abolished but it was drastically revised by a succession of writers who brought to it a new standard of criticism and a new insistence on the scientific study of evidence; and modern history was at the same time decisively turned towards social and economic questions. Thus history did undergo the change which Voltaire demanded, and all modern historical study is what he called the philosophy of history. But to call it by that name would involve retaining a long obsolete sense of the term philosophy, and moreover laying an exaggerated stress on the resemblances between the methods of critical history and those of natural science, or philosophy in Newton's sense of the word.

Subsequent writers, adopting Voltaire's phrase, gave it a slightly new sense. Kant did not use the phrase, but he wrote a remarkable essay called 'An idea of a universal history from a cosmopolitan point of view', in which he maintained that human history as a whole could be seen as a gradual development and realization of the conception of citizenship: that is, as a progressive development of political institutions and organization. Here we have Voltaire's idea of history as the history of social life, applied to the whole extent of human history. Kant's successors, notably Schlegel, applied to this idea the name philosophy of history. Thus in post-Kantian Germany the phrase philosophy of history became the regular name for universal history regarded as the history of human progress. The most famous attempt at such a reading of universal history is Hegel's lectures on the philosophy of history.

Kant had pointed out that any such attempt—which he himself modestly refused to make—demanded two qualifications: a philosophical head, and a great store of historical learning. Obviously, the task of writing a history of the world demands the latter qualification; and the task of envisaging this history as one of progress demands a philosophical head because it cannot be carried out except by a person who is willing to think out very clearly what progress means and what relation there is between various values which are realized in various phases of historical development. Both qualifications were possessed in an eminent degree by the great German philosophers of history, notably Hegel himself; and though

their works meet with little favour nowadays, they did an immense service to the advancement of historical studies. The reason why they are out of favour today is partly because historical knowledge has advanced enormously in the last hundred years and their facts are out of date: partly because we realize that history is too complicated a thing to be expressible in the form of a single chain of continuous progress. But the attempt so to express it proceeded from a sound and thoroughly historical motive, namely the recognition of history as a continuous whole, in which everything is significant and everything worthy of study: and this is why the influence of these philosophers of history on historical thought was, on the whole, highly beneficial.

3. This leaves the phrase vacant and unoccupied by any idea; and at the same time a new idea has arisen, namely the idea of a philosophical science of historical thought. In this sense, therefore, the phrase is here used.

A philosophy of history in this sense will have two aspects which are so closely intertwined that we need not try to keep them separate. History means both a special kind of knowledge, and a special kind of object, the proper object of that knowledge. History *a parte subjecti* means the thinking that goes on in the historian's mind and is reported upon in his writings; history *a parte objecti* means the facts or events about which he thinks, and whose nature, so far as he discovers it, he expounds. Now the philosophy of history in the old Voltairean and Hegelian sense is concerned only with history *a parte objecti*. It does not study the processes or activities of the historian's mind: its object is historical fact or the sequence of historical events. But the philosophy of history in our sense is concerned with history *a parte subjecti*. Its primary business is to study the thinking that goes on in the historian's mind; it is primarily a logic of historical method.

On the other hand, if historical method is adequate to the study of its proper object, as it must be if it is really historical method, then it follows that in studying the necessary and universal features of historical method we are studying the necessary and universal features of historical fact, its proper object. Logic and metaphysics are the same, in the sense that a law which really is a logical law—a law, that is, of thought *qua* valid, not a merely psychological law—must be a metaphysical law too: for a law of thought *qua* valid must be a law binding on the reality known by that thought. Our business, then, may be defined as that of discovering how historians always and necessarily think; but this must be understood as identical with the business of discovering how historical fact is always and necessarily constituted.

For this reason, it would be misleading to call the philosophy of history simply the science of historical method, the methodology of history. It is at once a methodology of historical thought and a metaphysic of historical reality, and it will only be a satisfactory science so long as these two aspects, the subjective and the objective, are kept together.

4. History *a parte subjecti* is the knowledge of the past; and history *a parte objecti* is the past itself. This double statement is not, I think, controversial: it will be generally admitted as true: but certain remarks must be made upon it at once.

(a) History and *memory* are not the same thing, though they are akin. The historian may remember the events he narrates, but he need not. And so far as he narrates them merely because he remembers them, he is hardly a real historian. To deserve that title, he ought to check his memories by getting into touch with other sources of information: he ought to leave out some things that he remembers, as irrelevant to his subject, and put in some that he does not. History and memory are akin in that their object is the past: but whereas the object of history is the past as inferentially 'reconstructed' from evidence, the object of memory is the past as immediately 'apprehended' by an act in which inference plays no part.

(b) So far as memory is immediate and devoid of explicit ground, it is doubtful whether it deserves the title of knowledge. The fallibility of memory depends on the fact that, in remembering, we have before us no evidence of that which we are trying to remember: therefore there is no way of checking our memory. The historian who has made a mistake may correct it by asking himself whether the evidence before him proves his view or not, and recognizing that it does not; but in remembering we cannot do this. Therefore history is more like real knowledge than memory is: for it has an element of self-criticism about it which memory lacks.

(c) For this reason it might almost be doubted whether the distinction between true and false was applicable to memory, any more than it is applicable to sensation. Memory is fallible, but (it may be reasonably said) not false: it may lead us into error, but it cannot itself be erroneous. History, on the other hand, consisting as it does of reasoned judgements about the past, is true or false.[4]

[4] At the end of the page Collingwood writes: 'Begin here the Martouret essay'.

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[5] Following the table of contents under the heading 'Topics dealt with in Martouret Ms.', a list of 'Topics to be worked in' is added, which reads as follows:

1. History as understanding of *process* (but history not a mere series of events) leads on to:
2. History as understanding of the *present* (but not the whole present)—leads on to:
3. *Contingency* of history.
4. Historical imagination (i.e. closer study of nature of historical *inference*).
5. Bradley's theory.
6. *A priori* element in history (i.e. the historian's point of view as starting point) (cf. history of history).
7. Bias, subjectivity, judgement of value (connected with 6).
8. Historical process and natural process.

Since in this list Bradley's theory is mentioned, it must have been added at a later date. For it is only in 1932 that Collingwood read Bradley's *Presuppositions of Critical History*, published in 1874, a copy being sent to him by the philosopher Joseph. In a letter to Joseph, dated 15 July 1932, Collingwood writes: 'It is very good of you to have lent me this rarity, which I have long wanted to see and have never seen before' (Bodleian Library, MS Eng. lett., c 453, nr. 202). In 'The Historical Imagination' (1935) and 'Human Nature and Human History' (1936) some of the topics mentioned were indeed dealt with by Collingwood. That Collingwood has read the Martouret manuscript again in 1935 is made clear by the addition he made in that year (see p. 470). The list of 'topics to be worked in' therefore probably dates from the same time.

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I. *Quality*

History *a parte objecti*, the object of historical thought, is of course in some sense real, for if it were not, there would be no sense in which historical judgements could be true, or indeed false. But in what sense are historical facts (using that term to denote the objects of historical thought) real?

Realistic philosophies seem generally to equate reality with existence and subsistence. Existence is the reality of a thing which is actual, which has a determinate position in space and time and determinate characters actualised in it. Subsistence is the reality of actualised characters: or possibly (according to some theories) of any character whatever, actualised or not [that, at least, would be true of the quasi-Platonic essences of Santayana].

But the reality of historical facts falls under neither of these heads. An historical fact is rather a thing than an essence. It *has* characters, it *is* not character. Therefore it does not subsist; it ought to exist. But an historical fact does not exist. An historical fact is an event. The actuality of an event, that in it which is parallel or analogous to existence, is called occurrence. An actual thing is one which is existing: an actual event is one which is occurring. But no historical event is ever occurring at any moment when historical thought takes it as an object. Certainly a writer may compose the history of a war as the war proceeds. But in such a case the particular battles and campaigns whose history he narrates year by year are always, when he describes them, events in the past; and until the war as a whole is an event in the past, he can never be said to have written the history of the war as a whole. He has only written the history of its earlier stages—those, namely, which are now events in the past.

The object of historical thought is thus *the past*: that is, past events. How much of the infinite whole of past events is a legitimate or necessary object of historical thought, and what meaning can attach to the words 'infinite whole of past events', are questions belonging to a further stage in this inquiry and will be dealt with under the head of Quantity.

Now an event that is happening is actual: an event that has happened is not happening and is not actual. All events that

are objects of historical thought are events which are not happening because they have ceased to happen: they are therefore not actual.

This proposition I shall call *the Ideality of History*. By the word ideality I intend to signify the quality of being an object of thought without having actuality: thus an ideal thing would be an object of thought without actually existing, an ideal quality would be an object of thought without being anywhere actually exemplified in any existing thing, an ideal event would be an event which was the object of thought without actually occurring. In all these cases the word 'actually' implies simultaneity with the thought in question. It may be fancied that an object may be both ideal and actual, in this sense, that an object present to thought only as ideal may be actual without being known as such—e.g. an archaeologist may put together an historical account of a primitive civilization without knowing that this type of civilization still subsists and may be studied as an actual state of things in a part of the earth unvisited by him. But in a case like this the object of the historian's thought is not the Bronze Age as such, irrespective of time and place, but (for instance) the Bronze Age of north-western Europe, which began and ended at dates that are within certain limits determinable: and it is only a non-historical and abstractive or generalizing type of thought that will forget the differences (differences not only of time and place but of character also) that lie between the ancient Bronze Age of north-western Europe and the Bronze civilization today subsisting elsewhere on the earth. The object of history, then, because it is not a thing or a character, but an event, cannot be both ideal and actual: it must be wholly and only ideal. A thing (e.g. the Matterhorn) may be both ideal and actual: the Matterhorn as I remember it ten years ago is ideal, the Matterhorn as I see it now is actual: but the mountain as it was then and the mountain as it is now are the same mountain. But an object of historical thought cannot have this double reality. I may write a history of music, and it may be said that the relation between music in the present and music in the past is much like the relation between the Matterhorn in the present and the Matterhorn in the past: and so it is; but music in the present never enters into my purview as historian of music. If I close with a

chapter on 'Present-Day Tendencies', either I am writing the history of the most recent past, which is still wholly past and in no sense present, or else I am illegitimately (for an historian) taking upon myself to prophesy as to the future or to engage in polemics concerning the present. For the historian as historian the present as present has no interest. The present of music belongs not to historians of music but to musical composers and musical critics. If therefore anyone says that music is both ideal (as past music) and actual (as present music) it must be replied that the term music is here ambiguous: in one case it means past events in musical history, which are always purely past, purely ideal: in the other it means present events which are always purely actual or present. And no event in musical history can fall in both these categories at once.

But this example of musical history illustrates another and an important point. No historian of music deserves the name unless he has studied for himself the old music whose growth and development he is trying to describe. He must have listened to Bach and Mozart, Palestrina and Lasso, and possess personal acquaintance with their works. This means that he must have been present at actual performances of these works either physically or in imagination; and in the latter case the imaginative power is acquired only by actually hearing similar things performed—e.g. a man who had never heard an orchestra of the Beethoven period could not read a symphony of Beethoven in score with any chance of obtaining a good imaginative hearing of it. We may therefore boldly say that the *sine qua non* of writing the history of past music is to have this past music *re-enacted in the present*. Just the same thing is true of other arts: e.g. we must read old poetry for ourselves, see old pictures for ourselves with the dirt of age actually or in imagination removed and the colours restored to their old values. Similarly, to write the history of a battle, we must re-think the thoughts which determined its various tactical phases: we must see the ground of the battlefield as the opposing commanders saw it, and draw from the topography the conclusions that they drew: and so forth.[6] The past event, ideal though it is, must be actual *in the historian's re-enactment* of it.

[6] This sentence was a later addition to the manuscript.

In this sense, and this sense only, the ideality of the object of history is compatible with actuality and indeed inseparable from actuality. The historian of music will certainly not be able to write the history of any musical work which he has not heard—which has not been actually enacted within his own musical experience. In what, then, does the Ninth Symphony differ from the Matterhorn? Is the former any more ideal than the latter?[7]

We are not concerned here to ask whether there is any field of thought in which a realistic philosophy is a plausible or even adequate account of the facts. We are only concerned to show that in the case of history, at any rate, it is neither. Perhaps the Matterhorn is as ideal as the battle of Marathon; but short of embarking on inquiries which might or might not lead to that conclusion, we[8] must reply that for the moment we are

[7] After this sentence Collingwood added the encircled words 'Distinction between present and past'.

[8] Here a sheet of paper with a new text is stuck over the original. The original text runs as follows: 'must here reply that the ideality of the Ninth Symphony consists in the fact that whereas for the mere musical critic the Ninth Symphony is a contemporary musical experience, in connexion with which the questions to be asked are: is it well written? Is it well performed? For the musical historian the contemporary musical experience is as it were a medium through which he sees to the original experience of the composer and his first performers and first audiences. Instead of saying, "how sublime, or, how naïvely sentimental, is this hymn to joy", the historian says: "how interesting an example of Romanticism!" Now Romanticism is not the historian's own frame of mind: it's a frame of mind whose history he is writing. Therefore he must both experience it and not experience it: he must enter into it, reconstitute it with his own mind, and at the same time objectify this very reconstitution, so as to prevent it from mastering his mind and running away with him.

The historical event is this actual and ideal at once: but not at all in the same way in which the Matterhorn is actual and ideal at once. The Matterhorn, because it is a physical thing, not an event, persists in time and may therefore be at once perceived and remembered. But the object of historical thought is an event, and does not persist. Its very permanence, so far as it has permanence, consists in its complete non-existence: death once dead, there's no more dying then; the event, once over and done with, can be re-enacted in the historian's mind anywhere and any time because it nowhere and at no time can actually recur. Its actuality is only another name for its ideality: regarded as itself, it is purely and only ideal: regarded as the object of *this* act of historical thought it is actual in so far as the act of thought is actual.

This re-enacting of history in the historian's mind is the opposite or complementary aspect of the ideality of history. Because the historical fact is ideal it has an actuality of its own, an actuality of a peculiar kind: it is *actualised* by the activity of the thought for which it has its ideal being. The object of history, then, while having no existence at all apart from thought, and being so far ideal, is actualised by the thought that thinks it.

Nevertheless this conception is a somewhat difficult one. How can the historian genuinely re-enact history in his mind? How can he call the dead to live again and repeat events that have happened once for all and are irrevocably past? And does not the idea of a literal revival of the past in the historian's mind savour of a crude magical necromancy rather than of a serious theory of knowledge?' The original text ends here. Then follow the words 'It is easy to answer', which are crossed out.

discussing a far simpler question than this. We are pointing out a distinction, which becomes obvious as soon as our attention is called to it, between the way in which a man looking at the Matterhorn finds the actual object present to his gaze, and the way in which a man thinking historically about the battle of Hastings has to reconstruct the battle in his head. And we are pointing out that this distinction is not done away with by saying that the past is re-enacted in the present. As so re-enacted, it remains merely ideal. The historian does not, by thinking out the battle of Hastings, cause a real battle to be fought there once more, neither does he fall into the error of believing that the battle he has reconstructed in thought is actually going on merely because he has reconstructed it. This applies equally to the historian of music. Ancient art does not become modern art simply by being performed over again. It is both interesting and delightful to sing madrigals and masses of the sixteenth century; but the historian is well aware, when he sings them and hears others sing them, that their place is in the sixteenth century and not in the twentieth. He listens to them not simply as music—not simply as the expression of feeling in musical language—but as sixteenth-century music, music belonging to a bygone world whose mind and civilization he is trying to understand. All we are concerned with at the moment is to call attention to the fact that these two attitudes to music are possible: the attitude of the contemporary critic, who hears music as an expression of the actual life of his own age, and the attitude of the historian, who hears it as an expression of the life of the past which he is trying to reconstruct. We are all familiar with the distinction between these

two attitudes, and at present I only want to emphasize its existence: later we shall ask how it is possible and what it implies.

The historian, then, re-enacts the past in his mind: but in this re-enactment it does not become a present or an actuality. The actuality is the actual thought of the historian that re-enacts it. The only sense in which the object of historical thought is actual, is that it is actually thought about. But this does not confer any kind of actuality upon *it*, taken in itself. It remains wholly ideal.

But how *can* the historian re-enact the past? What has happened has happened: it cannot be made to happen again by thinking about it. How can the historian call the dead to life by scientific research? Does not such a theory savour of crude magic, necromancy, rather than of serious philosophical inquiry? The answer is[9] that, without any necromancy, the historian may re-enact a past event if that event is itself a thought. When Archimedes discovered the idea of specific gravity he performed an act of thought which we can without difficulty repeat: he was drawing certain conclusions from certain data, and we can draw the same conclusions from the same data. Not only *can* we do this but if we are to write the history of Hellenistic science we *must* do it, and must do it knowing that we are repeating Archimedes's thought in our own mind. Similarly, if we are to narrate the history of a battle, we must see for ourselves the tactical problem that the victorious commander saw, and see the solution as he saw it. If we are to narrate the history of a constitutional reform, we must see what the facts were that the reformer had before him, and how his way of dealing with the facts seemed to meet the necessities as he felt them to exist. In all these cases, that is, in all cases where the history in question is the history of thought,[10] a literal re-enactment of the past is possible and is an essential element in all history.

Not only is the history of thought possible, but, if thought is understood in its widest sense, it is the only thing of which there can be history. Nothing but thought can be treated by the historian with that intimacy without which history is not history; for nothing but thought can be re-enacted in this way

[9] The new text which was stuck on the original ends here.

[10] 'history of thought' is encircled in the manuscript.

in the historian's mind. The birth of solar systems, the origins of life on our planet, the early course of geological history—all these are not strictly historical studies because the historian can never really get inside them, actualise them in his mind: they are science, not history, because, however much they may take the form of narrative, they are generalized narratives, accounts of how things must have happened in any world, not accounts of how things actually happened in this world. They are hypotheses, which, however probable, do not even approximate to the status of documented history.

All history, then, is the history of thought, where thought is used in the widest sense and includes all the conscious activities of the human spirit.[11] These activities, as events in time, pass away and cease to be. The historian re-creates them in his own mind: he does not merely repeat them, as a later scientist may re-invent the inventions of an earlier: he re-enacts them consciously, knowing that this is what he is doing and thus conferring upon this re-enactment the quality of a specific activity of the mind. This activity is a free activity. It differs *toto caelo* from the imitativeness which may induce a man or a beast to do what others do because these others are observed to be doing it. For the historian does not observe others to be doing the things which he does over again. Until he has done them over again he does not know what they are. It is only after I have grasped the idea of specific gravity that I can see what it was that Archimedes had done when he shouted ηὕρηκα: I am therefore in no sense imitating Archimedes.

A philosophical or pseudo-philosophical objection to the conception of the historian as re-enacting the past must here be met. It may be said that no such re-enactment is possible because nothing can happen twice. Archimedes discovered the idea of specific gravity: I can know that he did so, but I cannot re-discover the idea, for discovery implies priority. The second person who thinks of the idea is not discovering it. Nor is this, it may be said, a merely logical distinction: for there is a peculiar quality in the experience of discovery or invention, a peculiar feeling of being the first human being to penetrate

[11] The words 'All history, then, is the history of thought' is underlined in the manuscript.

into the presence of this particular truth, which the historian can never recapture just because it attaches to discovery as such. Clearly, then, if the historian knows the past by re-enacting it, he cannot re-enact this element of discovery or originality and therefore cannot know it historically: hence, from the view here maintained, the *reductio ad absurdum* follows that no discovery, no thought that is really original or unique (and what genuine thought is not?) can be historically known.

We shall answer this objection by admitting it. Surely everybody knows that the peculiar thrill with which the victorious commander watches the collapse of an enemy's defence is a thrill which the historian cannot recapture. No one thinks that the historian of Hellenistic science ought to leap out of his bath and run about the town naked when he comes to Archimedes in writing his history. It is obvious that the historian's duty of re-enacting the discovery or the battle does not extend to the impossible feat of actually discovering the law or defeating the enemy over again, but only to such re-enactment of the past as is possible.

For a certain kind of re-enactment *is* possible, as we have shown; and if the objector says that *no* kind of re-enactment is possible, merely because nothing can happen twice, we shall treat his objection with less courtesy: pointing out that he would himself not hesitate to speak of dining twice in the same inn, or bathing twice in the same river, or reading twice out of the same book, or hearing the same symphony twice. Is the binomial theorem as known to him, we should ask, the same theorem that Newton invented, or not? If he says yes, he has admitted all we want. If he says no, we can easily convict him of self-contradiction: for he is assuming that in our mutual discourse we have ideas in common, and this is inconsistent with his thesis.

But we must turn to a more serious difficulty. It is all very well to appeal to a 'peculiar thrill' as differentiating the act itself from the historian's re-enactment of it: but such a distinction is really no more than Hume's distinction between impressions and ideas on the ground that impressions are livelier and more vivid. We may, and must, recognize that the historian is unable to share the emotional heat with which the

characters in his narrative did the things narrated of them; and that *his* emotional heat attaches only to feats of historical research, historical discoveries made and historical perplexities removed; but we must go on to ask the question, why, if the historian really re-enacts the past, is this re-enactment unaccompanied by the emotional heat, the vividness and liveliness of impression, which accompanied its original enactment: and conversely, how, if this re-enactment is devoid of so important an element of the original enactment, can it be called the same thing over again and not a mere pale copy of it or something radically different?

The answer is that to re-enact the past in the present is to re-enact it in a context which gives it a new quality. This context is the negation of the past itself. Thus, the historian of poetry, reading Dante, re-enacts the medieval experience which that poem expresses: but while doing this he remains himself: he remains a modern man, not a medieval: and this means that the medievalism of Dante, while genuinely revived and re-experienced within his mind, is accompanied by a whole world of fundamentally non-medieval habits and ideas, which balance it and hold it in check and prevent it from ever occupying the whole field of vision. For Dante, the *Commedia* was his whole world. For me, the *Commedia* is at most half my world, the other half being all those things in me which prevent me from literally becoming Dante. These things include, for instance, Shakespeare and Newton and Kant, who also have gone to form my personality. In reading Dante I do not lose this personality; on the contrary, it is only by using my powers to the full that I succeed in reading Dante at all, and these powers are what they are, for better or worse, because of my going to school with Shakespeare and Newton and Kant. If I cease to be what these have made me, I cease to be able to do anything so recondite as reading Dante; but if I continue to be what they have made me, I approach Dante and his medievalism through a medium of my own modernity, and I must keep this modernity unimpaired by my contact with Dante's medievalism.

I thus genuinely re-enact Dante's medievalism—if I do not, I simply fail to understand or appreciate his poetry—but I re-enact it in a context (namely the rest of my mental outfit

and equipment) which gives it a new quality, the quality of being *one element* within a whole of thought that goes beyond it, instead of being a whole of thought outside which there is nothing. This quality of being an element within my experience, an element checked and balanced by others and so contributing to the equilibrium of the whole, is the ideality of history. The whole is actual and only actual; when William the Conqueror was fighting the battle of Hastings, his tactical plan was actual for him because in this plan was summed up everything he knew about fighting battles, and therefore it was for him a complete whole. For the historian of the art of war, the tactics of Hastings form a thought, a plan, which he can re-think in his own mind: but this plan is for him never a whole, it is only a part which goes along with others to form that whole which he calls the history of war—that is, his entire actual historical knowledge, which is the whole of his present thought just as the tactical plan of Hastings was the whole of William's thought.

The conception here expounded may perhaps be made clearer, or at least certain of its implications may be brought to light, by contrasting it with two familiar theories of knowledge: the realistic theory and the copy-theory.

According to the realistic theory, the object of knowledge is always something actual, whose actuality is independent of all cognitive activity on the part of the mind that knows it. The mind and the object are generally, in such theories, conceived as two independent actually existing things, which come together in such a way that the mind 'knows' the object. It is assumed that 'to know' is properly a transitive verb, and the grammatical object of that verb is a thing towards which the mind takes up a cognitive attitude or with which it enters into a relation called knowledge. The realist is in the habit of insisting that this event makes no difference to the object, which was just as real before the event as after it: a statement which is sometimes supported by arguing that if the act of knowing an object produced alterations in it, the act would precisely not be one of knowing, since knowing *implies* that what we know is not altered by our knowing it.

It is at once clear that from the point of view of an ordinary realistic theory of knowledge, history is impossible. A theory which regards knowledge as 'apprehension' of an independent object is reasonable if perception is taken as the only legitimate example of knowledge; it is plausible if knowledge is conceived Platonically as the knowledge of abstract ideas; it has no shadow of plausibility in the case of history. The historian who writes a monograph on the battle of Marathon is not 'apprehending' a thing, namely the battle of Marathon, that exists independently of the apprehending and, as it were, stands there to be apprehended. The battle of Marathon was an event which ceased happening some 2,400 years ago; there is nothing there to apprehend; in the realistic sense of the term object, there is no object whatever for the historian to know. And therefore, since without object there can be no knowledge, history as a form of knowledge is, realistically speaking, an absurdity.

Perhaps some ingenious realist will evade this difficulty by appeal to the four-dimensional space-time of modern physical theory. If time is only one of the four dimensions, and if any dimension may at will be taken as the temporal, the 2,400 years which separate us from the battle of Marathon may be at pleasure reduced to nothing by being taken, not as time, but as space; and a person actually at Marathon might at will interpret his spatial situation on the battle-field as temporal simultaneity with the battle. He will then, presumably, see it going on, and his task as historian will be greatly simplified. But until a realistic philosopher has actually witnessed the battle of Marathon by this method, we may forbear to contemplate the possibility of such an argument's being seriously put forward.

In opposition to all realism, then, any philosophy of history must assert the ideality, as opposed to the reality, of historical fact. It asserts that the past as past has no existence whatever, consisting as it does of occurrences no longer occurring, events that have finished happening: and it holds that these events can be historically known not by anything in the least analogous to perception, observation, or any process or act intelligibly describable as 'apprehension', but by their re-enactment in the mind of the historian.

This may seem to assimilate the present theory to the 'copy-theory' of knowledge, which pretends to explain how we know things by the hypothesis of images 'inside' our minds, mental

images, copying the appearance of objects 'outside' our mind. The past, as no longer present, is necessarily outside our mind, unknown, and unknowable: but we make a replica of it inside our mind, and know *that*, and so, mediately, come to know the past.

This is a wholly false comparison, and entails an unrecognizable travesty of the theory here maintained. The past is, for us, not outside the mind (whatever that means), it is wholly and utterly non-existent. The re-enactment of it in our mind is therefore not a copy of it in any sense whatever. How could anyone make a copy of something that does not exist? The re-enactment of the past in the present *is the past itself* so far as that is knowable to the historian. We understand what Newton thought by thinking—not *copies* of his thoughts—a silly and meaningless phrase—but his thoughts themselves over again. When we have done that, we know what Newton thought, not mediately, but immediately.

The historian's thought, then, neither is nor contains nor involves any copy of its object. The historian's thought is, or rather contains as one of its elements, that object itself, namely the act of thought which the historian is trying to understand, re-thought in the present by himself. A person who failed to realize that thoughts are not private property might say that it is not Newton's thought that I understand, but only my own. That would be silly because, whatever subjective idealism may pretend, thought is always and everywhere *de jure* common property, and is *de facto* common property wherever people at large have the intelligence to think in common.[12]

II. *Quantity*

The question here to be considered is, what is the scope of historical thought? Practically, this is equivalent to the question, what is the right or best form of historical composition? Theoretically, it amounts to this:—what are the limits of historical knowledge?

The simplest, and in that sense the best, form of historical composition is the memoir or contemporary history: the form

[12] Here Collingwood added a separate encircled note saying 'Dilthey's Nachbild'.

whose outstanding example is the History of Thucydides. The extraordinary merit of Thucydides's work is closely connected with the limitation of its scope. Apart from the introductory matter contained in the first book, it is concerned with events falling in the writer's lifetime, and under his own observation or that of persons with whom he could speak face to face. The problems of collecting sources and interpreting them—the two cardinal problems of historical research—were, not indeed eliminated, but reduced to a state of extreme simplicity, and this simplicity relieved Thucydides of all the more technical and elaborate part of the historian's work and put him automatically in the position of a man who has completed the collection and interpretation of his sources: a position in which he was able to use his enormous literary powers without hesitation or embarrassment.

Many histories of the same kind have been written since then; but no one, since the work done by the Hellenistic and Roman historians, would describe this as the ideal type of history. It is a form which, technically, can only be called rudimentary. It is applicable only [to] the simplest possible type of historical problem, and this is a type of problem that ceases to interest people when their field of vision widens beyond their own immediate concerns and embraces the life of other peoples and the past of their own. With this widening of interest the magic circle of a simple egotism is broken, and henceforth the problem of determining the proper scope and limits of historical inquiry becomes urgent. Thucydides represents the straightforward egotism of the Greek, for whom everything not Greek is barbarian and therefore unworthy of serious study. But the Roman can say 'humani nihil a me alienum puto', and this commits him in theory to studying, so far as he can, the history of the whole world.

This widening of interest leads to complications not because it introduces into history any genuinely new factors, for it does not: all the technical problems of the most advanced and complex historical thought are already present in what we have called the most rudimentary type of history: but because it introduces into history new interests, the interest in things foreign and remote and unfamiliar, in dealing with which the historian is compelled to find a new answer to the question

'why am I dealing with this particular subject rather than any other?' So long as his subject is the events of his own lifetime, he can plead that the subject has been forced upon him by the mere fact that these interesting things have been going on before his eyes; failing that, the responsibility of choosing his subject lies with him. On what principles is he to choose it?

We are here confronted by the conception of *choice*, which seems to imply that the historian has access to a vast expanse of facts, out of which he must choose something to study. History in its completeness, the sum total of historical fact, stretches out before him: an object, clearly, too large to be taken in at a simple glance: he must select some manageable part of it and ignore the rest, at any rate for the time being, while he acquires a competent knowledge of this part.

Thus arises the idea of the historical monograph or essay on a single circumscribed historical subject. It may be only a page long, or it may be as large as the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*; but it is still a monograph, if it presents itself as a particular, not a universal, history: the statement of a part, not the whole, of historical truth.

But the monograph is always open to theoretical objections and beset by practical difficulties. Every historian who has tried to write one knows that the exclusion of certain subjects, as alien to the monograph, leads to the presence, within the monograph itself, of loose ends, errors in perspective and emphasis, misleading expressions and downright blunders. How far the body of the treatise may be infected by these failings is a question which never admits of accurate determination. Historical facts are certainly never intelligible and never truly discoverable except in relation to their context; if you do not know what the La Tène civilization of Gaul was like, you do not know what the problem was which Caesar had before him when he undertook the conquest of that country, and therefore you do not understand the chief task of Caesar's life, and therefore you do not understand the chief figure in the closing phases of the Roman republic. It may be said that this is hypercriticism, because the amount of misunderstanding concerning Roman history as a whole which can arise from ignorance of La Tène civilization is very small. But how small it is, cannot be discovered until it has been corrected. The

whole reputation of a general may turn on the question whether he was right in thinking that a certain operation conducted against a certain enemy would be successful; and points that seem small to an ignorant person may have been the determining factors in his forming that opinion.

Practically, then, the monograph is always in difficulties because it impinges at every point on questions whose answers it is compelled to take for granted but into whose rights and wrongs it cannot enter. And theoretically, it is always open to the objection that since historical facts are what they are only in relation to other facts, the mere severance of certain facts from their context, in order to make them up into a monograph, is an act of false abstraction and a voluntary embracing of error.

Considerations like these led writers of the eighteenth century to attempt the composition of universal histories. The attempt, or something like it, had been made before, more than once; but for our purpose little interest attaches to these earlier endeavours, and we may confine our attention to the idea of universal history as that was formulated by eighteenth-century philosophy. The idea was that history should be looked at as a whole, and would, from that point of view, be found to possess a definite organic unity either as exemplifying constant general laws or as developing a single plan. This idea met with very wide acceptance in all civilized countries, and served as a powerful stimulus to historical research. It fostered, in especial, the tendency towards research into obscure and little-known periods, whose history was required for insertion into the scheme in order to make that complete; and it did more than anything else could have done to teach historians that other things beside their own immediate present were worthy of serious study. It broke down parochialism in history much as the Newtonian theory of universal gravitation finally broke down parochialism in astronomy.

Now that these results have been achieved, the idea of universal history has sunk into obscurity, like a town house in a quarter that was once fashionable and is now barely respectable. It is fully recognized by all serious historians that, if the monograph is open to objection, universal history is far more so, in proportion as its pretensions are far greater. It can never be written, because the whole of history is too large a

matter for anyone to bring together into a single literary work; and therefore every so-called universal history is a mere selection of the facts which the writer happens to think important or interesting or in some way capable of grinding his particular axe. In the time of the Venerable Bede it was possible to conflate all known history into a treatise; that only marked the poverty of the time; nowadays, a universal history is never even an honest attempt at real universality, it is only a veiled attempt to impose on the reader the prejudices and superstitions of the writer. No one with any pretensions to historical learning would attempt such a work today, unless it were as a mere textbook for examination purposes, containing frankly, not the history of the world, but those selected facts which candidates for certain examinations would do well to remember. And thus the writing of universal history has fallen into the hands of two classes of persons: the dishonest and the ignorant: the dishonest telling a garbled tale in order to spread their own opinions by specious falsehood, the ignorant naïvely writing down everything they know about history and not suspecting that they know it all wrong.

So complete is the discredit into which universal history has fallen, that we find it hard to look with tolerance or sympathy at the eighteenth and early nineteenth-century writers who brought it into favour. We tend to look on their works as attempts to close the doors of historical research and to institute a canon of historical fact outside which there shall be no salvation, and therefore we ridicule them for not knowing a great deal that every historian knows today. But if we wish to understand them we must invert this attitude. We must look on them not as closing, but as opening, the doors of historical research. We must regard their systems not as summaries of work done but as programmes of work to be put in hand. The truth about these systems is that they are forecasts, and in the main fairly accurate forecasts, of the lines which historical inquiry was to follow in the next few generations.

Outside the circle of professional historians, this extreme reaction against universal history has never been felt. The general public has always been eager for it; never more so than today, when brief abstracts of all knowledge are a staple food of the intelligent public and a staple source of income to many publishing firms. Universal histories of the two classes mentioned above are being produced and bought and read all over the world in quantities that would have brought tears to the eyes of Voltaire, and may well produce misgivings in the monograph-writing historians of our own time. Indeed, it evidently does produce some misgivings; enough to induce some of them to make remunerative if rather shamefaced contribution to journalistic outlines of history and popular collections of cheap little books, and others to invent and execute ingenious compromises, in the shape of works in many volumes, described on their covers as universal histories, but inwardly consisting of excellent monographs, each numbered as a chapter.

While, however, the professional historian tries in vain to reach the universal by adding particular to particular—a vain attempt, because the universality of a universal history consists not in the number of separate monographs out of which it is built up, but in the unity of the point of view from which it is envisaged—the general public, representing common sense as opposed to technical ideals, complains that the wood cannot be seen for the trees, and looks forward to a time when this passion for detail is tempered by a broader and humaner outlook on the problems of history as a whole. It suspects, not without reason, that the absorption of historians in points of detail is not merely distracting their attention from these larger problems, but is depriving them of the power to deal with such problems at all; that it is producing an intellectual myopia which, becoming endemic among trained historians, compels the reader who is interested in these problems to turn away from their works in despair and to look for what he wants in the writings of journalists and novelists and clergymen, who, just because they are only novices in history, have never taken a vow to refrain from dealing with interesting questions.

The professional historian may argue that this taste on the part of the public is a vicious and morbid taste, or at any rate a taste for something that is not history: a taste for sermons, for fiction, and for journalism; and he may contend that historians are right to refuse to satisfy this taste, and show a proper understanding of their own task when they leave these so-called larger problems severely alone and confine themselves

to problems that are genuinely historical; which, he may say, is what they are now doing. For, he may argue, history consists in finding out facts: and until one has sifted every scrap of evidence bearing on the facts, one is simply running away from one's duty as an historian if one allows oneself to wander from the point and indulge in edifying generalizations. 'Let the journalist and the parson', he may say, 'draw moral and political lessons from the decline of the Roman Empire; my business is to discover what exactly that decline was: what changes it involved in finance and administration and so forth; here is my work waiting for me, and unless I do it, people will go on using the old traditional language about the decline of the Roman Empire in the old traditional state of complete ignorance as to the nature of the thing they are talking about.' And he will settle down again to his study of the monetary history of the reign of Honorius.

But this extreme particularism (so to call it), like the extreme universalism against which it reacts, is based on a false view of historical fact. The universalism of a hundred years ago was based on the idea that there was such a thing as the sum total of historical fact, and that this whole could be narrated with some kind of completeness. Shallow thinkers fancied that this whole had been more or less discovered and was already stated more or less completely, though piecemeal, in historical works: and supposed that the task of the philosophical historian was only to put it together and thus bring its significance to light. Profounder minds regarded this whole as something not yet known, but awaiting discovery and capable of being discovered: even if some past facts could not be discovered, those that mattered for the completeness of the scheme, they thought, could. The essence of the error was the thinking of history as a kind of pattern, a complete body of fact, with articulations of its own and a structure of its own, which the historian had simply to discover. This involved denying the ideality of history: for if history is ideal, it cannot be a single self-contained body of fact awaiting discovery, it must be a growing and changing body of thoughts, decomposed and recomposed by every new generation of historical workers, and the exhaustibility of historical fact, which is implied in the idea of universal history, is an illusion.

The same illusion lies at the root of historical particularism. The devotee of the historical monograph aims at collecting all the evidence there is, and interpreting it completely, so as to give a final account of some point of detail. Here again, we meet with the notion of exhaustibility. 'All the evidence there is' implies that upon any point there is a finite quantity of evidence which is capable of being exhaustively handled in a monograph. But this is simply untrue. A given writer, or a given generation, possesses only a finite quantity of evidence on a given subject; but another writer, or a later generation, succeeds in tapping new sources of information; and where is the process to end? It cannot ever be ended until historical research is ended. Therefore the reasons which our historian gave for confining himself to minute details are bad reasons. They amounted to this: that such details admit of rigorous and scientific handling, which the 'larger' questions do not. But we now see that, precisely as the ignorant man thinks that the larger questions can be definitively settled, and is thereby merely showing his own ignorance, so, when the professional historian thinks that minuter questions can be definitively settled, he too is betraying, not ignorance of what has been done, but ignorance concerning the possibilities of future discovery. The idea of the evidence concerning this or that point as a given finite whole is just as false as the idea of history at large as a given finite whole. In both cases the ideality of history is denied. For to assert the ideality of history implies asserting that the evidence concerning a particular problem consists of everything which historical research has found, or shall find, to be relevant to it.

However wide the universal historian casts his net, there are left as good fish in the sea as ever he gets out of it, not to mention the million species that slip through the mesh. However large the magnification which the monograph-writer uses for his microscope, there are left, ultra-microscopic, as many pieces of evidence as he discovers, not to mention those which the magnification itself removes from his field of vision. Does this point to the futility of all historical research?

Far from it, if we assert the ideality of history. For on that view, the infinite things that are left undiscovered do not vitiate what we have discovered; they are only a name for the

infinite possibilities of future discovery. Whereas if historical fact were an actually existing reality, the universal historian would have failed altogether if anything had fallen outside his scheme and the monograph-writer would have failed with equal completeness if any evidence on his subject had escaped his scrutiny. To explain this, let us take an example. A and B are two historians of forty years ago, both specialists in the Athenian constitution, and holding divergent views on a certain point. After the controversy between them has developed and served to sharpen their views, the learned world is shaken by the discovery of Aristotle's *Constitution of the Athenians*. The new evidence thus discovered proves, to the satisfaction of all concerned, that A and B were both wrong. What follows? If historical fact is an actually existing reality, and if the truth of historical thought lies in its correspondence with historical fact, and if the value of historical thought lies in its truth, the value of both views, A's and B's, is zero: and both A and B were therefore fools, and equally fools, to hold their respective views.

But no one will accept this result. Everybody will agree that views held before the discovery of the *Constitution* must be judged in the light of the evidence available when they were held, and the arguments by which that evidence was made to support them. So judged, most people will agree that A's view was better than B's, and that neither was wholly valueless. Are we then to argue that the value of an historical view is something other than its truth? Impossible. Neither A nor B nor anyone else will acquiesce in that. We are forced to say that what A and B were both alike aiming at was 'a verdict in accordance with the evidence', a theory of the Athenian Constitution strictly consistent with the evidence available to them at that time. And, since the discovery of the Aristotelian treatise has not rendered us omniscient on the subject, the same thing must be said about ourselves. A view which is right for us to hold will be wrong when the next important new find of evidence has been made.

One of two consequences follows. Either the attainment of truth, even on points of small detail, is deferred until *all* new finds of evidence have been made—that is, deferred for ever, because in the nature of things further evidence might always

turn up—in which case every historical view is exactly as false as every other, that is, absolutely false: or else *the truth* about any point means the truth relatively to the evidence possessed by the person who raises the point. The principle of the ideality of history makes it perfectly clear that the second answer is the right one. The first answer implies the denial of that principle, for it implies that historical fact is an unknown and unknowable thing in itself: the second answer implies its assertion, for it implies that the object of historical thought is always present, and always grasped, wherever historical thought exists.

This leads to results of some importance. It shows that the monograph-writer, however wrong he may be to suppose that he is deciding anything once for all, and closing the doors of historical research, is perfectly right to review with all the care and skill at his command, all the available evidence on the question, however small, which he is studying. But the reason why he is right is because there is no such thing as a large or small question; any question that any historian actually and effectively studies is just large enough to fill his mind, and no larger. The monograph-writer is thus justified by the fact that, because historical fact is ideal and not actual, there are no historical problems except those which historical thought raises; and if I devote my life to the monetary policy of Honorius, the monetary policy of Honorius is for me the whole of history.

But by the same principle the writer of a universal history is equally justified. He is justified by his very failings. What proves him right is what we thought had proved him wrong—namely the fact that, after all, his universal history is not universal, not complete, but a mere selection of facts arranged to illustrate or prove some particular point. For this makes him a monograph-writer, and removes the sting from that appellation. All that is wrong with his book is, now, its title: it was called 'A History of the World'; it ought to have been called 'The Oppression of the Proletariat in the last Twenty-five Centuries', or 'The Growth of the Modern Conception of Liberty', or the like. And even to call it 'A History of the World' is not wholly wrong, for, as we have seen, the subject of the monograph that I am writing is, for me, the whole of history, and every monograph is in a sense a history of the

world—the best solution I can offer, at the moment, of the only historical problem which, at the moment, I feel to be a real problem. But because every history is equally a history of the world in that sense, and cannot be a history of the world at all in any other, nothing is gained by ever using the title.

The popular demand for histories dealing with 'larger' questions is also, from this point of view, justified. But this is not because these questions really are larger than those with which historians generally deal. It is because they are questions more interesting to ordinary unacademic people. A question does not cease to be scientifically answerable merely because it happens to interest unscientific people; and this applies as much to history as to any other branch of knowledge. The reason why modern historical thought has moved away from the problems most interesting to ordinary people is partly that it has been influenced by a false theory and a false ideal of historical method. The notion of historical fact as an actual and exhaustible whole has led it to seek that wholeness in smaller and smaller parcels of material; and this has led to the ruling-out of any question that any ordinary man would wish to ask, as being too complicated for the present state of knowledge. But no question is ever too complicated for an inquirer who will ask it resolutely and set about answering it to the best of his ability. The search for questions that are inherently simple and therefore capable of exhaustive treatment is a false atomism of knowledge, and can only lead to disappointment. To pursue that search, to the exclusion of questions which genuinely interest one, is to incur and to justify the ridicule which has always been directed at the pedantic scholar.

On the other hand, it would be wrong entirely to condemn the present specialization of historical studies. It would be wrong to imagine that this specialization is altogether based on a fallacious theory of history. Often a fallacious theory is only invented to justify a practice which is sound enough in itself and needs no justification. The specialism of modern historical research is a necessary and a fine thing. It is a school of disinterested accuracy, of cool and logical thinking, and of careful observation, which is in no way inferior to that specialism of scientific research whose praises have been so often and

eloquently sung. Modern historical research is a younger thing than modern scientific research, and its achievements are less known and its virtues less valued by the public; but they are equally real, and equally important elements in the life of the modern world. And further, the results which are being built up by this specialized research are very far from being lost to knowledge by an excess of specialism. They are, on the whole, easily accessible to students and provide an enormous and ever-increasing field for the activity of historians sufficiently wide in their interests to use them effectively. The phase of specialization through which historical studies have been passing is certainly the prelude to a phase when the narrowness of the specialist, which the public today finds repellent, will give way before a return to those 'larger' questions which, as if by an act of self-denial, historians of the present refuse to raise. When that happens, it will perhaps be realized that every new synthesis and every broadening of view has been made possible by the detailed and laborious specialism of a generation of scholars whose work, while they lived, was regarded as the mere indulgence of an eccentric antiquarianism.[13]

At this point it will be well to introduce a conception of great importance for the theory of historical method: namely the conception of history of the second degree, or the history of history.

The history of history arises when the historian, in trying to solve a particular problem, proceeds by collecting and criticizing the solutions which have already been offered. This collection and criticism of previous solutions may be done in two ways: either by treating the various solutions in a disconnected manner, dealing with each separately and discussing them in a haphazard order, or else by treating them historically, showing how each expressed a certain attitude which was itself an historical phenomenon, and established itself by criticizing its predecessors. For historical thought itself has a history, and there is no more sense in criticizing a particular historical theory without considering the conditions in which it arose, than there is in criticizing a political or military system without

[13] Following this Collingwood writes: '[addition, May 1928]'. This addition deals with the subject of the history of history, which is also discussed in the lectures of 1926. It runs until the last paragraph of p. 469.

such consideration. We have already seen that the value of historical work done in the past can only be assessed by putting ourselves in the position of the people who did it, thinking over the problem as it confronted them, and making use of the evidence which they possessed. This is only a way of saying that historical thought itself, when it is past historical thought, may be and must be an object for present historical thought.

Now it is plain enough that historical thought is one of the things that historians may think about; and that among the infinite possible subjects for historical research, some may legitimately be drawn from the past development of historical research itself. But to say that would be to misrepresent the real nature and importance of the history of history. For the fact is, that the history of history holds a quite peculiar position in historical studies: a position which may be defined by saying that all history is, or at least involves and presupposes, the history of history.

By saying this, I mean that anyone who is anxious to solve a particular historical problem must find out where he stands, and what his problem exactly is, by looking into the history of the problem itself: that is, into the history of research concerning the subject. Suppose the subject is the Peasants' Revolt, and suppose this becomes a problem for you because for some reason you have made up your mind to write an essay on it or, in general, to form an opinion as to what exactly it was. Now the first thing you do is to read it up in a standard and up-to-date history; and if you are not going deeply into the matter, you will simply swallow what you find there, and go no further. But if you get interested, or if you are sceptical about something in your history-book, you will go to other accounts of the Peasants' Revolt in other books; and you will find that these differ from the first and from each other. If you are determined to get at the truth, you must begin by trying to reduce these differences to order, and this can only be done by discovering how the various accounts grew out of each other. You now find that A's account, modified by removing certain inconsistencies, became B's; B's account, with additions from certain newly-discovered sources, gave rise to C's; C's account was so obviously one-sided that it provoked a controversial reply from D; C and D together resulted in the eclectic compromise advocated by E; and so on. Now the point is that, where all this work has already been done on the subject, no one is justified in putting forward a new view of his own without taking it into account. To do so, is to neglect not only possible assistance but certain dangers. A theory framed without reference to previous theories denies itself the help that may be got from seeing the points that have been already emphasized, and it runs the risk—which in practice is more than a mere risk, it is a practical certainty—of advocating views which have already been conclusively disproved. For these reasons all historians regard it as a *sine qua non* of research that one should begin by getting up the literature of the subject, and every historian regards it as peculiarly disgraceful to be found ill-read in the writings of other historians who have handled his theme. The historian has to study two kinds of material: 'original sources' and 'modern works', as they are called in bibliographies. To study the original sources is history: to study the modern works, and to trace in them the development of thought, is the history of history.

All history concerning a given subject, then, involves as a necessary part of itself the history of history concerning the same subject. And it must further be observed that the history of history precedes history of the first degree. I cannot compose my monograph on the Peasants' Revolt until after I have completed my bibliography of it and studied the works therein contained. The reason for this is easy to understand. The problem which I am trying to solve is a problem which has been left on my hands by some previous research on the same subject. I am not merely asking in a quite vague and general way 'what was the Peasants' Revolt?', I am asking for answers to certain definite and specific questions about it; and these are the questions which have been raised by previous inquiry. Now, unless I am careful to go over this previous inquiry in my mind—to re-enact it, or narrate its history—I shall not clearly see what the problem before me is and how it arose. And in that case I am not likely to be successful in trying to answer it. The presupposition of answering a question is that one should know what the question is that is being asked; and this means finding out how it came to be asked.

Examples are easy to find. If a student is told by his tutor to

write an essay on the battle of Salamis, he must certainly master all the original authorities for that battle; but everyone knows that he must also look up what has been written about the battle by modern scholars. And it is obvious enough that the value of his essay will largely depend on the clearness with which he has grasped the problems with which these modern scholars have been dealing, and the reasons for which they have differed from one another. Again, if a scholar is asked to write a popular life of Napoleon, the value of this, considered simply as a popular book, will depend upon the way in which the writer realizes how much the half-educated reader knows already, and what he wants to know next. The popular life of Napoleon must link itself on to the process of historical thought that has been already going forward in the minds of its readers; and this means that the writer must know the history of his reader's historical education. And lastly, if a student has led so lonely and so highly-specialized a life that his subject is one that has no literature, because no one but himself studies it and he does not publish his researches; even then, his progress in this field will still depend on his study of history of the second degree. For his progress at any given moment will depend on his solving the problem that has now been raised in his mind by the progress of his own thought; and in order to grasp this problem he must know how his own thought has been moving and how this new problem has arisen. In this case, the history of history will be the intellectual autobiography of the historian.

The history of history, then, is not an external addition or accretion tacked on to history, still less is it a mere special kind of history, like the history of art or the history of warfare. It is a permanent and indispensable element in history itself. It is the historian's consciousness of how he has arrived at the particular problem which confronts him. Everyone who is given to thinking knows that at times one loses the thread of one's thought; one pursues a question until one forgets how it arose and where it was leading; and at these times the question suddenly becomes meaningless and ceases to be a real problem. From this condition one emerges by turning round upon oneself and asking 'what was I going to say? what was I thinking about? how did I get myself into this position?' or the like.

These questions are concerned with the history of one's own thought; and their function is to preserve that thought's self-conscious continuity. Where the thought is historical thought, its self-conscious continuity is preserved by history of the second degree.

The conception of the history of history as an element in history itself is open to an obvious objection, which is intensified by the doctrine that the history of history is a presupposition of history itself. If history involves or presupposes the history of history, then (so the objection will run) the history of history will involve or presuppose the history of the history of history, and this, the history of the history of the history of history, and so *ad infinitum*. We are involved in an infinite regress, with the absurd result that we must begin by studying history to the *n*th, where *n* is an infinite number, and work back from that by degrees, before we can answer the simple question 'when was the battle of Hastings fought?'

This objection certainly contains an element of truth; but the truth is so overlaid by falsehood as to be, at first sight, barely visible. The truth is this: that if A's view led to B's, and B's to C's, and C's to D's, and my view is based on D's, then in narrating the history of research leading through A, B, C, and D to myself I am narrating a history each term of which already sums the whole series. The summation does not wait for me. B's view already involved the consciousness of his own relation to A; C's view involved the consciousness of C's relation to B; therefore C's history of the problem was already not only a history of history but a history of the history of history, because it involved explaining not only how B had conceived the Peasants' Revolt, but also how B had conceived the relation between his own account of it and A's. If therefore I narrate the history of thought from A to D, this involves at least the following terms: A's theory, B's alterations, B's view of the relation between them and the original theory, C's alterations, C's view of the relation between them and B's theory, C's view of B's view of the relation between B's view and A's, and so on. And this enumeration of terms, tedious as it would be, is illicitly abbreviated by the false assumption that B's theory was a single unitary theory instead of being, as it really must have been, a constant process of self-criticism in which

attempts at theories were advanced and corrected and left behind. In short, since each phase in the process of advancing research sums up the process as a whole and constitutes an interim report on the advance made, each phase is not only a review of the facts but a review of the past reviews of the facts and therefore a review of the reviews of the reviews of the facts and so, if you like, *ad infinitum*.

So much for the element of truth. What then is the error? It is simply the old error of Achilles and the tortoise. You begin by cutting up the distance between Achilles and the tortoise into an infinite number of distinct distances, each to be traversed in a separate movement; you then infer that in order to make an infinite number of separate movements Achilles will require an infinite amount of time and will never overtake the tortoise. The reason why Achilles in practice manages to overtake the tortoise is that his movement is not cut up into an infinite number of separate movements; it is a single continuous movement. Similarly, if you cut up the single continuous process of historical thought into distinct events, each called a theory or view or position, the result will be that you can distinguish as many of these positions as you please, and therefore since their number is infinite you cannot ever traverse the totality of them. The error here lies in the attempt to reduce a process, the process of historical thinking, into a series of static positions. No position, in this sense, ever exists. Any historical view or theory is a complex of thoughts which already contains movement within itself. It is not a cross-section of the stream of thought, it is a short length of that stream. The views of the historian do not remain absolutely fixed throughout his exposition of his subject; as he reaches a more interesting part his thought rises in temperature and he becomes more penetrating; as he returns to a duller or less carefully studied part he relapses into an uncritical acceptance of ideas which elsewhere he has left behind. This is not mere human weakness; it is a necessary condition of all knowledge, for in all knowledge we are fighting against errors and prejudices, and the battle never reaches a phase of complete stability. Even when we stop thinking in order to avoid going on changing our minds, as some people do, our object is not achieved, for our errors and prejudices then begin to solidify by degrees

round our thought and our mind undergoes a kind of progressive paralysis and decay.

Our thought, then, is advancing all the time; it does not advance by jerks from point to point, its advance is continuous; and therefore when we say that at each phase it must sum up its whole previous course, this sum must not be taken for an arithmetical sum of single static positions. Just as history is not a succession of distinct, isolated, atomic events, so the history of history is not a succession of distinct, isolated, atomic historical thoughts. When that is realized, the force of the objection we are considering disappears. There is no infinite regress, because there is no series of separate terms, but only a continuous process of thinking.

From the point of view of the history of history we can see a new aspect of the universality of history. We have already seen that any particular historical study, however particular it may be in the sense that its subject is a single historical problem, is universal in the sense that this problem is the only problem actually raised at the moment, the only thing that occupies the historian's mind and therefore, for him, all the history there is. But regarded as a study in the history of history, his study of this problem is universal in a further sense. It is universal in the sense of being a review and summary of all the historical work that has ever been done on this problem. *Qua* history, my study deals only with the monetary policy of Honorius; *qua* history of history, it deals with everything that has ever been written or said about the monetary policy of Honorius, down to the present day. Thus every historical work comes down to the present and traverses a process of which it is itself the last phase. As history of the first degree, it need not do this; a history of Rome has a perfect right to stop at the battle of Actium or the reign of Romulus Augustulus, and need not come down to Mussolini; but as history of history, it cannot stop short of the present day; it must take into account the latest discoveries and the latest theories, and put itself forward as continuing these discoveries and theories.

The doctrine that all history comes down to the present day is a doctrine of great importance in connexion with the question why people study history and what they hope to gain by the study. It is clear that in some cases history is an attempt to

understand the present: for instance, if we ask why we live under the peculiar laws and customs which we find existing around us, we are asking a question which can be answered, in a sense, by history. We understand our laws and customs better than we did, if we come to see them as the result of a historical process which has shaped them into the form they now present. And therefore it might seem reasonable to define the value and purpose of history by saying that history is the explanation of how the actual world in which we live has come to be what it is.

The objection to this is obvious. It is, that historians often concern themselves with questions that have no bearing on the actual world. If the historian spends time on inventing a new theory of Sumerian chronology, he is not doing anything to explain the social or political or economic conditions of the world in which he lives. And therefore we shall have to infer either that this account of the value of history is false, or that all history is valueless except that of the recent past.

But this objection can be answered from the point of view of the history of history. The historian of Sumerian dynasties is not merely concerned with Sumerian dynasties, he is also, and even more intimately, concerned with modern historical theories about them. He is indeed trying to reconstruct very ancient history; but he is also trying to reconstruct the very modern history of this history. Hence, though he is not bringing down the history of the Sumerians to the present day, he is bringing down the history of Assyriology to the present day. And Assyriology is just as much a real element of the modern world as coal-mining.[14] Hence the Assyriologist has a twofold purpose: both to describe the Sumerian dynasties, and also to summarize and criticize and comment upon a certain feature of modern life, namely Assyriological study. The popular view of the historian as a visionary whose mental gaze is turned wholly away from the present upon a distant and long-vanished past is therefore a false view. The distant past is as it were the stalking-horse from behind which the historian observes and criticizes the present. If this seems a fanciful and exaggerated view, a glance at the facts will suffice to convince

[14] In the manuscript is added: 'and the forms of thought which Assyriologists reveal are the characteristic forms of the modern world'.

any clear-sighted observer of its truth. The great historians—Macaulay, Hume, Grote, Gibbon, Mommsen, Maitland—are men keenly interested in their own present day; and every page of their history betrays the fact that in writing it they are concerned not simply to discover the truth about the distant past, but to combat historical errors which spring from faults in contemporary civilization and in turn flatter and foster those faults. The rationalistic history of Hume and Gibbon is an attack on what the eighteenth century called enthusiasm, i.e. superstition; the materialistic history of nineteenth-century economists is an attack on nineteenth-century romanticism; the prehistoric studies of today are an attack on our modern tendency to over-emphasize the value of material civilization and to regard the savage as a slave to exploit and a brute to despise. The great historians are sharply conscious of these motives; their academic and imitative followers may or may not have a dim consciousness of them.

Thus it may be said that while all history is particular in that it has a particular problem or ostensible subject, it is universal in that it must review the entire history of research concerning that subject. And therefore, while in one sense it always deals with the past, which may be a very distant past, in another sense it always deals with the present by setting itself up as a model of how the present ought to think of the past and of its own relation to the past. In this way the quantitative aspect of history—the question of its universality or particularity—is defined by the conception of history as particular in its content, as dealing with a special problem in historical research, and universal in its form, as linking that problem up with the whole extent of actual present-day life.

Attention may here be called to a special form, prominent today, of the attempt to combine particular history with universal history. Every particular history, or monograph, has certain characteristics derived from the fact of its being a monograph, and these it therefore has in common with all other monographs. Just as a tragedy, according to Aristotle, must have a certain size and must have a beginning, a middle, and an end, so an historical monograph must begin somewhere, proceed through a definite course, and end somewhere. Before its beginning and after its end there is darkness, that is

to say, a context not studied by this monograph and not illuminated, on this occasion, by the light of historical thought. The point of greatest illumination will probably fall in some approximately central position, and on either side of this point there will be a diminution of light due to the encroachment of the surrounding darkness. In the early phases of the period, we shall have only a very incomplete understanding of the events owing to our ignorance of that out of which they are developing: in the latest phases, we shall again partially fail to understand them owing to our ignorance of that into which they are turning. And this relative unintelligibility of the two ends of the period under review will appear emotionally as a relative uninterestingness or low degree of value:[15] the beginning will appear as a kind of dull, stupid, barbaric phase, interesting only for its visible promise of what is to come out of it; the end will appear as equally dull, stupid and barbaric, but, this time, the barbarism will be not the primitive barbarism of youth but the sophisticated barbarism of decadence.[16]

In so far as certain monographic points of view become conventionalized and fixed, this triple phase of primitive, mature, and decaying civilization becomes, in certain cases, an accepted dogma. Today, there are various historical periods

[15] This sentence is underlined in the manuscript.

[16] On the opposite page, dated 1935, the following statement was added: 'Emotionally is wrong. The point is, I think, that history (in spite of the contrary opinion of the "pure scholarship" school) is never composed simply of judgements of fact (such and such a thing happened): there is always involved a judgement of value. I think that the judgement of value tends to become positive in proportion as the events studied are more and more clearly understood: from which proposition the consequences in the text will follow.

If it is asked, why should there be *any* judgement of value? The answer is not merely psychological (i.e. that in fact we simply shouldn't, and couldn't, seriously study anything that did not arouse our sympathy and earn our approval: this is the question what we think *worth* studying or *historically important*). It is also, that if we re-enact the past in our own thought, the past thought which we re-enact is seen in re-thinking it as valid. (This is Croce's doctrine of the positivity of history, which wants careful stating.) The more adequately we re-enact the past, the more valid we see it to be: hence the *differential* result. What we judge negatively as error or evil in history is what we fail to understand.'

which are thus fixed into organized unities by a monographic point of view: thus, we are in the habit of regarding the Greek world as arising out of primitiveness in the eighth to the sixth centuries, culminating in a classical phase in the fifth, and lapsing into decay in the fourth, with the collapse of the city-state and the growth of Hellenism. Again, we are in the habit of recognizing a classical phase of medieval culture, represented in especial by the plastic art of the Gothic cathedral, which arises out of the primitive barbarism of the dark ages and passes into the sophisticated barbarism of decaying medievalism.

When a number of such periods are recognized, they may be collected into a single scheme by the conception of historical cycles. The theory is invented that history moves through a regular succession of waves, in which culture periodically culminates in classical phases of perfection, reached by primitive phases in which it is emerging from barbarism and succeeded by decadent phases in which the classical energy and purity are giving way to mechanical apathy and confusion. And remarkable feats of ingenuity may be performed in the attempt to work out a system of cycles, tracing the parallels between one and another and the peculiarities which distinguish each from the rest.

Such attempts are vain. Essentially, they are based on the fallacy of tacking one monograph externally to another and so hoping to arrive at universal history. If two monographs—for instance, one on Greek culture and one on 'Magian'—to use a conception familiarized by Spengler—instead of being merely tacked together, were thought out into a single whole, the transition from one period to the other being carefully traced and the relations between them adequately studied, we should no longer have a pair of waves, we should have a single wave. And conversely, if instead of being content with the conventional adulation of the fifth century at the expense of everything before it and after it, we devoted a little specialized study to the Hellenistic period, we should find in this period a character and an excellence of its own, and should be forced to regard it in certain respects as a culmination of tendencies which in the fifth century had not yet outgrown the stage of primitiveness.

It is certainly true that everything which is realized in the historical process comes into being and passes away through certain phases of growth and decay. In that sense, the idea of all history as made up of cycles each exhibiting a triple phase is correct. And it is also true that the various aspects or elements of a single culture change together: so that the characteristic qualities of the poetry of a period are also visible in its architecture and politics and science. But every historical change is a change in both directions at once. It is the growth of what comes after, and the decay of what comes before; and it is also the perfection of itself. It is only when we are unable to free ourselves from the accidents of historical specialization as practised conventionally in our own time, that we see one of these aspects and are blind to the rest.

III. *Relation*

Every historical work, as we have now seen, deals with a particular and limited problem, and is thus, as we have called it, a monograph. But such a treatise has a universal as well as a particular aspect: for the particular and limited problem is, to the person whose mind is concentrated upon it, the only genuine problem in existence. Into this problem he pours all his technical resources, and he illuminates it with the light of all the history he knows. Thus the whole of history is concentrated into this one monograph and it becomes a history of the world from a special point of view.

The monograph has both a unity and a plurality in its composition. As a unity, it is a single narrative, artistically and logically bound up into a whole; subjectively, it is one treatise; objectively, it is about one thing. As a plurality, it consists of a number of statements attaching predicates to that one thing. The one thing is an event: for instance, the French Revolution, or the Wars of the Roses, or the Evolution of the Pointed Arch. This is called the subject of the monograph, because it is the logical subject of all the statements contained in it—they are all statements about the French Revolution or whatever it may be. But this event is a complex thing, consisting of many aspects, each aspect being itself an event: and to write the history of the single event is to enumerate the various events that

composed it. A history of the Wars of the Roses will therefore consist of an enumeration of the various campaigns, battles, and so forth which went to constitute these wars: each battle being sufficiently described to individualize its contribution to the whole narrative.

From this point of view, the monograph as a whole is a sum of parts, each part being so designed as to make its proper contribution to the whole, and the whole being simply the organized system of parts. For instance, we should describe the battle of Trafalgar in different ways according as we were composing a treatise on naval tactics, on the Napoleonic Wars, on the life of Nelson, or on the influence of sea-power on history. Or we might be simply composing a monograph on the battle of Trafalgar, which would demand a different treatment again. Thus the whole must precede the part, in this sense, that the part must be thought out in relation to the whole. The converse is not true. The whole is not thought out in relation to the part. The whole simply is the mutual organization of the parts. For instance, an history of the Napoleonic Wars contains nothing except accounts of the various operations which collectively go by that name. The whole, then, is a regulative scheme dictating the details of the work:[17] apart from the details, it is a mere abstraction, or, at most, a name for someone's intention of writing an historical work, or the bare fact that someone has done so.

The practical consequence of this is that, in composing an historical work, the first thing to do is to decide upon a subject. This may seem a truism; but people sometimes fall into the error of allowing history to compose itself by adding essay to essay, hoping that if the essays more or less 'cover the ground' of a certain period the resulting book will be an history of that period. This is the fault, already mentioned, of tacking monographs together externally; to avoid it, the historian must begin with the idea of his work as a whole, and develop every part in relation to this whole. If a fragment composed without reference to the whole is incorporated in the structure, it will destroy the unity of the fabric unless it is so modified as to be brought into focus with the rest of the

[17] This sentence is underlined in the manuscript.

work. That this is the case with a work of art is notorious; and it is therefore obvious that it must apply to an historical work in so far as that is literature. But it applies no less to history as history. It would be absurd to suggest that any account of the battle of Trafalgar, so long as it was accurate, would do as well as any other to fill a place in a history of the Napoleonic Wars; every historian will recognize that the significance of this battle from the standpoint of the Napoleonic Wars is not the same thing as its significance from the standpoint of the biography of Nelson, and that a perfectly accurate account of it from the latter standpoint would be valueless, or indeed misleading and therefore inaccurate, from the former.

Granted the ideality of history, this is intelligible enough: for on that theory, the truth about an event is relative to the point of view from which one approaches it, and an account of an event written from a wrong point of view is therefore not merely irrelevant but false, for the giving of it amounts to claiming that it is relevant, and this misleads the reader and makes him seem to see connexions where there are none.

The various parts of a treatise, however, are not only related to the whole: they are related to each other. Primarily, they are related chronologically: they state a temporal sequence and therefore constitute a narrative. But the relation between them is very far from being merely chronological. They constitute not merely a sequence but a process. Each part leads to the one which follows and rests on the one which precedes.

In a sense it may be said that this process is a chain of causes and effects, each event being the cause of the one after and the effect of the one before it. And certainly it is true that each is in some sense the condition of the one after, and conditioned by the one before. Had it been legitimate to speak of the nebular hypothesis or the theory of geological epochs as history, we should have had examples of historical processes which were strictly causal. But we have seen that all history is the history of thought. A thought can never be either an effect or a cause; but thoughts may form a sequence of conditioned and conditioning elements. For instance, in a game of chess, it is because White has moved in a particular way that Black replies with a particular move: and this again determines the next move of White. But this determination is not causal.

What happens is that White's move places Black in a certain situation, and in this situation there is only one move by which Black can avoid defeat: in order to avoid defeat, he therefore chooses to make that move, and this again creates a new situation for White. It is only because each is a free and intelligent agent that he acts as he does; what is said to determine his act only creates a situation in which he exercises his freedom and intelligence.

This is the nature of historical sequence. Every event, so far as that event is an expression of human thought, is a conscious reaction to a situation, not the effect of a cause. This reaction in turn originates a new situation, and a new reaction follows. But the only reason why a given situation leads to a given action is that the agent is guided by certain principles: in the case of chess, the rules of the game. Apart from these rules, his reaction to his opponent's move would have no meaning and would be unintelligible: but if you know the rules of the game and know that he wants to win, you can see why he moved as he did; unless indeed his move was due to an oversight, in which case the best you can do is to understand what he meant, but failed, to achieve.

The principles here referred to are different from the causal laws of natural science in that they do not operate except consciously. It is only because the player knows the rules of the game that the rules of the game explain his moves. Consequently these principles cease to operate when people cease to think of them; and therefore they are themselves historical phenomena. It is the task of the historian to discover what principles guided the persons whose actions he is studying, and not to assume that these have always been the same.

To forget this is to fall into the error of naturalistic or materialistic history: a history which replaces principles by causal laws, and assumes that these laws, like the laws of nature, are constant. The result is that historical sequences are converted falsely into causal sequences, and the historian loses his grasp both on the free and intelligent character of the acts which he is narrating, the parts of his subject, and also on the individuality of this subject as a whole, as a particular historical fact with a character and physiognomy of its own. If the determining forces in history were unchangeable natural laws, every

period of history would be just like every other except in merely external and irrelevant details: it would be nature, and nature has no history. What individualizes historical periods is the diversity of the principles on which men act; but the historical materialist is obliged to deny this diversity and impose upon all men alike a single uniform set of motives and springs of action.

The excuse for falling into this error lies in the fact that in one sense all rational beings do, and must, act on the same principles: the principles which define what rationality is. It is necessary therefore to distinguish between two kinds of principles: these universal and necessary principles, apart from obedience to which there is no such thing as action at all, and others, which may be called empirical principles, which can be changed without such consequence. To take an example: different political organizations may differ very widely in their positive laws; one community may make it compulsory to drive on the right of the road, another on the left; and the historian ought to keep count of such differences. But all political organizations must agree in making laws and enforcing them, however inefficiently they do these things. It may be optional what laws, in detail, we have; but it is not optional that we must have some laws, and, having them, insist on their being obeyed.

Two complementary errors are therefore possible: the error of regarding as necessary what is really optional, and the error of regarding as optional what is really necessary. The first we have already mentioned. The second is the error advocated by those who, anxious to distinguish sharply between the workings of the civilized and the uncivilized mind, assert that the savage does not think logically as we do, but has other laws which take the place, in his mind, which the fundamental laws of logic take in ours. These so-called laws are in fact not laws at all; they are empirical descriptions of certain types of error to which all men are prone, whether civilized or uncivilized; and a very little clear thinking is sufficient to show that person who falls into errors of this type is just as loyal to the laws of identity, contradiction, and excluded middle as the most highly trained scientist.

The chronological sequence of events, which, as we have

seen, is also a logical sequence of reactions to situations, might seem capable of stretching out infinitely in both directions and so producing a universal history in (so to speak) one dimension. Obviously this is a false idea. Granted a single thread of this kind, it will cross and re-cross other threads, and there will also be threads which, so far as one can see, will never come into contact with it at all. Plainly, history as a whole cannot consist of a single narrative, recounting a single one-dimensional series of events. But it is equally plain that it cannot consist of any number, however large, of such one-dimensional narratives. This is because a sequence of this kind is discoverable only within a period whose limits have already been laid down. When we have determined the subject of our historical study, we can arrange its parts chronologically; but to suppose that the chronological sequence thus established is a selection from an infinite chronological sequence existing ready-made, like a road along one part of which we elect to make a journey, is to repeat the error of conceiving historical fact as something having actual existence. Because historical fact is ideal, those parts or aspects of it which we are not studying do not exist; what exists is the abstract possibility that we might have been studying them. This abstract possibility is the only kind of reality that attaches to chronological schemes and abstracts of history in general. These things are enumerations—very incomplete enumerations—of the various ways in which we might employ ourselves in historical thought. They resemble guide-books regarded as lists of possible excursions; but they do not resemble them regarded as descriptions of actual places.

An actually thought-out chronological scheme, then, exists only as the organization of detail within an historical monograph. Thus there is a certain resemblance between the chronological structure of an historical monograph, and the rhythmical structure of a symphony. The time-beats of a symphony do not go on *ad infinitum* before the music begins and after it ends; they form an organization which exists only in the symphony itself. They serve to articulate the symphony as a whole; and it is only when we have the symphony as a whole before us (as the composer must have it, and every really intelligent hearer does have it), with its successive parts

so interpenetrating one another that each colours the rest and gives them their peculiar significance, that the rhythmical structure becomes intelligible and visibly necessary. Thus the parts of a symphony, though they are certainly played at different times, are seen as parts of the same symphony only when the listener overcomes this difference of time by being conscious of all the parts at once. This may seem recondite, but it is a very simple and very familiar fact. It is because the rhythm and key of the first subject continue to ring in one's head that the contrasting rhythm and key of the second subject are felt to be significant; and to a person who knows the symphony well, it is in part because he knows how the second subject is going to contrast with it that he appreciates the meaning of the first subject—a fact which, under the name of Sophoclean irony, is a commonplace of dramatic theory. The downfall of Oedipus, though it has not yet happened, is felt by every instructed spectator to overshadow his greatness. In that sense, the parts of the play are simultaneously experienced, though successively performed.

The substance of an historical monograph must be simultaneously experienced in the same way. What appears chronologically as a sequence must appear as a simultaneous whole in the historian's thought. He is recounting the history of Gothic architecture: he must see in each phase of that history the fruit of what has gone before and the seed of what is to come. He must feel the earlier phases as preparing the way for the later, and the later as explaining the true meaning of the earlier. He must, in a word, see the inner structure of his subject as a development.

This conception of development, or progress, defines a necessary character of every historical period, where period means a particular subject of historical study—the subject-matter of a monograph. Development is only possible where there is unity: there must be one thing that develops, and when it changes into something that is not recognizably the same, it cannot any longer be said to be developing. Development also implies a plurality of phases within the process; and it further implies that the process brings out by degrees some characteristic of the one thing which at first was not clear. Development is an ideal process, not an actual process: it

consists in something's becoming more and more intelligible. Similarly, progress is an ideal process. Crudely and falsely conceived, it consists of something's getting absolutely better and better; an idea which is obviously false, because to get better from one point of view means to get worse from another. But progress relatively to a certain conception of that which is progressing is intelligible enough. If I have a certain conception of what science is, then I may be able to say that science progressed in the nineteenth century; that is to say, my history of nineteenth-century science may show it as becoming more and more scientific. If I had a different conception of what science is, I might have been obliged to say that it was becoming less and less scientific. Now, if I take my conception of science from the nineteenth century itself, I must necessarily say that science in the nineteenth century progressed: for that merely amounts to saying that nineteenth-century science had an ideal of its own and progressively realized that ideal in its development.

Progress is universal because ideals are always progressively realized. A people which fails to realize a certain ideal is a people which does not regard that as an ideal. Ideals are the principles which persons and communities set before themselves to guide their actions; if they really set these before themselves, their actions are really guided by them. If their actions are not guided by them, they are guided by some other principles, and these are their ideals. This is obscured by the hypocrisy which leads men to conceal their real ideals and do lip-service to others; but when that is seen through, the truth is clear enough.

Now when we isolate a period of history for study, we do so in virtue of a unity or homogeneity which we see it to possess. Since all history is the history of thought, this unity is a unity of thought—a unity in the thought of the persons whose actions form our period. That is to say, it is a unity of principles or ideals. Our history of the period is at bottom the history of these ideals. From the point of view of these ideals, the narration of the history reveals it as a development: that is, the actions which make up the period progressively show what the ideals in question are, just as the actions of a tragedy progressively show what the plot (or ideal unity) of the tragedy is.

And this development is a progress because, as the period advances, it becomes clearer and clearer to the historian what these ideals were, and therefore the actions of the characters more and more strikingly conform to them.

A special case, and one which has excited most discussion, is that of the recent past—the past immediately leading up to the present. In this case, as in every other, the history of the period shows a progressive realization of the ideals of that period. But in this case the ideals are our own; for we stand in, or on the edge of, the period itself. It is therefore exceptionally easy to see that there is progress. A person who glances over the history of Roman politics from the Gracchi to the Antonines does not see that it exhibits progress, unless he is able to grasp and sympathize with the Roman political ideals of the period; and this requires some study and some breadth of mind. But everybody, by being born and bred in a certain period, learns to accept the great majority of that period's ideals, however much he may rebel against it in detail. Therefore everybody who glances over the history of the immediate past must see in it the development of his own ideals, and therefore must regard it as a period of progress. People who deny that they can detect progress in the recent past are people who exaggerate the extent of their own rebellion against the ideals of the present; and since every man of thoughtful and independent mind has in him an element of this rebellion, no thoughtful and independent man can describe the immediate past as a period of progress without certain reservations; because he sees it as, in part, the growth of the things against which he has to fight. The fact is, that the ideals of the immediate past are never quite our own, but only very like our own; and therefore, to see this period as one of progress, we must take pains to distinguish between its ideals and ours, and to judge it by its own standards.

Progress, then, is universal in the sense that a narrative of any particular historical period as it proceeds, reveals more and more clearly the nature of that period's ideals; and it is by these ideals that it ought to be judged. It does not follow that the next period will be still better according to the same standards. On the contrary, it will certainly be worse; and at the same time, according to its own standards, better. But to hold

two periods together in this way side by side for comparison is bad history. If two periods are thought of together, they must be fused into one period and their common characteristics brought to light. If they have no common characteristics, it is idle even to compare them. No one would wish to compare any two things, unless he thought he detected something in common between them. But by bringing to light these common characteristics one is treating the two periods in question as articulations of one single period, and their ideals as modifications of a common ideal. And if anyone can really manage to treat all history from, say, 3000 B.C. to A.D. 1900 as a single period, grasped in a single act of thought and expounded in a monograph (instead of grasping various of its parts as periods, and expounding it in a series of disjointed monographic essays), he will certainly see it, in the same way, as a progressive development of a single ideal. It is certain that no living historian can do this; perhaps no one ever will; but it is by no means certain that some historian might not select from this vast period one single limited aspect and treat the whole period as a genuine unity from that limited point of view. One may recall the fact that Kant's idea of universal history was conceived exclusively 'from a cosmopolitan (*weltbürgerlich*) point of view'; that is to say, he threw out the suggestion that the idea of cosmopolitan citizenship could be treated (by a very learned and very philosophical historian—not by himself) as the subject-matter of an essay covering the whole of recorded history. And if it were so treated, he saw, and saw rightly, that the narrative would be a narrative of progress, of the gradual consolidation of an ideal whose presence in one form or another could be traced throughout that period.

In any other sense than this, progress is an illusion. To suppose that the world will go on getting better according to our own peculiar ideas of goodness, is to be beyond the reach of reason. Of one thing we may be certain: our posterity will live in a world which corresponds to their ideals quite as well as this, in which we live, corresponds to ours.

IV. *Modality*

The fourth question to be dealt with concerns the certainty of history, the nature of the grounds on which it rests, and its status as genuine knowledge. This question, from the point of view of the realism and empiricism which go to make up the theories of knowledge now fashionable, has been already answered: for, according to those theories, knowledge as such is knowledge of an object which is actual independently of the knowing; and, since the whole of our discussion hitherto has turned on the conception of the ideality of history, we stand irrevocably committed to the view that, on a realistic or empiricist theory, the historian has nothing to know and therefore his thought is not knowledge.

The ideality of history is so obvious and undeniable a truth, that realist and empiricist philosophers habitually treat history with coolness or even positive hostility. They find themselves most at home in dealing with the theory of perception, where it seems clear that the object is actual and in some sense independent of the percipient; and it is easy for them to make out a case for applying their views to natural science, where there is always a perceptible object being observed and experimented with, or even to pure mathematics, where they can hypostatize numbers and so forth and claim an intellectual intuition of these entities. In the case of history, this method breaks down, and the realist finds himself on the horns of a dilemma. Either he has to set his face against all historical thought as a form of illusion, which is easy to do by way of *obiter dicta*, but impossible to do in a consistent and reasoned manner, owing to the impossibility of explaining how the illusion reaches such an extraordinary level of consistency and apparent scientific perfection; or else he has to assert that the object of historical thought is not the past at all, but a trace or residue of the past in the present. The latter is at present the orthodox empiricist view of memory, and would no doubt be applied to history if empiricists and realists thought history a thing worth theorizing about. But it is obvious that any such view is bankrupt from the beginning. The whole of the present consists of traces or residues of the past, for the present is that into which the past has turned, and the past was that which has turned

into the present. To speak, therefore, of traces of the past in the present is to speak of the present and nothing but the present. The psychologists who would 'explain' memory by referring to such traces of the past, are putting forward a theory which, at best, would account for certain hallucinations like the apparent swaying of the land after a rough sea-voyage; but it could never explain why there is a difference between thinking that the land sways and remembering that the ship swayed.

The view which will here be maintained has something in common with both horns of this dilemma. We shall see that, if the purpose of history is to know the past, to become acquainted with things as they actually happened, which is what the realist necessarily supposes to be its purpose, then history is certainly an illusion. We shall then see that actual historical thought is intimately bound up with traces of the past in the present.

If anyone thinks that he can, by historical research, discover what the past was like in its actuality and completeness, a very little reflexion on the conditions of historical research will undeceive him. All he can do is to interpret the evidence at his command. He will, if he is a very uncritical soul, assume that the evidence which happens to have reached him is a fair sample of what has been lost; and that the past which he reconstructs from these fragments is the past as it really was. But it must be difficult for anyone to be so uncritical as this. Most historians realize very plainly that, the more fragmentary their evidence is, the more fragmentary must be their knowledge of the past; that the gaps between these fragments of knowledge cannot be filled by legitimate inference, and must not be filled by imagination; and that an overwhelming majority of past events must remain permanently unknown and unknowable. But most historians also realize that the past is not a plurality of atomic incidents, any one of which may be 'known' in an adequate way without the rest, but a whole in which parts are so related as to explain one another and render one another intelligible. It follows that, the more extensive our ignorance concerning the past is, the more infected with misunderstanding and error will be our knowledge of those fragments which we claim to know. But when one thinks how vast is the extent

of our ignorance even concerning the last general election, or the life of Gladstone, or the reign on which one has just written a successful prize essay, one cannot shut one's eyes to the fact that, even in the most favourable cases, one's ignorance is infinite, and one's historical knowledge consists only of a few atoms lost in the void of endless space. It is necessary to reflect carefully on this point, because we are apt to think that we know 'all about' something, that is to say, possess a complete knowledge of it, when we know all *that is known* about it; we mistake the coincidence between our information and the extant information for a coincidence between our information and the object. Once this confusion is cleared up, no historian would hesitate to say that, even in the period he knows best, there are infinities of things he does not know for every one that he does.

Certainly, then, history is an illusion, if it means knowledge of the past in its actuality and completeness. But does it really mean that? It is easy to answer the question by experiment. Take an historian who has made a special study of the battle of Waterloo: and ask him the name of the hundredth man to be put out of action by musketry fire. He will not be able to answer; but the question is, will he be disconcerted by his inability, or not? He will not; he will think it a silly question, and will be rather annoyed at your asking it instead of taking the opportunity to discuss all the interesting problems concerning the battle on which he has something to say. This proves that he does not want to obtain a complete knowledge of the battle of Waterloo in all its details; he knows, and accepts the fact, that his knowledge of it is and must always be a partial knowledge; he confesses, or rather he contends, that it is not the purpose of history to know the past in its actuality and completeness. He thereby implies that its purpose is something else.

Suppose you pressed him to explain why he was not interested in the name of the hundredth man. He would reply that there is nothing about it in the records of the battle, and that his business as an historian is to study and interpret these records. Now these records, which may be of various kinds—despatches, correspondence, descriptions by eye-witnesses or from hearsay, even tombstones and objects found on the battlefield—are traces left by the past in the present. Any aspect or incident of the battle which has left no trace of itself must remain permanently unknown; for the historian's business can go no further than reconstituting those elements of the past whose traces in the present he can perceive and decipher.

In this sense history is the study of the present and not of the past at all. The documents, books, letters, buildings, potsherds, and flints from which the historian extracts all he knows, all he can ever know, about the past, are things existing in the present. And if they in turn perish—as, for instance, the writings of an historian may perish—they in turn become things of the past, which must leave their traces in the present if he is to have any knowledge of them. These traces must be something more than mere effects. They must be recognizable effects; recognizable, that is, to the historian. It is conceivable that nothing in the past fails to leave an effect somewhere in the present; that the last thought that flitted through the mind of a dying man left some trace in his brain-cells, which left some trace in his cremated ashes; but until we learn how to read these traces they are not historical evidence, because they cannot be recognized and interpreted; and therefore, relatively to our present knowledge, we must say that this thought left no trace whatever.

The historian is bound by his evidence. His business is to interpret it, and not to reconstitute any past to which it does not point him. In the abstract, the whole present world consists of traces of the past, and of the whole past; theoretically therefore (in the common and false sense of the word) any part of the present can be used as evidence, complete and sufficient evidence, for a universal history. Practically, which means truly, evidence is only evidence when it is interpreted; and this means that someone must interpret it. But first of all he must look for it; and this means that he must have in his mind a question which he is trying to answer. The question must be what we have called the subject of an historical monograph. Only when such a subject has been envisaged, as an historical problem, can there be such a thing as evidence; for evidence means facts relevant to a question, pointing towards an answer. It is therefore an inversion of the truth to describe the world as a solid block of evidence on every conceivable

historical question; until a question has been asked, there is no evidence for it; and since any question is a particular question, a question selected from among possible questions, the evidence bearing on it consists of particular facts, the rest being irrelevant to it. Hence it is necessary to select or discover the evidence, as well as to interpret it.[18]

This is familiar ground. Every historian knows that evidence, even the most complete and striking evidence, is convincing and indeed significant only to one who approaches it with the right question in his mind. In following a difficult piece of reasoning, expounded to one by a person who has made an historical discovery, it happens over and over again that one's success in apprehending the drift of the argument depends on one's being able to ask the right questions at the crucial points; and conversely, it is easy to see that people who are unconvinced by such an exposition fail to be convinced because they do not see what the questions at issue are. They hope to be convinced if they merely come with an open mind; forgetting that an open mind means a mind which is not bent on getting a definite answer to a definite question, and that, to such a mind, the clearest evidence is meaningless.

This shows the difference between the principles of the theory of memory criticized above and those of the present theory of history. The empiricist theory of memory is content to observe that certain elements in the present are effects of the past: and it jumps to the conclusion that in being conscious of these elements the mind is *ipso facto* remembering or apprehending the past. But the traces of the past in the present are revelations of the past only to a mind which approaches them with a resolve to treat them as evidence of the past. Mere observation of the present, however much the present may be the effect of the past, would never arouse in the mind the idea of the past. The idea of the past must be possessed *a priori* by

[18] A later addition on the opposite page reads: 'The question which the historian asks is a question which only *he* can ask: it is a function of his individuality, and therefore of his generation. It expresses, in its own special way, the attitude of mind, both theoretical and practical, that is characteristic of his own age. This is why no generation can ever take over, ready-made, the historical conclusions of an earlier generation—It rejects them not because they are false but because they do not tell it what it wants to know.'

the mind: only so, approaching the present, can it ask the question 'what does this tell me about the past?' and, until that is asked, nothing is told.

From this point of view the question as to the certainty of history appears in a new light. The historian cannot have certain knowledge of what the past was in its actuality and completeness; but neither has he uncertain knowledge of this, or even conjecture or imagination of it. The past in its actuality and completeness is nothing to him; and, as it has finished happening, it is nothing in itself; so his ignorance of it is no loss. The only knowledge that the historian claims is knowledge of the answer which the evidence in his possession gives to the question he is asking. And the question itself is relative to the evidence, as the evidence is to the question: for, just as nothing is evidence unless it gives an answer to a question which somebody asks, so nothing is a genuine question unless it is asked in the belief that evidence for its answer will be forthcoming. A question which we have no materials for answering is not a genuine question; such a question is never asked by the historian, unless inadvertently; and his inability to answer it, if anyone asks it of him, is a sign, not of his incompetence, but precisely of his competence: it is a sign that he knows his business.

The certainty of history, then, is the certainty that the evidence in our possession points to one particular answer to the question we ask of it. This truth is partly expressed by the opinion—a false opinion, but with an element of truth in it—that the business of the historian is to hand on a tradition of information that has come down to him from the past: that he learns a story from his informants, and repeats that story, combined no doubt at his discretion with others, in his historical works.

To say that would be to ignore the element of spontaneous, critical, independent thought which is contained more or less in all history, and most in that which most deserves the name. Ignoring that, history is regarded as the repeating of stories, handed down from generation to generation, laid up in the memory of man or compiled by him into written volumes, out of which they may be copied and translated and re-combined by other men indefinitely. The historian's sources are, from

this point of view, 'authorities', that is to say, places where he finds his statements ready-made; his equipment consists simply of a retentive memory, and his methods of work are comprised in scissors and paste.

Many people, even some historians, believe that this is a fair description of history. They think that historical writing means copying out selected passages from trustworthy authorities, and that to be a good historian means remembering a great many things that you have read in such books. And there is a good deal in this; at any rate, it describes one feature without which neither history nor any other form of thought can arise—namely, blind reliance on authority and the passive acceptance of ideas which one lacks the ability or the inclination to criticize. But it is just as true of science as of history. Scientists often copy each other's ideas, borrow each other's formulae, and describe each other's experiments; small blame to them; if they did not, they would waste a great deal of time that might be better spent. But this passive acceptance of second-hand results is not science; it is, at most, the means of laying down a solid foundation in the mind, on which a structure of genuine, that is original and critical, scientific thought can be built. Similarly historians passively accept a great deal of what they find other historians saying; but this acceptance is not history, it is only an elementary or nursery stage of historical education.

The real business of history begins when this dogmatic stage is left behind and historical thought becomes critical. At this stage, authorities vanish and we are left with sources instead.[19] The difference is that whereas an authority makes statements which we accept and repeat, a source is something which enables us to make a statement of our own. In using authorities we are passive, in using sources we are active. In authorities we find history ready-made, in sources we find the materials out of which we have to make it for ourselves. An authority must, because it gives us ready-made history, consist of statements: that is, it must be couched in words, it must be a book or a discourse or an inscription or the like. And its

[19] On the opposite page of the manuscript, added at a later date, are the words: 'we must *cross-question* the evidence (cf. Bacon)—not merely *listen* to it—This destroys the conception of *authorities* and leads to that of *sources*.'

essence, as authoritative, consists in the fact that we take its statements as true and incorporate them into the body of our own historical beliefs. If we cease to take its statements as true, and criticize them; consider whether they really are true, try to read between the lines, ask ourselves what the speaker is concealing and by what motives he is induced to say what he does; then the written or spoken word ceases to be an authority and becomes a source. But when we have learnt to do this, we can use other things as sources, beside written and spoken words. The tone of voice, the involuntary gestures, of a witness giving evidence; the grammar and vocabulary, the script, the paper of a document; even the gestures of a person not giving evidence and the materials and form of something not meant for a document; all these can now be used with equally valuable results as historical sources.

There is no distinction of principle between written and unwritten sources. The distinction which is really meant, when people draw this distinction, is between authorities and sources. It is thought to be easier to use written sources than unwritten; and it is gravely doubted whether history can exist at all where written sources are altogether lacking; on their presence or absence is based the distinction between history, with its certainty and explicitness, and the twilight of prehistory. But in all these cases the question at issue is whether critical history is possible, or whether the historian must remain for ever in his nursery stage. It is easier to use written sources than unwritten, simply and solely because written sources can be used as authorities, copied out instead of being criticized, swallowed whole instead of being thought over. If written sources are used as sources, criticized instead of being dogmatically accepted, they are not a bit easier to use than unwritten. To say that written sources are easier to use than unwritten is like saying that it is easier to swim in your depth than out of it; because you can swim with one foot on the ground, if you call that swimming. Again, the doubt whether history can dispense with written sources at all, merely means that perhaps history cannot dispense with authorities, whose statements can be copied out uncritically, to act as an uncriticized foundation for a critical superstructure. And here again we detect the theory that no one can swim out of his depth—

now modified, so as to assert only that the swimmer must be allowed to touch bottom every few strokes. The advocates of such a theory ought to agree as to the maximum number of strokes permissible between touch and touch: in other words, how far exactly can one go without falling back on authority? Finally, the alleged uncertainty of prehistory consists merely in the fact that prehistory knows no authorities, only sources. Here the historian is frankly thrown in out of his depth; and the orthodox opinion among our professional historians seems in favour of giving him up for lost. *E pur si muove*; prehistory has achieved enormous triumphs in the last fifty years; its position is now so secure that it can face without serious perturbation even the situation of a wholesale forgery of objects whose genuineness is sworn to by several eminent men learned in other branches of scholarship than prehistory. The Glozel affair is the happiest possible augury for the future of prehistoric studies; the quiet, almost taciturn, certainty with which every prehistorian saw through the fraud proves that we are here standing on ground which will not shift beneath our feet, and vindicates the claim of historical thought to have got clear of the nursery.

This claim rests on the possession of means to criticize sources and extract history from them; and this implies, on the part of the historian, a technical equipment of the kind that is generally called scientific. No such equipment is required to enable people to swallow whole or copy out what others have said; and it is therefore the presence or absence of this technical equipment that marks most clearly the distinction between an active and critical history, using sources, and a passive or dogmatic history accepted from authorities. Critical history classifies its sources into groups, and then subdivides these groups, framing rules for the manipulation of the various subdivisions. Taken as a whole, this technique is an abstract or classificatory science, which has no general name, unless that of archaeology is used for it, and is subdivided into numerous departmental sciences such as palaeography, numismatics, epigraphy, and so forth. These archaeological sciences are a *sine qua non* of critical history. They are not themselves history; they are only methods of dealing with the sources of history; but without them history cannot pass beyond the dogmatic or nursery stage. They form, as it were, the bones of all historical thinking. History itself must be flexible, but it must have rigid bones, unless it is to lose all power of independent locomotion and become a parasite. Classificatory and abstract thought is the negation of history, which is individual and concrete through and through; but the concreteness of history can only be reached through the abstractness of the archaeological sciences.

Every advance in critical history rests on an advance in the interpretation of evidence, that is, an advance in archaeological science. Every advance in archaeological science consists in the discovery that some class of facts can be made to yield historical knowledge, which has hitherto yielded none. The archaeologist feeling his way towards new advances is constantly asking himself whether this or that detail of script or moulding or pottery can be proved characteristic of a certain date or a certain origin; he collects instances, perhaps thousands of instances, to test the suggestion, and may end by committing himself to the generalization that this feature has a definite significance. His fellow-archaeologists learn the new idea very much as medical men learn a new method of diagnosis: partly by reading his papers, far more by personal contact with the material and re-discovering the trick from his indications. That is what makes archaeology so tedious to people who are not archaeologists. It seems to be contained in books and reports, which, when one reads them, prove either unintelligible or flagrantly illogical. But these books and reports are only indications, addressed to the trained man, how to handle his material in order to get certain results; they are no more truly archaeology than a surveyor's field-book is a map.

Archaeology is the methodology of history. An historian innocent of all archaeology is an historian with no power of genuine historical thought, able only to accept what he finds his authorities saying. As soon as he begins to criticize his authorities, he begins to develop methods of archaeological work: bibliography, textual criticism, and so forth. But archaeology, even in its widest possible acceptation, provides only one side of the methodology required for historical work that shall be fully critical. Archaeology is empirical methodology; the methods of any archaeological science are applicable

only to a limited sphere, where materials of a certain type are found. There is another methodology which is pure methodology: the science which lays down universal canons of method for dealing with all kinds of sources and constructing any kind of narrative about any subject. This pure methodology is the philosophy of history; a science dealing with the universal and necessary characteristics of all historical thinking whatever, and differentiating history from other forms of thought.

This science is practical, or methodological in the sense of providing guidance in the pursuit of historical knowledge, in that it studies what history everywhere and always is, and therefore what history everywhere and always ought to be. It is easy to object that, on this showing, history always is what it ought to be, and therefore the philosophy of history can have no practical value. This would be true, were it not that people who refrain from pursuing philosophical inquiries are generally more or less at the mercy of philosophical fallacies. Often they are affected by a number of opposing fallacies, which in the long run cancel out and do little to disturb their practical life; but often, and especially in the case of people who pride themselves on being logical thinkers and clear-headed men, a single fallacy will impose itself and become an obsession, uncompensated by any opposing forces, until irreparable damage has been done.

Thus obsessed, logical thinkers have distorted history in various directions. They have advocated historical materialism; they have destroyed the continuity of history by asserting fantastic distinctions between the savage and civilized minds; they have tried to reduce history to a science by suppressing all that makes it history; they have invented the doctrine of historical cycles; they have asserted a mechanical law of progress; they have denied progress altogether; they have committed a hundred fallacies of the same kind, each involving an error in the philosophy of history and each in consequence falsifying the whole structure of their historical thought.[20] Most grievous error of all, they have been prevented from seeing the value, the logical solidity and intellectual respectability, of historical studies, and have taken upon themselves to denounce as vicious and philosophically sinful an activity which is one of the universally necessary and universally pleasant occupations of the human mind. Philosophers are not exempt from the general danger that besets specialists, the danger of priggishness and pedantry; and among philosophers these vices take the form of a tendency to set themselves up as judges of the various practical and theoretical pursuits of mankind and to declare in sweeping terms that art or religion or, in this case, history is a delusion and an error. When pedantry runs wild in this sort of philosophical crusade, it gives ground for more than a suspicion that the fault is in the pedant's own philosophy. For the pedant's accusations against the thing he is attacking are based on the assumption that, at bottom, the thing in question is irrational and therefore unworthy of attention on the part of rational beings. But if it is really irrational, why does it exist? It is easy to say that the people who pursue it are labouring under a delusion; but this is mere idle recrimination unless [it] is accompanied by some explanation of the sources and true nature of the alleged error. Unless this explanation is given, no one can object to the crude retort 'you're another'. If the philosopher dogmatically pronounces history to be rooted in error, he may be told that the error is precisely in his own theory of what history is.

If, as Burke said in a famous passage, you cannot draw up an indictment against a nation, *a fortiori* you cannot draw up an indictment against an entire department of human experience. Those who profess themselves enemies of philosophy are those who cherish a philosophy of their own which is so unphilosophical that they instinctively hide it under a bushel and protect it from the cold light of explicit thought. Those who, being themselves philosophers, profess themselves enemies of art or science or what not, and make this profession in proper philosophical form by pronouncing what they dislike to be irrational, are those who cherish a faulty philosophical

[20] On the opposite page, added at a later date, Collingwood wrote: 'To avoid these consequences of bad philosophy there is no way except by finding a better philosophy: in this sense the philosophy of history, as we have tried to expound it here, acts as a practical guide to the logical problems of historical thought.'

theory of the thing they are attacking. It is quite easy to fall into a philosophical error of a kind which involves, as a necessary consequence, a faulty theory of this or that department of human experience. For instance, a person whose theory of knowledge reduced knowledge to terms of an irrational intuition, might be a lover of art, but he would almost certainly hold science in contempt. A person whose theory of knowledge reduced knowledge to the apprehension of universal essences might speak respectfully of science, but he would have no use for history. But these hatreds show, not that something is wrong with science or history, but that something is wrong with the person who hates it.

A thing like art or science or history does not ask for justification at the hands of philosophy. It is capable of justifying itself. The fact that numbers of people have worked at it for a long time, building up between them a coherent system of thoughts by means of methods devised and elaborated for the special purposes of their pursuit, is itself the proof of its rationality. If anyone thinks otherwise, I do not know how to help him except by inviting him to overhaul the fundamental ideas on which his philosophy is based; and invitations to do anything so arduous as this are generally refused. But nothing short of this will bring conviction: just as nothing short of this would convince an astronomer that he was wrong if he said that the orbits of the planets are rational things and a credit to the law of universal gravitation, but that the orbits of comets are a crying scandal and ought to be prevented by a cosmic police force. Astronomers realize that, so long as comets actually move in parabolic orbits, their business is to accept the facts and reduce them to some kind of formula. But perhaps this is only because astronomers are forced to recognize that it is useless for them to preach at comets, whereas philosophers are not always clear how far it is of use to preach at human beings. And if they are too conceited to take seriously the advice of Oliver Cromwell—'I beseech you, brethren, think it *possible* that ye may be mistaken'—they will make every one of their own errors an excuse for preaching at the person or institution or practice about which they are in error.

The philosopher who sets out to theorize about human life must accept human life, in the spirit in which Margaret Fuller

'accepted the universe'. This does not mean that he must swallow it whole. He must understand it; and, in order to do that, he must analyse and dissect it, and refuse to accept anything unanalysed. But he must not fall into the error of thinking that it is his analysis that makes it rational. He can only find in it the reason which is in it already.

In this way, it is not open to the philosopher to find that the object of his analysis is irrational. To bring in such a verdict as that is to condemn himself for failing to find what he set out to find. But there is another side to this question. If philosophy simply studies historical thought as an object, something quite other than itself and independent of itself, as the astronomer studies the movements of the stars, it is bound indeed to find it rational, but only in the sense in which the movements of the stars are rational—that is, determined by laws of which it is unconscious. The philosopher who studies history from the outside thus finds history to be a rational and necessary form of thought, but he does not find in it the same necessities or logical connexions which the historian finds. Therefore he thinks of the historian as, at best, somewhat illogically logical and irrationally rational. This difficulty is only removed when the philosopher studies history from the inside: that is, when the philosopher and the historian are the same person and when this person's philosophical and historical work react on one another. In this case the philosopher is sure that the historian's historical thought is rational, because he is himself the historian, and he is merely assuring himself of the rationality of his own thought. It is no mere act of faith, but an examination of conscience, that makes him accept historical thought as a reasonable pursuit for a sane man. But conversely, the historian is able to depend for some things upon the philosopher. The philosopher is concerned, in his theory of historical knowledge, to think out certain questions concerning the limits, validity, and purpose of history: and the historian is able to bring his historical research into conformity with the results of this enquiry.

Thus a double result will follow. The philosopher's philosophy will become more trustworthy because of his personal and intimate experience of the subject about which he is theorizing; and the historian's history will become more rational

because it is being brought into increasing conformity with the philosophical idea of itself. History supplies philosophy with data, and philosophy supplies history with methods.

Archaeology has been described as the methodology of history. But there are two methodologies: an empirical methodology, concerned with particular varieties of historical material and the varieties of ways in which they should be handled, and a general or universal methodology, which deals with the universal problems of method which affect every piece of historical work just as much as every other. This universal methodology is the philosophy of history regarded as a study undertaken by the historian himself in the endeavour to clear up his own ideas about the nature and aims of historical research.

In this union of history with philosophy, as studied by a single person and reacting on one another, history for the first time becomes really rational, and philosophy for the first time apprehends this rationality not by a mere act of faith, but by virtue of the fact that history must be as rational as philosophy wants it to be, since philosophy itself has made it so.

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