



Man and His History

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MAN AND HIS HISTORY

One of the most valuable and unique characteristics of civilised man is the way in which he regards the past. The greater and more acute his awareness of it, the deeper his appreciation of the present and its prospective tendencies. The past – his past in particular – is in any case inseparable from it, for it is an essential part of the ethos in which he has his being. It is a mode of universal experience, common to man everywhere and at all times: all that he knows empirically has spatio-temporal characteristics, for nothing in fact lies beyond the here and there, the now and then. To man the world in which he lives, the co-ordinates of space and time, are the built-in attributes of what is. He cannot conceive of it otherwise.

Now by virtue of his innate, dispositional drives he seeks to discover within that which he senses what is valuable and satisfying in order to realise his own potential. But were it not for the changes both within himself and his environment he would scarcely be aware at all, still less of one present state giving way to another. What man experiences in the eternal flux of things, of constant change, is however only significant in the light of memory. Were it not for this capacity to recall that which he can no longer experience immediately, he would have no sense of pastness and life itself, if it *were* living, would be of little value. It is moreover beyond doubt that he could have no conception of a future, of realisable present states, had he not some recollection of presents already experienced – those that are past in fact. Gradually has he perceived in the temporal experience the immanence of change, of another state of being in the reality about him, and indeed in the dynamic self which makes for a changing not-self independently of the rest of Nature. From man's recognition of these changes, of in fact the consequent differences in states of beings, especially as manifest in other people, history has developed.

Generally, we have come to conceive of history as man's attempt to give an account of, to narrate, analyse and interpret, his past as it can be apprehended from memory and from artefactual remains of various kinds, or from other evidence of what he infers actually happened. This is based on a realist view of the past, that it exists or existed independently of us and of our knowing it. But it also assumes, as does all scientific enquiry, that the past of man and his environment is intelligible, that indeed we can count on Nature and on its most peculiar manifestation, Man, in particular. As we know it, it is a fairly sophisticated exercise of the mind, of varying

degrees of difficulty. In its general expression it has assumed a literary form for reasons of convenience rather than necessity, in that written language has so far proved the most adaptable, sensitive and flexible medium for communicating ideas.

But history would not have so developed at all had it not been that in his reflection and recollection man had not seen in the recall and recapture of the past in the instant some value for him. The nature of that value or values has varied as his own relationship with his environment has become modified, but basically it has remained the same, the recreation of the past for his own delectation and for whatever light it may throw on the future.

That there has always been some value inherent in the exercise of giving some expression to the past we may not doubt, else man would not have made the effort to do so. Yet the effort has always presented problems, the nature of which we are only now beginning to realise fully. History is fundamentally an epistemological task, and knowing the past is fraught with all manner of peculiar and often insuperable difficulties. They are peculiar in that history presupposes a knowledge of that which cannot any longer be known directly. This in itself presents problems of accessibility and of interpretation enough, but when one realises the essential nature of what the historian, and certainly the modern historian, is really after, all other difficulties pale into insignificance.

And the heart of the historical matter, as the eminent early twentieth century philosopher-historian, R.G. Collingwood, so lucidly and aptly put it, lies hidden within the kernel of events. For incapsulated in what happened, *res gestae*, the activities of man, are always the ideas, motives and intentions which impel the event of which we have tangible, sensible evidence. In other words, what we are really concerned about in history is the ideational content, what man has thought about his human situation and why he has reacted to it in the manner that he has. To ascertain this is an intellectual task of some magnitude, since it involves a sympathetic understanding of human nature and an imaginative projection of himself into an age and climate of opinion often very different from his own. Although we must, and can reasonably, assume that *homo sapiens* has at all times shared similar categories of thought, that the logic of his thinking has not varied fundamentally, we cannot assume that he saw the world about him and conceived of its value and possibilities in quite the same way as we do now. While man may not have changed generically, his ever widening experience and knowledge have wrought immeasurable shifts in his outlook on life and on what he has found valuable and rewarding.

Yet although this knowledge and experience have distanced and alienated him from the very past he may wish to know, it has in some very important respects better equipped him for the task. It is beyond doubt that we can know more of the early aborigines of Australia and of any country than they knew of themselves if only because our techniques of enquiry and the knowledge thus accumulated make possible more penetrating and wider analysis. True, many of the more subtle and delicate nuances of their social and tribal lives may be lost beyond recapture, but we can know of those lives and their past in a more comprehensive and critical way than they themselves could have done. How much, on the other hand, our highly conscious and intellectual probing of the past falsifies it and in a sense changes it we may never know, for, whatever it was, the human past will be for man what history says it was. And where historians differ, as indeed they often do in their interpretations, we as students of the human past must be the judge. As R.G. Collingwood succinctly put it 'History abides a verdict only we can give'.

What has been man's verdict on his past? How has he regarded it from the dim dawn of consciousness to the present? Of what determinative influence has his past been to him in the apprehension and resolution of the present? These are not easy questions, for their answers are bound up with his general awareness of what is. Whatever the past, his knowledge of it and the value judgments that he makes of it are present knowledge and present judgments. Are not our notions of past and future but different present aspects which have an existential interdependence in the eternal now? Neither exists independently of the other, for they are but the essential conceptual mode through which we become aware of change in things around us.

So it has ever been. We can imagine early primitive man groping purposefully in the dim light of his cloud chamber of reality, reflecting on his experience and on that of others. In a way which he could not appreciate he was bound in an iron law of necessity, a necessity born of the past. His memory was stored with the barest elements of vital knowledge making for survival. His past was doubtless part of his day-to-day consciousness: it informed and impelled his awareness of life about him. As such it could hardly be differentiated from a present or a future; all in fact were fused into his consciousness of being.

But thanks to his genetical inheritance he was able to reflect wilfully and deliberately, to pause on the brink of action and consider its possible consequences, not just for him but for the community to which he

belonged. Indeed, were it not for and because of others it is doubtful if he would ever have been provoked into the intellection which was to give him the understanding and insights into the possibilities of his environment. More pertinently, from the simple logic borne in upon him by experience, his blurred awareness of the temporal was gradually clarified and differentiated into a separable past, present and future. So we can imagine he developed a concept of time – a process which has gone on ever since with progressive refinement and elaboration in its cultural manifestation and presentation.

From this sense of the past, history as a sophisticated intellectual achievement was eventually to develop. Only after tens of thousands of years did man as a value-seeking creature begin to appreciate what the past – his past – meant for him. He saw in it meaning, for meaning in the sense of significance it doubtless possessed. As his understanding grew to enable him to turn his environment to more varied and valuable purpose, he vaguely felt a sense of awe and mystery in which all things seem to be enveloped. Tentatively, he conceived cosmogonical and cosmological notions consistent with experience, to form an ethos or cultural framework in which the different phenomena cohered and made some sense. Without seeing the inter-relationships of things, man could have had no understanding. And to give his social behaviour a metaphysical force he sought the sanction of moral ideals which he posited, compatible with the possible and desirable. Moreover, how else could he account for the starry heavens above and the earth below but anthropomorphically, endowing his metaphysical beings with human powers!

But the spirits or gods as they became in man's image, were endowed, in his imagination, with endless life. They therefore were not only coterminous with the past, they possessed it and determined the present and an unfolding future. Through them man was subject to brute contingency and absolute inevitability. So primitive man fearfully believed. We can well imagine how when he forsook his nomadic ways and began to settle in the more favourable river valleys, there to construct the rudiments of civilisation, his inchoate and crude notions of a spirit-ridden world became clarified and crystallised into more formal religious beliefs. Precedent and authority could not be otherwise conceived, if only by definition, but in the past. And if it was a past that resided primarily in man's memory and could be envisaged in the odds and ends of artefactual hardware, it was invested with an overpowering authority no past has ever since enjoyed. It subjugated him by its very ineffable weight and made future prospects but a prolongation of what had been.

Yet this primitive past possessed for man a doubt-defying inexorability, thus assuring its certainty. 'O world unknowable we know thee' our early forebears might have exclaimed with Francis Thompson. The inhabitants of Sumer and Akkad lived, we may believe, in awe of a spirit-animated past that in its unchanging nature made for a timelessness inconceivable to modern man. Unfortunately, so little remains of any attempt to record their past (for what was the point of doing so if it did not change?) that we can only imagine how they actually regarded it. With no knowledge, so we may reasonably suppose, of how their primitive ancestors lived, with no past knowledge beyond a generation or so, they probably assumed life past, present and future was and always had been pretty much as they knew it. Nor from what we can fairly infer from hieroglyphical evidence and monumental remains did the early Egyptians regard their past any differently; it wore a Sphinx-like inscrutability.

Even two or three millenia later, when we come to the ancient Judaic peoples, we cannot readily detect any significant change in their attitude towards the past. Biblical literature from Genesis onwards is suffused with a deep and abiding sense of and an awful reverence for their enveloping yesterdays. Jehovah and his earthly patriarchs marched and thundered from eternity; but they marched in circles, and earthly time counted for little against the timelessness of God. Although the prophets declaimed a rational, responsible theory of the past, it was based upon the uncritical acceptance of established belief. The Jewish peoples saw history as tragedy and responsibility, and could not conceive it as we do. Not for them a critical examination of their beliefs, nor any doubt as to their validity but only a certainty that could not be questioned!

It was not until the spirit of enquiry had been quickened among men that we find history in the modern sense possible. Even the early Greek poets, Hesiod and Homer, who had the root of the historical matter in them, could not conceive of their past as coming but from the lap of their gods, while the oft-termed fathers of History, Herodotus and Thucydides credulously accept most of the legends of the more remote Hellenic past. Their main concern is with what we would regard as contemporary affairs. Thucydides indeed begins his history of the Peloponnesian War by stating that nothing of great importance had happened before his time. The Greeks in fact had little historical sense, for they lacked any records and had no chronology except for the Olympic Games. They could only speculate about their remoter past and when they were sceptical of traditional myth and legend they had no means, no reliably attested criteria, by which to support criticism. Small wonder that even the most rationally minded and greatest of intellects in that exceptionally brilliant age were in the

absence of empirical reference to remote human past unable to conceive of it and the future in anything but a cyclical fashion.

If the Greeks were not historically minded, the Romans were little better so, and that in spite of their considerable corpus of historical writings. With almost no knowledge of the world beyond the imperial frontiers the Romans had little sense of new horizons or new possibilities. The history of their beloved Rome, *ab urbe condita*, was all that interested them. In its annals they sought the morals that undoubtedly were there for the seeking. Their intellectual climate heavy with foreboding and prediction did not induce any scepticism as to the validity and substance of their cherished beliefs. Since in their view there could be nothing new and since the world had seen nothing but a refashioning of old beliefs and customs, any radical change in the penetration of the past and in their conception of history was impossible. Meditating upon the cyclical regeneration of all things the Stoic philosopher Marcus Aurelius predicted that 'Our children will see nothing fresh, just as our forebears saw nothing more than we. So that a man of forty years, if he have a grain of sense, in view of this sameness, has seen all that has been and shall be'.¹ In fact, the surviving literature of antiquity shows virtually without exception that the Greeks and Romans believed in the cyclical theory of the past. Even the pedagogically minded Polybius in the 2nd century B.C. could not see beyond it. 'Such is the cycle of political revolution, the course appointed by nature in which constitutions change, disappear and finally return to the point from which they started'.² Hoi polloi, and the populace then of the classical world, we must conclude, knew little or nothing about the human past. Moreover, to few was the written word of their historians accessible and intelligible, and all were nurtured in legendary beliefs of god-ordained origins and predicted ends. Their concern was to divine those ends not to make them.

In its turn Christianity did little to increase man's scientific appreciation of the past. Founded upon the eschatological sense of the Jews and with no conception of intellectual values, it exhorted belief in a divinely appointed world with God at the beginning and end of it. Little room here for the historical sense as we know it! Its most influential early thinker St. Augustine, more than any other shaped the Christian view of history. In his great Christian epic *De Civitate Dei* Augustine depicts all history as a constant struggle between the City of God and the City of Man which was

1. Meditations Bk. XI. 1, Everyman Library, 1935, p.136.

2. Historiae Bk. VI. 9, Shuckburgh, Vol. 1, Macmillan London, 1889, p. 466.

built upon man's conceit of himself to the contempt and neglect of God. Together with the Bible it was the source of an account and determination of man's past that cleric and lay were to know for well nigh a thousand years. Yet although professedly a universal history, it was little more than a discursive refutation of the charge that the Church had caused the fall of Rome. But then it must be admitted that Augustine was not really interested in history as a detached, dispassionate enquiry into what had happened. In the anti-intellectual climate of his day scholarship counted for little, and thoughts on this earthly life were discouraged in favour of concentration upon Heaven for which here and now was but a time of preparation and testing. No great store then could be laid by medieval man against his past, for its history scarcely existed and where it did it was anecdotal and moralistic. And if men wrote what they in all sincerity believed to have happened, who was there to gainsay them? It was not surprising that a history of the pagan world written by Orosius, a disciple of Augustine, although little more than a compendium of horrors, became a manual of universal history for the Middle Ages. Even Gregory the Great embraced the most preposterous superstitions of the past. In the absence of any critical propensity and wish to examine objectively their past people of the Middle Ages were not only steeped in abysmal ignorance but they were easy prey for such gross frauds as the Donations of Constantine and the False Decretals. With the Scriptures the source of historical beliefs generally, there was no felt need to question accounts of the past, which in any case paled into insignificance against the transcendental prospects held out by the Christian Faith.

As Western man however discovered the fascinating nature of his world and began to realise its potential value so he became more enamoured of life here and now and interested in its past. Although the humanists of the Renaissance laid no great stress on history because of their concern for secular man, they did create a greater interest in the past generally. Even a Bishop Ussher was moved to calculate that the earth had come into being in 4004 B.C. But nothing so much gave stimulus, if indirectly, to interest in the human past as the scientific and geographical discoveries of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In the light of a new faith in man and his works the past took on a more exciting significance. The humanists of the eighteenth century Enlightenment, although not much given to history, saw in the human past the source of a new and secular optimism born of a faith in man and his obvious progress from a more primitive state. While the masses had little authentic knowledge of man's history and little notion of what progress meant, their leaders and the intellectuals of the day read with avidity the historical works of Hume and Voltaire with their implicit suggestions that man was gradually improving himself. From this

sober optimism grew the French idea of human perfectibility, and Emmanuel Kant, no historian himself, pronounced the proper function of history to be the revelation of the inner development of man's consciousness. How much the French revolutionaries owed to any reading of history it is difficult to estimate, but the Jacobins derived part of their revolutionary ideology from the rejection of much of what they had been taught of man's past, while their activities and ideas probably gave a tremendous fillip to greater general interest in history.

But what more than anything else promoted people's interest in the past was the spate of national histories that began to excite a pride in their countries' heritage and to foster a provincialism and the spirit of nationalism throughout Europe. Germans read in the heavy theological approach to the past of such writers as Schelling, Schlegel and Hegel, the historical justification for regarding Europeans, and Germans in particular, as peoples apart and destined by the Almighty for preëminence in world affairs and for ultimate redemption. Englishmen were fed on a historical diet of England's greatness and superiority, while Frenchmen who had thought to have cleansed their country's history in the blood of the *ancien regime* had greater reason to feel the impact of the past than did most Europeans.

On the other hand the study of history as a scientific discipline came into its own in the 19th century with the objective, archival methods of von Ranke and his school of historians. Their laudable object of holding the mirror up to the past and portraying what actually happened, or so they thought, naively conceived though the ideal was, fomented a widespread and lasting interest in history, so that historiography became one of the most outstanding achievements of the century. Moreover, for the first time history was taught at school and university and became popular reading fare for a fast increasing literate population.

Yet it was from outside of historical studies that man's notions of his forebears were to receive their most shattering but at the same time stimulating blow. In the long term nothing so much deepened and enriched the study of the human past as did Darwin's theory of evolution which gave to traditional history a biological tail of undreamed of length and opened up a great deal of speculation which archaeologists and other scientists have ever since been doing their best to substantiate. Here was perspective indeed taking man back over a million years into the remote biological past. His relatively contemporary accounts of civilised man took on a new significance when seen against this new conception of man's remote past stretching back to the origins of life itself.

But although such profound biological and archaeological discoveries have necessitated radical changes in man's conception of his past, they have not markedly affected his histories which, mainly dependent as they are upon literary evidence, can only take us back five or six millenia. For all that, *if* in that relatively short span of man's life on earth – about 1/250th of the time since Cro-Magnon man – we are still ignorant of at least our historical or literate past, it is not for the want of historiography, for histories have in this century poured from press and pen in greater profusion than ever before. They have moreover been of infinite variety, from annals and memoirs of old families and small communities to histories of the world, of which, for example, H.G. Wells' 'Outline of History' was epoch making. And whereas until the end of the 19th century, when Marxist teachings were beginning to influence historical interpretations, especially among the intelligentsia of Europe, history was as the English historian Freeman put it 'past politics', now it became not only political in its nature but economic and sociological. Even the physical sciences and art and literature began to find a firmer and more integrated place in history. In an attempt to redress the historical balance in favour of the non-political elements of human affairs G.M. Trevelyan wrote a 'Social History of England' with, as he claimed, the politics left out.

Altogether, there is no doubting that we in this century have been more exposed to historical writings than man has ever been. This is not simply because historians have been more active and prolific but also because there has been a much greater general interest in the human past. Oddly enough, the impatience with the past, so forthrightly expressed in Henry Ford's 'History is bunk' and its implied concern for the future have made it necessary to have a closer look at man's past in order to ascertain what the future might and could be. With the increasing tempo of change we have become aware of time as never before. Whereas our forebears took their past for granted, for the living past was closely interwoven into their daily lives, we have become mightily conscious of it as it recedes irrevocably from us.

But history cannot speak of the *legacy* of the past when it is still vibrant with meaning for us: it is only when we are acutely aware that it *is* the past that it needs to be recalled in order to see what value it may still have for man. There was little obvious need to be taught the history of the past when that past was naturally thought to be but part of the social climate in which one lived. All it needed was clarification and the making explicit of what was generally taken for granted, if in a vague sort of way. It is, for example, doubtful whether Edward Gibbon saw the need to examine and

interpret in the modern sense the annals and records of the Ancient World when writing his 'Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire'. In that sweeping and confident narrative he resolved with a robust common sense doubts which however would still trouble the modern historian. For him it was the end of the matter, whereas for us it is but the beginning. Histories are but interpretations and must be rewritten in terms of what a people is trying to do and is most concerned with.

History then needs now to be taught in a manner hitherto inconceivable. It has become a subject in educational curricula. Schools and universities all offer some kind of history, and that not simply to be 'read' as was once the academic convention but now to be critically analysed. No longer is it regarded as a harmless, if edifying, diversion for young ladies, for the power of the past has now been realised. And by no one better than statesmen and politicians who have deliberately exploited its psychological conditioning potential for political and national ends. In some fashion or another people know the history of their country or race, but that knowledge is often such as to prevent a clear, dispassionate and objective analysis even of themselves, to say nothing of other societies. With the best will in the world national historians have a hard job interpreting the evidence of their country's past objectively, free of bias and prejudice; while their readers are naturally prone to reading into their histories that which they would wish to read. Hence it is not surprising that national historians have created for their readers illusions for their people to cherish and harbour at the expense of less laudatory but more valid accounts of their ancestors.

No Western people is free of national prejudice derived from and fossilised by history. English notions of national superiority and bearers of a white man's burden were often subtly, if unconsciously, induced by historians who presented England's past as though that of the rest of the world hardly mattered. May not too France's 20th century attitude towards Europe, and Germany in particular, be largely attributable to an antiquated Napoleonic sense of destiny cultivated by her historians? Do not the Jews owe their age long traditional notions of a divinely ordained and unique destiny to Old Testament myths enshrined in their history? Americans too have been nurtured on fond illusions gleaned from their highly nationalistic histories. The great success story of private enterprise amassing great wealth will not allow such a people, so obviously favoured by God, to admit that elsewhere in the world the American code of values has little currency and is not acceptable to other peoples. It is also unthinkable that they should concede defeat, for their history does not prepare their peoples for anything but a happy and successful ending to their

country's undertakings. On the other hand, we can well believe that a Marxist-Leninist interpretation of history has conditioned Soviet and Eastern European citizens to an emphasis upon economic forces and to a communist way of life.

But nowhere has history been so perverted to serve ulterior political ends as in the totalitarian regimes of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. There youth especially were indoctrinated with a highly selected and warped version of their countries' histories, which omitted much of the past but which created illusions of national grandeur and race superiority, to foster a redemptive hope in a special destiny.

Yet, although history has much to answer for, it has for the most part achieved a high degree of objectivity, of ridding itself, or at least making allowance for, national and racial prejudices. In part this has been due to its break with the traditional narrative method and to the adoption of a more analytical and sociological account of the past. This secular, non-committal and scientific approach to history has of course done nothing to encourage traditional metaphysical and religious beliefs as to the origins and destiny of mankind, so that the redemptive role assumed by Christian historiography in particular has been shed in favour of the cold impersonal function of indifferent science. Man must now read for himself any meaning in history, for it does not palpitate through the pages of the past as once it did. Only in such so called philosophies of history as Oswald Spengler's 'Decline of the West' and Arnold Toynbee's 'A Study of History' do we find a history of Western Europe and of the world respectively written to support *a priori* theories of a transcendental nature. But being neither philosophy nor history in the strict sense of those terms they have not greatly influenced the teaching and reading of history and have, we may suspect, been more talked about than read by the European and American public at large.

Elsewhere, and it is a salutary and sobering thought, the great majority of the peoples of the world are blissfully and almost completely ignorant of anything like an authentic history. The teeming masses of India are not only unaware of their origins and ancient past but are indifferent to anything but legendary and fantastic stories of their forebears. Sufficient that the mysticism in which such beliefs are invested supports the all pervasive Hinduism with its quietism and apparent timelessness. For the Moslem world history is inspired and charged with a special religious significance which by objective Western standards must be considered largely a travesty of the past. Even the Chinese, who were the most historically minded of all ancient peoples and have never been unmindful of their

civilisation and their illustrious ancestors,¹ have been weighed down rather than enlightened by the sheer burden of a vast compilation of chronological annals. In part Confucianism with its fatalistic passivity has been to blame for the almost complete absence of anything like critical and objective Chinese historiography.

With then very *different* national approaches and attitudes to the past, it is little wonder that apart from sociological considerations peoples see life and the future of man variously. It is moreover by no means certain that one nation could ever regard history in quite the same manner as another. If the past as a mode of experience is conceived in varying degrees of personal involvement and reality, then history as its written record or interpretation will vary greatly. Where men live in the unquestioned and unexamined belief that they are the incarnation of all that has been, history as we of the Western World know it is a repellent barbarism of a grossly materialistic civilisation; it is not of the spirit but of the restless mind which knows no salvation.

But history *is* of the mind, stimulated by centuries of systematic scientific enquiry into the nature of reality, to examine with the same unimpassioned detachment the evidence for what was. History has consequently ceased to be an exercise of memory or piety but has become a critical task of no mean intellectual order, for in its attempt to discern the psychical elements and values implicit in human actions it goes beyond the empirical and measurable certainties of the physical sciences. Whatever esoteric and mystical qualities other means of apprehending the human past may possess that of the Western World does at least have the merit of being both the product of human intellection and an analytical account of the past which can be subjected to rational criticism.

And largely because it is open to criticism, and to re-interpretation Western historiography is not a fixed and finished process but is in a state of constant revision. Within the society which creates it are the very forces at work making for different kinds of history. Indeed, they have been produced by man's very knowledge of his past, a knowledge which as it increases affects his present outlook. Simply put then, the interaction between past and present is the dynamic making for change, even in historiography.

What new features therefore can we expect to see emerging in our

1. See J. Needham, *The Grand Titration*, Allen and Unwin, London, 1969, pp. 233-44.

histories? They will of course be consequent upon fresh knowledge of the world about us and of ourselves, and will reflect the ethos of contemporary society. What man values, what he finds satisfying and rewarding, will inform and impel his actions and thereby help create a ferment of activity and a climate of understanding shared by all. The values man seeks will be within the parameters of his knowledge, and as they change so may his values. This value seeking state of consciousness will determine what man makes of his past, what indeed he will be looking for and expecting when examining historical evidence. Though the historian must beware of the diagnostic fallacy of ascribing to remote ancestors factors and motives which are only relevant now, he will attempt to account for *res gestae* in terms of influences which were doubtless present with early man but of which he was ignorant. We may here think particularly of man's vastly deeper psychological involvement with the reality about him.

With the growing complexity of the human situation and the realisation that what actually happened may be more difficult to determine than we have imagined we shall need to examine not simply the bare physical evidence of events but beliefs, motives and intentions implicit in the artefacts. For this we need to know more of cosmogonical and cosmological beliefs, of how man conceived his life now and after death. More than ever shall we need to draw from other disciplines to assist us in the quest for the nearer and more penetrating 'truths' of the past.

Almost no branch of human enquiry is without some value for history, for all knowledge is grist to its mill. And how better can the two cultures of C.P. Snow be bridged than by history, drawing on science and technology not only to illuminate and make intelligible men's actions but by analysing the invaluable contribution of scientific knowledge to historical development! Only now are we beginning to realise the fundamental importance of science to civilisation of which history is a cultural part. Yet, as we have already noted, the scientific attitude to the past has long been manifest in historiography to warrant its designation as a social science. And to complicate the historical scene further, psycho-analysis is beginning to reveal hidden human motivations which may throw a different light on men's actions and transform the 'facts' of the past.

Here it is that philosophy may be invoked to examine the validity of history as a form of knowledge. Hitherto largely indifferent to history, with the notable exceptions of certain idealists, philosophers are fortunately beginning to turn their minds towards problems which are of considerable importance to historical studies. The classical assumption of a clear distinction between subject and object in our knowledge of the

external world has been challenged by both philosopher and scientist. The validity or hardness of so-called historical facts is in serious doubt. We know that the absolute in history must elude us, as it does elsewhere. Not only are 'facts' but variable interpretations of subjectively determined evidence but they are far more complex and involved than von Ranke, for example, ever imagined them to be. This is especially true of those abstract ideational concepts which are of the greater significance to contemporary man. Moreover, by our very enquiry into the past we intervene in it and see it essentially in the light of our evaluating mind. As our spectrum of values shifts with new knowledge, so shall we see historical evidence differently. New 'facts' will emerge and old ones become suspect. From new 'facts' the mesh of the web of general hypotheses spun out of our knowledge will become finer to catch different kinds of 'facts' which otherwise would pass through the web. The economist for example is more likely to catch and recognise the economic 'facts' of life than will a man of religion or an artist. For the historian this different disposition of values is at the heart of the matter, for it will help to explain why people saw what ostensibly was the same situation but reacted to it differently.

If then science and philosophy can be of inestimable value to history, so too can the arts. Indeed, they are the virtually untapped field of historical enquiry waiting for the historian's attention. Literature has played and doubtless will continue to play a most sensitive ancillary role to history, revealing and giving expression to the sense and sensibilities of earlier peoples who do not normally find a mention in traditional history. Lastly, but most fundamentally, let not the traditional historian restricted to his five or six thousand years of literate man be unmindful of the perspective that his kindred colleague, the archaeologist and prehistorian can give him, for their task is all of a piece with that of history.

Can we then in the maelstrom of conflicting value systems and different dispositions of interests discern new forces at work which may change the standpoint from which the past is likely to be judged? Certainly there will be a greater variety of histories but the straining after objectivity may give way to a realisation that not only is it *absolutely* unattainable but that it may not conform to the spirit or ethos of an age beginning to seek something more satisfying than scientific detachment. Alienated man is reacting against the gross materialism of his technologically controlled world because of its inhumanity to man and its utter soullessness. Out of this disillusionment with material values and rewards he has begun to grope for more lasting satisfactions in metaphysical speculation and in its most aesthetic expression, the fine arts. He may seek again to find in his past that which he has for the most part eschewed for a century or more, a

redemptive note which may sound a new basis for moral evaluation. Whatever the limitations, the naivete, credulity and sheer superstitions associated with and fostered by organised religion, the metaphysical notions to which it has sought to give expression have always originated in man's search for sanctions of a super natural origin. This new search for the transcendental and redemptive value of human life may find its expression and its fulfilment, if not in a new religion, then in the arts and hence in the contemplation of the abstract. This sublimation or 'etherealisation', to use a Toynbeian concept, of human endeavour for the sake primarily of aesthetic satisfaction could give to historiography a new vantage point and mode of interpretation.

If so, then may we not see the literary medium in which history has been expressed become outmoded, at least in part, in that it will be inadequate for the multifarious elements which may be thought necessary to give fuller expression to our interpretation of the human past? May not music and the arts be a more appropriate vehicle for the communication of some historical ideas?

Finally, to what end all this pother about the past? What can we make of it, if we will? This of course will depend upon us as much as upon the past; but escape it we cannot, for in a psychological sense we are confined within the limits of our historical perspective. Since we can never wipe the slate clean and start afresh, we must then reckon with history. While we may not subscribe to Hegel's view that the only lesson it teaches us is that we can learn nothing from history, we shall hesitate to argue from historical precedent. It is unlikely that we shall ever learn from what we in our hindsight may regard as mistakes of the past, since not only is such a judgment never universally shared, but circumstances alter cases and in the human situation no two comparable cases are ever quite the same.

Nor, if they could be, would we who see them be quite alike, for that which has brought about the contemporary world has also conditioned and determined us and how we shall perceive that world and its past. Moreover, our notions of the past are present notions; they constitute an essential part of consciousness and help render it intelligible. The world about us cannot be understood in virtue of its own immediate nature and activities, since it makes no sense except in the light of their antecedents. What then we are concerned about in history is the pastness of the present, and the specific task of the historian is to analyse and determine its historicity, in all its infinite variety. But, paradoxically, the point of the past lies beyond itself in the future, in the anticipation of finding the task of

enquiry and of understanding valuable and thereby rewarding in itself.

Yet not only may it be regarded as a prospective activity in the sense that any present activity must have prospective characteristics, but by revealing to ourselves the nature of our past we may incidentally be better able to determine the probabilities among the possibilities of future action. And in this respect the farther back we push our historical enquiry the greater the perspective. To think of man as part of the evolutionary development of life on this planet and history therefore as but an extension of natural history has not only the warranty of science and the scientific method but gives to historical studies a deeper and richer significance. It may increase our sense of wonder that 'man proud man 'drest in little brief authority' should have come so far in so long a time, and that his history is confined to so short a span of that immeasurable distance. And with so much knowledge of human behaviour and his environment that we can draw from other disciplines we can now ask questions of the historical evidence hitherto unlikely of answer. We shall indeed reconceive our past, not simply in terms of an interesting narrative, pleasant and valuable though that may be, but as an intellectually rewarding analysis of an aspect of reality that can heighten our appreciation of the present and its prospective tendencies. With the aid of the arts and philosophy history can recreate the immediacy of life by heightening our awareness of the now and enlarging our imaginative view of the world. For some it may even enable a self-transcendence, but for all it will offer insight into what was and is and will be, in short, into the human situation. So conceived history becomes an education in itself and needs no other justification.

Let a philosopher have the last word. 'Only through history' said Schopenhauer 'does a people become completely conscious of itself.'