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HISTORICAL FACTS

THEIR NATURE, ESTABLISHMENT AND SELECTION

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Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

ROLF GRUNER

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Rolf Gruner

Historical Facts
Their Nature, Establishment and Selection

Abstract

This work is divided into three main parts or chapters. Chapter I deals with the concepts of the basic entities with which historians are concerned. 'Fact' (something that is the case) is distinguished from 'event' (something that occurs or happens) and also from 'interpretation' or 'theory'. 'Event' is delimited from 'situation' (something which is changed by an event) as well as from 'thing' (something which is in a situation) but it is shown that the difference between the three - as well as the difference between events and 'subevents' or 'superevents' - is relative to the point of view adopted by the historian. Chapter II deals with the question of how the knowledge of simple historical facts (as opposed to connexions between facts) is acquired and validated. The general presuppositions are examined which are necessary for the inference of facts from evidence, and the concept of evidence itself is subjected to an analysis whereby the role of the interpretation of data is emphasized and distinctions are drawn between different kinds of evidence (direct and circumstantial, records and remains) and their reliability. Chapter III deals with the adequacy of whole historical reconstructions (as opposed to the adequacy of single historical statements), i.e. with the criteria for deciding whether a historian's account is adequate, or more adequate than a rival account. It is pointed out that conditions of truth alone cannot provide such criteria but that selection and emphasis play an important part, the selection and emphasis of what is 'relevant' or 'important'. These two concepts are analyzed in detail and several suggested solutions of the problem as to when something is relevant or important are examined and rejected. Finally, the concept of representativeness is introduced, explicated and put forward as a criterion of adequacy.

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INTRODUCTION

The philosophical analysis of historical knowledge has been characterized since its beginnings by the practice of comparing history with science. That this is the right approach seems now so self-evident that a well-known writer can declare that 'the raison d'être of critical philosophy of history is very closely bound up with the question whether historical inquiry is, or is not, "scientific", in a sense in which physics, biology, psychology or even applied sciences like engineering are'.¹⁾ Philosophical schools come and go, philosophical fashions and terminologies change, but the question whether history is a science has so far survived all transformations. What is more, it seems to suggest a simple and straightforward answer. Consequently, there has always been a strong tendency amongst philosophers (and amongst some historians, too) of dividing on clear lines, and although the more circumspect writers have never replied with an unqualified 'yes' or an unqualified 'no', in one way or other they have usually been counted among the sheep or the goats.

The present philosophical scene in Britain and America is no exception. On the one hand there are the 'humanists' who are convinced that what distinguishes history from science is more important than what both have in common. On the other hand there

1) W.H. Dray, Philosophy of History, Englewood Cliffs, N.J. 1964, p. 2.

are the 'naturalists' according to whom such differences are, if not negligible, at least of minor significance philosophically. The argument between both usually follows very predictable lines. The humanist looks at historical practice and finds again and again that there are great differences between what historians and scientists are doing. The concept of fact, the concept of relevance, most of all the concept of explanation are compared in both fields and the humanist comes to the conclusion that in these and other respects there are crucial differences. The naturalist starts his reply by conceding half the case to his opponent ('true, in history the position is indeed such and such') but then goes on to show that the humanist has misunderstood or misconstrued the activities of the scientist and that the differences are after all only minor ones, differences in the techniques and purposes of enquiry, not differences in methodology ('but in science, too, it is true that...'). Whatever the merits of each of the two cases, the important point is that both, humanist and naturalist, are hypnotized by this topic of similarity or dissimilarity and are incapable of averting their eyes from science for more than a short time.

From these remarks it will be seen that we are out of sympathy not only with the humanist and naturalist positions but with the whole approach which is common to both. In fact, we do not care a jot whether history is a science or not and regard this as a question which is more likely to impede a fruitful

discussion of historical knowledge than to further it (although we do not wish to deny that an occasional look at other fields, such as science or art, may be helpful). What matters is whether, and in how far, history can be viewed as a branch of rational knowledge, not whether it is a branch of scientific knowledge; and by 'rational knowledge' we understand knowledge which is capable of being supported by evidence or reasons, reasons which are not private to one individual but which, at least in principle, can be checked or shared by other people. It is one of the main errors of both, humanist and naturalist, that they tend to equate scientific knowledge with rational knowledge whereas in fact the former is only one specific kind of rational knowledge. The humanist often creates the impression that the rules and canons of rational thinking can be, or must be, dispensed with in the case of history and that history is hardly more than a kind of poetry, a poetry which has the advantage of being true. He and the naturalist agree that anything which follows these rules must be scientific, that science is the only field in which man can acquire reliable and intersubjectively testable knowledge.

To make our position still clearer let us declare once and for all that history is not a science, cannot be a science and should not be a science (whereby we mean by 'science' what is usually meant by it in present-day English), for the simple reason that if it were it would no longer be history.

However far the social sciences may advance, they will never absorb history for history in the traditional sense will always be necessary. But this history lacks most of the paraphernalia of a science. It lacks, for example, a special terminology distinct from the terminology of everyday language, and although it may borrow here and there a term from psychology, anthropology or sociology, heaven forbid the systematic adoption of scientific language by the historian which can only result in a bastard which is neither science nor history.

But although in this respect we incline to the side of the humanist, he will not be pleased. For now we go on to declare that all this does not imply that there are no means for deciding on the truth of historical statements or on the adequacy of whole historical reconstructions. It is not only scientific knowledge that is objective; it is a terrible simplification to say that whatever is not scientific is subjective, that science has a monopoly on intersubjectivity, and that either the historian is a scientist or he ^{is} a superior story-teller. History is a branch of discursive and rational knowledge. It is not knowledge based on intuition or feeling (although both come into the picture) but on intersubjective testability. It is knowledge of this sort only in so far as it can be substantiated,²⁾ and a very large part of

2) This has been expressed more strikingly in German by V.Kraft, 'Intuitives Verstehen in der Geschichtswissenschaft', Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung, Erg.bd. 11, 1929, p.28, when he says that 'Wissen ist an der Geschichte eben nur das Erweisbare'. The German term 'Wissenschaft' is more comprehensive than the English term 'science' and comes very near to what we have called

what historians write can indeed be substantiated (although maybe in a way which is different from the way in which this is possible in science).

To forestall misunderstanding, it is not that there is no room in history for improvement in respect to a greater preciseness of terms and a greater awareness of methodological presuppositions. But it is one thing to demand that the historian develop a greater theoretical and methodological consciousness, that he ask himself more often 'what exactly do I mean by this' (for example, 'what exactly do I mean when I say that the French Revolution was a revolution of the bourgeoisie?') or 'is it possible to find good reasons for asserting the opposite of what I have just said?', and it is another thing to demand that he become more science-conscious (which usually means more social science-conscious) and adopt the latest fashion and the latest jargon from sociology or psychology.

There are other widespread opinions which we do not share. There is the belief that the most important problem of historical knowledge is the problem of historical explanation (or that all other important problems can somehow be reduced to this one). But 'how do (or how should) historians explain?' is just one among many points of interest, and although it is true that some of the others, such as the role of generalizations

'rational knowledge'. Consequently, one may very well say that history is not a science without denying that it is a Wissenschaft.

in history, can be discussed within the context of explanation, it is doubtful whether this is the best way of discussing them. There is further a belief which has gained great currency within the last few years, the belief that the true form of historical organization is narration. While more and more historians write non-narrative history, more and more philosophers boldly declare that the proper or most typical task of historians consists in the telling of stories. (Some writers even try to spin a whole theory of historical knowledge out of this dogma by regarding what it is to tell and to follow a story as the central question.) Although it may be true that history has developed from epic poetry this says nothing about its true character and does not entail that it is essentially narrative. The description of past situations and states of affairs is as much part of history as the narration of past events in a time-series. Closely related to this limitation of history to story-telling is the opinion that history is always history of human actions. Again, this is an illicit confinement for history is also history of human suffering and, more general, of human situations. In principle, actions can be as little divorced from situations as situations can be from actions, but in any work of history the one or the other may be dominant.

Our concept of history is free from these and similar restrictions. Its only limitations are that by 'history' we will usually mean history as knowledge, not history as reality,

and that we shall refer by this term only to the history of men and their creations, not to the history of nature or any part of nature. Our concept is permissive also in that we will count as history what is usually counted as history, i.e. what is called by this name in the department of our universities and in the catalogues of our great libraries. This means that we do not confine ourselves to political history and do not exclude other special branches such as economic history or social history (and even such narrow fields as the history of inventions or the history of costume). But what we will usually have in mind is general history, i.e. the portrayal of a stretch of the human past in all its parts and all its aspects, as far as this is ever possible.

As will have become clear by now, the basic point of view from which this work is written is that of evidence, evidence in a rather wide sense which not only includes remains and records but also something which we will call 'general experience'. In other words, whenever we meet either with an individual historical statement or with a whole historical account, the questions we are interested in are 'Is this adequate? Is this more adequate than another statement or another account? And what are the reasons why it is adequate or more adequate?' One might think that there is no need to distinguish between the adequacy of single statements and the adequacy of whole accounts for the latter after all consist of single statements and if

every statement within an account is adequate, the whole account is adequate. This, however, would be a mistake for while the adequacy of a statement by itself consists in its truth, the adequacy of a whole account consists in something more than truth.

Individual historical statements may be divided into those which only assert that something is or was the case (statements of fact) and those which not only assert this but which relate or connect two or more facts with each other (statements of connexions between facts), e.g. by stating that one fact is in some way or other dependent on another fact. Since any satisfactory treatment of the criteria of adequacy of statements of connexions would require a book on its own (the whole complex of causality in history, for instance, would come in here) we shall leave them out of account altogether (although when we speak about the adequacy of whole historical accounts we have in mind accounts which contain both kinds of statements).

Our first chapter will be devoted to a short investigation of what can be regarded as the basic entities historians are concerned with. Here we shall analyse the concept of fact on the one hand and the concepts of event, thing and situation on the other, a task which is necessary to provide a general background for what follows. In the second chapter we shall take a close look at the problem of how historical facts can be established or supported: how can individual statements of historical facts be substantiated by evidence, or, what amounts

to the same thing, what are the criteria of their adequacy? The last chapter will deal with the adequacy of whole historical reconstructions, and this will involve us in an investigation of the criteria of selection in history and in an analysis of the notions of relevance, importance and representativeness. We do not claim that our treatment of all these points is complete or comprehensive. This is not a systematic account of historical knowledge but just one amongst many contributions to such an account, and our objective is achieved if we succeed in clarifying some points and in answering some questions.³⁾

3) As far as the literature we have consulted is concerned, the bulk of this consists in works written by British and American philosophers and published after the end of the Second World War. Since it is not possible to read everything and to take everything into account, this seemed to be a principle of selection as good as any. But we have not adhered slavishly to this self-imposed restriction but have broken it whenever we found something which we could use for our purposes. Therefore, we shall also refer to books and articles by authors who are neither British nor American (or who are not philosophers but historians or social scientists) and to work published not after but before, maybe even a long time before, the year 1945.

CHAPTER I: FACTS AND EVENTS

1. Facts

For more than fifty years facts have not enjoyed a high reputation amongst those philosophers and historians who write about the foundations of history. Facts in themselves, 'dry' or 'raw' facts, we are given to understand, are of no higher interest, and the naive preoccupation of some nineteenth century positivists with these philistine entities is recalled with horror or ridicule. True, one agrees that it is not possible to get away from facts altogether but their proper place is supposed to be more in those disciplines which are somewhat contemptuously referred to as 'ancillary' to history. It is the antiquarian, not the historian, who is mainly interested in facts.

From this one gets the impression that facts are regarded as something in the nature of a necessary evil. Understandable as this attitude may be in the light of certain developments in twentieth century philosophy and science, it goes too far. For after all, where would we be, where would history be without facts? A list of dry facts may be neither pleasing nor useful but it is at least possible to compile such a list while any historical 'interpretation' without at least some facts is more than useless, it is impossible.

What, however, are facts? Unfortunately, the attack on the preoccupation with facts is rarely accompanied by a satisfactory analysis of this concept. Facts, evidence, truth,

events, situations, objects are all thrown together, are all regarded as more or less the same thing and are all contrasted with 'synthesis' or 'theory'. So our first task must be to make some basic distinctions.

Although historians in particular are rather fond of this confusion, facts are not the same as evidence (where evidence itself can mean at least two things, the good reasons somebody has for making an assertion and the objects, physical or otherwise, which he thinks provide him with good reasons). 'You cannot ignore the facts' means as much as 'you cannot ignore the evidence for the facts'; 'he has discovered a new fact' very often stands for 'he has discovered new evidence which strongly suggests a fact that was not known before'; 'he has collected all the facts' is used instead of 'he has collected all the evidence'. Uses of 'fact' such as these may be unobjectionable in ordinary discourse but when it comes to intellectual activities of a higher order we should be aware of the difference between 'x is the case' and 'there is evidence that x is the case'.¹⁾

The mistake involved in making no distinction between facts and evidence is a special case of the confusion of facts with physical or non-physical objects, i.e. things usually referred to by nouns. But a thing or object is not a fact; Robespierre, the French Revolution, the idea of 'Liberty, Equality, Fraternity'

1) The same point is made by P. Gardiner, The Nature of Historical Explanation, London, 1952, pp. 73/74, 78 - 80.

are not facts, but that there existed a man called Robespierre, that there happened an event 'French Revolution' and that there was such an idea, all those are facts, and historical facts at that.

Closely related to the equation of facts with evidence (or good evidence) is the equation of facts with what we know on the basis of evidence or good evidence. People sometimes contrast facts with 'mere theory' or 'mere interpretation' where 'fact' means something for which we have sufficient evidence and 'theory' or 'interpretation' something for which our evidence is not sufficient or not quite sufficient. 'What you are saying is just theory but what I am saying is fact' is here the usual context. Again, this is not a correct usage of 'fact' (and for that matter not of 'theory' either). Purely speculative statements for which we have no shred of evidence may be true and so express facts while statements for which we have masses of evidence may after all be false and not express facts. 'There are men on Mars' may for all we know express a fact while 'there are men in the Easter Islands' may not.

From this it would seem that 'fact' is equivalent to 'truth' but this is also not the case. Truth, at least according to the most common interpretation, is a relation between a statement and a fact. Therefore, it cannot be fact itself. A statement is true if it corresponds to the fact

with which it purports to deal.²⁾ 'Grass is green' is true if it is a fact that grass is green but the statement or its truth is not the fact itself. If truth were the same as fact then any correspondence theory of truth would be impossible.

The most common equation, however, as far as historians and philosophers of history are concerned, is of facts with events. More often than not, when a writer speaks of historical facts what he has in mind are historical events. But again, facts and events are by no means the same. An event is something that happens, occurs, takes place (whether in the past, present or future) whereas a fact is something that is the case (or - if we think of negative facts - that is not the case). We cannot say that a fact happens or that an event is the case. A true statement states or expresses a fact^{2a)} (and, let us hope, a historical statement expresses a historical fact) but it does not express an event. It might report it or describe it but it does not express it. (We also can say that it represents a fact if we do not forget that 'represents' here is different from 'represents' in 'Mr. Smith represents the Ministry of Agriculture'.)³⁾ The battle of Waterloo is an event but that the battle of Waterloo took place is a fact.

2) See C.D.Broad, Examination of McTaggart's Philosophy, Vol.1, Cambridge, 1933, p. 77.

2a) We are, of course, aware that the phrase 'expresses a fact' raises many philosophical problems but for our purposes here (and on our level of analysis) it is not necessary to say anything about them.

3) See Gardiner, The Nature..., p. 74/5.

One might agree with this formal distinction but might say that every statement must be about an event, must refer to an event. This, however, is also a mistake. It is a fact that two and two make four, that copper is a good electrical conductor, that Louis XIV was vain, that all officers in the pre-revolutionary French navy were noblemen, but these statements do not describe or report events, i.e. something that happened, happens or will happen.

Events are confined in space and time, facts are not. If a statement expresses a fact at one time it expresses the same fact at any other time (forgetting now certain difficulties brought out by tense-logic). Events, on the other hand, do have spatio-temporal coordinates. By its very nature an event must happen at a time (or during a time-span) and at a place (or in a locality). Otherwise the notion of event would not make sense.

This spatio-temporal character entails the individuality or particularity of events. It is true, we can make statements about classes of events but the members of those classes are individuals, not other classes. Therefore, we cannot speak of general events. But we can very well speak of general facts. 'All past revolutions in Europe were followed by dictatorships' (assume this to be true) expresses a general fact but it does not report or describe what could be called a general event. It is not about an event at all; it is about a class of events. And this is by no means the same.

Another point related to the spatio-temporal character of events is that events have size, i.e. cover a larger or smaller time-span or locality. Consequently, we could speak of 'large' and 'small' events (and a small event may be much more significant than a large one) but it does not make sense to speak of large or small facts (unless we do so in a purely metaphorical way where 'large' means 'important' or 'very general' and 'small' means 'unimportant' or 'not very general').

Finally, we can speak of negative facts but what meaning could be attached to 'negative events'? If we say that something is not the case we still state a fact. But if we say that something did not happen, for example, that Hannibal did not attack the city of Rome in 216 B.C., we do not describe or report a negative event although we do state a negative fact. We cannot describe something that did not exist or occur although we can describe what did exist or occur in negative terms. One could object here by saying that for every negative description there exists an equivalent affirmative one, and vice versa, and that whether we use the one or the other is a matter of choice. In other words, one could maintain that every non-existence or non-occurrence of something is, or can be viewed as, equivalent to the existence or occurrence of something else and that, consequently, every event is, or can be viewed as, a 'non-event', that the event of Napoleon's losing the battle of Waterloo is equivalent to the non-event of his winning it. But from this example it can already be seen that the objection is not justified. For 'not winning' is not equivalent to 'losing';

Hitler's decision not to invade Britain is not equivalent to his 'non-decision' to invade it. If there were such equivalences it would be possible to write history adequately in exclusively negative terms, as an account of all that did not take place or did not exist. But such history is impossible. It is true that historians do sometimes use negative descriptions, for instance when they do not know what happened but are fairly sure that something did not happen, but they can only do so within the framework of what they know did happen. They also use negative facts when they attribute causes; that something did not occur can be a necessary condition for the fact that something else did occur, and vice versa. There are negative causes but there are no negative events.⁴⁾

2. Events, Situations, Things

So whatever position one wishes to defend in the philosophy of history, facts are not events and events are not facts.⁵⁾ History has to do with facts only in the sense

4) This is one of the reasons why A.J. Ayer, Man as a Subject for Science, London, 1964, p. 17, maintains that causal relations must hold between facts and not between events.

5) Some writers who make this distinction do so in rather queer ways. C.L. Becker, for example, maintains that a historical event is what happened in the past which is why the historian cannot deal with it (whereas Becker apparently thinks it possible to 'deal with' events that are present) but only with 'affirmations about the event', and it is an affirmation of this sort which 'constitutes for us the historical fact' (i.e. Becker confuses the affirmation of a fact with the fact itself). Since a historical event is in the past the question then arises where the corresponding historical fact is, and according to Becker it is 'in someone's

that any knowledge has to do with facts, i.e. in the sense that it is concerned with the formulation of true statements, statements that express facts. Therefore, whoever attacks or ridicules historical facts attacks or ridicules the status of history as a branch of knowledge.

There is a clear distinction between an event that in fact happened at a certain time and in a certain place and the fact that this event happened at that time and in that place.⁶⁾ All true statements reporting or describing events express facts. But not all true statements expressing facts report or describe events. For there are general facts, there are non-empirical facts^{6a)} and there are negative facts, and statements expressing any of these are not about events at all.

mind or it is nowhere'. What is implied here is that present events are facts, only past events are not. Facts turn out to be really events after all, only (that) the historian is in a position different from that of a contemporary observer. For the latter a fact can be next door, for the historian it can only be in the mind. The mistake here is that facts, and for that matter events too, are seen in analogy with, or on the same level as, chairs and apples and motor cars. See C.L. Becker 'What are Historical Facts?', H. Meyerhoff (Ed.), The Philosophy of History in Our Time, Garden City N.Y., 1959, p. 124/25.

6) Similar¹ Broad, An Examination...., p. 58.

6a) Many writers use 'fact' exclusively in the sense of 'empirical fact' and distinguish 'formal' and 'factual' knowledge. Our concept, however, is wider and allows us to speak of logical and mathematical facts.

But there are also individual, empirical and 'positive' facts expressed in statements which do not refer to events. Not all individual empirical phenomena are events. In everyday language we distinguish between things (or objects), situations (or conditions or states of affairs) and events (or occurrences or happenings). Things and situations are or exist; events happen, occur or take place. 'Smith was at home when he heard the news': Smith is the thing, being at home the situation and hearing the news the event. That which is or exists is not an event (or - as we shall see later - is in the context in question not regarded as an event). A civilization does not happen, it exists, while a war or revolution does not exist, it happens. Being sixty years of age is a situation but reaching the sixty-first year is an event. The birthday changes the situation of the person concerned into a new situation. In other words, an event is something that is viewed as introducing a change into an existing situation. Up to a certain time the situation was such and such; then something happened; and afterwards the situation was different. An event that leaves the situation, i.e. any situation, unchanged is not an event at all whatever it may be.

What is in a situation at a certain time, and whose situation is changed by an event, is the thing or object in question. (We do not need to think here only of physical objects or human beings; other things, for instance, ideas, too are in situations.) Smith is ill, i.e. a thing R is in a

situation \underline{S}_1 at time \underline{t}_1 . He takes the medicine prescribed by his doctor, i.e. an event \underline{E} happens to \underline{R} in \underline{S}_1 . He feels better, i.e. \underline{R} 's situation \underline{S}_1 is changed into a new situation \underline{S}_2 .⁷⁾ (But what if the taking of the medicine has no effect? Then we can still regard it as an event, only now in respect to some other situation.)

However, the new situation cannot be completely new. It must have at least something in common with the old situation. There must be something that remains constant, that keeps its identity,⁸⁾ and this can only be the thing concerned,

7) W.H. Riker, 'Events and Situations', The Journal of Philosophy, Vol. 54, 1957, p. 61, speaks of 'initial' and 'terminal' situations, a very happy coinage. (But he adds some restrictions which make his concept of event too narrow.) See also G.A. Birks, 'Towards a Science of Social Relations', The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science, Vol.7, 1956/57, p. 207, who, however, confines himself to one particular kind of event, to actions.

8) So already Kant in the Critique of Pure Reason, Transcendental Analytic, (Book II, Ch.2, Sect. III, 3, A: First Analogy of Experience): 'Change is but a mode of existence, which follows on another mode of existence of the same object; hence all that changes is permanent, and only the condition thereof changes.' See also M.R. Cohen The Meaning of Human History, La Salle, Ill., 1947, p. 107, and A.C. Danto, Analytical Philosophy of History, Cambridge, 1965, p. 235, F.J. Teggart, Theory and Process of History, 3rd printing, Berkeley & Los Angeles, 1962, p. 146, on the other hand emphasizes that there must be something that changes if we want to speak of an event. This is quite correct, for what changes is the situation and what remains constant is the thing. To say, however, with G.J. Renier, History. Its Purpose and Method, London, 1950, p. 104, that 'all is motion' and that, therefore, facts, states, conditions, in short 'all things are occurrences or events' is to forget that we can only speak of motion if something does not move. F.H. Bradley: 'The Presuppositions of Critical History', Collected Essays, Vol. 1, Oxford, 1935, p. 13, is more correct when he describes events as containing motion and passage, transition and connexion between elements.

i.e. that whose situation is subject to change. Smith is the same Smith in illness or in health, at home or in his office. The Russia before the October Revolution is identical with the Russia after the Revolution. Of course, we can say it is a new Russia but the fact that we still use the name 'Russia' indicates our belief in some identity and continuity of the same thing. Without this belief we could not grasp or understand at all what has happened.

So events cannot be described or reported without taking account of things and situations. On the other hand, it is very well possible to describe a situation without taking account of events. If we assume that over a stretch of time nothing changes in the situation of a thing, or if we willingly and consciously disregard all changes, then there is no need to refer in our description to events at all. Reference to the thing in question is, however, still necessary for we cannot imagine a situation as such, i.e. a situation which is not a situation of something.

From this it follows that it is misleading or false to say or to imply, as many writers do, that history is exclusively concerned with events (or, what is worse, with one kind of event, with human actions). The description of a situation is possible without reference to events, and there is nothing which prevents a historian from supplying such a description. In fact, there are eventless works of history.

Although what counts as an event, thing or situation depends on the context in question, within a given context these three elements are not shifting and can be clearly identified and distinguished from each other. It is true that in a purely physical sense it may be possible to 'reduce' things and situations to events, and if this is so then all singular statements are indeed about events.⁹⁾ This, however, is of no great importance on the level of everyday or historical discourse.¹⁰⁾ Here the distinction between events, situations and things must be upheld if we want to communicate at all in an intelligent way with each other.

One ^wshould think that the distinction between the three elements is so elementary for historians and philosophers of history that no one would fail to make it. Actually, however, there are a number of writers who do not make it or who draw the line in very strange ways. One, for example, sees in Napoleon an event¹¹⁾ while another defines a historical event as

9) So e.g. K.R. Popper, The Open Society and Its Enemies, 4th ed. (rev.), Vol. 2, London, 1962, p. 362, who defines an event as 'the common designatum of a class of mutually translatable singular statements'.

10) This point is made by A. Hofstadter, 'Generality and Singularity in Historical Judgment', The Journal of Philosophy, Vol. 42, 1945, p. 57, while the distinction between things and events is also emphasized by P. Gardiner, 'The "Objects" of Historical Knowledge', Philosophy, Vol. 27, 1952, p. 212.

11) C. Frankel, 'Explanation and Interpretation in History', Philosophy of Science, Vol. 24, 1957.

12) B. Waters, 'The Past and the Historical Past', The Journal of Philosophy, Vol. 52, 1955, p. 256.

a 'continuant', i.e. as something, for instance, a man, that 'continues to exist while its states or relations are changing',¹²⁾ which corresponds exactly to what is normally understood by a thing or object. From the fact that both things and events can have duration it does not follow that both are the same. A further view of equating things with events is that of the Dutch historian G.J. Renier¹³⁾ who, following certain pragmatists, holds that the historian's material evidence constitutes events. A pyramid, e.g., is said to be 'an event that has become concrete' and 'continues to be perceptible in the present'. But, one may ask, is there no difference between the pyramid and the building of the pyramid, between the pyramid and the burial that took place in it, etc.? At the bottom of this is, of course, the confusion of evidence with that for which it is evidence.

The equation of situation and event is perhaps not quite as common as that of thing and event but it still occurs. M. Mandelbaum,¹⁴⁾ for example, thinks that economic conditions and interests can be events or - to be more precise - subevents which form part of a larger event, the enactment of a bill. Since the enactment is of shorter duration than the economic conditions and interests in question Mandelbaum is driven to the

13) Renier, History, pp. 98, 156 - 58.

14) M. Mandelbaum, The Problem of Historical Knowledge, New York, 1938, pp. 257/58.

strange view that a subevent can be larger than its superevent which is very much like saying that the part can be greater than the whole.

3. Events and Time

It has been indicated before that whether something is regarded as an event, thing or situation is in a certain sense relative, i.e. depends on the context in question. This has to be explicated in greater detail but before we do so some preliminary remarks are necessary. As many authors, historians and philosophers alike, have pointed out reality is continuous; there is a continuous stream of 'something going on'¹⁵⁾ and only by mental activity do we isolate and distinguish - and so emphasize - certain points within this process. It is the mind which cuts up the continuum, and this is the only way to come to grips with empirical reality at all. In order to experience the world we have to distinguish individual phenomena from each other. Differentiation and segmentation are inevitable.¹⁶⁾ But it is

15) This phrase is used by W.R. Matthews 'What is an Historical Event?', Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, N.S., Vol. 38, 1937/38, p. 210, who adds that this 'something going on' is all that is distinguished in original primitive consciousness. But is there such a thing as original primitive consciousness? It is very doubtful whether anybody or anything, even a very small child or an animal, does experience reality as an indifferentiated process. To have memory, for example, probably already presupposes some differentiation.

16) To say that empirical reality is a continuum does not entail the doctrine that Nature makes no jumps which 'is as obsolete as Nature abhors a Vacuum' (M.R. Cohen, Reason and Nature, 2nd ed., New York & London, 1964, p. 139). It only entails

just as well to remember that mental activity is indeed involved here, that history is not 'a series of atomic occurrences separated from each other by empty time-space intervals'¹⁷⁾ and that things and situations are never completely static but that there is change all the time.

Two features must be distinguished in this respect. Firstly, the continuum is not linear in character. More than one event, thing or situation happens or exists at any one time. Not all of them are known to us and of those which are known we only take some into account in any one context and ignore the others. We behave as if the rest did not exist for we cannot deal with all elements at once, not even with all known ones. Secondly, how we delimit our elements, where we make the cuts in the continuum is also decided by us and not imposed upon us by reality. Two events which are separate for some purpose may form one single event for another purpose¹⁸⁾ and the same holds for things and situations.

From this relativity of what constitutes an event, thing or situation some writers have drawn idealist conclusions. Since only certain elements are picked out and since the delimitation of these elements is relative to context and purpose

the view that something is going on all the time, that there are no periods and places where nothing happens.

17) Cohen, The Meaning..., p. 107.

18) Ibid., p.108.

it is tempting to see in them altogether mental constructions or even falsifications of reality¹⁹⁾ with no existence outside the mind. If to this is added the constructional features in the building up of historical facts from evidence a fully grown historical idealism seems unavoidable.

However, these conclusions are not justified. First of all, the argument is not an argument in favour of historical idealism but of idealism schlechthin. It applies not only to the past but also to the present and the future, and it applies not only to human affairs but to the affairs of nature as well. The man in the street and the scientist, too, break up the continuum in manageable elements. But, more fundamental, what sense can it have to say that events, things and situations do not 'really' exist? And does their non-existence in any sense follow from the fact that the delimitation is selective and relative to some context? One can divide an apple in two, three, four parts depending on how many people are going to share it. Does this

19) So, for example, Matthews, 'What is...', pp. 213/14, in respect of historical events. On the other hand, views such as those of R. Aron, Introduction to the Philosophy of History, 2nd impr., London, 1961, p. 41 (the pure event exists only for a consciousness), R. Aron, 'Evidence and Inference in History', D. Lerner (Ed.), Evidence and Inference, 2nd printing, New York, 1962, p. 36 (the unity of an event is constructed, not experienced), or Riker, 'Events...', pp. ~~59, 69~~ 59, 69 (the separation of events is a subjective structuring of reality) can be construed in a non-idealist sense, the sense in which Bradley, 'The Presuppositions...', p. 13, writes that events 'though the offspring of the mind, ...are still independent and real'.

mean that the halves, thirds or quarters do not really exist, that they are constructions of the mind, or that they did not exist before the divisions were made, when the apple was still intact? Posing these questions is to answer them. From the fact that we have to categorize reality and that we categorize selectively and in different ways no idealist conclusions can be drawn.

Events happen at certain times. What is more, they must happen at certain times if they are to happen at all. So without time no events. But the converse is also true: without events no time. For if there were no events there could be no sense of time.²⁰⁾ In a world in which nothing happened there would be no change and, consequently, no time. But some people do not think that change is tied to events in this way, and if they are right then time would only presuppose change but not events. Change, according to R.M. MacIver,²¹⁾ 'need not manifest itself in any event or series of events'. Now this may be true (depending on what we mean by 'manifest'), especially in the light of what we said before about reality as a continuous process. But the point is that change can only be apprehended in terms of events. A plant grows so gradually that I cannot see it growing. At some specific point or other,

20) See L.S. Stebbing, 'Some Ambiguities in Discussions Concerning Time', R. Klibansky & H.J. Paton (Eds.), Philosophy & History, Essays Presented to Ernst Cassirer, New York, 1963, p. 115.

21) R.M. MacIver, Social Causation, New York..., 1964, p. 125.

however, I must notice the difference in size if I am to notice the change at all, a point already made by Leibniz. In other words, I apprehend the change as a difference between two situations, \underline{S}_1 at time \underline{t}_1 and \underline{S}_2 at time \underline{t}_2 , and this is exactly what constitutes an event. The fact that I know that there was no big bang when the plant changed its size suddenly but that the growth took place gradually does not affect the fact that I can only apprehend the change in the form of an event (or of a series of events).

So change, or the apprehension of change, presupposes events and events presuppose time. But the concept of time also presupposes events. Therefore, the question as to what is more basic, events or time, is a question of the hen and egg sort. There is, however, another question which is more fertile. Do events have extension in time? We have seen that they must happen in time, but must they have duration, must they be 'time-extended'?²²⁾ Some authors maintain that by definition an event must have duration²³⁾ whereas according to others it cannot have duration.²⁴⁾ The position which will be defended here is that some events have duration, that others have none

22) This expression is used by Danto, Analytical Philosophy..., p. 115.

23) So, for example, Mandelbaum, The Problem..., pp. 222, 255, who quoting C.D. Broad defines an event as 'anything that endures at all' and as 'pervaded by a special unity and continuity'. Similar Matthews, 'What is...', p. 213, according to whom every event must have a beginning, middle and end.

24) An event is defined by Aron, Introduction..., p.41, as that 'which passes through existence at the imperceptible boundary separating two instants'.

and that in some cases we can view an event as having or as not having duration.

G. Ryle²⁵⁾ has drawn attention to certain words which indicate 'achievements', i.e. which refer to the successful or unsuccessful outcome of an activity. The success is realized at the unextended point when the activity is completed, not a moment before and not a moment after. Since statements about achievements are statements about events it follows that here we have events which are not time-extended, and, what is more, cannot be time-extended because of their logical character. In 'Napoleon lost the battle of Waterloo' the event in question is Napoleon's losing or defeat, and it does not make sense to allocate a certain time-span to the losing. Agreed, in ordinary discourse we do not always stick to this. Napoleon when asked towards the last stages of the fighting what he was doing might very well have replied 'I am losing a battle'. But it is possible to construe this as a shorthand version of something like 'I am fighting a battle and it very much seems that I shall lose'. In this way the thesis that losing is not time-extended can be upheld.

On the other hand, in 'Napoleon fought the battle of Waterloo' we can only regard the event, the fighting, as taking time. Now, in order to lose a battle one has to fight one. In

25) G. Ryle, The Concept of Mind, Harmondsworth^S, 1963, pp.125/26, 143-47, 283-86.

other words, the losing, the outcome of an activity, entails the fighting, the activity of which it is an outcome, but not vice versa. One can very well fight a battle without losing it. Therefore, events with no duration presuppose events with duration. This, however, may be disputed for, as again shown by Ryle, there seem to be achievements which do not follow certain activities. A man may find a treasure without having looked for it, a sea captain may discover an island by chance. But the question is whether achievements of this type do not after all take some time. Ryle does not think so because we cannot, for instance, see something slowly or rapidly, systematically or haphazardly.²⁶⁾ This argument, however, is not quite convincing. The fact that we do not use 'see' etc. in this way is consistent with the assumption that the duration involved is here so minute that we do not take it into account, in a way similar to that in which we would not take into account the time which elapses before the light rays coming from a source reach our eyes if science had not told us that there is a time interval. There is nothing illogical in the supposition that one person sees things more quickly than another person but there is something illogical in the supposition that it takes time to lose a battle in contradistinction to the time it takes to fight it.

To find, to discover, to see something, even if one

26) Ibid, p.145.

has not looked for it, may after all be viewed as something that does not happen instantaneously in that perception can be seen as a process with several stages, from light rays meeting the eye to the point where we become conscious of 'something there'. It is, however, not recognizing the object in question as what it is which matters here. One may find a treasure without being aware that it is a treasure one has found. But finding it does entail one's awareness of having found something, and it is this awareness which can be viewed as taking time, however little. Therefore, we can stick to our thesis that events which are not time-extended presuppose events that are.

In any case, there are events with duration and there are events without duration. But there are also events that can be viewed as of either kind. In 'Smith died yesterday at 7 p.m. exactly' the event of Smith's death is seen as having taken place at one unextended point in the time-scale, while in 'Smith died a slow and agonizing death' the event of Smith's death is time-extended. Death is not an achievement; it is not the successful or unsuccessful outcome of anything (it would be odd to see in death the unsuccessful outcome of life) in the way in which losing a battle is the unsuccessful outcome of fighting a battle. The difference between the two views of the same event, Smith's death, is a difference of delimitation or definition. A physician may pinpoint death to a precise time according to certain precise criteria, for example, when the heart stops beating, while the layman is more permissive and thinks of

something in the nature of a process which may have a definite termination but has no definite beginning (unless one sees in the 'point of no return' the beginning, i.e. the point at which death becomes a certainty, e.g. because certain organs have decomposed too far). Other examples can be found in the legal sphere. 'I bought a house' may mean for the lawyer signing the deeds (to be more exact, the last stroke of the pen which completes the sale), i.e. the event is not time-extended, but for me it means an event with duration which includes viewing, paying, signing etc. The beginning of a war may be pinpointed in international law to the moment when the declaration of war takes effect but it may also be seen as an unfolding process.

A further point in respect of the difference between events with and without duration is that the former may be continuous or discontinuous while for the latter the question of continuity does not arise. An event is discontinuous²⁷⁾ in that it does not go on all the time but has its stops and starts. Revolutions are usually discontinuous in this sense. The people concerned do not revolutionize all the time in a revolution; they have other things to do in between. A war may be viewed as

27) The term is used by Danto, Analytical Philosophy..., pp.165/66. It may be that a discontinuous event (as discontinuous as the writing of a book) can after all be viewed as continuous because it may be that even then something goes on all the time (e.g. the intention to continue with and to finish the book). Nevertheless, there undoubtedly is a difference between events of this kind and events (such as a wheel rolling down a hill) which are continuous in a literal sense.

continuous if we adopt the position of international law according to which the state of war lasts without interruption from its declaration to the signing of an armistice or peace treaty. But for the normal man, including the historian, a war, too, is usually discontinuous (and there are times and places where in any case wars are not governed by international law which makes all legal criteria of continuity inapplicable). The armies in the affected countries did not wage war without interruption for thirty years, from 1618 to 1648.²⁸⁾

It has been said that events without duration cannot be described but only reported.²⁹⁾ This, however, cannot be taken to mean that such a report can take one and only one form. Instead of saying 'Napoleon lost the battle of Waterloo' I may express the same fact differently by saying 'Napoleon's army was beaten at Waterloo' or even 'Napoleon's quest for European

28) Danto thinks that the difference between continuous and discontinuous events may be a difference of degree. I.e., a continuous event, if analysed minutely, may be found to be discontinuous after all which in turn would mean that all time-extended events are discontinuous. This, however, depends on the point of view adopted. For a lawyer a certain war is continuous no matter what are the results of any detailed analysis.

29) W. Fales, 'Historical Facts', The Journal of Philosophy, Vol. 48, 1951, p. 87 - There is also the other possibility of regarding a statement which simply asserts that a phenomenon E happened or existed as a report, while a statement which asserts that E had a certain feature or property is called a description. But then one could say that a description is a report of the existence of such a feature, and so one would not have gained much.

supremacy was defeated on the battlefield of Waterloo'. In respect to different possibilities of this kind there is no difference between reports and descriptions. Further, a dichotomy of reporting and describing is only possible if a rather narrow concept of description is adopted, one according to which a description must consist of more than one statement. But commonly the term is used in a much wider sense in that any true empirical statement can be said to describe something, and if so reports are at the most a special kind of description.

Another distinction which might be mentioned here is that between events characterized by statements and events characterized by individual names or definite descriptions. According to C.G. Hempel only the former are capable of being explained whereas the latter, events such as the Children's Crusade, the October Revolution, the assassination of Caesar, are not susceptible of explanation, 'indeed it is unclear what could be meant by explaining such an event'.³⁰⁾ The reason for this, in the opinion of Hempel, is that any such event has infinitely many aspects which make a full description and, therefore, an explanation impossible. 'Caesar's

30) C.G. Hempel, 'Reasons and Covering Laws in Historical Explanation', S. Hook (Ed.), Philosophy and History. A Symposium, New York, 1963, p. 150. A similar opinion is expressed by M. Levich, (Review of) 'Philosophy and History: A Symposium', History and Theory, Vol.4, 1964/65, pp. 340/41, who, however, thinks that such events can be interpreted.

assassination' includes the facts that it was plotted by Brutus and Cassius, that both these men were in certain political positions, etc., up to such facts that with every breath we inhale some molecules exhaled by Caesar in his dying breath.

This argument is not satisfactory for two reasons. The first is that an event characterized by a statement has infinitely many aspects too. To cite Hempel's own example for such an event, 'the particular rolling i of the four dice yielded a total of more than four dots facing up' does not tell us anything about the particular shapes of the dots as seen under the microscope, about the precise movements the dice took in i, etc. If it is objected that the statement concerned was not about those aspects and that, therefore, their inclusion would be irrelevant, then we can reply that the expression 'Caesar's assassination' too does not refer to who plotted it but only to the fact that Caesar was assassinated (and did not die, for example, in his bed of pneumonia) which means that the plotting is equally irrelevant.

The second and more fundamental criticism is that there is nothing which prevents historians from reformulating an individual name or definite description characterizing an event into a statement characterizing the same event, and vice versa. 'Caesar was assassinated, and this led to the establishment of the Imperium' can be expressed without loss or change of meaning as 'Caesar's assassination led to the establishment of the Imperium'. This has to do with the fact that historical terms

which refer to events, things or situations have 'existential import'. Using the name 'Caesar' implies for a historian that there was such a man, and by speaking of Caesar's assassination he commits himself to the view that this assassination did in fact take place. Of course, statements such as 'Caesar did not exist' or 'Caesar was not assassinated' are not meaningless. They only amount to an explicit denial that 'Caesar' or 'Caesar's assassination' have existential import. In other words, they amount to a denial that these terms are historical terms, a denial which, so to speak, puts them outside history. But if a term is historical in character then it can be replaced by a statement in which a verb such as 'occurred', 'happened', 'took place', 'was', 'existed' appears.

Although it may not be possible to explain the existence of Caesar but only the existence of certain of his characteristics it is perfectly possible to explain Caesar's assassination, i.e. to explain why this event happened and not only why it had such and such features. In fact, in some cases it may be possible to explain the occurrence or existence of something but impossible to explain certain of its characteristics (and here we must also not forget that the explanation of a specific feature or characteristic can be construed as an explanation of existence or occurrence, for what is explained in this case can be regarded as the existence or occurrence of just this feature). All this must lead to the conclusion that whether we can explain something or not does not depend on the form of

the linguistic expression which is used to characterize the explanandum, at least not in the sense in which Hempel thinks it does.

4. Events and Subevents

It is easy to see that as far as history is concerned time-extended events are far more common than events without duration. Indeed, the latter can be regarded as the exception. But when an event has duration there may be other events which are part of it. Following M. Mandelbaum³¹⁾ let us call these smaller ones subevents of the larger event of which they are parts. These subevents, in as far as they are themselves time-extended, may be found to have further subevents, and so on, while on the other hand one will most probably also find one or more other events of which the larger event itself is a subevent, etc. If the event we start with is Smith's going to his bank, then this - a time-extended event - can be seen as 'consisting' of other events, such as the events of leaving the house, crossing

31) Mandelbaum, The Problem..., p. 222. It must be pointed out, however, that Mandelbaum's concept of a subevent is different from ours in that he seems to have in mind a horizontal division of an event while our division is vertical. 'Horizontal' is here applied to strands of an event which go through its whole length or duration (and, according to Mandelbaum, may even start before and end after the event; see text to note 14) above) while 'vertical' refers to sections which are not co-terminous with the event in question but are of shorter duration. The history of an individual soldier throughout a battle is coterminous with the battle and, therefore, a horizontal subevent while a particular engagement within the battle would be a vertical subevent. We are concerned here only with the latter.

the road, etc. Crossing the road, then, is a subevent of going to the bank, but it has subevents itself, for example, the events of stepping off the pavement, looking to the right towards an approaching vehicle, etc. The whole event we started with, Smith's going to the bank, can itself be seen as a subevent of a still larger event, e.g. of Smith's spending a whole day in town.

This distinction between events and subevents is very obvious to the historian. The killing of de Launay, governor of the Bastille, is a subevent of the storming of this fortress which itself is a subevent of the overthrow of the French monarchy which in turn is a subevent of the French Revolution. It may be the case that every time-extended event has subevents and that it is itself a subevent of at least one other event.³²⁾ What is certain is that the duration of a subevent must be shorter than that of the event of which it is a part.³³⁾

However, this picture of a 'hierarchy'³⁴⁾ of events and subevents is as yet much too tidy. It is more in the nature of a model than of an adequate description of reality. First of all, not everything that happens during the duration of an event is one of its subevents. Events in America during the time of the French Revolution are not subevents of the French Revolution nor even are

32) So Cohen, The Meaning...., p. 107.

33) This seems self-evident but, as we pointed out before, Mandelbaum holds that a subevent may be of longer duration.

34) This term is used by P. Meadows, 'The Scientific Use of Historical Data', Philosophy of Science, Vol. 11, 1944, p.54.

all events in France itself subevents. This is obvious and follows from what was said before about the discontinuity of events. There can be 'holes' in an event E which are filled with other events, events that themselves cannot be viewed as subevents of E although they may be subevents of some other event. If someone falls in love during a revolution, then this is not a subevent of the revolution.

Another complication is related to the existence of 'projects' and the use of '(project verbs',³⁵⁾ Smith may have written a book and courted a widow all during June. Both events concern the same individual, both are contemporaneous with each other, but neither is a subevent of the other. Both may be subevents of a third event (which shows that subevents can be contemporaneous but need not be) but equally well each may be a subevent of a completely different event. What is more, these two possibilities are not mutually exclusive for one and the same event may be a subevent of each of two other events which in turn are not subevents of each other. There are even cases where of two contemporaneous events E₁ and E₂ the event E₁ is a subevent of another event E₃ while E₂ is not, and E₃ in turn is a subevent of a further event E₄ of which E₂ itself is a subevent. In brief, many kinds of multiple relations, shortcuts and cross connexions are possible here so that in the end we do not get tidy hierarchical or classificatory systems but much more complex structures. We must beware of picturing the real

35) See Danto, Analytical Philosophy...., p. 165.

state of affairs as too orderly and regular.

This explication in terms of events and subevents gives rise to an interesting point respecting the use of the word 'present'. A present event (and we are now speaking only about ~~time~~-extended events) is an event that, so to speak, has not finished yet. It stretches from the past into the future³⁶⁾ and connects both with each other³⁷⁾ in that the past contains some of its subevents and the future contains others. We use the word 'present' in connexion with any event further subevents of which we still expect to happen, irrespective³ how long ago the event started. The duration of the present is thus relative to the event we have in mind.³⁸⁾ In 'the present quarrel between Britain and Rhodesia' the present started in November 1965 while in 'the present decline of religious faith' it started in the nineteenth or eighteenth century, depending on taste. A present event has subevents some of which are in the past while others are in the future. Therefore, 'E is present' does not entail that all of its subevents are present. What holds for the whole does not necessarily hold for its parts.

We have to distinguish between the relations of events and subevents on the one hand and the relations between subevents

36) Ibid., p.147.

37) Cohen, The Meaning..., pp. 63/64.

38) A similar view is expressed by L. von Mises, Theory & History, London, 1958, pp. 202/03

themselves on the other. The subevents of an event are by necessity related in that they are all subevents of the same event. But apart from this they may be related in many other ways.³⁹⁾ They, i.e. the complete set of subevents of an event E or part of the set, may also be subevents of another event different from E and perhaps not related to E as event or subevent. They also may be causally related although it is doubtful whether all subevents of E can be causally related with each other.

As to the relations between events and subevents, however, we have to distinguish these very sharply from causal relations. They are conceptual in character and have no causal features whatsoever. Indeed, a relation of this kind can be said to be analytic (in some sense of this protean word) in that an event is defined by its subevents. To say that the storming of the Bastille is a subevent of the French Revolution entails that the meaning of the term 'French Revolution' includes amongst other things the storming of the Bastille. However, if this view is rigorously upheld it implies that whenever a new subevent of an event E is discovered the name of E changes its meaning. It implies further that no two historians ever use the name of an event, for instance, the name 'French Revolution', in the same sense for it is most improbable that they have in

(39) Mandelbaum, The Problem..., p. 276, seems to think that they cannot be related in any other way.

mind exactly the same subevents when they speak of the French Revolution. This seems an extremely narrow view and, therefore, it is preferable not to make all subevents part of the definition of an event but only the more obvious ones which are generally known or can be assumed to be generally known. This saves us from the embarrassment of assuming that we change the meaning of our terms all the time. Otherwise, if it turned out that some soldier who was believed to have stayed alive in the First World War was actually killed, then this new subevent would change the meaning of the expression 'First World War', a rather odd result.

To return to the distinction between causal connexions and event-subevent relations. An event the occurrence of which is regarded as a causal condition of an event E cannot be a subevent of E. For according to our normal understanding a cause must be temporally prior to its effect (prior at least in part) but no subevent of E can occur prior to E if, by definition, it occurs during the duration of E.⁴⁰⁾ The difference can also be expressed in the following terms. The more subevents we know of an event E the better we know E itself, i.e. the better we know what E is or was. But this does not mean that we also know E better in the sense of

40) Mandelbaum is of exactly the opposite opinion (ibid., p.225). For him the complete set of subevents of E is the cause of E. This view can only be defended if the meanings of 'cause' and 'effect' are changed beyond recognition.

knowing better why E happened⁴¹⁾ although knowledge of E in the first sense may be a necessary precondition of knowledge of E in the second sense.

Similar considerations apply when the relationship goes in the other direction. We can say that an event E is better known if we know other events E₁, E₂, E_n of which E is a subevent. It may be objected that if we have any knowledge of E at all we know ipso facto at least some of its superevents. This is true in some but not in all cases. The battle of Verdun is, of course, a subevent of the First World War and there was no time after the beginning of the battle when we did not know this. But when it comes to more remote periods it may be very enlightening to discover that a certain battle was part of a certain war which had not previously been associated with it. Our knowledge of the battle (and our knowledge of the war as well) is increased by our knowledge that the battle was a subevent of the war.

The procedure which is described by W.H. Walsh under the name 'colligation' seems to be in all essentials a way of increasing our knowledge of an event by finding that it is a subevent of one or more larger events. At least this interpretation is suggested when Walsh refers to colligation

41) So also Fales, 'Historical Facts', pp.89/90. A similar view is expressed by H. Gomperz, Interpretation, The Hague & Chicago, 1939, p.7, who speaks here of two different kinds of interpretation.

as 'the procedure of explaining an event by tracing its intrinsic relations to other events and locating it in its historical context.'⁴²⁾ Whatever 'intrinsic relations' may be, the bit about the location in context fits our analysis in terms of events and subevents very well. But Walsh thinks that his colligation only works where the events involved are human actions and that, therefore, the procedure is specific to the historian. We do not make any such restrictions. The historian is not only concerned with events that are actions (nor is the historian the only one who is concerned with such events) and events that are not actions can be subjected to the same procedure.⁴³⁾

Some historians have described the process of arriving at a large-scale event (or at the concept of a large-scale event), an event such as the French Revolution, as a process of

42) W.H. Walsh, An Introduction to the Philosophy of History, 7th impr., London, 1964, p.59.

43) W.G.^H Dray, 'Explaining What' in History', P. Gardiner (Ed.), Theories of History, 5th printing, New York, 1964, pp. 276 & 285, describes a procedure similar to Walsh's colligation but with similar limitations. There is also the question whether colligation amounts to an explanation of the event concerned as is claimed both by Dray and Walsh (although Walsh sees in it an incomplete explanation which has to be supplemented by other procedures). It is, of course, a matter of choice how wide we want to make our concept of explanation but perhaps it leads to less confusion if we reserve this title for relations not between events and their subevents (or subevents and their superevents) but between events that are not subevents of each other.

generalizing subevents into larger wholes.⁴⁴⁾ However, to use the words 'generalizing' or 'generalization' in this context is misleading. Not only is the relation between event and subevents not a relation, and not analogous to a relation, between classes and class members, but also the word 'generalization' commonly refers to statements and not to terms. Terms may be general but they are not generalizations. And terms referring to events (in contradistinction to terms referring to classes of events) are not general in the sense that they refer to more than one individual. 'French Revolution' is an individual term or proper name, not a general term. Of course, if 'general' means 'wide', 'large-scale', 'covering a large temporal or spatial area', then 'French Revolution' is general, or at least more general than, say, the death of Robespierre. But one should be careful not to confuse these two different usages of the word.

Even if we avoid 'generalize' and its derivatives and use some other expression, e.g. 'summarize',⁴⁵⁾ there remain some difficulties. It may be true to say that subevents are summarized into an event, but only as far as the origin of the concept of the event in question is concerned. Nobody could have had the concept of the Thirty Years War in 1618. Only after

44) So, for example, S.H. Beer, 'Causal Explanation and Imaginative Re-Enactment', History and Theory, Vol.3, 1963/64, p.19.

45) So, e.g., Renier, History, p.23.

the end of this war a number of events on a smaller scale were summarized or united into one event, the Thirty Years War. But this does not mean that any historian today proceeds in this manner. He comes upon the event ready-made when he starts his studies, and only gradually, by learning more and more about its subevents, does he give it flesh and blood. Therefore, to say that such an event, or the concept of it, is the summary of its subevents is misleading in that it might be understood to mean that we cannot use the name of an event unless we know which subevents are going into it.

Closely associated with the view just discussed, or a further development of this view, is the opinion that large-scale events do not 'really' exist but that only their subevents have existence. This is sometimes called 'historical pluralism' and it asserts in essence that if there are different things A, B, C and we refer to them together as 'G', then although 'G' has meaning G has no existence.⁴⁶⁾ This raises a whole host of well-known philosophical problems but here we only need to

46) This view is adopted, albeit with qualifications, by H.J. Phillips, 'Historical Skepticism', The Journal of Philosophy, Vol. 44, 1947, pp. 452/53. E.J. Tapp, 'Knowing the Past', The Journal of Philosophy, Vol. 55, 1958, p. 466, too, sees in the 'generalization' of subevents into events a 'falsification'. - Incidentally, the view discussed here is not identical, and should not be mixed up, with the thesis that only individuals have existence while concepts of social collectives or social 'wholes' are theoretical constructs.

say the following. If on those reasons the existence or reality of a rather large-scale event is denied then the existence or reality of its subevents must be denied as well. Why should the French Revolution be a mental construction while the storming of the Bastille is not? The latter event, too, has subevents which in turn have subevents themselves, etc. Even directly observable actions of individuals cannot be taken as the last, the 'real' elements. Indeed, there are no last elements in this series although there are boundaries as far as our power of analysis is concerned. If a large-scale event is a construction of the mind then any time-extended event is a construction of the mind. In this respect there are no first and second class citizens in the republic of events.

On the other hand, the seemingly opposite view that a historical event is a whole, a unity, which cannot be 'reduced' to 'atomic units'⁴⁷⁾ is likewise misleading. True, in this case reality is not denied to subevents as it is denied to large-scale events by historical pluralism. But what does it mean to say that an event is an irreducible whole? Obviously, it cannot mean that it is not definable or identifiable by reference to all or some of its subevents for it can be so defined or identified. But if it does not mean this then we are left with the rather trivial point that an event has properties which are not shared by any of its subevents. The point is trivial in that as a matter of course whenever we form the concept of an individual

47) Mandelbaum, The Problem..., p. 279.

(and for that matter of a class as well) then that individual must have some property or predicate (or at least we must think that it has such a property or predicate). Otherwise we simply would and could not form the concept.⁴⁸⁾ Therefore, to say that every event must have unity can be regarded as making an analytic statement. The only interesting point is whether we can choose ourselves which events we wish to bring under the comprehensive heading of another event - how we split up and delimit the continuum of reality - or whether we are forced to do this in one way rather than in another by the character of the material we deal with. The view here defended is that we are not so forced.

Since every subevent is itself an event what has been said of the relations between events, situations and things holds also for subevents. But we can go a step further than this and point out that the two situations (initial and terminal) relative to an event are different from the two situations relative to any of its subevents. The French Revolution changed the ancien régime but a subevent of the French Revolution, e.g. the storming of the Bastille, alone does not change the ancien régime but a different situation, the revolutionary state of France prior to the storming. More generally, an event cannot share both its initial and terminal situations with any of its

48) Phillips, 'Historical Skepticism', p. 455, expresses this by saying that for any event there must be something that is true of it, i.e. true of all of it.

subevents (although it may share one of them, if we think of a subevent which comes right at the beginning - or is the beginning - of the event in question or which comes right at its end - or is its end).

The matter is different, however, in respect of the thing whose situation is changed. Here it depends solely on the point of view adopted whether the thing relative to an event is identical with the thing relative to one of its subevents. If Smith suffers an injury to his knee we can refer to this event as an injury to Smith's knee, an injury to Smith's leg, an injury to Smith himself. I.e., the thing whose situation is changed by the injury can be seen as the knee, the leg or the whole person, to select some out of many possibilities. Similarly, the storming of the Bastille changed a situation but it is possible to view this situation as being the situation of revolutionary France, of France itself or of Europe, to mention again only some of many possible choices. In short, as far as things are concerned, we are always free to 'jump levels', to conceive the item whose situation changes widely or narrowly, and there is nothing which forces us to do the one or the other or to select just one subject of a situation out of many possible ones.

5. The Relativity of Events

We said that an event is bounded by an initial and a terminal situation. A situation \underline{S}_1 prevails, something happens

and thereby \underline{S}_1 is changed into a new situation \underline{S}_2 . But if an event changes a situation and if there are events and subevents, i.e. events of different levels, then what is viewed in a specific case as the situation which changes depends on what is viewed as the event that changes it, and vive versa. The French Revolution changed the situation called 'ancien régime' into a new situation called, for example, the 'age of nationalism' (or 'liberalism' or 'democracy', etc.), while the fall of Danton, a subevent of the French Revolution, also changed a situation, a situation that could be described as, say, 'the distribution of power amongst the Jacobins before Danton's fall'. This means that there are situations within events, i.e. situations that are of shorter duration than events, which is one of the reasons why we cannot adopt the length of duration as a criterion for distinguishing events from situations.⁴⁹⁾

What is more important, however, is that an event itself (and we are still speaking only about time-extended events) can be viewed as a situation. Smith going to his bank is an event relative to two situations \underline{S}_1 (Smith being at home) and \underline{S}_2 (Smith being at another place away from home) but it is itself a situation \underline{S}_1 relative to some other event, e.g. the event of meeting a friend on the way which changes the original situation of going to the bank into a new situation \underline{S}_2 , e.g.

49)^{As)} M.G. White, 'The Logic of Historical Narration', S. Hook (Ed.), Philosophy and History, New York, 1963, p.6, seems inclined to do.

going to a café. In history the position is quite the same. The French Revolution itself can be viewed as a situation which was changed into a new situation, e.g. by the events of the formation of the Directory or of Napoleon becoming First Consul. But it can likewise be viewed as an event which changed the situation of France or Europe.

Why, however, distinguish situations and events at all; why not say simply that one situation changes into another situation or (if we prefer to speak in terms of events) that one event is followed by another event? In short, why not view all historical phenomena as events or all of them as situations? The reason why we cannot do this is that the terms 'event' and 'situation' are complementary, i.e. using the word 'event' is presupposing the existence of different situations, and vice versa. And this in turn has to do with the fact that we can experience reality only if we distinguish that which changes and loses its identity from that which does not change but remains the same and both from that which introduces, or is responsible for, the change. But the important point is that one and the same item can play each of these roles in different contexts. The French Revolution can be seen as that which inaugurates a change, a change in the social and political situation of eighteenth century France or Europe, and if seen in this way it is an event. It can also be seen as that which changes in the sense that it becomes something else. A revolutionary condition changes into a condition in which law and order reign once more,

although now law and order of a different kind. If viewed in this way the Revolution is a situation. Finally, it can be seen as something which is not a situation but is in a situation, i.e. as something that does not change in the sense of losing its identity but whose situation changes. For instance, the constitutional phase of the Revolution can be distinguished from the legislative phase. Both are passing situations of the same thing, the French Revolution, and here ^{it} is the Revolution that remains the same. What changes is its situation.

A remark is here necessary on our usage of the word 'change'. 'Change' is ambiguous in the sense that 'x changed' can mean either (a) 'x has become y and is no longer x' or (b) 'x is no longer in state S₁ but is now in state S₂'. In other words, change can mean change of identity (identity in some loose sense) or change of state (situation). 'Ulysses' companions were changed into pigs' means that they lost their old identities and acquired new ones. 'He has changed very much since I saw him last' (he then was a young man and now he is old) means that the state he is in now is different from the state he was in before. When we speak of change here in the context of things,

events and situations we have in mind change in sense (a).

So our three elements are relative to each other. They all have duration; they are 'temporal structures'.⁵⁰⁾ In the expression 'the history of x' x must be a temporal structure for only temporal structures can have histories. Usually, x will be a temporal structure with thing-character, i.e. it is seen under the 'thing-aspect'. In a book called The History of England we expect to be told something about a thing, England, something that throughout its history keeps its identity although it changes its situations. The same holds for The History of the Printing Press, The History of the German Middle Class, The History of Portrait Engraving in Italy, etc., but it also holds for The History of the French Revolution, The History of the First World War or The History of the Fall of Sevastopol. In the latter cases, however, it is

50) This term is adopted from Danto, Analytical Philosophy..., p.167.

likely that at least in the first part of the book the subject is treated not as a thing but as an event, as something which interfered with and changed an existing situation. The historian of the First World War will probably first give a picture of the situation before the outbreak of the war, i.e. he will treat the war as an event which changed this situation. But then he will treat the war no longer as something that changes something else but as something whose situations change themselves. He will treat it as a thing.

Not all historical works, however, are histories of something. There are books about historical subjects written by historians which are not histories of those subjects. Daily Life in Ancient Rome, England in the Fifteenth Century, The Culture of the Renaissance in Italy, The State of French Art under Louis XIV. all these are or may be titles of works which treat their subjects neither as things nor as events but as situations. They may be descriptions of a variety of features within a state

of affairs which is by and large viewed as static, as not undergoing change. Usually it is events which are supposed to be the only or the proper subject matter of history. But histories or historical works are written of nearly everything under the sun; countries, civilizations, epochs, art styles, ideas, words, etc.; and adopting this view means to regard all those entities as events.⁵¹⁾ The point, however, is that they are events, situations or things at the same time, or rather not at the same time but at different times depending from which point of view and in which context they are treated. But, one might say, if an epoch or era can be viewed as an event why not go further and regard the whole course of history as an event? For, if our analysis is correct, there seems to be no limit to the size of events, and events can become larger and larger until in the end we reach a stage where we are forced to see in history as a whole one big event. The answer to this is that to speak of an event makes sense only if the event is bounded by, and distinguished from, two situations and if there is something further which is in those situations. But what could be the situations in the case where history in its most comprehensive sense is viewed as an event? Adopting a metaphysical position one could argue that here the initial situation would be a state of affairs where nothing exists at all. But if so, the terminal situation, too, could only be a state of nothingness which would mean that initial and terminal situations are the same, and this in turn entails that 'history'

51) For Mandelbaum (The Problem..., p.282) an epoch is a long-enduring event, and H.D.Oakeley, 'How is History Possible?', Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, N.S., Vol.41, 1940/41, pp. VII, IX, regards a history of a people and a historic age as events.

which intervenes between the two cannot be an event after all for an event must make a difference, must change a situation. It also entails that there could be no thing in this case; there would be nothing whose situation is changed by 'History'.

However, if we take a narrower concept of history, such as the history of man or mankind, then this history can be viewed as an event. For there was a situation \bar{S}_1 of the world when man did not exist and we can assume that there will be a situation \bar{S}_2 in the future when man will not exist any longer. Both situations are not the same; the world after the existence of man will be different, and will look different, from the world before his existence, and we can also safely assume that each of the two situations is of longer duration than the period of man's existence in between. (It is characteristic that in this context it does not make much difference whether we speak of the history of man or of the existence of man or of the period of man's existence. Under the point of view adopted they all fall together.)

But there is also nothing which prevents us from viewing the existence or history of man as a situation, a situation of the world which by some event or other, e.g. by a thermonuclear war, will one day be changed into another situation. Finally, and this is probably the common and natural approach, mankind itself may be seen as a thing which is in certain situations and whose situations are changed by virtue of certain events.

So it is possible, at least in principle, to regard the same phenomenon either as an event, a situation or a thing. There are, of course, many cases where it is in practice rather hard to change one's perspective. A phenomenon of very long duration can be viewed as an event only with difficulty while it is difficult to view one of very short duration as anything else but an event. But in principle it is always possible to change the angle or focus of one's view such that what used to be an event becomes a thing or situation, or vice versa. (In English the change is often indicated by a change of grammar. 'Smith wrote a book last year', 'Smith was writing a book last year' and 'Smith's writing of a book last year' can indicate the difference between event, situation and thing respectively.) And this does not only hold for physical phenomena but also for beliefs and ideas, motives and dispositions, etc.

In summary, we may say that the concept of an event is relative in at least four respects. (1) It is relative in that from the continuum of empirical reality certain points or stretches are cut out and isolated. Where the cuts are made depends on which parts of the continuum are known and which of those are thought to be important. (2) It is relative in that it is a question of conceptualization whether we prefer to speak of a series of events or of one single event which has the members of the series as its subevents. 'Once we recognize that the separation or definition of events is relative we see that two

events which are separate for some purposes may be parts of a single event for other purposes for which the separation is irrelevant.⁵²⁾ (3) It is relative in that it only makes

sense to speak of events in relation to situations and things. Something, E, is an event only if there is something else, a situation S, which is changed by E, but S in turn cannot exist by itself but must be a situation of something, of a thing R.

(4) It is relative in that one and the same phenomena can be viewed as an event, situation or thing depending on the context or level in or on which we choose to speak about the subject matter in question.⁵³⁾

6. Facts and 'Interpretation of Facts'

As we have pointed out before, most contemporary philosophy of history is haunted by the spectre of positivism. It is, therefore, not surprising that so many writers lean over backwards to avoid the impression that they are worshippers of 'brute' facts. This is why we meet so often with the emphasis that facts do not speak for themselves, that facts cannot be isolated, that there is no difference between fact and interpretation of fact, between fact and theory.

52) Cohen, The Meaning..., p. 108.

53) The role of questions, problems and purposes has been emphasized in this respect by E. Grunberg, 'Notes on Historical Events and General Laws', The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science, Vol.19, 1953, p. 513, and by F.A. von Hayek, The Counter-Revolution of Science, Glencoe, Ill, 1952, p, 70. This is correct here if we do not think of specific questions, problems or purposes but have in mind something rather vague and inarticulate.

These and similar statements sound plausible enough. But what exactly do they mean? And are they true? To these questions we have to turn now.

Before we do so a preliminary remark is necessary. When people speak about facts in this way they have in mind simple and individual facts: Caesar crossed the Rubicon, there was a French Revolution, the battle of Waterloo took place in 1815, etc. They have not in mind facts of a different nature, facts, so to speak, of the connexion between facts, e.g. the facts that if Caesar had not crossed the Rubicon the Civil War would not have happened, that the course of the French Revolution was strongly influenced by the philosophy of the Enlightenment, that the battle of Waterloo sealed Napoleon's fate. And usually they also have not in mind general facts such as the fact or supposed fact that in the past all revolutions in western Europe were revolutions of social classes. Consequently, when we speak of facts in the following we shall also only refer to simple and individual facts.

The view that there is no difference between fact and interpretation or that it is impossible to distinguish between the two has often been propounded⁵⁴⁾ but if stated in this

54) So (as one would expect) by M. Oakeshott, Experience and its Modes, Cambridge, 1933, pp. 94/95, but also by M. Mandelbaum, 'Causal Analysis in History', Journal of the History of Ideas, Vol. 3, 1942, p. 35, according to whom such a distinction is senseless, and by C. Blake, 'Can History be Objective?', P. Gardiner (Ed.), Theories of History, 5th printing, New York, 1964, p. 342, who maintains that the need for it only arises because of certain illegitimate presuppositions. I. Berlin, Historical Inevitability, 2nd impr., London, 1955, p. 71, and H. Butterfield,

general form it can easily be refuted. For it makes nonsense of the logical character of the word 'interpretation'. An interpretation must be an interpretation of something and it is logically not possible that what is interpreted is the same as the interpretation itself. ('Interpretation' is ambiguous in that it can refer to the process of interpreting something or to the product of this process. Here we have the latter in mind. Some philosophers, following Vico, have based their notion of fact on its etymological origin from facere and have so brought 'fact' too into the vicinity of a process but this is obviously not the usual meaning of 'fact' and we shall not adopt it here.) The use of the expression 'an interpretation of fact x' presupposes a difference between x and the interpretation of x. The difficulty is not avoided if the thesis of the sameness or indistinguishability of fact and interpretation is varied into a thesis asserting that there is no primacy of facts over interpretation⁵⁵⁾ or that the distinction is only a matter of degree.⁵⁶⁾ For how can it be possible to give an interpretation of x unless x is known first? And in what sense can the distinction between fact and interpretation be a matter of degree

History and Human Relations, 2nd impr., London, 1951, p. 236, belong to the small group of authors who explicitly deny that there is no distinction between fact and interpretation.

55) So E.H. Carr, What is History?, Harmondsworth, 1964, p. 155.

56) So P.H. Nowell-Smith, 'Are Historical Events Unique', Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, N.S., Vol. 57, 1956/57, p.155.

(unless one understands by 'fact' simply that which we know with greater and by 'interpretation' that which we know with less certainty or confidence)?

The picture is changed if 'there is no difference between fact and interpretation' does not mean 'there is no difference between a fact x and the interpretation of x' but 'there is no difference between a fact x and the interpretation of y' where 'y' denotes a fact different from x. In this case there is no logical incompatibility involved but now the statement is simply false. There may be cases where stating a fact amounts at the same time to interpreting another fact but this need not always be so. In a trivial sense it is, of course, true that even 'basic propositions', e.g. 'here is a coin struck by Vespasian', 'embody an element of interpretation'⁵⁷⁾ in that to identify the object in question as a coin and as struck by Vespasian can be said to be an 'interpretation' of the object. The idea behind this usage is to emphasize that even physical objects are not simply 'given' but that mental activity is needed for their grasp or comprehension. This is doubtlessly a laudable motive but to use the word 'interpretation' in this context can only be confusing. Identification, classification, description, all these presuppose mental activity and previous knowledge, not only in history but everywhere, but they are not interpretation if that word is to keep at least some of its usefulness.

(57) Walsh, An Introduction..., p.84.

The thesis of the sameness of fact and interpretation can also mean that in order to establish any historical fact it is necessary to interpret evidence such as written records or material remains. This is quite true but it does not entail the sameness of fact and interpretation. Not only is the establishment of a fact not the same as the fact itself, the interpretation of evidence is not even identical with the establishment of the fact. The latter presupposes the former, i.e. a fact cannot be established without prior interpretation of evidence. 'In history the interpretation of symbols precedes the collection of facts, and without this interpretation there is no approach to historical truth,'⁵⁸⁾ and 'what we call historical facts are the results of our interpretation of certain fragmentary data or remains'.⁵⁹⁾ But a result cannot be the same as that from which it is derived, and the interpretation of evidence (product) cannot be the same as the establishment of the fact (product) nor can interpreting evidence (process) be the same as establishing the fact (process).

58) E. Cassirer, An Essay on Man, 3rd printing, New Haven, 1945, p. 196. On the other hand Mandelbaum, The Problem..., p. 200, is one of those who do not restrict interpretation here to the interpretation of evidence but declare roundly that any 'distinction between the historian's discovery of facts and his interpretation of those facts is a wholly fallacious distinction' (italics supplied).

59) Cohen, The Meaning..., pp. 4/5 (italics supplied); see also Gomperz, Interpretation, p.6, who, however, points out that in order to interpret a text we must have some knowledge of the facts referred to in the text.

Apart from 'interpretation' it is the word 'theory' which seems to have attracted attention in connexion with facts. Goethe is reported to have pronounced that the facts of today are the theories of yesterday and Bradley, too, maintains that 'that which is called a fact is in reality a theory'.⁶⁰⁾

Naturally, the meaning of 'theory' here must be quite different from the mean^{ing} of 'theory' when the word is used by scientists or philosophers of science (in this case the universal character, for example, is implicit). To say that there is no difference between fact and theory can only mean one or other of two things:

(1) It can mean that there is no sharp distinction between what we know with certainty and what we do not thus know. 'x was a theory yesterday', i.e. x was held tentatively or provisionally at a certain time; 'x is a fact today', i.e. at a later time our confidence has increased to such an extent that now we regard x as certain. In this sense it is true to say that 'there is only a difference of degree of generality and validity between facts and hypotheses and theories'⁶¹⁾ but we should not forget that not all facts have once been theories and that not all theories will one day be facts. There are facts which always have been facts and there are theories which always will be theories.

60) Bradley, 'The Presuppositions...', p.17.

61) S. Hook, 'Problems of Terminology in Historical Writing: Illustrations', Theory and Practice in Historical Study, New York, 1946, p.124; G. Barraclough, History in a Changing World, Repr., Oxford, 1956, pp. 14/15, too, seems to identify factual knowledge with certain knowledge.

(2) But 'there is no difference between fact and theory' can also be a loose way of saying that making a statement expressing a fact presupposes some theoretical, i.e. general knowledge. This is what E. Cassirer seems to have in mind when he maintains that 'all factual truth implies theoretical truth'.⁶²⁾ Even allocating a certain date to a certain event presupposes a calendar, i.e. a chronological system.⁶³⁾ All this is again self-evident. It could even be held that it follows logically from the notion of discursive knowledge. But to say that factual knowledge presupposes theoretical knowledge is quite different from saying that fact and theory are the same thing or that we cannot make a distinction between the two. 'x presupposes y' entails that there is a difference between x and y. Things which are not different cannot presuppose each other.

The whole complex of fact and interpretation and fact and theory can also be clarified in the following way. A fact is expressed (or rather can be expressed) in a statement. The statement contains terms (individual or general but let us concentrate on the individual). The terms are based on concepts we have formed, e.g. the concept of a certain event. However,

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- 62) Cassirer, An Essay...., p.174. It is an unjustified restriction to equate theory with causal theory in this respect as does Renier, History, p.22, and seemingly also Berlin, Historical Inevitability, pp. 60/61. (Berlin, however, insists on the difference between fact and theory.)
- 63) So Hook, 'Problems....', p.124; but Hook does not distinguish between 'theory' in this sense and 'theory' in sense (1).

as we have seen before, concepts of events can be formed in different ways (and different concepts can be formed) in respect of the same stretch or part of reality. How we come to form our concepts in a specific case depends on our interests and purposes. These in turn depend on a certain 'picture' we have of the world or, if we want to use that term in its popular sense, on a 'theory'. In short, theory affects facts via the formulation of statements expressing facts (formulation in thought, in speaking or in writing). But we have to be clear about two points. A fact is not identical with any of the statements expressing it. There are facts which are not expressed in any statement; there are facts which are not even known. Facts and known facts are not the same and the idea that they are accounts for much confusion in the discussion of the nature of historical facts. If all facts were known facts we could never increase our knowledge; we could never discover that something is the case which we did not know before. Secondly, it is true that we form the concepts which go into our statements on the basis of 'theory' and that we can form them in one way or another. But from this it does not follow in the least that the truth of a statement (or the fact expressed by it) is 'relative'. In a sense, of course, the truth of a statement is relative to the terms which appear in it; i.e. the truth-value of the statement may change when the meanings of the terms change. But then, one can argue, the statement has changed too (it is no longer the same 'proposition') and there is nothing which prevents the

new statement from being false while the old one was true. In other words, the fact that we choose our concepts in the light of some 'theory' or other does not affect the logical truth that the statements in which the concepts appear are either true or false. This is elementary but reading some of the things which have been written by historians and philosophers of history one gets the impression that it is necessary to enlarge on it.

There is also the view that no difference exists between fact and value, at least not in history.⁶⁴⁾ Obviously, 'fact' here can only mean 'known fact expressed in a statement'. Otherwise, a fact concerning a past, present or future event which was, is or will be known to nobody would also be indistinguishable from a value, and this could be asserted only on the strength of some peculiar metaphysics. But even if 'fact' is limited to 'known fact' it seems a strange view to maintain that facts and values are the same. For prima facie there is a great difference between factual statements and value judgements. 'Napoleon lost the battle of Waterloo' and 'it is a good thing that he lost it' seem to be on two completely different levels. However, to do justice to the view under discussion this is probably not what its proponents have in mind. What they may have in mind is that terms used by historians (and not only by historians) are in some way evaluatively charged or coloured and that the use of those terms

64) Berlin, Historical Inevitability, pp. 58-61, denies that facts can be distinguished from valuations but affirms their distinction from interpretation or theory.

amounts to an evaluation of the fact stated. But even if so understood the thesis seems questionable unless we extend our conception of what is a value beyond all reasonable limits. It is simply impossible to see what value is involved in the fact that Napoleon was born in 1769.

Still, one could give the matter a different twist by saying that if anybody makes such a statement then he must think the fact concerned worth-while or important enough to be stated and that this amounts to a value judgement. But if one argues in this way it becomes analytically true that every statement of fact amounts to a value judgement. It is then impossible to state any fact whatsoever without committing oneself to a value, and this is hardly helpful.

However, we may pursue the problem in a different direction and say that although the words actually used may not be evaluatively loaded, the way in which we come to use them is closely bound up with our evaluation of empirical phenomena. As in the case of theory so in the case of value: concepts can be formed in different ways and the way we choose depends on our view of the world which in turn depends on certain basic values adopted. In this sophisticated indirect sense it may be true to say that to use a term such as 'the age of Enlightened Absolutism' is to make a value judgement⁶⁵⁾ but if so it cannot

65) W. Bauer, Einführung in das Studium der Geschichte,
Tübingen, 1921, p 88

be a value judgement about the fact expressed by a statement in which 'the age of Enlightened Absolutism' occurs. It is true, there might be a problem whether there was such an age at all. Can any absolute prince be called enlightened, if so in what respects, and do these respects justify our making them into a criterion for distinguishing one age from another? The answers to these questions undoubtedly depend on an evaluation of certain historical phenomena, an evaluation which at least in part may be of a moral character. In short, forming the concept of Enlightened Absolutism and using it as a name or label of an age distinguishable from other ages, instead of choosing any other possibility of identification or delimitation out of a large and perhaps infinite number, all this rests amongst other things on value judgements. But making this choice and using the expression in a statement, e.g. in the statement 'Catherine the Great was a typical representative of the age of Enlightened Absolutism', does not entail that the statement itself is a value judgement or that the fact expressed by it cannot be distinguished from the values on which the formation of the concept was based. The statement is true or false, even for somebody who challenges the formation and use of 'age of Enlightened Absolutism' on the grounds that there was no such age or that the criteria on which the formation of the concept is based are useless, uninteresting or misleading. For even then reasoning would still be possible on the lines 'assumed he is justified in conceptualizing in this way - which actually he is not - then what he asserts is true

(or false) and there is evidence in favour of its truth (or falsity)'. More is not required anywhere to enable us to regard a statement as true or false, not even in science or in daily life.

So far we have not touched upon what is perhaps the most important point in respect to the relationship between fact and interpretation (or theory). When it is said that all facts need interpretation or that no facts can speak for themselves what is usually meant is that an isolated fact is of no interest to the historian, that is has no 'meaning'. In other words, a fact is only of interest if it is seen in relation to, or in context with, other facts, and sometimes 'fact' itself is implicitly so defined or understood that only a fact which is so related or connected can be called a fact or historical fact at all. This raises a host of problems of which only a few can be treated here.

Let us, first of all, enter some reservations about the application of the word 'meaning' to facts. Is it meaningful to say that a historical fact (or a historical phenomenon) has 'meaning'? The trouble is that if 'meaning' is used in this way it can refer to so many different things at the same time. Recently, a book was advertised with the title The Meaning of the First World War, i.e. a book which purports to be about the meaning of the event of the First World War or of the fact that this war took place (in the present context it does not make much difference whether we speak about the meaning of facts or the

meaning of events). Knowing the title only it is very difficult, if not impossible, to say what the book is about. Is it about the consequences of the war, about what followed from it which still affects us today? Is it about what the war 'means' or 'meant' to certain people or groups of people, e.g. what the attitude of the British working class was to the war at the time it was fought or how the war affected the life and attitude of this social group? Or is it perhaps that God or History (with a capital 'H') used the war as a sign or portent which had a certain meaning for western man, e.g. the meaning of worse things to come if he persisted in his wicked ways? All this and much more is covered by the word 'meaning' if applied to facts.

The only relatively unambiguous use of the word is to be found where it is not applied to facts but to symbols or signs (and even there it is wrought with logical and philosophical problems). It is fairly clear what is meant by expressions such as 'the meaning of the word "omophagous"', 'the meaning of this difficult passage in Aristotle', 'the meaning of the egg symbol in fifteenth century painting', 'the meaning of this morse signal'. All these are cases where 'meaning' means 'referential meaning' and is applied to something that can be clarified or explained by way of definition or translation into another idiom. But what are we to understand by the meaning of a fact or event or thing or situation?⁶⁶⁾

66) To this question see also R. Gruner 'Understanding in the Social Sciences and History', Inquiry, Vol.10, pp.152ff (1967) (Similar considerations apply in respect of 'interpretation'. Is it possible to interpret a fact at all, in contradistinction to, say, the interpretation of a text?) There is, of course, no

What is usually meant by the meaning of a fact is much the same as significance, relevance or importance. All these are terms which can denote relations so that it is necessary to specify 'significant in respect to x', 'relevant to y', 'important in view of z'. But it can also mean indication. 'A fact x means a fact y' is then another way of saying that a fact x indicates a fact y. There is, however, a difference between meaning and indication which is not always recognized.⁶⁷⁾ If a friend says to me 'you are a fool' then this expression has a certain meaning but it is also an indication of his state of mind towards me at the time the statement is made. Both are not the same, and to say that 'you are a fool' means that my friend thinks I am one, while the same statement made by someone else at another occasion means something else, is mistaken. If a parrot greets me with the words 'you are a fool' the expression has still a meaning and its meaning is exactly the same as when my friend or any other person uses it. But it is not an indication of the parrot's mental state although it may be an indication of something else.

Similarly, we have to distinguish between
understanding a statement that expresses a fact x and

objection to using 'meaning' in any of a number of non-referential senses as long as it is made clear in what sense exactly is is used.

67) The distinction between meaning and indication is not very frequent. V. Kraft, Erkenntnislehre, Wien, 1960, pp.43/44, distinguishes signs from symptoms but following Peirce (who used 'index' instead of 'symptom') he regards symptoms as causal indicators only.

understanding x itself. Both are independent from each other in that we may understand x, i.e. relate it correctly to other facts, without being able to understand a statement (or to understand the meaning of a statement) expressing x. Conversely, we may be able to understand such a statement, and so come to know the fact concerned, without being able to understand the fact itself.

To say that a fact has meaning or is meaningful, in contradistinction to the meaning of the statement that expresses it, can only mean that if the fact is related to other facts (individual or general) it is possible to draw certain conclusions from it such that we enrich our knowledge over and above the knowledge of the fact itself. In short, there can be no doubt that a fact acquires significance and intellectual interest only in relation to other facts, and if so construed it is analytically true that an isolated fact is a meaningless fact.⁶⁸⁾ If one goes a step further and includes the meaning of

68) '... the meaning of an event denotes its relations to other events connected with it...', Cohen, The Meaning..., p.49 (but what is the difference here between relations and connexions?). See also C.B. Joynt and N. Rescher, 'The Problem of Uniqueness in History', History and Theory, Vol. 1, 1960/61 p. 153, according to whom understanding is achieved by grasping causal and conceptual interrelations. When R. Witttram, 'Das Faktum und der Mensch', Historische Zeitschrift, Bd. 185, 1958, p. 57, maintains that all understanding of facts is dependent on understanding of context, the analytic character is concealed. Understanding is not dependent on understanding of context but is understanding of context.

a fact in this sense into the definition of 'fact' or of 'historical fact' then it is also analytically true that facts without meaning are not facts, or are not historical facts, at all.⁶⁹⁾ This, however, leads to confusion for now the distinction between knowing a fact and understanding it becomes blurred and the impression is created that we can never know a fact without understanding it or, what is worse, that we cannot make a true factual statement if we do not understand the fact in question. This goes strongly against the ordinary usage of the word 'fact' according to which a fact is a fact independent of its meaning to anybody. Some illiterate person might know that there was a battle of Waterloo without having the slightest idea what it was about and what it 'means' in this or that context, nay, in any context. And when it comes to very remote and badly documented periods the most sophisticated historian may not be in a much better position. He, too, may know that a certain event happened without being able to make sense of it, to relate it to any other known event.

It is true that speaking about an event presupposes a situation that is changed by it which in turn presupposes

69) Becker, 'What are...', p.123, holds that Caesar crossed the Rubicon 'is not an historical fact properly speaking at all' and only becomes one if it is taken as a 'symbol' which stands 'for a long series of events', i.e. for the 'relation between Caesar and the millions of people of the Roman world'. The use of 'symbol' here is a good example for the corruption of a perfectly good term in the hands of some philosophizing historians (and not only historians).

something which is in this situation. But we may know that an event happened without knowing what situation was changed by it and what thing was in that situation. The point is only that if we speak about an event we have to assume that there was such a situation and such a thing without necessarily knowing what they are.

To come to know a fact, to establish it, presupposes the possession of other knowledge but this need not be knowledge which provides an understanding of the fact in question. To establish the fact that a certain battle was fought in the remote past we have to find and to interpret certain material evidence, e.g. we have to read documents, and this involves a whole galaxy of formal and factual knowledge, including the knowledge of general facts.⁷⁰⁾ But this knowledge does not help us to understand the fact that such a battle occurred in the sense that it relates the historical fact to other historical facts.⁷¹⁾

70) Walsh, An Introduction..., p.83, expresses this somewhat misleadingly by saying that the fact that evidence needs interpretation implies that no statement about the past can be true in isolation. It is even more misleading to say with Renier, History, p.175, that there can be no knowledge of any event without the knowledge of other events.

71) Therefore, Cohen, The Meaning..., p.33, is wrong when he maintains that no fact can be established unless it is already related to other facts or is part of a larger system. 'Is already related' is ambiguous in that it can mean (1) related by the historian or (2) objectively related. If taken in sense (1) Cohen's assertion is false for we can only relate what we know, i.e. have established already. If taken in sense (2) it is trivial for there is no fact which is not related in some way to other facts.

But to return to the view that a fact only acquires 'meaning' if it is related to other facts. This relatedness can be made into a defining characteristic of what constitutes a historical fact. According to E.H. Carr, for example, 'any fact may, so to speak, be promoted to the status of a historical fact once its significance and relevance are discerned'.⁷²⁾ This view leads to the strange consequence that what today is a 'mere' fact will be a historical fact tomorrow provided someone relates it to some other fact, e.g. if it is so related in a history book.⁷³⁾ Conversely, if at a later time those relations with other facts are forgotten or ignored the fact ceases to be historical. In short, according to this view x is a historical fact at time t if it is mentioned in a text written by a historian (or in a majority of such texts on the subject in question). This means in the end that a fact is historical if historians think it is historical, or in Carr's own words, 'it is the historian who has decided for his own reasons that Caesar's crossing of the... Rubicon is a fact of history',⁷⁴⁾ hardly a very enlightening result. It is far more useful to view every fact of the human past, even the most trivial one, as a historical fact⁷⁵⁾ but to make distinctions as to relevance or

72) Carr, What is..., p.103.

73) Carr himself (ibid., p.12) draws this conclusion although, not quite consistently, he makes the historical status of a fact dependent on whether many historians regard it as significant.

74) Ibid., p.11.

75) So von Mises, Theory..., p. 195, in respect to past human actions.

significance. But relevance or significance in what respects? In other words, what are those relations which make a fact 'meaningful'? The usual answer is that they are relations of consequences i.e. causal relations. A fact is significant if it has consequences later on, if it leads to something else which in turn is viewed as important.⁷⁶⁾ This, however, is too narrow. It is not only relations of a causal nature whose knowledge makes a fact intelligible or more intelligible. There are other relations which are important here, e.g. the relations between events and subevents. The fact that an event E took place is better understood if we find out which were the subevents of E and of which other events E itself was a subevent. It is also better understood if we find out what initial situation was changed by E and what terminal situation resulted from E. (Although the latter may be regarded as a causal analysis it is not an investigation into the causes of E nor is it an investigation into the consequences of E in the sense of further events caused by E). There are still other relations, not mentioned by us so far, e.g. relations of analogy or similarity. If we find that a historical phenomenon is in certain respects similar and in other respects dissimilar to another historical phenomenon of a different time but of the same or similar kind we

76) According to Mandelbaum, The Problem..., p.10, only those facts are historical which are seen in the light of their consequences for the social structure. A similar opinion is expressed by Z. Barbu, Problems of Historical Psychology, London, 1960, p.11. Berlin, Historical Inevitability, pp. 60/61, also seems to have only causal imputation in mind when he speaks of the interpretation of facts.

also can rightly claim that we have better understood the fact of the existence or occurrence of this phenomenon (although analogies are a risky business in history, and not only in history). In short, causal relations are not the only kind of relations which are important for the understanding of historical facts.

Finally, we have to mention the view according to which the interpretation of a fact is closely connected with the formulation of a hypothesis. 'Facts', so we are told, 'never speak for themselves but only to someone who has a hypothesis which he wishes to test.'⁷⁷⁾ Now it is true, and we have emphasized it ourselves, that we need something in the nature of a 'theory' or world-picture (and if we wish we can also say here hypothesis) in order to be able to conceptualize historical phenomena. But this is not 'testing' a hypothesis or the attempt to solve any specific factual problem. Such a problem can only be posed with the help of concepts already formed. Nor can we speak of a 'construction' of facts' by the kind of questions which the investigator asks of the phenomena before him'.⁷⁸⁾ For how can a question construct a fact?

77) Hook, 'Problems'...', pp. 123/24. See also J.H. Randall, Jr., Nature and Historical Experience, 3rd printing, New York & London, 1962, p.34: '... events become "facts" only in the light of their relation to some hypothesis...'

78) H.V. White, 'The Burden of History', History and Theory, Vol. 5, 1966/67, p.127.

Actually, to speak about the testing of hypotheses in history in this context is misleading in that it suggests too close an analogy between the procedures of historians and scientists. A scientist does indeed test general hypotheses while individual facts are only of interest to him in as far as they can serve in such a test. A historian, however, is not interested in confirming or disconfirming any general hypothesis (unless we stretch the notion of hypothesis so far that it includes the Weltanschauung someone holds but even then it is more than doubtful whether such a world view is ever tested in any meaningful sense of that word). The historian is interested in the individual facts themselves.

True, there are general facts in history as well, e.g. the fact that all officers in the pre-revolutionary French navy were noblemen. But it is not true that a historian formulates such a statement as a hypothesis and then tries to test it by looking for confirmatory and disconfirmatory evidence, as a scientist would do. His procedure rather goes in the other direction; he finds that officers a, b, c, etc. in the French navy of that period were noblemen and he summarizes this for simplicity's sake into the statement that all officers were (he does this even if he has not examined every individual case of an officer and so cannot be absolutely sure about his generalization, and if he finds an exception later on it is very doubtful whether he would revise his statement).

It may be that generalization of this kind is not what

is meant here by hypotheses. We might be told that something much more fundamental was referred to, namely certain assumptions necessary for a historian's work. Now, without doubt, there are such assumptions, the most important ones being perhaps those which allow him to decide whether a fact is relevant or irrelevant for some purposes, e.g. for the purpose of writing the history of a specific subject. But we cannot say that these assumptions are hypotheses which are tested. In the light of further experience they may be modified, altered or replaced by other assumptions, but they are not tested by empirical historical investigation. The conduct of the investigation itself is dependent on those assumptions, not the other way round. A historian does not systematically try to verify or falsify them in the course and on the strength of his research.

However, so far we have spoken only about general hypotheses. But not all hypotheses are general in character. They can be 'singular statements about one individual event, or a number of such events', ⁷⁹⁾ and although it may be true that between hypotheses of this kind and universal 'points of view' there is only a gradual variation ⁸⁰⁾ the difference has to be taken into account. Now it is true that sometimes such an individual hypothesis is indeed tested by a historian. This is the case when previous research and knowledge (including general

79) K.R. Popper, The Poverty of Historicism, 2nd ed., Repr., ^{London, 1961,}
p.107.

80) Popper, The Open Society..., p.266.

knowledge) makes him suspect that something must have been the case. He has then indeed a hypothesis in the proper sense of the word, say 'x happened at time t in place l', and he tests it by looking at certain evidence. If he is lucky, and provided he has interpreted his evidence correctly, his hypothesis will be confirmed by his findings. But we should not forget that historical facts are not always (and perhaps only infrequently) established in this way. A historian may 'stumble on' a fact by pure chance, without having looked for it or expected it and so without having had beforehand any hypothesis whatsoever.

All this shows that it is misleading to say that facts only speak to someone who wishes to test a hypothesis. A historian never wishes to test a general hypothesis and only in some cases does he wish to test an individual one. We ignore the questions in what sense is the assertion of a historical fact itself of hypothetical character, how far are hypotheses necessary in order to establish connexion between facts and can an interconnected historical account be viewed as a hypothesis.

7. Facts and Connexions

So far we have taken into account only simple, i.e. single and individual facts and we have done so in the belief that there is a difference between these and the connexions between them. Using the term 'connexions' in this context has its dangers; it might occasion a picture of invisible ties which

connect two or more facts with each other in the same way in which ropes tie ships to jetties or rubber bands hold together bundles of index cards. This, of course, is nonsense and that it is nonsense follows from the notions of fact and event explicated previously. Nevertheless, we shall use the term 'connexion', for it is commonly used in this context, but we shall try to avoid the pitfalls associated with this usage.

It also follows from our notion of fact that connexions between facts are facts themselves. 'It is the case that x' and 'it is the case that x is connected to y' both express facts provided they are true. 'The French Revolution took place' and 'the French Revolution was influenced by the philosophy of the Enlightenment' are both factual statements. The distinction between facts and connexions between facts is, therefore, really only a distinction between two different kinds of fact.⁸¹⁾

Another preliminary point is that it does not matter very much whether we speak of connexions between facts or connexions between events (or things or situations). A statement of the form 'event E happened' expresses the fact that E happened while 'event E is connected to event C' can be regarded either as stating that the fact that E happened is connected to the fact that C happened or it can be regarded as stating that the event E is connected to the event C. Further, although there are

81) This is the common view. Only Berlin, Historical Inevitability, p.60, seems to think that an assertion of a connexion between facts is not an assertion of a fact itself.

differences in some respects between the event itself and the happening or occurrence of the event, in the present context this distinction is of no importance and it does not matter whether we say that E is connected to C or that E's happening is connected to C's happening.

However, the connexions in question are not logical relations, i.e. they are not relations between statements or relations between terms. A simple statement p, e.g. 'E happened', may be logically related to a simple statement q, e.g. 'C happened', e.g. by conjunction, disjunction or material implication, but the existence of such relations does not entail that E is connected to C or that the fact expressed in p is connected to the fact expressed in q. (On the other hand, it is true that certain connexions, e.g. causal ones, can be construed in such a way that in certain respects they correspond to or entail logical relations, e.g. material implication). Similar considerations apply to relations between terms, e.g. in respect to definitions.

In short, the connexions under discussion can be viewed as connexions between facts or as connexions between events (or things or situations) or as connexions between the occurrences of events; they are not logical but factual relations and they are facts themselves (or rather that such a connexion exists is a fact); but they are certainly not events. We cannot say that a connexion happens, that the fact that an event E is connected to an event C is an event itself. A true statement asserting a connexion between two or more events expresses a

fact but does not describe or report an event. The existence of, for example, a certain causal relationship is a fact but the causal relationship itself is not an event. At least, speaking of connexions as events cannot be reconciled with what we have said before about the characteristics of an event. Events have causal efficacy and for a causal connexion to be an event it must have causal efficacy itself. But it makes no sense to say that the fact that event C caused event E caused a further event F, an event which is different from any event caused by C or E.

Connexions between facts can be divided into two large classes. Speaking now in terms of events we can say (1) that there are connexions between an event E and something else of which E is a part or which is itself a part of E and (2) that there are connexions between an event E and something which is not a part of E and of which E is not a part.⁸²⁾ The relations between an event and its subevents and between an event and its superevents fall under the first class. To say that the storming

82) Similar distinctions are made by Gomperz, Interpretation, p.7 ('to interpret a fact ultimately means to determine the way in which, on the one hand, its parts are connected with each other or in which, on the other hand, it is itself connected with other facts') and Fales, 'Historical Facts', p.89 ('a historical event is specified by its subordinate events and can be interpreted by connective events'). However, our connexion of inclusion is different in that it is not a connexion between the parts of an event, and not only the connexion between an event and its ~~subevents~~ subevents, but also the connexion between an event and its superevents.

of the Bastille was part of the French Revolution is to connect two events with each other the first of which is included in the second, and to make the statement in question is only to state that it is so included. The problem arises here again (we have already mentioned it before) of whether such a connexion of inclusion is not perhaps after all non-empirical, i.e. whether to assert that the storming of the Bastille is a subevent of the French Revolution is to make an analytic statement. The answer depends on what is understood by 'French Revolution'. It may be that our concept is such that the statement is indeed analytic. But this need not be the case for it is certainly possible to discover that an event has another event as one of its parts or is itself part of another event, and then the connexion is not one which is necessary by virtue of a relation between a definiendum and part of its definiens, i.e. it is not a logical connexion between two terms but is non-analytic and empirical in character.

As far as the second class is concerned the connexion which springs to the mind most easily is the empirical connexion between what conditions and what is conditioned without one of the elements being a part of the other. Let us call connexions of this kind 'connexions of dependence' for stating that such a connexion exists is to assert that two elements E and C are not independent but that one exerts some kind of influence on the other. The most obvious case is a straightforward causal nexus but we should not only think of this, at least not of causal

connexions in a more restricted sense, for teleological and functional connexions, to mention only these, are also connexions of dependence.

However, the second class of connexions is not only constituted of connexions of dependence. Although we shall be mainly concerned with these in the following we must not forget that there are many other connexions which also fall under this class and in which historians are interested. To mention some of them, there are temporal or spatial relations between facts or events, and to say that the battle of Waterloo took place after the battle of Leipzig is to assert a temporal connexion between two events which is not a connexion of dependence and where none of the events concerned is a subevent of the other. There are also relations of quantity or quality - one country may have a higher birth rate than another country, a prime minister may be successful in certain policies where his predecessor was unsuccessful - and these, too, are not connexions of dependence or inclusion. And there may be other kinds of connexion which fall under the same class. There is no need to attempt any classification and it is sufficient to make clear that not all connexions of the second kind are connexions of dependence or even causal connexions, while none of the first kind are. Many writers seem to equate a statement which connects two facts with each other to a statement which answers a 'why'-question and the latter is in turn sometimes equated with a causal or motivational

statement. This conception of what constitutes a connexion between facts is too narrow and leaves out of account many connexions found in history books.⁸³⁾

In more general terms, according to our concept of a connexion any statement is connective in character if its truth depends on the occurrence or existence of at least two individual phenomena as well as on the existence of a specific factual relationship between the two. There are simple statements and there are connective statements. Simple statements merely assert that something (E) occurs or exists ('E happened' or 'E existed') but they may also assert that E has a certain feature or property ('E was f'). This difference is of minor importance here for, as we have pointed out already, a statement asserting a feature can be viewed, at least in the context of history, as a statement asserting existence, the existence of an individual phenomenon, namely the existence of the specific feature in question. Instead of saying that Napoleon

83) In an article on 'The Substantiation of Historical Statements' The Durham University Journal, Vol. 58, 1965/66, pp.75-85, I have been guilty myself of conceiving connexions between facts too narrowly as connexions of dependence. If we adopt instead the wider conception proposed here we meet the criticism of Gardiner, The Nature..., p.81, that 'the connexion-between-facts terminology encourages the same confusions' as assimilating all explanations to the causal pattern. - One might think that there is a difference between (1) connexions of dependence and (2) other connexions in that a statement formulating (2) can be replaced by, or translated into, two or more other statements while statements formulating (1) cannot be so replaced and are therefore the only 'genuine' connective statements. 'E occurred after C' might be said to be replacable by two other statements, 'C occurred at time t' and 'E occurred at time t+1'. But what if we do not know the times at which

was ambitious I can say that Napoleon's ambitiousness existed, even if that sounds rather awkward. If 'E was f' is understood as asserting the membership of an individual E in a class f then what is asserted is the existence of this particular membership. The important point is that in this case as in the case of 'E happened' or 'E existed' the truth of the statement presupposes the existence or occurrence of one and only one individual phenomenon. It would be wrong to say that 'E was f' implies the existence of two individuals, E and f, for f is not an individual at all but a class, and although 'is a member of' is a relation it is not a relation between individuals but between individuals and classes.

But there are other statements where at least two individuals must exist or occur in order that they can be true, and these are statements which assert that one individual is in some way or other connected or related to another individual. Therefore, the criterion for deciding whether a given statement p is a connective statement (i.e. whether p asserts a connexion between facts) or whether it is a simple statement (i.e. whether it asserts a simple fact) is whether p is true only if more than one individual exists or occurs or whether it can be true if there is just one. The matter can be expressed differently as follows (and this has the advantage that we avoid speaking in terms of existence or occurrence): Asserting a connexion between two facts entails the

C and E occurred and know only that E occurred after C? The replacement would then be quite as impossible as it is in the case of a statement formulating (1), e.g. in the case of 'E was caused by C'. This is the reason why we cannot adopt this interpretation.

assertion of the facts which are connected but not vice versa. I.e., the truth of a connective statement depends on the truth of each of two simple statements but the truth of the latter does not depend on the truth of the former. Anyone who says that the French Revolution was influenced by the philosophy of the Enlightenment commits himself to the truth of each of two simple statements, the statement that there occurred an event called 'French Revolution' and the statement that there was such a thing as the philosophy of the Enlightenment. In short, a connective statement consists of at least three parts, the assertion of a statement p, the assertion of a statement q and the assertion of a connexion between the fact stated in p and the fact stated in q.

It is not necessary to assert the existence of a connexion between facts in a connective statement in which a term such as 'because', 'therefore', 'consequently' or - if we think of connexions which are not connexions of dependence - a term such as 'before', 'after', 'greater as', etc. occurs. The assertion may not be explicit but may be implicit in the arrangement of a whole historical text. This is why the absence of such key terms is no guarantee that only simple facts have been asserted. On the other hand, any individual statement which at a first glance seems to be simple in character may on inspection also turn out to be connective. 'Aristarchus anticipated the theory of Copernicus'⁸⁴⁾

84) This example is adopted in altered form from Danto, Analytical Philosophy..., p.156.

is a connective statement even if it does not seem to be one. For its truth depends on the truth of more than one other statement to the effect that Aristarchus developed a certain theory, that Copernicus developed a certain theory and that both theories are related to each other in a certain way. The fact that connective statements can be disguised in these and other ways does not prevent us from making a distinction between the assertion of simple facts and the assertion of connexions between facts for it is always possible to make explicit what so far has only been implicit.

The distinction, however, cannot be as obvious as it seems for it has often been maintained that there is no difference, at least not in history, between facts and connexions of facts and so between statements which express facts and statements which express connexions between facts ('connexions' here usually means 'connexions of dependence' and we shall have those in mind in the following). The case is parallel to the denial of a difference between facts and interpretations and in as far as our retort to the latter can also be applied to the former we shall not repeat it. However, the cases are not completely the same and the denial of the difference between facts and connexions between facts rests on some arguments which have not been cited in favour of the denial in the case of facts and interpretations. It is only with those arguments that we have to deal now.

On the face of it the denial of the possibility of distinguishing facts from connexions is even less plausible than the denial of the difference of fact and interpretation. For it is obvious that in works of history we do find statements which merely assert that something occurred or existed but we also find statements which assert that the occurrence or existence of something is connected with (for example, is dependent on) the occurrence or existence of something else. The latter clearly connect two facts with each other, or rather they assert that two facts are connected in a certain way. How can this be reconciled with the view under discussion, with the assertion that when a historian 'knows what happened, he already knows why it happened'⁸⁵⁾, to quote a well-known phrase?. As a matter of fact, it cannot be reconciled at all and the denial is untenable but in order to show this we have to go into greater detail.

The view in question has different versions and is supported by different arguments. One has to do with the identification of the simple fact which is asserted, and it goes roughly as follows: The concept of a certain fact or event can only be formed within the framework of other facts or events which are connected with it. Consequently, these connexions are already implicit in the concept itself. For instance, we can call an event E a revolution only if we have recognized certain

85) R.G. Collingwood, The Idea of History, Repr., London, 1963, p. 214. The same point has been made before by G. Salvemini, Historian and Scientist, Cambridge, Mass., 1939, p.51. Others have formulated it in different terms, so Nowell-Smith, 'Are Historical...', p.135, according to whom there is no sharp division between an event and what explains it.

connexions between E and certain other events (or things or situations). The task of identifying E as a revolution is, therefore, not different from the task of identifying the connexions between E and those other phenomena.⁸⁶⁾

It is not difficult to see that two different things are confused here, namely what happened and the description of what happened. The fact that an event E, commonly called 'French Revolution', occurred is different from the description of E as the French Revolution. It could be named or described otherwise. To know or to establish that E occurred is different from describing E as a revolution. Therefore, even if it is true that describing E as a revolution presupposes the assumption of causal or other connexions between E and other phenomena it does not follow that to know or to establish E's occurrence presupposes the same or similar assumptions.

But is it even true that describing E as a revolution presupposes the assumption of connexions between E and other phenomena? We can grant that there are terms which are implicitly connective, for instance, causal. 'Rust', to give an example, is defined as a 'yellowish-brown coating formed on iron or steel by oxidation....' (The Concise Oxford Dictionary, 4th ed.) which means that to know that something is rust we have to know how it was caused. However, asserting that there is rust on this screw is not asserting why there is rust on it. The question why there is rust on it is just the question why in consequence of oxidation a yellowish-brown coating developed, and to this the reply cannot be 'because of oxidation'.

But it is not true that all historical terms are causal or connective even in this sense. 'Revolution' is certainly not one of them, and while rust by definition must be caused by oxidation a revolution can be caused by any of a whole series of different things. It is, of course, possible to lay down the law and to say that anything that is not caused by, say, social discontent is not a revolution, and then it follows that one cannot call E a revolution unless one knows or assumes that E was caused by social discontent. But this is hardly the way a historian would proceed although a sociologist or political scientist may be more inclined to do so. One might also say that not connexions of dependence but other connexions are relevant here, e.g. the connexions between an event and its subevents or superevents. But even this claim goes too far for, as we have seen already, a historian might know that a certain event E happened without knowing any superevent or subevent of E. He might know that a battle was fought without knowing anything about the war the battle was a part of or about any particular engagement which was part of the battle. True, the forming of the concept of a battle or revolution, or of any other event, presupposes the assumption that the battle or revolution was caused by something and was itself the cause of something else. But this does not mean that one needs to know what caused it and what was caused by it.

However, the pronouncement that when a historian knows what happened he already knows why it happened can be understood

in a sense that is somewhat different from the one discussed so far. For R.G. Collingwood and his followers history is or should be concerned exclusively with human actions (understood here in the narrower sense of deliberate actions). What happens in history is then always the actions or deeds of individuals. Further, the proponents of this view make no distinction between knowing that an action E took place and understanding E. Or rather, the thesis is that we only know E if we understand the agent who committed E, i.e. if we know the agent's reasons or motives for doing E, in short if we know why he did what he did. So what this view amounts to is the thesis that a historical event is an action and an action can be known only if it is known why it was committed and, therefore, to know what happened is to know why it happened.

It is difficult to see how this argument could convince anybody. It is open to attack at nearly every point but the point we are concerned with at the moment is the assertion that to know what action took place is to know the reasons why it took place. What is involved here is the peculiar opinion, very fashionable at present, that there is a 'logical' connexion ('logical' in some rather idiosyncratic sense) between an action and the reasons for it. An action, so we hear, is more than a mere physical performance; it includes or entails the reason or reasons for which it is committed. (This, incidentally, is also one of the stock arguments for the view that reasons cannot be

causes since the relation between cause and effect is not a 'logical' but a 'contingent' connexion).

It is true that mere physical behaviour is usually not called 'action', and in this sense one can say that an action is more than a physical event. But from this it does not follow that the knowledge of an action presupposes or entails the knowledge of the reason or reasons for which it was committed. Evidently, there are cases which are analogous to our example of rust in that an action is named or described in such a way that reasons implicitly enter the description. To say that Smith committed suicide is to say that he killed himself because he wanted to kill himself,⁸⁷⁾ and not by misadventure or accident, just as to say that there is rust on a screw is to say that a yellowish-brown coating has formed on it as an effect of oxidation. But, again parallel to the case of rust, is it not to say why Smith committed suicide. The reason for his suicide is not included in or entailed by the description, only the reason for the fact that he killed himself. In other words, 'Smith committed suicide' states that Smith killed himself and why he

87) This is strictly speaking not quite correct. In antiquity people were sometimes ordered to commit suicide; some political prisoners of the Gestapo committed suicide in order not to betray their comrades; and in respect to more normal circumstances it is a well-known fact that many people take their own lives in the hope that someone will rescue them from death at the last minute. In these cases it is rather misleading to say that the people concerned wanted to kill themselves. But let us assume for argument's sake that 'wanting to' is in some sense part of the notion of suicide.

killed himself, but it does not state why he committed suicide. And the reason why someone kills himself is very different from the reason why someone commits suicide. People commit suicide for nearly any reason and the reason why Smith committed it is certainly not stated, and cannot be stated, by saying that he committed suicide.⁸⁸⁾

Put in more general terms the matter is as follows: An action, like any other event, can be described in various ways and we have to distinguish the action E itself from its different descriptions $\underline{d}_1, \underline{d}_2 \dots \underline{d}_n$. One description may be more general than another description (the description of Smith's action as 'killing himself' is more general than its description as 'committing suicide' which in turn is more general than, say, 'committing suicide because of a hopeless love-affair') and for a more specific description we require more knowledge than for a less specific one. In a case where causes or reasons enter a description, as in our example, we can say that by describing E (Smith's action) by means of \underline{d}_2 ('Smith committed suicide') we give a reason for E under a description \underline{d}_1 ('Smith killed himself') which is different from and more general than \underline{d}_2 . What we can never do is to give a reason for E under \underline{d}_2 simply by describing E under \underline{d}_2 . In order to give a reason for E under \underline{d}_2 we require more knowledge than is needed for describing E in terms of \underline{d}_2 . And all this does not only hold for actions but for other events as well.

⁸⁸⁾A very similar explication can be found in M. Brodbeck, 'Meaning and Action', Philosophy of Science, Vol. 30, 1963, pp. 321/22.

This, however, is not all. For there are many cases where reasons do not enter the description of an action at all. Take the example of a statesman or civil servant who submits his resignation. A historian may know from his evidence that such a person did in fact submit his resignation, i.e. he may be quite certain, as certain as any historian can be, that an action E was committed. But he may be completely in the dark as to the reasons for it, and since 'to submit one's resignation' does not even implicitly refer to reasons for E under another description there is nothing available to him which would correspond to 'because he wanted to' in the case of suicide. It is not necessary that a man should intend to resign when he submits his resignation, and modern history is full of examples where resignations were submitted in the hope that they would not be accepted. It is, therefore, impossible to see what reasons could be referred to in 'He submitted his resignation'.

Of course, the proponents of the view here criticized can always reply that if we do not know the reasons for an action we do not know the action, or we do not 'really' know it. In other words, if we have no knowledge of why the action took place we may know that something took place but we cannot call it an action. 88a)

88a) Or an event, if event is equated with action: 'An account of events, by definition, involves an understanding of the actors'. Aron, 'Evidence...', p.23. The important point is this feature of definition. So it has been asserted that if a woman who wants children talks of the stork, then her 'talking about the stork is wanting children'. T.Mischel, 'Concerning Rational Behaviour and Psychoanalytic Explanation', Mind, Vol. 74, 1965.

This amounts to a redefinition of 'action' (or of 'knowledge of action') which is not in accordance with the ordinary usage of that term, and for philosophers who are usually prone to equate the meaning of a term with the context in which it is used this is rather a damaging point. In essence, such a reply would consist in an identification, at least as far as actions are concerned, of knowledge and understanding. But knowing that something is the case and knowing why it is the case are two different things and it is not possible to make one out of them without defective reasoning.

However, there is a variant of the view discussed which asserts, not that in order to know an event E it is necessary to know E's reasons or causes, and not that in order to identify or form a concept of E it is necessary to know how E is connected with other events, but that it is necessary to know these connexions, or at least some of them, if we want to establish that E happened⁸⁹⁾ (where 'to establish' means making the assumption that E happened so probable that for all practical purposes it cannot be doubted any longer and where 'connexions' usually

89) Gardiner, The Nature..., p.78, speaks of a 'procedural interconnexion' between fact-finding and the discovery of causal relations, while Danto, Analytical Philosophy..., p.140, is 'inclined to believe' that it is not possible to establish it as a fact that a certain event occurred 'without having established connections between this event and other events in the past'. - There is also the other view that the establishment of a fact is at the same time the establishment of connexions between this and other facts. But the difference seems to be negligible. For to establish a connexion (in the sense of 'establish' explicated above) presupposes previous knowledge of the connexion.

refers to connexions of dependence).

Now this may be sometimes true but it is certainly not always true. It may be sometimes true because one can at least imagine a situation in which a historian thinks it possible that an event E happened, but is by no means sure about it, and that he has to look into the question of why E happened or into the question of E's consequences in order to confirm his assumption. If he finds that there were factors which made for E's happening or that there were subsequent events which can best be accounted for by assuming that E did in fact occur, then he has made his hypothesis to that extent more secure, even if he can find no independent evidence for E's happening, for instance, in a contemporary written document. But probably it will always be his endeavour to find such evidence and so to become independent of any inference from E's probable causes or effects. (It is true that the existence of the document itself can be regarded as an effect of E or as something whose existence can best be explained by the assumption that E did in fact occur. But this is hardly what is meant when people say that a fact cannot be established without establishing or having established its connexions with other facts). In other words, in the normal case there is a difference between establishing facts and establishing connexions between facts (at least as far as connexions of dependence are concerned) in that the evidence on which the establishment is

based is different in each case. An indication of this difference can be seen in the fact that historians are usually much more sure and much more in agreement about what happened than about why it happened or what consequences followed from it. This is not surprising for connexions between events are usually not open to confirmation to the same extent as the occurrence of the events themselves.⁹⁰⁾

90) So also W.H. Walsh, ' "Plain" and "Significant" Narrative in History', The Journal of Philosophy, Vol.55, 1958, p 483.

CHAPTER II: KNOWLEDGE OF FACTS

1. Historical Scepticism

We have tried to gain some clarity in respect to the character of the entities historians are concerned with. Historical knowledge, we can say, is knowledge of events, things and situations as well as knowledge of their connexions. The problem then arises of how such knowledge is acquired and what are the criteria for its correctness and adequacy. Posing the question of how historical facts and connexions can be established is to make the assumption that they can be established. But is this assumption justified? Is there, or can there be, historical knowledge at all, i.e. knowledge of something that happened or existed in the past? Is it not at least possible that all our knowledge or alleged knowledge of the past, indeed that the past itself, is a figment of our imagination, that a past fact or event is a construction of our minds, something whose existence is not independent of our thinking about it as the existence of this table is independent of our thinking about this table?

Strictly speaking, we are under no obligation to answer these questions. A work on the analytical philosophy of history can take for granted that there is or was a past outside our minds and independent of them, in the same way in which a work on the philosophy of science can take for granted that there is an external physical world independent of and outside our minds. In both cases the philosopher in company with the historian or the

scientist takes the position of 'naive realism', and he is justified in doing so. On the level on which he is occupied it is not his task to enquire into the possibility of knowledge as a relation between mind and object but to look into the structure and validation of knowledge understood as such a relation. But while the philosopher of science is hardly any longer confronted with scepticism as to the reality of the physical world and the possibility of scientific knowledge, the philosopher of history is indeed confronted with historical scepticism.¹⁾ While scepticism in respect to science seems to be nearly extinct historical scepticism is very much alive, and this is why it is pertinent after all to discuss the question of the independent reality of the past and of the possibility of historical knowledge.²⁾

1) We distinguish here between historical scepticism and historical relativism. The latter does not deny the reality of a past independent of the mind of the historian. It asserts only that the truth of a historical statement is relative to the position (social, cultural, psychological, etc.) of the person who makes it and that, consequently, no historical statement can be 'objective'. Of course, from the alleged fact that we can have no objective knowledge of the past it has sometimes been inferred that the past itself only exists in the mind of the historian, and in this way relativism may shade into scepticism. But the two positions are nevertheless basically different, which is also shown by the fact that there are sceptics who are not relativists and have not been led to scepticism by way of relativism. See, for example, M.Oakeshott, Experience and its Modes, Cambridge, 1933, pp. 109/10, who takes exception to relativism from a sceptical point of view.

2) There is also the problem whether history is indeed confined to the past (there can be no doubt that the past is not confined to history). After all, 'past history' is not a pleonasm; we do speak of contemporary history; and a clairvoyant's detailed and connected account of things to come, if it were possible, could very well be called a history

Now, if somebody insists that there is or was no past, that, for example the world complete with all our memories and with all historical remains came into existence this very instance, we cannot prove him wrong as we cannot prove wrong the man who maintains that there is nothing in the present world apart from his own mind. (In fact, there is no good reason why one should adopt temporal but not spatial scepticism. The thesis that the world came into being a moment ago has the same degree of plausibility or implausibility as the thesis that only my mind or my body exists.³⁾ In both cases no experience can be imagined which could act as refutation, and in this sense both theses are equally bare of empirical content). We can also give no proof or evidence for our own view that there is or was a past. But the sceptic is in exactly the same position; he, too, cannot prove his thesis nor can he disprove ours. So, as far as proof or evidence is concerned the matter is a stalemate. The question, however, is on whom falls the burden of proof, and since without doubt there is an initial assumption in favour of the reality and independence of the past, an assumption which is built into large parts of our language, the burden falls on the person who challenges this assumption, i.e. on the sceptic.

The argument so far is not as sterile as it may seem for it directs our attention to an important fact, the fact that

of the future. But although the meaning of 'history' does not necessarily include pastness (see The Concise Oxford Dictionary, 4th ed.) the word is usually applied to the past or a record of the past. Cases where it is not so applied are relatively rare and we can safely ignore them.

3) So also A.C.Danto, Analytical Philosophy of History, Cambridge, 1965, p. 82

there is an assumption which by its very nature is unprovable, but which underlies all our thinking about the past and, consequently, all our historical thinking. This is the assumption that there was a past, i.e. that past events or things occurred or existed and that their occurrence or existence is independent of our present thinking about them. It may sound strange to say that this assumption is unprovable for do we not, after all, have very good evidence for the occurrence of certain events in the past? So we have, but the point is that something becomes evidence for a past event only under the assumption that there was a past and for this assumption there is no evidence whatsoever. It is not true that there are certain things around us which bear what has been called 'marks of pastness',⁴⁾ and from which we can infer that there was a past. For these marks become marks of pastness only after we have made the assumption that past entities happened or existed. The characteristic of being in the past is not open to inspection and there is nothing in our present experience which could lead us to connect it with the past. It is only because we assume from the start that past events or things happened or existed that we can treat present experience as evidence for past facts. But there is nothing in present observable qualities which would suggest or support this assumption. A statement to the effect that a particular event happened, if it is not a mere guess, is indeed based on

4) C.I. Lewis Mind and the World Order, New York..., 1929, p.153.

present evidence, but this evidence has become evidence only because we have assumed that there was a past, that in general past events did happen.⁵⁾

In short, it is not possible to prove or to support by an appeal to experience the assumption that there is or was a past. But what about memory? Do we not have at least convincing inner experience of the reality of the past, even if it is only our own past? It is true that memory and only memory gives us a sense of the past. Without memory we could not form any concept of the past, and since without such a concept there could be no historical knowledge we can indeed say that history is based on memory.⁶⁾ But although the concept of the past depends on memory the fact that we have memory does not prove or support the reality of the past, does not prove or support the assumption that there were past events whose occurrence is independent of our minds. We know that our memory can play tricks on us and we sometimes remember (or seem to remember) events which did not take place and things which did not exist. This means that memories

5) We have here very closely followed G.C. Field, 'Some Problems of the Philosophy of History', Proceedings of the British Academy, Vol. 24, 1938, pp. 60/1 and 69. See also E.J. Bond, 'The Concept of the Past', Mind, Vol.72, 1963, p.537.

6) So also H.N. Lee, 'Knowledge and Truth in Historical Inquiry', Tulane Studies in Philosophy, Vol. 5, 1956, p.63, and W.H. Walsh An Introduction to the Philosophy of History, 7th impr., London, 1964, p.84. This point was made before by B.Russell, The Problems of Philosophy, Repr., London..., 1964, p.115, who says that without memory we would not know that there was a past nor would we understand the word 'past'.

have to be checked, and they can only be checked by their coherence with other memories (our own or other people's) or with historical records. In order to make these checks we have to assume that these other memories or these records are themselves evidence for something which happened in the past, and as we have seen we can assume this only if we have made the basic assumption that there was a past at all. Therefore, memory gives us the sense of the past but its existence does not prove the reality of the past; 'the idea of the past is an "innate" idea'. 6a)

But the fact that the existence of the past, or the existence of past events or things, independent of our thinking about them, cannot be proved does not lend credence to the sceptical view that the past is not real and 'there is nothing at all which is not present through and through'⁷⁾ or that past events are present ideas⁸⁾ and statements about them are not about something outside our minds but are only instruments for the 'special organization' of 'the present world of experience'⁹⁾ or whatever form the thesis may take. What is in our minds is the knowledge or supposed knowledge of the past but knowledge of the past is not identical with the past itself. The main failure of scepticism, whether idealist, pragmatist or positivist, lies

6a) R.G. Collingwood, The Idea of History, Repr., London, 1963, p. 247.

7) Oakeshott, Experience..., p.109.

8) Ibid., p.99.

9) Ibid., p.111.

in making this equation of the past with the knowledge of the past¹⁰⁾ and in insisting on the meaningless or self-contradictory character of the view that there are or can be past events or things of which we know nothing and perhaps never shall know anything.¹¹⁾ But this view is neither meaningless nor self-contradictory.¹²⁾ In fact, it can be based soundly on inductive inference. For (1) there is no doubt that by design or accident we discover previously unknown events and things all the time and (2) we know that at the present a very large number of events are taking place and a very large number of things exist while the number of known past events and things is incomparably smaller. From (1) and (2) we conclude rightly that our records of the past must be incomplete and that many more events must have occurred and many more things must have existed than we know of and most probably ever shall know of.

From the identification of the past with the knowledge of the past (an identification which, incidentally, is related to the identification of the knowledge of a fact with its

10) 'There are not two worlds - the world of past happenings and the world of our present knowledge of those past events - there is only one world, and it is a world of present experience', ibid., p.108.

11) '... a course of events independent of experience, untouched by thought and judgment, is a contradiction', ibid., p.94; see also pp. 95, 107.

12) Of course, as with similar statements asserting ignorance it seems there is a contradiction involved in that knowing that one knows nothing is at least some kind of knowledge. But apart from the fact that this is not the point here and is not the reason why the sceptic considers the view in question to be untenable, there is a sense of 'knowledge' such that it would only be self-contradictory to speak of a specific event of which we know nothing whereas it would not be self-contradictory to say that there are some events about which we

description) the rest of the sceptical argument follows easily. No doubt, our knowledge of the past changes, and if this knowledge is identical with the past itself, then the past changes as well and a 'fixed and finished past' is unthinkable.¹³⁾ Evidence does not follow fact but fact follows evidence and the correspondence theory of truth becomes impossible and is replaced by a coherence theory.¹⁴⁾ Indeed, there is no difference at all between a historical fact and the evidence for it: 'All that history has is "the evidence"; outside this lies nothing at all,¹⁵⁾ - and this entails that a historical fact is a present fact, for all evidence is, by definition, present evidence. In other words, the past is really present, and thus we are led back to the thesis we started with, namely that there is no past but only 'present experience'. It is hardly necessary to criticize this view in detail, for instance by pointing out that 'knowledge' and 'evidence' are correlative terms, i.e. that knowledge to be knowledge must be knowledge of something, that evidence to be evidence must be evidence for something and that in history this something cannot be present but must be past.¹⁶⁾

have no knowledge, i.e. which we cannot describe. The case is parallel to an example given by J.R. Bambrough, 'Unanswerable Questions', The Aristotelian Society, Supp. Vol.40, 1966, p.152: '...we can say that there are some numbers that will never be thought of, even if we are not able to say of any particular number that it will never be thought of'.

13) Oakeshott, Experience..., p.107.

14) Ibid., pp.113 ff.

15) Ibid., pp.107/08.

16) So also in respect to evidence P.Gardiner, The Nature of Historical Explanation, London, 1952, p.39, and W.H.Walsh, An Introduction..., p.89.

If knowledge is equated with present experience then we cannot know the past, and it is this narrow notion of knowledge which is adopted by many sceptics. (Some sceptically inclined historians express their regret that we cannot have present experience of historical facts and see in the fact that no direct observation or inspection is possible a major disadvantage of history. They do not recognize that if it were possible history would no longer be history, that it is just the purpose of history to find out about things which cannot be directly experienced any longer).¹⁷⁾ If 'knowing' denotes a relation between a mind and a present object then there can indeed be no historical knowledge for, by definition, a past object is not present.¹⁸⁾ The sceptical argument, then, runs on the following lines: only what can be directly experienced (i.e., what is observable or inspectable by means of our sense organs) can be known. Only what is present can be directly experienced. Therefore, nothing past can be known.¹⁹⁾

The catch is in the second premise. It is simply not true that we can only know what we directly experience. To assert this is to assert an empiricism of the crudest form which has

17) So also Danto, Analytical Philosophy..., p.94.

18) See J.W. Harvey, 'Knowledge of the Past', Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, N.S., Vol.41, 1940/41 p.161, who also points out that if this kind of argument were sound it would also prove that we cannot think about the past for ('thinking', too, involves two terms - There is, of course, the freak case of astronomy where we can actually observe an object which does not exist any longer. But, as Field, 'Some Problems...', p.60, emphasizes, this is irrelevant for history.

19) See also Bond, 'The Concept...', p.535.

most implausible consequences, e.g. the consequence that I cannot know that I posted a letter this morning and that this event has only reality in my mind. For nobody can observe it; nobody can see, hear or touch my posting the letter as I can see, hear or touch something which goes on right now in my room.²⁰⁾

It does not help if the sceptical thesis is reformulated in terms of verification or verifiability. A statement about a historical event is not equivalent in meaning to a statement about the present and future evidence for the occurrence of this event, and it is amazing that anyone could have believed that it was equivalent. 'I posted a letter this morning' does not mean that I have a certain memory or that there is a certain entry in my diary. 'The battle of Waterloo was fought in 1815' does not mean that there are certain papers in archives and certain passages in memoirs. The truth of a statement about the past, like the truth of any other statement, is not the same as the criteria which allow us to decide whether the statement is true. I know, or I think that I know, that the battle of Waterloo was fought in 1815 without having the faintest idea what evidence there is for the truth of this statement.²¹⁾

20) For similar criticisms see A.J. Lovejoy, 'Present Standpoints and Past History', H. Meyerhoff (Ed.), The Philosophy of History in Our Time, Garden City, N.Y., 1959, p. 184; Gardiner, The Nature..., pp.37, 80; Danto, Analytical Philosophy..., p.92

21) Danto, Analytical Philosophy..., p.45, also points out (against C.I. Lewis) that equating the meaning of a statement with the set of experiences that verify it entails that the meaning may differ each time the statement is verified.

But perhaps the most important point is that the sceptical argument proves too much. If the sceptic were right not only would historical knowledge be impossible but knowledge of the present as well. For knowledge of the past is involved in knowledge of the present in many ways. Knowledge of the present does not consist in present perception; it is not what we see, hear and feel here and now. First of all, in most cases we rely on indirect evidence, e.g. on the testimony of others. 'A good half of all we see is seen through the eyes of others.'²²⁾ In respect to directness the difference between knowledge of the past and knowledge of the present is not as great as the sceptic thinks it is. If I cannot admit the existence of Caesar I cannot admit the existence of my absent son.²³⁾ And if we think of sciences such as physics or chemistry or certain parts of biology it becomes still more obvious that in non-historical fields, too, we often have no direct access to our subject matter by way of sense perception. It is just as impossible to see an electron as to see the Charge of the Light Brigade. Statements about both have to rely on indirect evidence, and although there are many differences between the tracks in a cloud chamber and the words written in a historical document (for example the former can be reproduced at will, while the latter cannot) as far as directness

22) M. Bloch, The Historian's Craft, Repr., Manchester, 1963, p.49.

23) G.G.S. Murphy, 'Sir Isaiah Berlin on the Concept of Scientific History: A comment', History and Theory, Vol.4, 1964/65, p.236.

is concerned there is not much to choose between the two.²⁴⁾

But not only is knowledge of the present indirect in these and similar respects, it is also indirect in that it involves memory. An observation usually takes time and if we forget before we have finished with it what we have noticed at the beginning we get nowhere as far as the acquisition of knowledge is concerned. Even a scientist who reads a figure off the scale of a meter and then turns round to record the reading in his diagram relies on memory. In fact, he records a past event, and if he turns back to his apparatus and finds that the pointer has changed its position he will most probably not conclude that his first reading was false or that the event of the first reading did not take place. He will firmly believe in the truth of the now historical statement that at time t the pointer was in position l, and without beliefs of this sort not only history would be impossible.

What is more, memory is involved in the very use of language and if knowledge is dependent on language then it is dependent on memory. We remember habitually the correct uses of words and grammatical rules. A man who sees a table can say 'table' if he associates the object with the word, and this process of association, even if it is unconscious, is based on past experience and memory. We remember how to apply a name, a term or

24) See also F. Dovring, History as a Social Science, The Hague, 1960, p.22; and Danto, Analytical Philosophy..., p.22.

a rule correctly, and someone who completely lost his memory would not be able to use language. To recognize a table as a table and to call it 'table', therefore, would be impossible if all our knowledge were present knowledge.

But the past is involved in language in still another way. As we have seen, there are terms such as 'rust' which implicitly refer to the cause of a phenomenon. The notion of causality is connected with the notion of the past and, therefore, reference to a cause entails reference to the past. If there is no past then the statement 'there is rust on this screw' is necessarily false for it can only be true if there was a previous time when the brown stuff on the screw was formed by oxidation.²⁵⁾ The denial of the independent existence or reality of the past implies the assertion that all statements such as these are either false or meaningless.

In summary, it is impossible to see how there could be knowledge of the present which is completely independent of knowledge of the past. If knowledge of the past is impossible, then knowledge of the present is likewise impossible, at least knowledge which deserves its name and is more than 'momentary awareness of transient and private data... devoid of all external relations and continuants, of all reference to "others"

25) See also Danto, Analytical Philosophy..., pp. 71-74, who uses the example of a scar and speak of 'past-referring terms'.

or "beyonds"'.²⁶⁾ On the other hand, it is also true that we could have no knowledge of the past without having knowledge of the present. Both are inseparably intertwined and, as it has been put, we only reach into the past because we have a foothold in the present and we have a purchase upon the present only because we get a leverage from the past.²⁷⁾

All this does not disprove the sceptical thesis - it cannot be disproved - but it shows that it is not possible to confine oneself to historical scepticism. To be consistent scepticism must be all-embracing. One cannot maintain that there is no past, that past facts are present mental facts or that statements about the past are not about anything independent of our minds but only have the function of organizing our experience here and now, one cannot say all this without saying the same about the present and the future and about present facts and future facts. One cannot be an idealist as far as history is concerned and a realist in respect to science and daily life. One cannot be sceptical about history without being sceptical about everything else.²⁸⁾ An all-embracing scepticism, however, loses the little plausibility a partial scepticism might have. It is a position which a reasonable man will hesitate to adopt (and if he adopts it he can only do so in theory but not in

26) Lovejoy, 'Present Standpoints...', p.184; see also Harvey, 'Knowledge...', p.152.

27) Harvey, 'Knowledge'...' pp. 165/66.

28) So also J.Huizinga, 'The Idea of History', F. Stern (Ed.), The Varieties of History, 11th printing, Cleveland & New York, 1964, p.302; Lovejoy, 'Present Standpoints...', p. 186; Danto, Analytical Philosophy..., p.110.

practice). It is absurdity par excellence and we need not say anything further about it.

2. The Inferential Character of History

Historical knowledge is inferential knowledge, i.e. knowledge gained by inference. But, so one might reply, what of it? After all, all empirical knowledge is inferential. To know that such and such an individual thing or event exists or happens in the external world here and now I have to make some kind of inference because I am never in direct and immediate contact with the object of my knowledge. This is true (forgetting now about the problem of whether we can speak of inference here, whether I really 'infer' that there is a desk in front of me) but history is inferential in a stronger sense. While in knowledge of the present the inference is usually direct, in historical knowledge it is always indirect; what is inferred is, so to speak, one step further removed. In knowledge of the present we normally 'infer' from the fact that we have certain perceptions, in conjunction with certain other facts, e.g. facts of memory, that x is the case. But in historical knowledge we not only do this but we go further and infer from the fact that x is the case, again in conjunction with certain other things, that y was the case in the past.

Inference of this kind is, however, not confined to knowledge of the past. The presence of electrons is inferred

from certain tracks; the chemical composition of celestial bodies is inferred from the properties of their spectra.^{28a)} In these and similar cases the inference is as indirect as in history although what is inferred concerns a present object, property or event. On the other hand, there is also knowledge of the past, namely knowledge of one's own past, which is not based on indirect inference. From the fact that I remember having posted the letter this morning I 'infer' the fact that I have really posted it, in a way similar to that in which from the fact that I see a desk now I 'infer' that there is a desk. True, it is easier to be mistaken, and checking is more difficult, in the case of memory than in the case of sense-perception but this does not affect the similarity in respect to directness.²⁹⁾ Not all knowledge of the past is, therefore, inferential in the stronger sense of the word³⁰⁾ and not only knowledge of the past is inferential in this sense. But if we combine these two features, pastness and inference, we come to a fairly accurate characterization of history (although

28a) But as Bloch, The Historian's Craft, p.55, remarks, scientists can produce their tracks while historians cannot produce their evidence.

29) A similar account is given by V. Kraft, Die Grundformen der Wissenschaftlichen Methoden, Wien & Leipzig, 1925, pp. 258/59, who contrasts the direct ascertainment of individual facts with the indirect ascertainment of other individual facts on the basis of directly ascertained individual facts.

30) Collingwood, The Idea..., pp. 252/53, excludes knowledge which is based on memory alone from history because nothing can be historical knowledge which is not based on evidence.

it is still too wide to be used as a definition). 31)

The same point can be made more concisely by saying with F.H. Bradley that 'it is only from our knowledge of what is that we can conclude to that which has been' or with R.G. Collingwood that it is the historian's business to study events not accessible to our observation, and to study these events inferentially, arguing to them from something else which is accessible to our observation, and which the historian calls "evidence" for the events in which he is interested'. 32) In short, to say that historical knowledge is inferential in character means only that it is based on evidence. What, however, is evidence?.

31) The two features are shared by history with 'historical sciences' such as palaeontology and geology. This comparison, however, has been criticized on the ground that in sciences which are concerned with the past the object of inquiry can be exhibited while in human history this is not possible. The subject-matter of a palaeontologist is the skeletal structure of past animals and when he is confronted with a fossilized skeleton he is confronted with his subject-matter itself. The subject-matter of the historian, on the other hand, consists in the past actions and situations of man, and with those he is never confronted. See B. Waters, 'The Past and the Historical Past', The Journal of Philosophy, Vol.52, 1955, p. 263. (The same point was made many years before by E. Bernheim, Lehrbuch der Historischen Methode und der Geschichtsphilosophie, 3.M.4 Aufl., Leipzig, 1903, p.227). This argument is not convincing. For, firstly, there are many instances where the subject-matter of such a 'historical science' cannot be exhibited (one need only think of past volcanic eruptions to see this point). And, secondly, in history, too, the remains of the past may themselves be the subject-matter the historian is interested in. The subject-matter of an art historian may consist in Italian seventeenth century paintings (not painters) and these he can exhibit in the same way in which a fossil can be exhibited.

32) F.H. Bradley, 'The Presuppositions of Critical History', Collected Essays, Vol.1, Oxford, 1935 p.25. Collingwood, The Idea...., pp. 251/52.

Like many other key terms in history or the philosophy of history, the term 'evidence' is so vague and ambiguous that it is almost useless unless it is specified at least to some extent. Basically, it has two meanings, the reasons for asserting something and that which is thought to supply those reasons. It is the latter sense which we shall have in mind here. Thus, the existence of certain documents supplies us with good reasons for the belief that there was a battle of Waterloo. Therefore, these documents are evidence for the event in question. In short, evidence consists in present objects (these need not be material in character; a present custom or institution can be evidence for a past thing or event). But instead of saying that something present constitutes evidence for something past we can also say that a statement p asserting the existence of something present constitutes evidence for a statement q asserting that something was the case in the past. It is a matter of choice whether one regards the evidential relationship as holding between objects or as holding between statements³³⁾ but whichever we prefer we must not forget that, as far as empirical evidence is concerned (and formal evidence we shall ignore here), the relationship in either case is not an inherent or logical one. Objects are not evidence for each other per se; statements are not evidence for each other by logical necessity, but 'the very idea of evidence rests upon the mediation of our knowledge'.³⁴⁾

33) So also N. Rescher, 'A Theory of Evidence', Philosophy of Science, Vol. 25, 1958, p.83.

34) N. Rescher & C.B. Joynt, 'Evidence in History and in the Law', The Journal of Philosophy, Vol. 56, 1959, p. 565.

In other words, in order to make the step from evidence to fact we need something in addition to evidence.

The function of evidence is twofold, although in practice it is often not possible to separate or to distinguish the two factors. Evidence is needed for establishing a fact (establishing in the sense of finding out that something is or was the case) but it is also needed for supporting what has already been established. A fact is established on the basis of certain evidence (and without evidence we could not speak here of establishment at all). At a certain time we did not know that an event E happened. At a later time we know it because we have been led to it by certain evidence. We also can say that the fact has been suggested by certain evidence. But further evidence is required in order to increase the likelihood of E's occurrence. After the fact has been established on the basis of evidence₁ further evidence₂ is used to support the original establishment, to make E's occurrence more likely than it was before.³⁵⁾ At some point, sooner or later, we shall have to stop and be satisfied with the degree of likelihood achieved. We then take E's happening for granted until such time as further discoveries are made which shake our confidence or remove it altogether.

This process of establishing and supporting is at the same time a process of justification. If a historian claims that

35) Similar Rescher 'A Theory...', pp. 83-87, who distinguishes confirming evidence by means of which a hypothesis is established from supporting evidence by means of which it is rendered more tenable.

something was the case he must be in a position to justify his claim to anyone who questions him, to anyone who asks 'how do you know?' or 'why should it be as you say and not otherwise?'. He must then be able to point ~~out~~ to certain evidence and to reply, in effect, 'this is why'. Otherwise he is not a historian, whatever he may be.³⁶⁾

However, the fact that all historical knowledge rests on evidence does not imply that it only rests on evidence. We have said already that to make the step from evidence to fact we need something in addition to evidence. The basis of historical knowledge does not consist in evidence alone but something else is required.³⁷⁾ It is not the case that a historian finds certain evidence, e.g. a document, just looks at it and concludes without any further ado that something happened in the year dot. For, firstly, to recognize something as evidence is only possible under certain conditions and, secondly, from evidence alone nothing follows at all.

This means that no historian and nobody else can approach his evidence with an empty mind. The view that this ^{is}/possible could be called the 'positivist fallacy', a fallacy which is usually associated with historians and philosophers of the

36) So also Collingwood, The Idea..., p.252.

37) So also V. Kraft, 'Geschichtsforschung als strenge Wissenschaft', E. Topitsch (Ed.), Logik der Sozialwissenschaften Köln & Berlin, 1965, p.81. - There is, of course, a wider concept of evidence which includes everything that is needed in order to make an inference to an individual fact. But this is not the concept adopted here.

nineteenth century (although it seems rather questionable whether any of them really believed in this tabula rasa thesis; these men were not quite as foolish as they are sometimes made out to be nowadays on the strength of short quotations taken out of context). This is so self-evident that it hardly needs emphasizing, and it is pointed out in almost every work on historical knowledge, written from any point of view, that open-mindedness is not intellectual vacuity, that no inquiry can take place in a mental vacuum, that without initial ideas nature as well as history is 'one blooming confusion',³⁸⁾ or that 'one does not go naked into the archives'.³⁹⁾ In other words, the points from which inference starts are not just the points of evidence in the sense explicated. Before we can infer anything from evidence we have to take a lot of things for granted. We need previous empirical knowledge, including historical knowledge and knowledge of individual facts and their connexions, and we need certain general assumptions or presuppositions.⁴⁰⁾

38) So (in respect to nature) M.R. Cohen, The Meaning of Human History, La Salle, Ill., 1947, p.78.

39) Danto, Analytical Philosophy..., p.101.

40) It may be true, as maintained by Oakeshott, Experience..., p.98, that no line can be drawn between what is known and what is presupposed, at least no sharp line. After all, all empirical knowledge is in a sense presuppositional. But although all data may be presuppositions we can still distinguish between these data on the one hand, i.e. the items of knowledge from which we start, and the facts we establish and support on the basis of these data (so also Cohen, The Meaning...., p.44). And although data may themselves be products of inference it is wrong, or at least misleading, to say with R. Aron, 'Evidence and Inference in History', D.Lerner (Ed.), Evidence and Inference, 2nd printing, New York, 1962, p.27, that no 'rigorous distinction between data and inferences' is possible.

It is obvious that all empirical inquiry rests on and starts from some received knowledge. All research is really further research⁴¹⁾ and this holds for history in particular. When a historian starts his work he has already acquired a huge amount of historical knowledge which by and large he takes for granted. (It may even be that some inconsistency of inadequacy in such a transmitted historical account induces him to engage in research in a certain field⁴²⁾ but this is another question connected with the selection of a topic or the formation of a hypothesis). He treats certain things as if they were settled⁴³⁾ even if it is his intention that they should be in the end altered or supplemented through his activity, and he has to do this because it is simply impossible to question and to check everything at once. But some items are taken more for granted than others; some are regarded as virtually certain, e.g. such facts as the past existence of Napoleon or of the Roman Empire or such connexions between facts as that Caesar lived after Hannibal. Whether he is in all cases justified in doing so, and in how far he is justified in any individual case, is questionable, but in order to get anywhere he cannot proceed differently.

This already follows from the fact that no datum could become evidence, or could be regarded as evidence, without previous

41) So in respect to history W. Bauer, Einführung in das Studium der Geschichte, Tübingen, 1921, p.81.

42) W.B. Gallie, Philosophy and the Historical Understanding, London, 1964, p.60.

43) Collingwood, The Idea..., p.244.

knowledge. If here is a coin and I infer from its inscription something about the later Roman Empire, then I can only do this if I know, or if I think I know, that there was a Roman Empire. What is more, to recognize or to identify the object in question as a Roman coin may already presuppose my conviction of its existence. It is true that when a historian or archaeologist opens up a completely new field of scholarship he may infer from an artefact the past existence of such an entity itself. But even then it is doubtful whether he could do so without taking other historical facts for granted, even if it is only in order to use them for analogies and comparisons.

This brings us to the second kind of precondition of inference from evidence, to general assumptions or presuppositions. One of these, and perhaps the most fundamental one for history, we have discussed already, namely the assumption that there was a past, that past events happened and past things existed. 'We cannot begin to think about what happened unless we are already taking for granted that something happened.'⁴⁴⁾ The step from the present to the past, from present evidence to past fact, can only be made if it is assumed that there was a past, and without this assumption evidence could not even be seen as evidence.⁴⁵⁾ This is so obvious that we shall not say anything more about it; and we shall also not say anything about necessary assumptions of a formal or logical character, assumptions which are preconditions not only of historical but of all

44) Field, 'Some Problems...', p.61.

45) Danto, Analytical Philosophy..., p.95

thinking and all discursive knowledge.

But historians also need general assumptions of a different character in order to make inferences from evidence to facts.⁴⁶⁾ Or rather, to give these inferences a valid logical form such generalizations are required. There can be no doubt that in most cases they are not made explicit at all; they are usually not even distinguished from each other but form an interwoven texture, a unified complex of 'life experience' in the light of which certain things seem more or less obvious.^{46a)} The principle which underlies the use of such complexes of experience is a principle of analogy. Whoever makes the step from evidence to the past has to assume that past events and things had certain basic characteristics which are very much like the characteristics which can be observed today,⁴⁷⁾ and if we assume a world with neither uniformity nor consistency it is hard to see how we could use anything as evidence at all. This applies to the sphere of nature as it applies to the sphere of

46) This has been emphasized by many writers, e.g. by Cohen, The Meaning..., pp. 37, 115; Danto, Analytical Philosophy..., p.100; C.G. Hempel, 'The Function of General Laws in History', H.Feigl & W. Sellars (Eds.), Readings in Philosophical Analysis, New York, 1949, p.470; S. Hook, 'Problems of Terminology in Historical Writing: Illustrations', Theory and Practice in Historical Study, New York, 1946, p.124.

46a) I.Berlin, 'History and Theory - The Concept of Scientific History', History and Theory, Vol. 1, 1960/61, p.20, in a different context (that of explanation) uses the phrase 'experience in general'.

47) Similar Field, 'Some Problems...', p.60. See also E.W.Strong, 'Fact and Understanding in History', The Journal of Philosophy, Vol. 44, 1947, p.622.

~~nature as it applies to the sphere of man.~~ We postulate that men who lived in the past faced a physical universe identical with ours,⁴⁸⁾ a universe in which, for example, no man and no object can vanish in one place and reappear in a different place, and a universe in which artefacts such as coins, temples or manuscripts do not come into existence naturally like trees or stones but are due to the activities of man.⁴⁹⁾

In short, we assume the uniformity of nature.⁵⁰⁾ But we also assume a uniformity of human nature, at least in certain respects. We assume, for example, that certain creations of man presuppose that the creator has reached a certain stage of intellectual maturity (that a work such as Plato's Laws could not have been written by a small child) or that men normally have certain needs and desires which they strive to satisfy and which sometimes conflict with each other.

This account of the basic character of historical presuppositions has been criticized by Collingwood⁵²⁾ who maintains against Bradley that the criteria supplied are of a negative character and only give us knowledge of what could have happened but not of what did happen. Against this, however, one

48) A. Johnson, The Historian and Historical Evidence, New York, 1926, p.154.

49) M.R.Cohen, Reason and Nature, 2nd ed., New York & London, 1964, p.15. See also D.C. Williams 'More on the Ordinarity of History', The Journal of Philosophy, Vol.52, 1955, p.274.

50) Bradley, 'The Presuppositions...', p.21.

52) Collingwood, The Idea..., pp. 239-241.

can point out, firstly, that it is a matter of form whether our presuppositions are formulated in negative or positive terms, whether we say 'this text cannot have been written by a child' or 'this text must have been written by an adult person', and, secondly, that it is impossible to arrive at what did happen from any general assumption without the knowledge of 'initial conditions', i.e. without statements asserting individual facts. Collingwood wants to supplement the principle or principles of uniformity by another and in his view sole positive principle which he calls 'historical interpolation',^{52a)} but it seems that this is just another form of the same principle he has criticized before. This is at least suggested by the example he gives of interpolation: '... our authorities tell us that on one day Caesar was in Rome and on a later day in Gaul; they tell us nothing about the journey from one place to the other, but we interpolate this with a perfectly good conscience.' Of course, we do, but only because we subscribe to the general presupposition that if anything or anybody is in a place at one time it can only be in a different place at a later time if it has moved or travelled there and that this movement must have taken some time.

However, the issue raised by Collingwood is really whether the presuppositions in questions are gained by experience

52a) The same procedure has been described before Collingwood by others. Bernheim, Lehrbuch..., pp.571, calls it 'combination', while L. Reis & P.O. Kristeller, 'Some Remarks on the Method of History', The Journal of Philosophy, Vol.40, 1943, p.237, refer to it (like Collingwood) as 'historical imagination'.

or are a priori. Collingwood thinks that Bradley opts for the former while he himself follows Kant and speaks of 'a priori imagination'. But it is doubtful whether he is right, i.e. whether any of these presuppositions is a priori in the sense that whatever our experience may be we shall stick to it, or that it is even a precondition of all possible relevant experience. After all, we can imagine their contraries; we can imagine that Plato wrote the Laws when he was three years old or that Caesar vanished in Rome and reappeared in Gaul. And assuming that all, absolutely all the evidence, direct and circumstantial, written and unwritten, supplied by every witness, even the most sober and reliable one, by official reports and papers of state, and supported by scientific investigations such as measurements of Greek and Roman skulls, assuming that all this were to support the conclusion that some babes in arms of those days could compose intellectual works of great maturity, or that some people could vanish in one spot and reappear in another, then it is at least possible that serious historians might after all be inclined to the belief that Plato did write the Laws when he was three or that Caesar did vanish and reappear.

In other words, if all the evidence pointed that way, we might be persuaded that one or other of the present laws of nature or of human nature did not hold at a certain time in the past. It is, therefore, risky to call any of those laws a priori or to assert that 'there are certain accounts which we would simply not allow as true no matter what the "evidence" for them might be'.⁵³⁾ At least, we can only be sure about this in cases of contradiction and

53) Danto, Analytical Philosophy..., p. 105, who gives the case of the child Plato as author of the Laws as example.

formal impossibility, e.g. in respect to reports to the effect that in Caesar's time two and two made five. This we would and could indeed not allow to be true, however strong the evidence in its favour. But not all presuppositions of history are of this formal nature and a presupposition necessary for history need not be a necessary proposition.⁵⁴⁾

However, all this does not prove that there are no a priori and non-formal presuppositions whatsoever. It perhaps only proves that Collingwood and others have looked for them in the wrong place. It may be that no particular uniformity is a priori but that the general principle of uniformity is. In order to make the step from evidence to fact it may not be necessary to hold any particular law, such as the law that nothing can vanish and reappear in different places, but it may be necessary to stick to the general rule that matters in the world by and large were ordered in the past in the same, or at least in basically the same, way in which they are ordered now. In fact, it is most likely that if we were to scrap all the laws in which this uniformity is embodied we could not get anywhere in history and that under the assumption of non-uniformity nothing could be evidence at all. Similar considerations hold in respect to the conceptualization of reality in terms of things, situations and

54) Some presuppositions which might appear to be empirical at first sight turn out to be analytic, e.g. the principle that no man can be in two different places at the same time. For it follows from our conception of identity that if something is in two places at the same time it is not one thing but two.

events. That there are such entities as events which change the situations of things may be regarded as a basic presupposition of all our experience which means that no experience, and consequently no evidence, can change it.

But the empirical and, therefore, refutable character of any particular and specific presupposition, as opposed to those general principles, can hardly be denied, and we can uphold our original view that they are based on generalized experience. This experience, however, is, at least in part, itself of historical character, and this is why historical knowledge can have an influence on the specific presuppositions which were applied in the process of acquiring it. It is possible, at least in principle, that certain presuppositions used in historical research are changed or modified in the light of the outcome of this research. This kind of circularity is frequent, not only in history but in all empirical inquiry, and it cannot be avoided.

3. Problems of Evidence

We have spoken of the inference from evidence to fact and although we have pointed out that presuppositions are necessary to make such an inference possible, one might still think that a historian finds his evidence ready⁻made and has only to apply his presuppositions in order to infer that something was the case. But this would be a very inadequate conception of

historical procedure, for presuppositions are necessary for the very identification of a datum as evidence as well as for the evaluation of evidence. If a historian is confronted with a certain datum, such as a coin or a document or a ruined temple, it seems that three problems arise: (1) The problem of the identification or interpretation of the datum, i.e. the problem of what this thing is; (2) the problem of what it is evidence for i.e. what fact or statement of fact is established or supported by it; and (3) the problem of the degree of such establishment or support, i.e. in how far the fact or statement in question is established or supported by it. Let us look more closely at each of these three problems.

(1) It is useful to distinguish between data and evidence. A datum is what is perceived or known in the present but it only becomes evidence if it is used as evidence,⁵⁵⁾ i.e. if it is used to infer that something is or was the case. But if the datum is not identified in a certain way it cannot be used as evidence. If I am confronted with a Roman coin but I do not recognize it as a Roman coin it is not evidence for anything relating to the Roman Empire (although it may be evidence for something else). Still more obvious would be the case of a document written on an unknown material in an unknown script and an unknown language. This, too, could not be evidence although it might become evidence one day, namely when somebody is able to identify the material, to decipher the symbols and to understand the language.

55) Similar¹ Collingwood, The Idea..., p.280.

From these considerations it becomes clear that 'evidence' is ambiguous in a further sense not mentioned so far. There is a relativised and an unrelativised concept of evidence,⁵⁶⁾ or, as we can also say, there is actual and potential evidence.⁵⁷⁾ Every present individual thing with a past is potential evidence for something,⁵⁸⁾ even if it is only for facts relating to its own past. But if this is so, then it is not very practical to use the term 'evidence' for potential evidence for then there could be hardly anything which would not be evidence. Consequently, by 'evidence' we shall refer here to actual evidence reserving the terms 'datum' or 'data' for potential evidence, and we can then say that only data which are identified or interpreted can be evidence.

(2) Identification or interpretation is thus a necessary condition if a datum is to establish or support a statement about the past. The question is whether this is also a sufficient condition. In a sense it is. If I have identified this object here as a Roman coin then the object is evidence for the past existence of the Roman Empire. And if I refine my identification, e.g. by describing it as a Roman coin of the time of Hadrian, then its value as evidence is increased in that it becomes evidence for a more specific past existence, and this process of

56) J. Giedymin, 'Reliability of Informants', The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science, Vol.13, 1962/63, p.299.

57) Collingwood, The Idea..., p.279.

58) Similar ibid., p.280, and G.J.Renier, History. Its Purpose and Method, London, 1950, p.99.

more and more refined identification and so of more and more specific conclusions can be continued. This seems to entail that our problems (1) and (2), the problem of correct identification of a datum and the problem of what it is evidence for, are basically the same.^{58a)}

However, this presupposes a meaning of 'identification' (or of 'interpretation') which is too inclusive. It presupposes, for instance, that the recognition of the truth or falsity of an assertion contained in a historical document is part of the correct identification or interpretation of that document and that a historian can only claim to have identified or interpreted a datum exhaustively and correctly if he has found out exactly what it supports, i.e. what conclusions can be drawn from it. He would have to know that the assertion in the document is true and so is evidence for the event whose occurrence has been asserted. This would not permit us to say that someone has identified or interpreted a datum adequately and sufficiently but has drawn the wrong conclusions from it. However, we do say this sometimes, and in fact the whole division of labour between 'history proper' on the one hand and disciplines such as paleography, epigraphy, diplomatic, sphragistics and heraldry on the other, as well as the common distinction between external and internal criticism of sources, rests on the assumption that it is one thing to identify,

58a) This is the conclusion of Bernheim, Lehrbuch..., p.527, who writes that strictly speaking the identification of an object as a source of historical knowledge is already an interpretative activity.

to read, to interpret a document and another thing to find out what it shows or proves in respect to past events and things.

It is, therefore, better to conceive 'identification' and 'interpretation' more narrowly in such a way that we are able to say that identifying a datum, e.g. identifying it as a Roman coin, is to transform it into evidence, but that it is still an open question what it is evidence for, i.e. what historical conclusions can be drawn from it, apart from conclusions of the most obvious kind, e.g. the conclusion that there must have been a Roman Empire. A conclusion like this is indeed given with the identification itself, and in this elementary sense to identify or interpret a datum is to recognize what it is evidence for. But when it comes to more detailed (and more interesting) conclusions, then we no longer regard it as a matter of mere identification or interpretation but as a separate and distinct activity, the activity of finding out what fact or statement is established or supported by an identified and interpreted datum, i.e. by a piece of evidence, even if both activities may blend into each other so that no sharp line of division can be drawn between them.⁵⁹⁾

As a matter of fact, one and the same piece of evidence

59) A similar distinction between the decision to recognize something as evidence and the decision as to the conclusion it points to is made by Walsh, An Introduction..., p.83. - J.H. Wigmore The Science of Judicial Proof, 3rd ed., Boston, 1937, p.982, from a legal point of view, distinguishes between the authentication of a historical document and its use as testimony.

can establish or support different conclusions; one and the same datum can be used as evidence for different facts. A Roman funerary inscription, for example, can serve as evidence relating to the speech of the time, to its religious beliefs and practices, to its political system (the name and date of an emperor may appear on it), to its economy (the deceased may have had an unusual and interesting trade), etc. etc.⁶⁰⁾ It is very obvious that what such a datum is used for depends on the interest of the historian concerned, on the questions he wants to answer, the problems he intends to solve. It has often been emphasized that a question or hypothesis is necessary in order to use something as evidence⁶¹⁾ and that this is not suggested by the evidence itself.⁶²⁾ This is true, provided we understand 'question' and 'hypothesis' in a wide and rather vague sense and do not want to say that only someone who has a specific, definite and clearly formulated problem can make use of a datum as evidence. History is not a theoretical discipline, and the sweeping desire to increase one's knowledge of certain aspects of a historical period often takes the place of a specific question.

(3) But to know that something is evidence for a fact is

60) This example is taken from Bloch, The Historian's Craft, p.145.

61) Bloch, The Historian's Craft, p.64; Collingwood, The Idea..., pp. 280/81; Giedymin, Reliability..., p.299; L.J. Goldstein, 'Evidence and Events in History', Philosophy of Science, Vol. 29, 1962, p.180; Renier, History, p.103.

62) Cohen, The Meaning..., p.80.

not yet to know how strongly it is evidence for it, i.e. in how far the fact concerned or the statement asserting that fact is established or supported by it. In short, evidence is a matter of degree; it is a 'probabilistic concept'; and there is no unique answer to the question as to how good evidence must be before it can be regarded as sufficient.⁶³⁾ There is no sharp dividing line which would allow us to say that up to here the evidence is insufficient to make the fact a virtual certainty while from here onwards it is sufficient. In history, as everywhere else, there is no specific criterion for deciding where conjecture becomes knowledge.⁶⁴⁾

The decision for considering certain evidence as sufficient depends on many factors. It depends most of all on the congruence or coherence of several pieces of evidence. One piece gives strength to the other and this mutual interlocking support is one of the essential features of historical knowledge.

63) So also Rescher & Joynt, 'Evidence...', pp.563, 565. See also Lee, 'Knowledge...', p.65 - Rescher & Joynt (p.562) and Rescher, 'A Theory...' p.93, also point out that the evidential relationship is not a relation of entailment, not only because it is not a logical implication but also because one statement may be evidence for another statement which goes beyond the first in 'assertive content'. In other words, the first may only partially cover the second. Consequently, a true statement may provide evidence for a false one or for several incompatible statements. We can add to this that it may also be the other way round in that the statement which provides evidence may cover a wider field than the one for which it provides evidence. In that case the problems involved are not as serious.

64) Lee, 'Knowledge...', p.65.

However, the demand for reciprocal reinforcement may feed back on the criterion of what constitutes sufficient evidence in that we lower our sights in cases where we cannot expect to find many records or remains. In other words, what constitutes good or sufficient evidence is also pragmatically dependent on what is available. Where evidence is more abundant we tighten our requirements while where it is scarce, we ^ol_osen them.⁶⁵⁾ The amount and quality of evidence considered as sufficient for the early Middle Ages would never do for the nineteenth century. Finally, it is also obvious that we take into account the quantity and quality of 'negative' or 'contradictory' evidence, i.e. of evidence which points in a direction which is opposite to our conclusion and which diminishes the degree of support provided by 'positive' evidence.

So much for our three problems. What we have said amounts in the end merely to the recognition that historical knowledge, like any empirical knowledge, can only be probable and never certain although it is probable in different degrees.⁶⁶⁾ The interesting question is, however, whether there are any criteria which allow us to pin-point the degree of probability and to weigh the evidence for a historical fact or statement. If there are, then it is possible to decide between conflicting claims of different historians as to whether a fact is established by the

65) Bernheim, Lehrbuch..., p.506; Rescher & Joynt, 'Evidence...', p.564.

66) So also Walsh, An Introduction..., p.87.

evidence or whether it is better supported by it than another fact.

But before we come to that we had better ask first whether there are any criteria for the correct identification or interpretation of data. The answer to this can be fairly brief and straightforward. It is, of course, true that the principles of interpretation change in time⁶⁷⁾ with the change of our knowledge and presuppositions but within any generation of historians they are relatively constant. This has to do with the fact that the relevant presuppositions are fairly intersubjective and shared by the majority of scholars. Naturally, there are always borderline cases where the experts disagree about the identification of a datum (whether this fragment is really Etruscan, whether this deed is really a forgery, whether this charter really dates from the tenth century, whether this passage is really to be construed in this sense rather than that, etc.). But by and large the criteria applied and the conclusions reached are intersubjective (and the application of science to historical criticism, as in carbon dating and textual analysis by computer, may, within limits, help to increase this intersubjectivity).

Matters are not as bright when it comes to deciding whether a certain datum is evidence for a certain fact. It has been said that a historian has to decide for himself that something is evidence and that if his colleague does not agree

67) Collingwood, The Idea..., p.248.

with him there is nothing he can do about it.⁶⁸⁾ This, although a bit of an overstatement, is basically true. The datum itself can indeed not enforce any agreement. This feature is shared by history with other fields of inquiry in which the evidence is direct and observational. A scientist can ask a colleague to 'see for himself' and look through a telescope or microscope but he cannot force him to come to the same conclusion, i.e. to regard what he sees as evidence for the same fact, while in a sense he could 'force' him to agree that two and two make four by demonstrating that a denial of this proposition leads to a self-contradiction. All this is not surprising for it follows directly from what we have pointed out before, namely that from a piece of evidence alone nothing can be inferred but that presuppositions are necessary in order that such inference be possible. If another person does not make the same presuppositions he may come to different conclusions, if he comes to any conclusions at all, and the presuppositions here are not as easily shared by all or most historians as those which are relevant for the identification or interpretation of data.

Now, it is just this feature of different presuppositions which has been used in an attempt to show that in the last resort there is no genuine disagreement at all in such cases.⁶⁹⁾ The argument goes as follows: assuming there are two

68) Walsh, An Introduction..., p.117.

69) Danto, Analytical Philosophy..., pp. 107/08.

historians, A and B, and A has a set of presuppositions P₁ from which (in conjunction with certain evidence e) a statement of historical fact p can be inferred while B has a different set of presuppositions P₂ from which (in conjunction with the same evidence e) a different statement q is derived (where p and q are incompatible). Then, so it is said, there is no logical opposition between the two statements for p is acceptable relative to P₁ (and e) and q is acceptable relative to P₂ (and e). Further, there can be no genuine disagreement between A and B for 'either they share the same set of presuppositions, and hence cannot genuinely disagree, or they have different sets of presuppositions, in which case they cannot genuinely disagree'.

If this argument were tenable any genuine disagreement as to what can be inferred from the same evidence would be impossible. Or rather, disagreement would be possible only where historians share the same presuppositions and base themselves on the same evidence but come to different conclusions which could only happen if there were some formal error of reasoning (and such errors are detectable and the accompanying disagreements eliminable). However, this dissolution of 'disagreements through relativization' presupposes that historians proceed hypothetically and that their arguments start with formulas such as 'assuming that such and such presuppositions are justified...'. But the historian who argues in this way has to be invented. History does not proceed like mathematics, with postulates, axioms and the

rest. Historians argue categorically, if they argue at all; they hold their presuppositions absolutely and believe firmly in their truth, even if they believe only that something is more probable than something else (probabilistic statements can be just as firmly asserted as non-probabilistic ones). What is more, in many cases they are not even aware what their presuppositions are (and if they are aware of this then only incompletely and vaguely) for, as we have pointed out already, the individual presuppositions are usually not distinguished from each other but form an interconnected texture of 'life experience'. Such a complex whole cannot be formulated in words (although parts of it may be formulated inadequately); much less can it be used as the antecedent in a hypothetical argument.

Genuine disagreements exist; it does happen that historians agree as to the identification or interpretation of their data but genuinely disagree on what they are evidence for or in how far they support a particular conclusion. Different scholars begin with the same evidence but come to different results; they cannot come to the same conclusion as to what the past had to be like in order best to make sense of present data,⁷⁰⁾ and they disagree not because their modes of reasoning are different but because they start with different presuppositions. Similar difficulties arise in other disciplines but they are perhaps more frequent in history for here it is more

70) So Goldstein, 'Evidence...', p.177, and L.J. Goldstein, 'A Note on the Status of Historical Reconstructions', The Journal of Philosophy, Vol.55, 1958, p. 474.

difficult to make the presuppositions explicit, and to make them explicit would be a precondition for coming to an agreement about them.

A historian A may assert 'this e is evidence for event E' or 'e (in conjunction with other evidence e₁, e₂, etc.) is sufficient to prove that E occurred' while historian B replies 'no, e is not evidence for E at all' or 'e may constitute some evidence for E but (in the light of certain contradictory evidence e_x, e_y, etc.) e is not sufficient to prove that E did occur'. Is there any procedure available which would allow us to decide in favour of either A or B? There is none, at least not a cut and dried one which could be applied methodically and in all cases. There is no 'logic of nondemonstrative inference',⁷¹⁾ and although the lack of it has certain consequences also in other disciplines, in history they are more obvious. Fortunately, there are presuppositions which are shared by all historians and others which are shared by most of them, and there exist also 'many unformulated habits of thought which embody sound principles of nondemonstrative reasoning',⁷²⁾ (not only in respect to the inference of individual facts from evidence but also in respect to the connexions between facts), and it is due to this that disagreements about ~~which~~ ^{what} constitutes evidence and what constitutes sufficient evidence in a particular case are not as

71) E. Nagel, The Structure of Science, London, 1961, p.592.

72) Ibid.

frequent and not as serious as they might be.

There is no justification for drawing sceptical or relativist conclusions from the fact that there is no logic of non-demonstrative inference and that there are disagreements which cannot be resolved. Historical knowledge is not impossible because there are cases where the experts cannot agree. Neither does it follow that the truth of an assertion of a historical fact is 'relative' to the presuppositions of him who makes it. Any such statement is either true or false, whatever the presuppositions, and this is not affected in the least by the fact that because of differences in these presuppositions historians sometimes cannot come to a unanimous opinion about truth or falsity. After all, there is no absolute certainty and no absolute proof to be had in any empirical investigation so that there will always be some room for argument for or against a particular conclusion.

In our account of evidential inference we have only considered cases where from the presence of evidence it is inferred that something was the case (or was not the case). However, it is also possible to reach certain conclusions from the absence of evidence. From the fact that there is no record or remains of a certain event or thing it can sometimes be inferred that the event in question did not occur or the thing concerned did not exist. For instance, from the absence of contemporary documents it is concluded that there was no Donation of Constantine (and that later documents which assert that there was

are spurious).⁷³⁾ This kind of inference is sometimes called the 'argument from silence' and it is also used in courts of law.

Most of what we have said about the inference from evidence to fact also holds for the argument from silence. It might seem at first that there is nothing here which corresponds to the identification or interpretation of a datum because there is no datum. But if we look somewhat closer we find that there is. For, first of all, in many cases the argument is not an argument from the total absence of data but only from the absence of certain features in available data, e.g. from the absence of a reference to an event in one or more documents; and this, of course, presupposes that the data in question are identified or interpreted. But even where the argument is from the total absence of data it is usually necessary that certain existing data should be interpreted in such a way that they do not constitute evidence for the fact in question. I can only say that there was no Donation of Constantine because there are no contemporary documents to this effect when I have identified all existing data as records which are not contemporary or which do not assert the fact in question.

Further, there can be no doubt that here, too, presuppositions are needed. For the argument takes roughly the following form: 'If event E had occurred some evidence for its

73) This and other examples can be found in J. Lange, 'The Argument from Silence', History and Theory, Vol 5, 1966, p.289.

occurrence would be present (or would be known); but there is no evidence present (or known) for E's occurrence; therefore E has not occurred.⁷⁴⁾ The premisses here rest on at least three assumptions, the assumption that if E had occurred it would have left some trace, the assumption that such a trace would not have been lost or destroyed in the time-interval between E's occurrence and the present but would still exist today, and the assumption that the trace would be known to exist today.

Needless to say, in any particular case each of these assumptions rests on a host of presuppositions, e.g. on the presupposition that it is against human nature not to report important events which affect the life of everybody (such as a war or the assassination of a national figure) if means are available for reporting them (e.g. if writing is not an unknown art). It is equally obvious that here, too, historians may not share the same presuppositions and so may disagree as to what is supported by the absence of evidence or as to the degree of such support. And for these disagreements there is also no decision procedure.⁷⁵⁾ In short, the results we have arrived at in respect to the inference from the presence of evidence also hold in respect to the inference from its absence.

74) Lange proceeds on similar lines. - The argument can, of course, also be to the occurrence of E (instead of its non-occurrence) in which case it takes the form: 'If E had not occurred then some evidence for its non-occurrence would be present; but there is no evidence present for it; hence E has occurred.'

75) Lange (although he treats the problem in a much more detailed way) only takes into account the absence of written evidence (whereas we have spoken of evidence in general) but he also comes to the conclusion that no logic of confirmation is

4. The Interpretation of Data

According to our thesis a datum must be identified or interpreted before it can become evidence. But it is not sufficiently clear yet what we mean by 'identification or interpretation'. In the view we wish to adopt there is no difference between the two (although in common usage 'interpretation' has a flavour of subjectivity and uncertainty not associated with 'identification') and both are in turn closely related to description. In all three cases the word 'as' is essential in that an object is identified, interpreted or described as a (or the) so-and-so.⁷⁶⁾ In fact, description is only the explicit or discursive part or aspect of identification and interpretation, and the relation here is somewhat similar to the relation between concepts and terms. As far as discursive knowledge is concerned identifications or interpretations always take the form of descriptions, and it has been truly said that to interpret something 'means to discover terms by which it may suitably be

applicable and that in the end historians have to rely 'on their subjective estimations of likelihood'. See ibid., pp. 300/01.

76) It might be objected that only interpretations which take the form of definite descriptions ('the so-and-so') can be viewed as identifications, and this is indeed the meaning attached to the word in many cases ('the body of the man found in the river has not been identified yet'). However, 'identification' is also used in a more inclusive sense in connexion with indefinite descriptions ('the strange animal in Hampshire has been identified as a puma') and it is this sense which is adopted here.

described'.⁷⁷⁾ An object e is perceived and is recognized or seen as something, i.e. it is identified or interpreted, and if this identification or interpretation is made explicit one arrives at a description. (We are not concerned here with the question in how far, if at all, it is possible to split off perception from identification or interpretation, but it will not affect our argument if we grant that a completely unidentified or uninterpreted object would be a Ding an sich and, consequently, unknowable and imperceptible; that, in other words, any perception is at the same time an identification or interpretation, even if only a very rudimentary and primitive one.)

Obviously, an object can be identified, interpreted and described in different ways and all these identifications, interpretations and descriptions may be correct and compatible with each other. I perceive something in the street and identify it as a human being, or as a man, or as a bald man, or as a bachelor, or as my next-door neighbour, or as Mr. John Smith, or as the manager of the local branch of Lloyds Bank. All these identifications may be correct, in spite of the variations in specificity and detail. Some entail others ('this is a bachelor' entails 'this is a man') while others do not. In

77) H. Gomperz, Interpretation, The Hague & Chicago, 1939, p.6 - One could define interpretation as the explanation of data (as opposed to explanation proper, i.e. explanation of facts) but we shall not do so because we want to use 'explanation of data' (or rather 'explanation of evidence') in a specific sense.

general, the more specified a description the more knowledge is conveyed by it. But there are exceptions to this rule, and it may be more enlightening to know that this is a person suffering from diabetes than to recognize him as the man who sat next to me in the theatre yesterday.

As far as history is concerned, it would seem that the identification of a datum must be in terms of past events or things. Thus, if a historian meets with a flat metal disc of circular shape its identification as a flat metal disc of circular shape is pretty useless while the identification as a Roman coin is not. Nevertheless, there are descriptions no part of which refers to the past but which are still historically useful, namely in connexion with items of historical knowledge previously acquired. If, to give a primitive example, something is interpreted as a text printed with movable types, then one can conclude immediately that it cannot be older than Gutenberg's invention.

Interpretation has often been understood as the discovery of the meanings of symbols⁷⁸⁾ but this is too narrow unless our conception of 'symbol' becomes so sweeping that there is nothing a historian can touch which is not of symbolic character. If we restrict the application of this term to entities whose status depends on their being used (or intended to

78) So E. Cassirer, An Essay on Man, 3rd printing, New Haven, 1945, p. 177 & passim, who sees in this the special task of history.

being used) in communication,⁷⁹⁾ even if it is only communication with oneself, then we cannot say that the historian's data are all of a symbolic nature and that historical interpretation always consists in the discovery of meanings. If someone interprets a datum as an arrow-head he is not dealing with a symbol, for this object has not been produced with the purpose of conveying some meaning. It is, of course, trivially true that in one or more senses of 'meaning' which are different from the sense of referential meaning the arrow-head, too, has or had a meaning to someone, e.g. the meaning of being dangerous, effective or beautiful. This is trivially true because there can be no object man comes in contact with that may not be associated with some feeling or thought,⁸⁰⁾ and since, by definition, history is concerned with men, their actions and creations, any historical datum must have 'meaning' and must be 'meaningful' in this sense, and it is at least part of the historian's task to discover these 'meanings'. If he has identified his object as an arrow-head he has discovered its 'meaning' in the sense of having found out to what purpose it was designed and what its creator had in mind when he made it. But it would be far-fetched to call the arrow-head (which we assume has no inscription) a 'symbol' of those past purposes and aspirations. It was not made to convey these thoughts and feelings to anybody; it was not made

79) So also W.P. Alston, Philosophy of Language, Englewood Cliffs, N.Y., 1964, p.56.

80) See also R. Gruner, 'Understanding in the Social Sciences and History', Inquiry, Vol. 10, 1967, pp, 154/55.

to convey meaning at all.

But there are historical data of symbolic character and these have meaning in the proper sense of the word. As far as usefulness as historical evidence is concerned they may be the more important ones. This, however, does not justify our declaring all data symbolic or meaningful. It only justifies us ⁱⁿ dividing the data used by historians as evidence for past events or things into two broad categories, symbolic and non-symbolic (whereby we should, however, not forget that every symbolic datum also has a non-symbolic aspect, but not vice versa). Both have to be interpreted to become evidence, and this is why interpretation cannot be the same as the discovery of meaning.

Interpretation (whether of symbolic or of non-symbolic data) is only possible on the basis of previous knowledge and previous assumptions.⁸¹⁾ The first point to be made here is the very general one that a historian must be able to distinguish between present data that originate from the past and those that do not. He must have some criteria by means of which he can distinguish 'old' from 'new' and these are derived from knowledge as to what traits are shown by objects when they date from the past. Quite apart from the specific historical knowledge which usually enters already at this stage we have a rough idea in what ways objects of a certain kind change their appearance with age, and this is why we can exclude a large amount of presently available data at first sight without engaging in any process of

81) So also Collingwood, The Idea..., pp. 247/48.

reasoning.

But knowing that something is old and may, therefore, be considered as evidence for the past is not enough. The historian is only interested in the human past, and if he finds that the datum, although old, has been completely unaffected by man he will likewise exclude it as evidence. A stone may be very old indeed but if its colour and shape and the marks on its surface are due to wind and weather alone it cannot be regarded as historical evidence. Therefore, a datum has to be identified as something connected with the activities of human beings of the past, and, as we have emphasized before, for this, too, general presuppositions are essential.

If a datum has been positively identified in these two respects the historian knows that it is evidence for something. But he still does not know what it is evidence for, and in order to find this out he will have to find out first how old it is. The datum has to be assigned a place in a chronological series, and since chronology, at least in history, is basically a question of before and after, this is in effect a process of comparison.⁸²⁾ Fixing the date of an object is comparing it temporally with other objects or with known facts. Dating, therefore, is only possible if we possess previous historical knowledge, knowledge of individual as well as general historical facts. If a historian is confronted with a medieval charter written in French he will date it after A.D. 1200 (and if the charter itself

82) Bloch, The Historian's Craft, p.110.

purports to be of an earlier date he will declare it a forgery) because he relies on a historical generalization 'all charters in French were written after 1200' which in turn is based on induction in that so far no charters in French have been found which date from before 1200 (to be exact, from before 1204). So the historian sees whether the features of the datum conform to or contradict the general circumstances of the period concerned⁸³⁾ and his knowledge of these general circumstances is derived by induction. This induction, however, gains its force only from the assumption that in a society of a certain type there prevails a similarity of custom which is too strong to permit anybody to deviate from it. The question is then in how far this assumption is justified and where and when we should fix the points where the force of such custom becomes irresistible or ceases to be irresistible. To this there is no clear-cut answer and this means that the generalizations cannot be held as laws which do not allow of exceptions. A charter written in French but dated 1180 need not be a forgery after all.⁸⁴⁾ A text may be older than Gutenberg although it is printed with movable types. As these examples show, the generalizations involved vary in respect to the degree of their reliability. It is less likely that someone was printing with movable types before Gutenberg than it is that someone wrote a charter in French before 1200.

83) Kraft, Die Grundformen..., p.263.

84) Bloch, The Historian's Craft, pp.113-121, from whom this example is taken, comes to the same conclusion. For a similar example see J.R. Strayer, (Ed.), The Interpretation of History, Princeton, 1943, p.15. 'Introduction', J.R. Strayer

The decision of whether in any given borderline case the generalization should be upheld can only be made by taking other factors into account, i.e. in the light of coherence or congruence with the rest of our knowledge. If the French charter purporting to date from 1180 is written in a style peculiar to the thirteenth but not to the twelfth century then another generalization comes into play and we decide the case accordingly. When all the factors (e.g. language, style, writing material, ink, etc.) point in the same direction the decision is not difficult although even then a last element of doubt will remain.

Many of these generalizations are based not only on the assumption of the invariability of custom within a certain society but on the wider assumption of the basic invariability of human nature, an assumption which permits us to construe the behaviour of men of the past in analogy with our own behaviour. This holds not only in respect to establishing the date or genuineness of a datum but also in respect to interpretation in general. If a building is excavated with very large rooms we shall probably identify it as a house used for communal or religious purposes on the assumption that nobody is so irrational to waste space and energy for nothing.⁸⁵⁾ In general, we can say that no interpretation of historical data is possible without this assumption of the fundamental similarity of human nature.⁸⁶⁾

85) This example is taken from Q. Gibson, The Logic of Social Enquiry, 2nd, impr., London, 1963.

86) So also L. Gottschalk, 'The Historian's Use of Generalization', L.D. White (Ed.), The State of the Social Sciences, Chicago, 1956, p.445, and F.A. von Hayek, The Counter-Revolution of Science, Glencoe, Ill., 1952, pp. 78/9. Bernheim, Lehrbuch..., p.534, mentions this assumption only in connexion with the interpretation of written sources.

This becomes still clearer where we deal with the interpretation of symbols (symbols in the sense indicated before). The basic presupposition here is that we are sufficiently like the men of the past to understand the meanings they have attached to certain signs. If a historian meets with a written text he wishes to interpret his immediate task is to subsume it under two general systems of rules and correlations, the system of script and the system of language. These systems must be given first before any interpretation can take place (and in cases where they are not given their establishment is usually allocated to another discipline, e.g. to philology or linguistics).⁸⁷⁾

However, even if script and language are known this is not yet a full guarantee of right understanding. We also have to take into account the vagueness, ambiguity and shift of meaning of individual words as well as of whole phrases. Intentionally or unintentionally, men do not always express themselves clearly, and they also 'fail to change their vocabulary every time they change their customs'⁸⁸⁾ so that even fairly well-known words, such as 'beneficium' or 'civitas' may refer to quite different things at different times.⁸⁹⁾ To establish the exact meaning historians will have to take into account the context and the situation in

87) So also Kraft, Die Grundformen..., p.260.

88) Bloch, The Historian's Craft, p.34.

89) Ibid., p.34, and E.M. Hulme, History and its Neighbours, London..., 1942, p.70; see also Doving, History..., p.15, and Berheim, Lehrbuch..., pp.538/39.

which the word or phrase was used and also the way in which it was understood by the contemporary public to whom it was addressed. Comparison is again all-important here, be it the comparison of the text in question with other texts of the same or similar kind and content, be it the comparison with texts of a different kind but written by the same author or by one of his contemporaries.⁹⁰⁾ In the end, the criterion of whether a word or phrase has been understood or construed correctly can only consist once more in congruence or coherence, i.e. in whether our interpretation fits in with the rest of our knowledge, whether, in the light of all we know, it 'makes sense'.

As pointed out before, knowledge and presuppositions applied in historical research are sometimes modified in the light of this research. This is especially true in respect to historical interpretation. In order to gain knowledge of facts a historian must interpret data but if he wants to interpret data he must have knowledge of facts,⁹¹⁾ and the facts may be the same

90) Gomperz, Interpretation, pp. 67, 76 - 78 - Gomperz (p.63) also directs attention to the fact that in the interpretation of written evidence something must be taken for granted at some point if an infinite regress is to be avoided. The interpretation of a certain passage in a text is based on certain other passages (in the same or in different texts). But each of these needs interpretation itself which in turn is based on comparison with further passages and further texts, etc. At some point we have to stop and have to accept an interpretation on its own merits, i.e. on the basis of 'intuition'. The similarity to the process of explanation is here obvious.

91) Ibid., p.6.

in both cases. Expressed differently, historical interpretation presupposes previous knowledge of facts (historical and non-historical, individual and general), but the result of the interpretative activity may change the quantity and quality of this knowledge. This is most obvious in the case of written evidence. In order to be sure that one has understood a text it would ideally be necessary to know everything about the period in question, including the Zeitgeist⁹²⁾ and the Geist of the author.⁹³⁾ However, the text is itself an expression of this general and individual 'spirit', and in order to know both completely one would have to know the meaning of the text.

There is no way out of this difficulty and all a historian can do is to bring his knowledge of the times and the author to bear upon the interpretation of the text even if this knowledge is corrected or supplemented afterwards in the light of just this interpretation. Such situations are not confined to history but can be found in many branches of knowledge. A physicist 'seeks to infer general laws of nature by instruments themselves subject to these laws. For measuring heat, a fluid like quicksilver is chosen as a standard, and it is claimed that it expands evenly with increasing warmth. Yet how can such an assertion be made without knowledge of the laws of thermodynamics? And again, how can these laws be known except by measurements in

92) L. Gottschalk, Understanding History, New York, 1950, p.27.

93) R. Aron, Introduction to the Philosophy of History, 2nd. impr., London, 1961, p.28.

which a fluid, e.g. quicksilver, is used as a standard?' In short, the circle is here as unavoidable as it is in history in that 'every instrument as every document participates in the structure which it is meant to reveal'.⁹⁴⁾

5. Remains and Records

Historical evidence has been classified in various ways the basic distinction being usually that between records and remains. The criterion of this distinction is, however, often not as clear as it should be so that one does not know whether it consists in the feature of possessing symbolic or non-symbolic character or in the feature of being used for inference of one kind instead of another. Here, the latter criterion will be used; i.e. we adopt a pragmatic concept of remains and records such that if there is a text containing a statement p which asserts a fact E and p is used as evidence for E we shall say that p (or the text of which p is a part) is used as a record while in all other cases of inference it is used as remains. This implies that all data of non-symbolic character as well as symbolic data which contain no factual assertions can only be used as remains whereas symbolic data which do contain factual assertions may be used either as remains or as records, depending on the interest of the person who uses them.⁹⁵⁾

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- 94) E. Wind, 'Some Points of Contact between History and Natural Science', R. Klibansky & H.J. Paton (Eds.), Philosophy and History. Essays Presented to Ernst Cassirer, New York, 1963, p.257.
- 95) This dependence on interest has also been emphasized by Bernheim, Lehrbuch...., p.232; Johnson, The Historian...., p.17; and Doving, History...., p.32.

To make this somewhat clearer, let us first point out the obvious, namely that in the case of artefacts without inscriptions (we speak of inscriptions here because the symbols in question are usually symbols of language) an interpretation of symbols is neither necessary nor possible. Consequently, the question of whether the assertion of a fact E is evidence for E does not arise, simply because there is no such assertion. Similar considerations hold in cases where there is an inscription but one in which no fact is asserted, i.e. where language is used exclusively in one of its non-informative functions (moral exhortation, religious praise, aesthetic contemplation, etc.). Since no facts are asserted, such data can also only be used as remains, but they can be used as remains in two ways, one in which the interpretation of symbols is not necessary (one may infer something from such a text about the manufacture of parchment in the Middle Ages) and one in which it is necessary (one may infer something about the religious attitudes prevalent in medieval times). Finally, there are data which bear inscriptions of an informative nature, i.e. in which it is asserted that something is or was the case, and these can be used in all three ways, not only as remains in the two respects indicated but also as records, as evidence for the fact or facts asserted in them.

If a historian is confronted with a document of this character he can, first of all, draw conclusions from it without having a clue as to the meaning of its contents (as, for instance, in respect to medieval writing materials), and this means using

the document as remains. But he also can use it as remains in a way which presupposes the understanding of the text concerned. He may read a charter and note its formal characteristics in order to draw conclusions as to the bureaucratic practices engaged in by certain scribes or chancelleries; or he may read an ambassador's report and note what was included in it and what was left out, which persons were praised and which were criticized, etc., in order to make certain inferences as to the ambassador's capabilities, prejudices, etc.

All the cases mentioned so far have in common that the symbolic or non-symbolic features of a datum are used as evidence for or against facts which are not themselves affirmed or denied in or by the datum. From the fact that an interpreted datum has a certain feature another fact is inferred.⁹⁶⁾ In short, it is immaterial here whether an assertion contained in a datum (if there is any assertion at all) is true or false. The truth or

96) This may only be the fact that somebody committed a forgery. Or it may be the fact that a datum of this kind has a certain feature. A historian may ask 'what were Robert Curthose's charters like?' (this example is taken from V.K. Dibble, 'Four Types of Inference from Documents to Events', History and Theory, Vol. 3, 1963/64, p.213), and all he has to do is to look at and read one or more of these charters. The inference involved here runs on the following lines: 'This is one of Robert's charters; it has features f, g, h; therefore, Robert's charters have features f, g, h'. Stated in this form the reasoning is inductive (from a sample to the whole population) but if all of Robert's charters had been preserved and if all of them were examined it would not be inductive (unless we want to speak here of 'perfect induction'). But then we might prefer not to speak of inference at all but only of a summary restatement of individual observations.

falsity of a statement recorded in a text does not affect the use as evidence, and this in our terminology means that the datum is used as remains and not as a record. Or, in other words, if a historian is interested in whether any or all of the statements made in a text are true or false (or in how far and in what respects they may be judged as true or false) he uses the text as a record. If he is not so interested he uses it as remains.

If a datum is used as a record, i.e. as evidence for what is affirmed or denied in it, the question arises of how one can decide as to the truth or falsity of the recorded assertion, and this is where the whole apparatus of internal criticism comes into play. But there are also cases where no such decision need be made and where we take the text or document in question at its face value because the fact that the assertion has been made entails the truth of the assertion. This happens when the recording of an action is identical with performing it, and in analogy with 'performative utterances' we can speak here of 'performative evidence' or 'performative records'. If a charter grants a certain right it asserts in effect 'herewith X grants right Y to Z' and (provided the charter is not a forgery and bears all the seals and signatures which make it legally effective) the action of granting the right has been performed by recording or reporting its performance (no matter whether the right granted was actually taken up or whether it was revoked a short time later), in the same way in which 'I now pronounce you man and wife' in a marriage ceremony simultaneously performs and reports

the action. Other examples from history are a declaration of war (whether fighting broke out or not, the war was declared) or an order given by a commanding officer in a battle ('I order the regiment to attack on the left wing at 6 a.m. sharp'; the fact that the regiment might not have received the order or might have been unable or unwilling to carry it out does not affect the fact that the order was given). An ordinary record only reports that an action E was performed, and so the question arises as to whether the report is true, i.e. whether E really was performed. But a performative record not only reports E but by reporting it E is or was performed, and the question of whether the report is true, i.e. whether E really was performed, does not arise.⁹⁷⁾ This is why performative records are less troublesome and make a lot of critical analysis unnecessary. Their disadvantage, however, is not only that they are relatively rare but that in the nature of things for many interesting historical facts they do not and cannot exist. After all, we are probably keener to know whether a certain war^Y was fought and how it was fought than to know whether it was declared. In the following, therefore, performative evidence will be ignored.

Our thesis was that data of a symbolic nature can be used as remains or as records and that in the former case a statement p made in a text is not regarded as evidence for the fact

97) It seems that the only writer who has clearly recognized this distinction between performative and non-performative evidence is Wigmore, The Science..., p. 988 (the 'status as res gestae, i.e., a law in the original record, is by autoptic preference its own evidence of its enactment'). Bernheim, Lehrbuch..., pp.495/96, only implies it.

asserted in p while in the latter case it is so regarded. Now, Collingwood has criticized historians who proceed in the latter way and inquire whether a recorded statement is true or false. According to him, the question should not be 'true or false?' but 'what does it mean?' in the sense of 'what light is thrown on the subject in which I am interested by the fact that this person made this statement, meaning by it what he did mean?'. A historian should treat recorded statements not as statements but as evidence, 'not as true or false accounts of the facts of which they profess to be accounts, but as other facts which, if he knows the right questions to ask about them, may throw light on those facts'.⁹⁸⁾ This, to be clear about it, does not only amount to the demand that a historian should never take the truth of a recorded statement for granted but should always apply his critical tools in order to find out whether and in how far it is true. It is the much more extreme demand that he should not be interested in the question of truth or falsity at all. In our terminology, it is the demand never to use a datum as a record but always to use it as remains.

Is such asceticism possible and, if so, is it justified? As a matter of fact, it is not possible. If a historian is interested in the question of whether a certain event E happened and he finds in a document a statement p to the effect that it did happen, he will naturally ask whether p is true and how the author of the document could have known that it was true. No

98) Collingwood, The Idea..., p.275; see also p.260.

philosopher in the world will prevent him from doing so. True, he should not accept p at its face value by simply saying 'in this document it is asserted that E happened; therefore E did happen' but should criticize his text, compare it with other evidence, etc. This may sometimes be difficult and he may not always be successful in separating chaff from wheat, in recognizing what is bias and what is fact in a given text, but however this may be, what he cannot do is to ignore the question of p's truth or falsity, especially if p is just the statement he is himself interested in, i.e. if p coincides with his own assumption as to what happened.

But even if it were possible to ignore the question of p's truth, what would be gained by it? Would history be more 'critical', more soundly based on evidence, more successful in finding out about the past? It is difficult to see why it should be and why the question 'is this recorded statement true?' should do any harm. A one-sided reliance on one type of evidence is indeed harmful, and if Collingwood's thesis had been only to the effect that historians often rely too much on what could be called 'direct' and too little on 'indirect' or circumstantial evidence we could agree to it_x (in fact, we shall argue ourselves in favour of such a thesis). But this would not amount to a proscription of the use of direct evidence altogether as Collingwood has proscribed it.¹⁰⁰⁾

100) There is the further point that in certain specialized histories (e.g. the history of philosophy or the history of science) the historian has a legitimate interest in whether (or in how far) statements made in the past are true or have turned out to be confirmed.

6. The Reliability of Witnesses

To whatever conclusion one may come as to whether a recorded statement p should be used as evidence for the fact expressed in p, it is at least certain that if p is used in this way, it should be done with all possible care. Historians are very much aware of this, and large parts of their methodological handbooks are devoted to the technical problems which arise in this context.

When we are confronted with such a statement and have done the necessary interpretative work (i.e. have found that the document in question is not a forgery, have understood its contents and have made sure that the statement is and was meant to be a factual statement¹⁰¹⁾), we ask whether what is asserted is true or false. As it is usually understood, this amounts to the question whether the author of the statement (the 'witness' or 'informant') can be trusted, whether and in how far he is reliable. But there are two concepts of reliability which are relevant here. (1) An author A is reliable if other statements made by A and relating to the same domain have turned out to be true, and (2) A is reliable if (a) he had the means and competence to report correctly (e.g. if he was an eye-witness and a trained observer) as well as (b) the intention, and the ability to follow his intention, to do so (e.g. if he was free

101) Gomperz, Interpretation, p.32, rightly points out that the difference between what is fact and what is interpretation in a source is not given but has to be established by historical criticism.

102) Here (and partly also in the following) we are indebted to Giedymin, 'Reliability...', passim.

from bias).¹⁰²⁾ Both concepts are applied simultaneously in judging the truth or falsity (and this means here no more than the amount of probability) of the statement in question.

As far as reliability in the first sense is concerned it depends on the contingent fact of whether any other comparable statement¹ made by A are known and, if so, whether we have some idea about their truth or falsity. If none are known at all, then reliability in this sense cannot be judged. If some are known, then the question arises how do we know that they are true, and if we remain within the circle of A's reliability we shall have to apply the same criteria again which leads us into an infinite regress. In other words, at some point or other we shall have to leave this circle and have to look for other evidence independent of A and his statement or statements.

As for reliability in the second sense, let us assume that there is no evidence available for the fact in question apart from A's statement. In that case, it has been said, we must rely on the plausibility and consistency of the whole of A's account. But this presupposes that only one account can be plausible and harmonious, and in order to be sure about that we would have to examine all other possibilities and exclude them as implausible and disharmonious, an impossible task.¹⁰⁴⁾ However, we are not completely dependent on this criterion of inner plausibility. As far as point (a) (means and competence) is concerned, we may know

104) So also Johnson, The Historian..., p. 146.

on the basis of other and independent evidence that A was a good observer and was on the spot when the event in question took place. But apart from the fact that here again the question arises as to the reliability of those independent reports, this is only of any help if we assume that A did not lie or distort the truth, be it intentionally or unintentionally, and so we are led to aspect (b), A's objectivity. Here, if we do not want to fall back on reliability in sense (1) ('A was unbiased when he gave other reports; therefore, he is unbiased in this one'), we have to make two assumptions in order to get anywhere, namely (I) that nobody misrepresents the facts he knows without cause or reason,¹⁰⁵⁾ and (II) that if we cannot detect such cause or reason there was none and we can conclude that A was free from bias. These are large assumptions, and even if we take (I) for granted, in respect to (II) there arises not only the problem of whether we can ever be sure that we would know such reasons if they had been present, but also what is to count as possible reasons which induce people to give biased reports. To this there is no clear-cut answer, and we have to rely on our own feeling and experience, which is necessarily limited and so can only provide a shaky foundation.

The historian is here in a position similar to that of judge and jury in a court of law who also ask themselves whether a witness could possibly have an interest in distorting the truth or might be prejudiced in this or that direction. In court, however,

105) Ibid., pp.142/43, who here follows Bernheim, Lehrbuch..., pp.483/84.

it is possible to put questions to the witness such that his answers are likely to reveal any existing bias, a way which is not open to the historian. Even so, a court does not rely on this remedy alone but, where possible, calls a second one to its help, the examination of other witnesses with different characters and different backgrounds. The analogous procedure in history would be to use evidence provided by other authors in which the same fact is reported, but this presupposes that there is such evidence.

In short, our result for reliability in sense (2) is the same as it was for reliability in sense (1), namely that the historian is in a rather hopeless position if he is forced to rely on one piece of testimony alone. If the event in question is not reported by anybody else, there is hardly justification for coming to a firm decision as to whether it did or did not take place^{105a)} (although the likelihood that it took place is greater when it is reported by one person than in cases where it is reported by nobody at all), unless, that is, we have other, circumstantial evidence which makes its occurrence probable, evidence which is not used as record but as remains.

The reason why we think that a fact is more certain if it is reported by more than one author is obvious. As already pointed out by Bradley (although in a somewhat different context), the coexistence of the same observation with every variety of standpoint is a crucial factor for judging the reliability of the

^{105a)} Bernheim comes to the same conclusion (ibid., p.486).

observation.¹⁰⁶⁾ As in law, so in history, we think that if one and the same event or thing is observed and reported by different people with different competence and different prejudices, it is much more likely that the event did take place or that the thing did exist than in cases where it is observed and reported by one individual only or by several individuals who all share the same abilities and outlook.¹⁰⁷⁾

However, not all statements reporting facts originate from single and individual authors. Many reports are made anonymously in that groups of people, e.g. the servants of an institution, are responsible for them. They are the result of what has been called 'social book-keeping'¹⁰⁸⁾ and not the testimony of individual witnesses. Parliamentary debates, bank books, tax returns, court records, etc. fall under this heading, and in cases such as these many individuals participate in drawing up the report. They are, therefore, more trustworthy than cases in which one single individual has recorded a fact¹⁰⁹⁾ and their value is somewhat comparable to the value of a whole set of statements made

106) Bradley, 'The Presuppositions...', p.59.

107) Giedymin, 'Reliability...', p.291, points out that the differences in the mental make-up of the appraising historians play a role as well. If scholars of the most different backgrounds and outlooks arrive at the same conclusion as to whether a reported event did in fact occur, then the likelihood of its occurrence is much greater than in a case where only one historian or a group of like-minded historians comes to this conclusion.

108) Dibble, 'Four Types....', p.206, from whom the examples below are taken.

109) So also Johnson, The Historian..., p.249.

by different individuals of different abilities and different backgrounds.¹¹⁰⁾

Another distinction which is relevant here is that between records intended for the public (the public of the day or the public of posterity) and those intended for private and confidential use.¹¹¹⁾ Historians have come to rely more and more on the latter, on 'evidence of witnesses in spite of themselves', and they prick up their ears far more eagerly when they are permitted to overhear what was never intended to be overheard.¹¹²⁾ Again, the reasons are obvious. We assume that men are more inclined to be frank, and less inclined to put things in a favourable light, in their private and confidential transactions than in those that are destined to come to the attention of many people. We only need to compare the report in a newspaper or in the memoirs of a general on some military campaign with an internal military report marked 'top secret' on the same matter, in order to see the point.

110) Two provisos must be entered here: (1) Many institutions develop a certain esprit de corps or self-interest, and this may affect the reliability of the records of those facts which relate to the recording institution itself. (2) The above only holds within the limits of certain presuppositions. No matter how many people of how many different backgrounds report on the existence of the devil, we shall not even stop to consider truth or reliability. See also Bradley, 'The Presuppositions...', p.59, and Hulme, History..., p.72. (But if circumstantial evidence points in the same direction it may be a different matter).

111) This distinction is made by Bloch, The Historian's Craft, pp. 60 ff, and by Renier, History, p.98.

112) Bloch, The Historian's Craft, p.63.

If these two features, the feature of being part of 'social book-keeping' and the feature of being of private and confidential nature, are combined, we get the best we can ever expect as far as the reliability of recorded statements is concerned. But even then it is not advisable to rely on those reports exclusively, i.e. to use only statements asserting a fact E as evidence for E. If possible (and it is usually possible) we also should rely, and perhaps primarily so, on evidence of a different sort, on 'indirect' or circumstantial evidence.

7. Circumstantial Evidence

It is a well-known fact that many people are not very dependable when it comes to observing things or events which exist or take place in their presence. Not only do they go through the world without noticing half of what goes on around them, but what they do notice often bears little resemblance to what actually is the case. And later on, when it is a question of remembering what has been noticed and of putting those memories into words, there arise further occasions for incorrectness and distortion. As we have seen, the number and variety of different witnesses of the same event is certainly of some help but then it is not unusual for their reports to contradict each other. Even where a relatively short and simple occurrence is concerned, such as a motor accident, the observations of one witness may be incompatible with those of another. On the other hand, if every witness reports exactly

the same there arises the question of whether they are not perhaps in collusion with each other¹¹³⁾ or are subject to some invalidating common experience, such as mass hysteria,¹¹⁴⁾ and how far this may be the case.

It is, therefore, preferable if we can establish for ourselves what must have been the case, without depending (or without depending solely) on what other people tell us. When many details which are independent of the failings of man point in the same direction so that their presence suggests or permits only one explanation, namely that such and such must have happened or existed, then we can be fairly sure that this is what really happened or existed. To use the terminology of law, we have then relied not on 'direct' but on 'indirect' or 'circumstantial' evidence.

113) Ibid., p.114; Wigmore, The Science..., p.984.

114) There are further disadvantages of relying solely or mainly on historical witness's reports, even where those are absolutely reliable. For instance, we may arrive at a one-sided picture of a historical period because only the educated and literate have left records; and only the dramatic and spectacular may have been found worth reporting, i.e. those events which in the eyes of the authors were unusual or exceptional. In short, we are dependent on the pre-selection made for us by the witnesses. Also we might be inclined to think that the records tell us all, while actually they only tell us part of what was the case. They may lead us to assume that something originated at the time from which the earliest record dates whereas in fact it had started much earlier. The sources may inform us that Solon or Lycurgus promulgated such and such laws, and so we may conclude that these laws came into existence at that time while actually they may have existed before and may have only been reaffirmed and reinforced by these men. See also A.M.Hocart 'Evidence in Human History', ~~p. 91~~, Psyche, Vol. 13, 1933, p. 91

Now it is clear that all historical as well as all legal evidence is indirect in the sense that neither in law nor in history are the events or things in question observed directly. Neither the judge nor the historian witnesses himself the facts in which he is interested. Therefore, if circumstantial evidence means indirect evidence, then it is opposed to direct evidence only in the sense of witness reports, not in the sense of direct observation by the investigator. If in a murder case the court bases its judgement on the deposition of one or more witnesses who saw the accused kill his victim, it relies on direct evidence. If, on the other hand, the decision is made in the light of certain clues, e.g. in the light of the facts that the weapon was in the accused's possession, that his handkerchief was found on the spot where the murder took place and that he had a strong motive for seeing the victim dead, then it relies on circumstantial evidence. In history the position is the same. As our distinction between records and remains indicates, a historian either infers a fact E from the fact that E has been asserted in one or more historical texts, or he infers E from one or more individual facts (facts of present evidence and/or previously established historical facts which are taken for granted)^{114a)} that are not

114a) Of course, historical facts which are taken for granted are in a sense also facts of present evidence. Nevertheless, there is a difference between (1) inferring a historical fact E from the presence of certain data such as archaeological remains or linguistic peculiarities, and (2) inferring a historical fact E from other historical facts F, G, H (often, but not always, elementary facts like the existence of Napoleon or the occurrence of the Thirty Years War) without bothering about their present evidence, in the belief that F, G, H are so well established that they need not be questioned. In fact, every historian has to take

facts of E's assertion. In the former case he uses direct, in the latter he uses circumstantial evidence.

Historians have in the past usually preferred direct to circumstantial evidence. In fact, before the nineteenth century it was rare for circumstantial evidence to be used at all, and a historical work consisted almost exclusively of the skilful rearrangement of statements found in contemporary sources or in the works of later historians. Since then the emphasis has shifted considerably (as the means for analysing and criticizing recorded statements have been refined enormously) but there is still a lingering preference for direct evidence which is regarded as the 'normal' case,¹¹⁵⁾ and finding a contemporary text which asserts that something was the case is even today considered by many to be the hallmark of historical proof. But more and more historians as well as philosophers of history are coming to recognize the value of circumstantial evidence.¹¹⁶⁾

What is, however, usually not recognized is that in any case the use of circumstantial evidence is normally unavoidable. For even if a historian bases his account exclusively on recorded statements, the data which constitute his evidence must

an enormous number of historical facts for granted for it is impossible to check everything and to look up the evidence for every historical fact from which an inference is made.

115) So by R. Aron, 'De la vérification en Histoire', Revue Internationale de Philosophie, Vol. 5, 1951, p.370.

116) Hocart, 'Evidence...', Passim., like Collingwood, The Idea..., p. 276, wants historians not to rely on direct evidence at all, or to treat even recorded statements as circumstantial evidence, whereas Johnson, The Historian..., p.49, comes to the conclusion that circumstantial evidence is by and large preferable.

first be identified and interpreted, and this can as a rule only be done by reasoning from circumstantial evidence. He will hardly find direct evidence, i.e. he will hardly find other statements which inform him that the witness statement in question is not a forgery; he will hardly find testimonial evidence as to the authenticity of documents,¹¹⁷⁾ and even if he were to find it he would be faced with the question of whether such evidence is itself genuine. Similarly for the establishment of the meaning of his witness statement. He will be very lucky indeed if he discovers another statement which tells him directly how the statement concerned has to be construed, and if he does find one then the construction of this second statement itself becomes a problem. So sooner or later he will have to base his interpretation on circumstantial evidence and will have to decide on authenticity, meaning, etc. by taking into account other facts and other evidence relevant to the period in question, in the manner we have already described.

This is not all. In order to give a coherent and connected account of a subject or period a historian cannot base himself on recorded statements alone. In a way similar to that in which the blanks of present sense perception are filled by inference¹¹⁸⁾ the blanks in the recordings of past developments or states of affairs have also to be filled in in order to arrive

117) So also Wigmore, The Science..., p. 983.

118) So Hocart, 'Evidence...', p.93.

at a picture that makes sense. Facts are usually not recorded for the convenience of later historians so that the bare rendering of such records in itself constitutes a satisfactory account. Many records have been lost, others never existed, while still others leave out important items because their authors regarded them as not worth mentioning.

This process of 'historical construction' or 'interpolation'¹¹⁹⁾ cannot be based on fantasy and arbitrary invention but must be a process of rational inference if history is not to change its character. As we have seen, sometimes it is possible to interpolate a fact that is not recorded in one step, simply by applying a general presupposition. (If Caesar is reported to be in Rome one day and in Gaul at a later day we interpolate his journey from Rome to Gaul in the belief that nobody can reach one place from another place without moving or travelling there). Often, however, a general assumption is not sufficient and we have to use known individual facts so that a suitable inference can be made. For instance, the sources may tell us that at a certain time in a certain country there was an agrarian crisis and the large number of small landowners were eliminated by a few large ones. Other documents may inform us that fifty years later the class of small farmers was again numerous and prosperous. In between the sources are silent but no

119) 'Interpolation' is used by Collingwood, The Idea..., pp.239 ff. but, as we have pointed out, he is not justified in regarding it as a process of 'a priori imagination'.

historian worth his salt would just relate those two items without trying to fill the gap.¹²⁰⁾ And he will not invent an intermediate event ad hoc but he will take stock of all the evidence and all the facts he knows about the period in question and will try to infer from these (in conjunction with certain basic presuppositions) what must have happened in those fifty years. He may know that at that time the country was ruled by a king who was involved in constitutional struggles with the nobility, i.e. with the great landowners, and was finally able to subdue his opponents. From this he may infer that the king supported the small farmers against their expropriators, took the land from the nobles and redistributed it amongst the poor;¹²¹⁾ and he may do so in spite of the fact that no source exists which reports such a redistribution.

It is clear that circumstantial evidence may consist in different items of various kinds. It is usually not only composed

120) Here, incidentally, is a case where the establishment of an individual fact and the establishment of a connexion between facts amounts to the same thing. Instead of speaking of the filling of a gap by establishing a further fact we might well speak of explaining the gap or of finding the cause of the second event. We have then a type of historical explanation where the explanation consists in interpolating a fact so far unknown.

121) This example is adopted from M.I. Finley, 'Generalizations in Ancient History', L. Gottschalk (Ed.), Generalization in the Writing of History, 2nd impr., Chicago, 1964, p.30, who speaks here of a process of 'extrapolation', 'Interpolation', however, is more appropriate for it expresses better the feature of putting something in between (instead of extrapolating into an unknown field).

of evidence in the sense we have used this term so far, i.e. of records and remains, but also of known historical facts which are taken for granted. (Therefore it would be wrong to equate inference from circumstantial evidence with inference from remains). And as far as it consists in evidence proper it may consist in whole or in part in recorded statements. We have seen already that a recorded statement p asserting a fact E can be used as remains, so that, irrespective of p's truth or falsity, from the fact that p was made another fact F is inferred. From the fact that an author reports that the enemy's troops numbered 10,000 men we can infer that there was an enemy and, therefore, a war, whether the number of men was really 10,000 or not. But witness statements may also be used in reasoning from circumstantial evidence not as remains but as records, namely in such a way that from the fact that an author x reports an event E we infer first the fact of E's occurrence and then use this fact as circumstantial evidence for another fact F. The fact that in one or more documents the enemy's number is given as 10,000 may be taken as sufficient evidence for the fact that the number was indeed 10,000, and from this it may be inferred that in order to reach the place of a certain battle such and such problems of transport and supply had to be overcome. It is obvious that in such cases the reliability of inference is dependent on the reliability of the witness reports.

However, it is by no means inevitable that witness statements should come into circumstantial evidence at all.

Especially as far as periods are concerned for which no or very little written evidence exists it is possible to arrive at facts without having a single witness at one's disposal. When articles made of amazonite were found in the tombs of Ur and it was known that the nearest deposits of this mineral occur in India and near Lake Baikal, it was inferred that this city must have had very developed trade relations with distant countries.¹²²⁾

But whether reasoning from circumstantial evidence is reasoning from records or from remains or from both, this much is certain: it is only possible on the strength of general presuppositions and assumptions, assumptions which allow us to connect individual facts with each other.¹²³⁾ This holds for law as it holds for history. The soundness of inference depends on whether the individual facts are what they are supposed to be and whether the fact which is inferred does indeed follow from them. If a court decides that the accused committed the crime because the dagger with which the victim was killed was found in his possession, the question is, firstly, whether the dagger was really found in his possession (it may have been a different dagger or the policeman who reported the finding may have been lying) and, secondly, assumed that it was so found, whether this is sufficient reason for concluding that the deed was done by the accused. Whether it is sufficient depends on the force of certain generalizations. Is it true that whoever possesses the lethal

122) This example is taken from Bloch, The Historian's Craft, pp.53/54.

123) So also Kraft, Die Grundformen..., p.275.

instrument a short time after the murder was committed is, or is most likely to be, the culprit? Saying so would be risky, for out of hand we can account in several ways for the fact of possession. One may find a dagger in the street and take it home because it is a nice piece of workmanship. Or another person may leave it deliberately or accidentally in one's house. In other words, the fact that the weapon was found in the accused's possession can be explained in several ways, and the assumption that he took it home with him after he had committed the crime is only one of them. Consequently, no decent court would pronounce someone guilty on this piece of circumstantial evidence alone. And a sound historian, too, would suspend judgement in an analogous case in history.

The problem involved here is a problem of 'can' or 'must': 'From such and such evidence it follows that E can have been the case' or 'from such and such evidence it follows that E must have been the case'. If it is the first, then \bar{E} is possible; if it is the second, then \bar{E} is impossible.¹²⁴⁾ Now, strictly speaking \bar{E} is never completely impossible. We cannot exclude freaks and coincidences of even the most unlikely kind. Therefore, what impossibility amounts to here is only that there is no imaginable alternative, that we cannot find any other explanation to account for the presence of the fact or facts on which our inference is based, i.e. that we cannot think of any specific \bar{E}

124) Similar ¹ibid., pp. 276/77; and Gibson, The Logic..., p.185.

which could take the place of E. Or at least, if we can think of such a fact it is, in the light of our general experience, so improbable that to all practical intents and purposes it can be excluded as a possibility. In other words, the method of reasoning from circumstantial evidence consists in pointing out certain facts F, G,... N (facts of present remains or records as well as known historical facts) which can only be plausibly accounted for if a further fact E is assumed.¹²⁵⁾ It is obvious that this type of reasoning can be found not only in history and in law but generally in any field where it is a question of ascertaining some individual fact which is not observed or observable by anybody.

The method achieves its most impressive results when it leads to predictions (or retrodictions) which are later confirmed by the discovery of independent evidence. A detective (at least, a detective of fiction in the Sherlock Holmes style) may conclude that if his reconstruction of the crime (how it was committed, by whom, and for what reasons) is correct he will make a certain find in a certain place. He then goes, looks and finds what he expected to find and so has confirmed his conclusion as to what must have happened. In history, similar cases arise, e.g. the well-known case of the German historian W. von Giesebrecht who in 1841 concluded on the strength of circumstantial evidence that certain chronicles of the eleventh century must have drawn

125) Similar Kraft, Die Grundformen..., p.284; Hocart, 'Evidence...' p.80.

their information from an unknown common source, the hypothetical Annales Altahenses, and who went even further by constructing the contents of this document. Twenty-six years later these annals were discovered and their contents conformed in all essentials to von Giesebrecht's assumptions. This case is comparable to the discovery of the planet Neptune when from the fact that the orbit of the planet Uranus showed certain irregularities the existence of another, so far unknown planet was inferred, a conclusion which was confirmed by the discovery of Neptune in 1846.

There can be no doubt that the results reached by inference from circumstantial evidence are the more reliable the more facts are taken into account. While a single fact may not be telling, the cumulation of several facts is. If there is a large number of them, indicators of the most diverse kinds and from the most diverse fields, recorded statements and material and other remains as well as well-established historical facts which nobody doubts any longer, and if all of them converge and point in the same direction, in such a way that only by stipulating a further fact can we plausibly account for their combination and co-presence, while assuming any other fact would tax our credulity too much as far as unlikely coincidences are concerned, then we reach a degree of certainty which is the best we can ever expect in empirical investigations.¹²⁷⁾ If, on

127) So Kraft, Die Grundformen..., pp. 276/77. See also Gibson, The Logic..., p.185; and H.N. Lee, 'The Hypothetical Nature of Historical Knowledge', The Journal of Philosophy, Vol.51,

the other hand, we base our inference only on direct evidence and rely on the trustworthiness of witnesses, the average likelihood of coming to a correct conclusion is much smaller.

We have spoken on the inference of facts (or statements of facts) from evidence (and from other facts which are taken for granted). However, we can now also describe the position by saying that the existence of certain evidence or certain facts is accounted for or explained by certain statements of facts.

'Explanation' here is, of course, different from the explanation of historical facts in the usual sense, as well as from the interpretation of historical data, and is similar to the sense in which a scientific theory is said to 'explain' certain data of observation or experiment. Adopting this terminology we can describe the task of history as building 'a body of information which provides the most certain and simplest explanation of all available materials'.¹²⁸⁾ In the ideal case the reasoning follows the pattern 'if such and such an event took place, or if such and such a thing existed, then this piece or body of evidence is accounted for; if such and such an event or thing did not occur or exist, then this evidence cannot be explained'. (There is hardly need to point out once more that arguing in this way is only possible on the strength of general presuppositions or assumptions without which nothing can account for anything.)¹²⁹⁾ As far as

1954, pp.216, 218. Lee concludes that the more historical knowledge we have the more we can have because every piece may be used for the establishment of further facts, a point also made by Collingwood, The Idea..., p.247.

128) Reis & Kristeller, 'Some Remarks....', p. 238.

129) So also Lee, 'The Hypothetical Nature...', p.216; and Lee, 'Knowledge...', p.67.

the major facts of history are concerned the matter is most obvious. What large amounts of evidence would have to be regarded as forgeries or misinterpretations if one were to deny them,¹³⁰⁾ and he who did not agree that such events as the French Revolution or the Crusades took place or that persons such as Aristotle or Napoleon existed, would have to explain away a huge number of records and remains.¹³¹⁾

It has been maintained that this view of regarding facts as accounting for evidence is preferable to the 'normal' view according to which facts are inferred from evidence,¹³²⁾ but it is difficult to see why there should be any opposition or why we should even speak here of two different views at all. Anyone who infers a fact from evidence is saying, in effect, that if certain evidence e exists it is reasonable to assume that a certain fact E was the case, or - to transpose this - that if E was not the case then it is not reasonable to assume that one would find this evidence e. This is what is usually understood by the inference of facts from evidence. On the other hand, unless one makes special assumptions, as in the argument from silence, one cannot say that if E was the case it is reasonable to expect evidence e, i.e. one cannot infer evidence from facts. But the view under discussion seems to hold that 'facts account for evidence' means

130) V. Kraft, 'Intuitives Verstehen in der Geschichtswissenschaft' Mitteilungen des Instituts für Österreichische Geschichtsforschung, Erg.bd. 11, 1929, p.28. (t)

131) So also Cohen, The Meaning..., p.21; and Lee, 'The Hypothetical Nature...', p.218.

132) Goldstein, 'A Note...', pp. 473/74.

that the evidence is somehow inferred or deduced from the facts or, to be more exact, from a postulate of the facts.

The mistake involved here is the mistake of seeing in historical events and things 'hypothetical constructs', of seeing in a whole historical account a 'theory' and in the historical past itself a 'construction devised as the best explanation of the evidence'.¹³³⁾ But is it really appropriate to say that an event is a hypothesis whose function it is to explain evidence, that historians 'construct' events in order to explain evidence and that these events are not descriptions of 'real' events?¹³⁴⁾ If that were true we would expect a historian to proceed on the following lines: 'Here we have some evidence. Now then, let's see what event would fit it. This one? No, not quite. Better try that one. Well, that seems all right. So let's adopt it as a provisional hypothesis. As long as it fits the evidence it does not matter whether it really happened or not.' But no historian reasons in this way (and it is questionable whether any scientist does). Rather, he is interested in a certain historical period or problem and he looks at the data which in the light of his knowledge and experience may be relevant to it. He identifies and interprets those data and comes to the conclusion that they are evidence for a certain fact. That is, he argues to himself: 'If I have interpreted correctly then this

¹³³⁾Goldstein, 'Evidence...', pp. 177, 179; similar Lee, 'Knowledge...', p.66; and Gibson, The Logic..., p.186.

¹³⁴⁾Goldstein, 'Evidence...', pp. 181, 183.

is evidence, and sufficient evidence, for such and such a fact. It does not mean that it must have happened like this. For if it had not, how could I account for the existence of these data? He certainly does not regard the event, thing, or situation in question as a hypothetical construct introduced solely for making his evidence intelligible. True, one can regard the statement that a certain event took place (but not the event itself ¹³⁵⁾) as a hypothesis which explains the existence of evidence. But it is a hypothesis only in the sense that it is a statement the truth of which (as the truth of any empirical statement) is not absolutely certain, and it is not the function or purpose of this statement to explain evidence (although what is asserted by it does in fact account for the existence of certain evidence). Its purpose is no less and no more than to describe, and (as far as this is possible) to describe correctly, a post fact, not to serve as an instrument in the explanation of evidence.

The thesis criticized is associated with the more general and more common view (mentioned by us already in a different context ¹³⁶⁾) according to which it is the business of historians to formulate and to test hypotheses, even where the establishment of individual facts is concerned. But it is not identical with it nor to say that historians are putting forward hypothetical constructs is different from saying that they test hypotheses when they establish that something was the case in the past. The fact that the second view uses the word 'testing' points to a procedure which starts with the formulation of a hypothesis and then supports it by reference to evidence, whereas the first thesis suggests that the historian is first confronted with certain evidence and only afterwards postulates the past occurrence or existence of something, in short, that the 'hypothetical construct' follows the evidence, not vice versa. Writers who adopt the second view, i.e. who describe historical fact-finding in terms of testing and problem-solving usually

135) It seems that von Steiner does not distinguish here between a fact and the assertion of a fact. (When we criticized the view that a fact only requires 136) see Chapter I, Section 6, 'The King' in the light of a hypothesis.

~~errors of an old style positivism. They~~ argue on the following lines: Every historian starts with the recognition of a problem, the recognition of something to be explained, and he does so because he regards previous statements or accounts as unsatisfactory in one respect or another.¹³⁷⁾ This problem is then given the form of a specific question, and here we have already the hypothesis, an 'interrogative hypothesis' which, however, is easily transformed into a hypothesis proper, a 'declarative hypothesis'.¹³⁸⁾ The formulation of a hypothesis also provides the historian with a criterion of relevance in that he can then exclude from the start everything which has no bearing on his problem, which does not help him to answer his question.¹³⁹⁾ There is, however, always the danger that he might accommodate the facts to his hypothesis, instead of the other way round,¹⁴⁰⁾ and this is why some writers advocate the use of

- 137) H.G.J. Aitken & B.J. Loewenberg, 'History among the Social Sciences: Nature and Purpose of the Report', The Social Sciences in Historical Study, New York, 1954, p.23; S.H. Brockunier, 'Methods: Theory and Practice, ibid, p.131.
- 138) S.H. Brockunier, 'Problems of Historical Analysis', ibid, p.93; L. Gottschalk, 'The Historian and the Historical Document', L. Gottschalk, C. Kluckhohn & R. Angell, The Use of Personal Documents in History, Anthropology and Sociology, New York, 1945, p. 36; Gottschalk, Understanding..., pp.142, 196; Gottschalk, 'The Historian's Use...', p.49. Gottschalk favours the interrogative form because he thinks that it helps historians to keep an open mind.
- 139) So, for instance, Gottschalk, 'The Historian...', p.36; Gottschalk, Understanding..., p.143; E.W.Strong, 'The Materials of Historical Knowledge', Y.H.Krikorian (Ed.), Naturalism and the Human Spirit, 2nd printing, New York, 1945, p.164.
- 140) E.W.Strong, 'How is Practice of History Tied to Theory?', The Journal of Philosophy, Vol 46, 1949. p.641.

alternative hypotheses.¹⁴¹⁾ But whether one or more hypotheses, in any case the next step is thought to consist in testing by reference to evidence.

If we want to give a more formal and simplified account of all this we might put it in the following terms (taking into account only the establishment of facts, not the establishment of connexions between facts with which we are not concerned at the moment). A historian wants to solve a problem. He poses two specific alternative questions: 'Was this so or otherwise, E or E?' On the strength of previous knowledge and generalized experience he is more inclined to favour one of these possibilities, say E. This, then, is his hypothesis which is subjected to testing but in doing so he always keeps the possibility of E in mind, i.e. by testing E he at the same time tests E. Testing, of course, consists here in seeing whether the evidence (in conjunction with known historical facts) confirms or disconfirms E. If it confirms it, the historian cannot stop yet but must see whether it confirms perhaps also E, i.e. any of the many alternatives to E which occur to him. Only if he finds that he cannot discover any alternative which conforms equally well to the evidence can he rest and regard E as established (until such time when either new evidence is discovered or someone else thinks of

141) Brockunier, 'Methods...', p. 130; also F. Machlup, 'The Problem of Verification in Economics', The Southern Economic Journal, Vol. 22, 1955/56, p.2. - Johnson, The Historian..., pp. 162-166, cites Whewell and Venn as advocates of the use of alternative hypotheses but rightly points out that even if alternatives are formulated we are not prevented from bestowing parental affection on one of them alone, for the mind cannot pursue two lines of enquiry

an acceptable alternative). If the evidence does not confirm \bar{E} , i.e. if there is a clash between evidence and fact, he must replace \bar{E} by any of the possibilities of $\bar{\bar{E}}$, e.g. by \bar{F} , and he will have to start all over again, asking ' \bar{F} or $\bar{\bar{F}}$?'.

This or some other scheme of similar neatness can easily be devised. But is it an adequate account of how historians actually proceed? More general^{ly}, is it appropriate at all to describe the historian's activity in terms of the testing of hypotheses? Now, it is certainly true that the interest of the historian and the topic he selects has an important influence on how he proceeds with his work. For instance - and we have pointed this out repeatedly - the conceptualization of his subject matter in terms of events, things and situations as well as the delimitation of these entities is dependent upon his interest, and his interest also plays a decisive role in recognizing a datum as possible evidence for a particular fact.¹⁴²⁾ But all¹⁴²⁾ this does not mean that historians formulate and test hypotheses as scientists formulate and test hypotheses. The establishment of historical facts is 'hypothetical' only in two respects: (1) The results of historical enquiry are tentative and can be refuted in the course of further enquiry.

at once and hence can only use one hypothesis at a time which, naturally, will be the one which is given priority because it seems to be the more plausible or probable one.

142) If we wish we can say here with Collingwood, The Idea..., pp.280/81, that it depends on the 'question' asked whether something is evidence, or with Goldstein, 'Evidence...', p.180, that evidence becomes evidence only when a 'hypothesis' is formulated (although it is doubtful whether any explicit formulation is indeed necessary).

In this sense any single statement of historical fact as well as any whole historical account or reconstruction is a 'hypothesis'.

(2) The step from evidence to fact is possible only on the strength of certain general assumptions or presuppositions. Consequently, statements of fact are correct only if these presuppositions are correct (excluding now cases where their correctness is a matter of pure chance), and in this sense, too, they are 'hypotheses'.

(1) and (2) however, do not entail that historical enquiry is also hypothetical in the further sense in which scientific enquiry can be said to be hypothetical. It is not hypothetical in a procedural sense, i.e. a historian does not normally see his task as confirming or refuting certain (general or individual) statements previously formulated by him or by somebody else. True, it may happen that in the reconstruction of some historical fact on the basis of meagre evidence, in the course of some historical polemic or as a methodological device in some historical explanation historians do proceed in this way.¹⁴³⁾ But these are not their usual occupations and they can be regarded as exceptions to the rule. As far as the normal case of the establishment and support of facts on the basis of evidence is concerned it is difficult to find anything a historian does which could be called 'testing of a hypothesis'. If he starts to

143) Johnson, The Historian..., p.171, makes the point that for giving a historical account it is not necessary to formulate hypotheses while it may be necessary in cases of doubt as to how historical events are connected or are to be explained.

write a book on, say, the history of the Thirty Years War or on the state of France under Louis XIV, and he is asked what 'problem' he wants to solve, what 'question' he is asking, what 'hypothesis' he wishes to confirm or to refute, he may be at a loss for an answer, and the only reply he can give may be something like this: 'I have always been interested in that period, it is my speciality, and what has been written about it so far is a bit out of date and not quite satisfactory because it does not take such and such evidence and such and such factors sufficiently into account.' Where would be the hypothesis in such a case? Of course, one can always say that it is there, only hidden from view, perhaps even from the historian's own view. The fact that he is dissatisfied with previous accounts and thinks that a new account is necessary or at least useful indicates that he must have a hypothesis, or a number of hypotheses, as to what happened in the past, and writing his book amounts to testing or defending these hypotheses. But, we may ask, can one test a hypothesis without knowing what this hypothesis is or without being able to formulate it? It seems far-fetched to believe that this is possible. Formulating and testing a hypothesis, if these terms are to keep their usual meaning, are conscious processes; they presuppose that one is aware of what one is doing or attempting to do. Someone may be said to be testing a hypothesis only if he knows that he has a hypothesis, if he knows what this hypothesis is, and if he wants to test it. These conditions are usually not satisfied in the case of history,

and it will not do to say that whether a historian knows it or not, what he does is to test hypotheses. In that case, we might as well say that any small boy playing with his ball is testing Galileo's laws of the free fall of bodies or Newton's theory of gravitation.¹⁴⁴⁾

It is not the historian's purpose to 'solve problems' and to use evidence for the confirmation or disconfirmation of hypotheses. It is his purpose to state what was the case and to support his statements as best as he can by evidence. Of course, one can demand (e.g. for reasons of clarity and intersubjectivity) that historians should formulate problems and hypotheses so that any critic knows exactly what is at stake. But this would be a recommendation, not a description of what historians actually do, and it is disputable whether history would be improved by following this advice or would be able to serve the purposes it has served so far.

~~In short, saying that historians test hypotheses is, if not outright false, at least misleading. It cannot be more than an analogy, and not a very good one. A better analogy would be to~~

144) The case is, however, neither analogous to nor identical with the celebrated case of the use of generalizations in explanations of historical facts (or in the justification of such explanations). It does make sense to say that a historian bases himself on one or more generalizations when he gives a certain explanation, even if he is not aware of doing so (whether in any given case he is actually using a generalization is another question). For it may be possible to show that a generalization is required as a presupposition because without it the explanation loses all its force. But it cannot be logically required that a historian must test hypotheses in order to establish facts.

at this point it is necessary to answer a possible objection. One could say that the claim we have criticized is not a claim about the actual conscious procedure of the historian, of the way he sees his task, but a claim about the logical or epistemological status of his activity. One may grant that in its pragmatic aspect this activity can indeed not be described in terms of the testing of hypotheses, but one may nevertheless insist that it is appropriate to give a logical reconstruction or analysis in those terms. Our reply to this would be that such a logical reconstruction is possible but pointless. For, naturally, one can always find a question, problem or hypothesis for a statement, such that the statement constitutes an answer to this question, a solution of this problem or a confirmation of this hypothesis, and if this is so then one can always say that someone who makes the statement has thereby answered a question, solved a problem or confirmed a hypothesis, even if he did not know that he was doing so. But the fact that this is always possible is an indication of triviality (unless, that is, the view is put into the context of a general philosophical theory, such as, for example, Collingwood's theory that a statement only requires meaning and can only be regarded as being true or false if it is understood as the answer to a question, and then such a theory would most probably be untenable). Therefore, if the thesis is to have a point at all, it must be construed as a thesis about the actual procedure employed in the acquisition of knowledge, a procedure consisting of certain steps taken in a certain temporal order. And this is indeed how it is usually understood, not only by philosophers of science who analyse the activity of the scientist in terms of the testing of theories or hypotheses, but also by those philosophers and historians who describe what historians do in similar terms. But while this may be an adequate interpretation as far as scientific work is concerned, it is inadequate in respect to historical fact-finding.

In short, saying that historians test hypotheses when they establish facts is, if not outright false, at least misleading. It cannot be more than an analogy,

and not a very good one. - 191 - A better analogy would be to speak of a pattern of interlocking pieces, which are fitted together similarly to the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, and where the pieces consist of facts of evidence, and known historical facts. As in such a puzzle, if one piece does not fit (and we are really convinced that it belongs to the puzzle, i.e. that it is a genuine piece which cannot be left out) we have to dismantle the work already done and start again. All the relevant facts have to be accounted for but in order to account for any one of them we must not force it into the pattern by a process of bending, twisting and distorting.¹⁴⁵⁾

But unlike a puzzle, the number of pieces in history is not fixed in advance and, what is more important, there may be several ways of fitting them together.¹⁴⁶⁾ The question is again whether there are any criteria which allow us to decide that we have produced the right picture or that one of two conflicting pictures is the better one. There is no problem as to falsification; any assertion of historical fact and any whole historical reconstruction can be falsified, at least in principle, by the discovery of new evidence (and the position here is similar to the position in science although in history we usually cannot expose our account to falsification but have to wait for the

145) So also H. Butterfield, Man on His Past, Cambridge, 1955, p. 162; G. Ritter, 'Scientific History, Contemporary History, and Political Science', History and Theory, Vol. 1, 1960/61 p. 267; C.V. Wedgwood, Truth and Opinion, London, 1960, p.94.

146) The same point is made by P.H. Nowell-Smith, 'Are Historical Events Unique?', Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, N.S., Vol. 57, 1956/57, pp.127, 130.

accidental discovery of new evidence). But there is no comparable criterion as to verification. It is a fact that very often the pieces of the puzzle can be fitted in different ways, i.e. that more than one reconstruction can satisfy the demands of consistency and coherence, and that incompatible accounts are consistent with the same evidence and the same facts.¹⁴⁷⁾ As we have seen, what reasoning from circumstantial evidence in the end amounts to is an attempt to account for certain facts in a way to which there is no plausible alternative. But finding such an alternative is a question of the power of the imagination. It has been said that as the devil can cite Scripture to suit his own ends the historian can cite documents to suit his.¹⁴⁸⁾ This, no doubt, is an exaggeration but it does happen that one account of what took place or existed is incompatible with another account, but that both explain the evidence equally well and have the same degree of plausibility (assuming now that plausibility is at least partially intersubjective and is not a purely subjective foible). Consequently, to say that the 'hypothesis which accounts best for all the present evidence is accepted as historical fact'¹⁴⁹⁾ or that it is a question of finding a theory which explains all the data and to which there is no imaginable alternative,¹⁵⁰⁾ is

147) So also Goldstein, 'Evidence...', p.182.

148) J.A. Huston, 'Do Historians Seek the Truth?', Social Studies, Vol. 44, 1953, p.260.

149) Lee, 'The Hypothetical Nature...', p.215.

150) Hocart, 'Evidence...', p.80.

not sufficient for supplying an adequate criterion in such a case. True, if the condition of accounting for all or most of the evidence is not met, the statement or account can be dismissed straight away.^{150a)} But this condition may be satisfied and still the historian may not succeed in convincing us that his explanation of the evidence 'is more probable than any alternative that has been (or can reasonably be) envisaged'.¹⁵¹⁾ In that case we have a stalemate and nothing short of future evidence can help us to come to a decision. We have to regard both accounts as equally good or equally bad, as far as their truth is concerned.

8. Truth and Certainty

There was a time when historians believed without reservations in Ranke's dictum that history does no more and no less than [tō] give an account of wie es eigentlich gewesen. But when Ranke wrote these famous words it was mainly his purpose to indicate that he did not want to prove a thesis or to support a philosophical doctrine. He wished to make it clear that unlike other contemporary writers he did not intend to use history as the handmaiden of philosophy or of anything else, but wished to study it for its own sake and with the sole purpose of finding out what really happened and what really existed in the past,

150a) It is an overstatement to say with Nowell-Smith, 'Are Historical...', p.131, that a historical reconstruction is refuted if one fact is discovered which does not fit in.

151) Rescher & Joynt, 'Evidence...', p.564.

simply because he thought that knowing this would be valuable in itself. By and large, historians still believe in the autonomy of their discipline and in the value of historical knowledge in its own right, but they are much more sceptical in respect to the possibility of realizing Ranke's programme and of achieving an unadulterated reconstruction of past reality. The establishment of wie es eigentlich gewesen has become much more problematical and seems much more fraught with difficulties than it did in Ranke's times, and it is recognized that what is regarded as the eigentlich depends on so many things, from the accidental survival of evidence to the personal idiosyncracies of the scholar.

It is, therefore, understandable that there are historians who profess, at least in their more reflective and theoretical writings, scepticism as to the possibility of making true statements about the historical past. What is more, the consistent denial of this possibility has led some of them to the conclusion (encouraged and supported by the writings of certain philosophers) that the concept of truth, or at least the normal and everyday concept, i.e. the correspondence theory of truth, is not applicable in history at all and has to be replaced by something else, e.g. by a theory of coherence.

The argument here usually starts with the premise that since the events, things or situations historians are concerned with are past and no longer existent, they cannot be directly observed. Consequently, no comparison is possible between a historical statement and the fact asserted by it. Comparison is only

possible in respect of present facts, not in respect to past facts.¹⁵²⁾ For we cannot go and see whether and how far our historical account corresponds to the facts. From this it is concluded ~~that~~ it is useless to regard a historical statement asserting a fact E as true if and only if E was the case. Of what use could it be if it is impossible to find out whether E really was the case, if the question 'did this really happen?' cannot be answered in terms of correspondence? In short, the correspondence theory is inapplicable in history,¹⁵³⁾ i.e. truth in the sense of correspondence with fact is unattainable and, therefore, illusory, while what is attainable is truth in the sense of coherence.¹⁵⁴⁾ (In fact, some authors would go so far as to hold that 'did this really happen?' is a meaningless question because we can never ascertain for certain that something did or did not really happen. If meaning is tied to verification or falsification

152) Oakeshott, Experience..., pp.108, 113. (There seems to be some inconsistency here in Oakeshott's account for elsewhere he holds that the past is the present and that past facts are present facts. But within the general framework of his philosophy these views can possibly be reconciled).

153) So C. Blake, 'Can History be Objective?', P.Gardiner (Ed.), Theories of History, 5th printing, New York, 1964, pp.338,340.

154) So E.J. Tapp, 'Knowing the Past', The Journal of Philosophy, Vol 55, 1958, p.466 - Others do not redefine 'truth' in terms of coherence but wish to replace the concept of truth altogether, e.g., by 'probability' or 'verisimilitude' (Gottschalk, 'The Historian...', p.35; and Gottschalk, Understanding p.139) or even by 'passion' (J. Stannard, 'The Role of Categories in Historical Explanation', The Journal of Philosophy, Vol 56, 1959, pp. 439, 447).

and if in history we can never verify or falsify the correspondence of a statement with the fact expressed by it, then it is clear that the whole correspondence theory of truth must be meaningless in history, i.e. must be inapplicable to statements about the past.)_x

Coherence means here coherence with evidence and previous knowledge, and if the concept of truth in history is a concept of coherence, then 'fact' does not mean any longer 'detail of past reality' but 'detail derived from a critical examination of historical documents'.¹⁵⁵⁾ Or, in the words of another author, 'when the historian says, This happened, that is always an abbreviated phrase for, The available evidence points to this having happened' with the consequence that 'this happened' may be true although actually this never happened.¹⁵⁶⁾ In other words, it is maintained that truth consists for historians 'in agreement with the evidence... rather than the facts',¹⁵⁷⁾ or, to quote Oakeshott's well-known phrase, that '"what really happened"...must... be replaced by "what the evidence obliges us to believe"'. A historical statement is true if it coheres with evidence; its truth depends on the whole 'world of experience' to which it

155) Gottschalk, 'Understanding...', p.193.

156) Field, 'Some Problems...', p.70. (On the next page, however, Field maintains, not quite consistently, that historians have to assume a correspondence theory although their only criterion of truth consists in coherence).

157) So A.M. MacIver, 'The Character of a Historical Explanation', Aristotelian Society, p.47, who, however, goes on to defend the correspondence theory of truth.

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belongs, and the decision whether it is to be regarded as true or false depends on whether this world gains or loses in coherence. 158)

In spite of the undeniable difficulties in respect to the ascertainment of truth in history this view is open to serious objections. The most obvious consists in pointing out that, deliberately or by accident, two things are here thrown together which should be distinguished, namely what truth is and how truth is ascertained, or, to give it the more common formulation, between the meaning of 'truth' (and 'true') and the criterion (or criteria) of truth. There are powerful forces at work in present-day philosophy which make for an identification of the two. For if the meaning of a term is constituted by the criterion of its proper use of application and if coherence is the criterion for the proper application of 'true', then to be true does indeed mean to cohere. There is no need here to show that this theory of meaning is untenable in general. It suffices to point out that it is untenable in respect to the concept of truth. For there can be no doubt that we do speak of truth and true statements in cases where we have not the slightest idea of how truth can be ascertained, that we know what 'truth' and 'true' mean even in cases when we do not dispose of any criterion for deciding whether a given statement is true or false. 159)

In fact, it is not self-contradictory or meaningless

158) Oakeshott, Experience..., pp. 107, 113, 114.

159) So also K.R. Popper, The Open Society and Its Enemies, 4th ed. (rev.), Vol. 2, London, 1962, pp. 371-374.

to say that a statement is true or false but that nobody will ever know whether it is true or false or that nobody will ever have a criterion for deciding on its truth or falsity.

If the concept of truth were a concept of coherence, truth and knowledge of truth would be identical. This, however, would lead to insurmountable logical difficulties. For instance, in a case where two incompatible statements are both equally coherent with all the evidence we would be forced to regard both as true. But incompatibility just means that they cannot both be true, and in order to avoid this contradiction we would either have to say that no two incompatible statements can be equally coherent with the evidence, which is obviously false, or we would have to drop the concept of incompatibility altogether so that any two statements would be compatible with each other, which is impossible.

So, knowing that or why a statement p is true is not the same as the truth of p; the way in which a statement is 'tested', i.e. in which its truth-value is decided, does not commit us to any theory as to the meaning of 'truth' or 'true'. All this seems so obvious that it is difficult to understand how anybody could have thought differently. A judge or jury is not content to condemn an innocent man, however good the evidence may be on which the verdict is based.¹⁶⁰⁾ And a historian, too,

160) This example is taken from MacIver, 'The Character...', p.47.

(apart from those few who in their theoretical moments are inclined to think otherwise) wants to ascertain what really was the case, not 'what the evidence obliges him to believe'. He does not regard 'E happened' as true if E did not happen at all, and he would be very surprised if one told him that 'E happened' is true, whether E really happened or not, as long as the statement coheres with all the evidence and with the rest of his knowledge. In other words, the concept of truth applied in history is the same as the concept applied in ordinary life; it is a concept of correspondence. 'E happened' is true if E did happen; 'E existed' is true if E did exist.

On the other hand, there can be no doubt that the only way of judging or appraising the truth-value of a historical statement consists in determining whether and in how far it coheres with evidence and previous knowledge. Coherence, although not identical with truth, is a test of truth,¹⁶¹⁾ whereas correspondence, although it does not furnish a test of truth, is what we mean by truth.¹⁶²⁾ A historical statement is true if what is asserted by it corresponds to past reality. It is judged to be true if it is coherent, consistent, congruent, compatible or in agreement (there is not much difference between the meanings of these terms when used in this context) with the facts of evidence, with known historical facts and with general presuppositions or assumptions. '... in historical thinking we have to assume a

161) Walsh, An Introduction..., p.79.

162) Lee, 'Knowledge...', p.68.

correspondence theory of the nature of truth. And yet the only evidence or proof or test we can have of this correspondence is the coherence of the judgements with each other and with the available evidence.† 163)

So it seems^m that we could say now that the concept of truth employed in history is the normal concept of correspondence but that since history is concerned with the past the criterion of truth is coherence. This, however, might be understood to imply that in knowledge of the present the criterion of coherence is redundant and that here we can compare statements directly with the facts they are about. But this is too sweeping an assertion and, therefore, false. For, first of all, as we have seen in another context, very often in empirical knowledge of the present, too, no such comparison is possible. A physicist making a statement about elementary particles cannot 'compare' it with the fact expressed by it. An astronomer who speaks about the chemical constitution of distant stars cannot go and see whether what he says corresponds to reality. Secondly, and this we have also pointed out already, almost all statements about the present involve knowledge of the past and, therefore, criteria of truth in respect to statements about the past. Thirdly and more fundamentally, there is a case for saying that when we have

163) Field, 'Some Problems...', p.71. - Lee, 'Knowledge...', p.68, speaks in this context of 'matrix correspondence' (as opposed to 'picture correspondence') and does not use the term 'coherence'. In a sense, we can, of course, say that the criterion of the truth of a historical statement consists in whether it 'corresponds to' (instead of 'coheres with') other statements, whereas it is true if it corresponds to the fact expressed in it. But it is questionable whether anything would be gained by this usage.

direct sense-perception the comparison is not with the fact itself but with sense-data. 'It is raining now' can be checked by a look out of the window and if what I see is in accordance with my statement the latter is regarded as true. But I may suffer ^(from) delusions or make a mistake in my observation and in spite of the correspondence between statement and sense-data the statement may not correspond to the facts. However, the terminology of sense-data is rather in disfavour at the moment; so let us waive this point. Even so, we can say, fourthly, that coherence is essentially involved in knowledge of the present in that a statement about a present fact is regarded as true only if it is coherent with all relevant experience. Assume I say that it is raining now and look out of the window and see it raining. Assume further that half a minute later I look again and notice that the pavement is completely dry. My first observation is then incoherent with my second one and (assumed the second to be more thorough and more prolonged than the first) I will judge now my previous statement to be false and will correct it: 'It did not rain after all when I said it did'. In short, the coherence between different observations or different memories (different observations or memories of the same or of different persons) is an important criterion for deciding about the truth of statements concerning the present.

All this indicates that we cannot simply say that the criterion of truth as far as statements about the present are concerned is a criterion of correspondence whereas in respect

of statements about the past it is a criterion of coherence. Coherence somehow comes in everywhere, or almost everywhere, as a criterion, not only in historical knowledge or in knowledge of the past, and it is more or less a myth that in knowledge of the present a direct comparison between statement and fact is possible.

Coherence, moreover, is not an unfailing criterion of truth. To show this, let us see in some detail what the relationship is between truth and coherence. We know that it is not a relationship of identity in meaning, i.e. that it would be false to say that 'whenever a statement p is true it is coherent with evidence and previous knowledge, and whenever it is so coherent it is true'. If coherence is a criterion of truth, one might think that at least one of these two implications holds, either 'whenever p is true it is coherent' or 'whenever p is coherent it is true'. But neither is correct, for p may be incoherent but nevertheless true, and p may be coherent but nevertheless false. In other words, matters cannot be represented at all in the form of such statements of unlimited universality, but we have to speak in terms of likelihood of truth or falsity and of degrees of coherence or incoherence. If we do this, we can say then that a statement p is the more likely to be true the more it coheres with evidence and previous knowledge, and vice versa, or, alternatively, that p is the more likely to be false the more it is incoherent with evidence and previous knowledge, and vice versa. 'Coherence' is here understood to mean no more than compatibility, and incoherence no more than

incompatibility, i.e. if two statements are coherent they can both be true (although they may both be false), while if they are incoherent they cannot both be true (but may both be false).^{163a)}

Perhaps the matter can best be clarified in the following way. On the one hand we have a statement p asserting a historical fact. On the other hand we have a set of statements a, b, c, d..., a set which represents a whole complex of knowledge constituted by statements about evidence, about individual historical facts and about general facts. As far as coherence or incoherence is concerned a number of different situations can arise of which (if we idealize and purify) the following are perhaps the most typical:

(1) p coheres completely with a, b, c, d ... and there is no known alternative to p which shows the same degree of coherence. We then conclude that p is true (or is most probably true), until such time as either new evidence e is discovered which is incompatible with p and we decide for some reason or other in favour of e against p, or an alternative to p, e.g. q, is thought of which is as coherent with a, b, c, d... as p.

163a) This is not the only concept of coherence. There is a stronger version in which 'p is coherent with a, b, c, d' does not only mean that p is compatible or consistent with a, b, c, d, but that p is made probable (or even certain) by a, b, c, d. We adopt here the weaker version for reasons which will become clear shortly. (It is obvious that neither concept will do for a theory which attempts to define truth in terms of coherence. For saying that p is made probable (or certain) by a, b, c, d is to say that if a, b, c, d are true then p is probably (or certainly) also true, and the definition becomes circular. But it also becomes circular if we adopt the other version in that 'p is compatible with a, b, c, d' is equivalent to 'p and a, b, c, d may be true together' which again leaves us with ~~the~~ truth. In fact,

(2) In the latter case we have the position already mentioned before where at least two statements, p and q, are equally coherent with a, b, c, d... but are incoherent with each other, i.e. cannot both be true. Here the criterion of coherence would need a further criterion which goes beyond it but there is no such criterion apart from new evidence. This compels us to suspend judgement until such new evidence is discovered, evidence which is compatible either with p or with q ^{but} ~~with~~ not with both.

(3) p is incoherent with a, b, c, d..., i.e. either p is true and the conjunction of a, b, c, d...x is false or vice versa. However, a conjunction is false if at least one of its members is false so that the question arises which member or members are the ones that clash with p and how many members do so clash. Let us distinguish here just two possibilities:

(a) p is incoherent with every single member of the set, or at least with a very large number of them. (One may think here of a statement such as 'Napoleon did not exist'). We then decide as a matter of course that p is false, for it would be unreasonable to revise an enormous amount of previous knowledge just to 'save' p. (b) p is incoherent with very few items, or perhaps only with one item, say a. We then have the choice between a and p, i.e. we can either change a into a' in such a way that p coheres with a' as well as with the ensuing conjunction of a', b, c, d...x Or we can keep a and change p

it is impossible to see how coherence can be defined in a way which does not involve reference to truth.)x

into p' such that p' is coherent with a and with the whole set a, b, c, d... Our decision will depend on many factors and there is no single crucial factor. It will depend, for instance, on what carries greater subjective conviction, p or a, or what will happen to b, c, and d, if we change a (it may be that there are interconnexions and that if a is changed it becomes difficult to uphold some of the other items; in that case the situation may blend into a situation of type (a)). If p is incoherent with more than one item, then there is no precise number n such that we could say: 'If p is incoherent with more than n items it must be regarded as false, whereas if it is incoherent with less than n items it must be regarded as true.'

In all three cases no absolute certainty is involved. (But in cases (1) and (3) we can at least come to a decision, even if it is only a provisional one which holds until 'further notice', while in case (2) we cannot even arrive at such a provisional decision but have to suspend judgement altogether). Absolute certainty is not to be had in history, and the most we can expect is a high degree of probability. This, however, has been disputed, namely by no less a philosopher than Collingwood who writes that it is 'wholly untrue' because historical arguments can prove their 'point as conclusively as a demonstration in mathematics' and the historian's decision can 'follow inevitably from the evidence'.¹⁶⁴) It seems that Collingwood is of this opinion because he does not see the

164) Collingwood, The Idea..., pp. 262, 268 (italics supplied).

criterion of truth in coherence but believes that there is something else and something stronger, namely the feature of being the only way of accounting for evidence and known facts. Speaking in terms of accounting for evidence may seem at first sight just another way of speaking in terms of coherence but it is not quite the same. Let us see why by looking at four different forms of argument:

(I) One could say that the facts expressed in statements a, b, c, d...x can only be accounted for if p is assumed to be true, and this is what Collingwood seems to have in mind.^{164a)} In other words, a, b, c, d...x are true only if p is true, or, to give the argument its complete form: 'If a, b, c, d...x then p; but a, b, c, d...x; hence p.' This is different from an argument (II) which is based on coherence for if we just say that a, b, c, d...x ... are coherent with p we can only argue: 'If a, b, c, d...x then p may be true (need not be false); but a, b, c, d...x; hence p may be true.' Here we have the weaker form of the two which is criticized by Collingwood. But if we now argue in negative terms, in terms of falsity and incoherence, then it makes no difference whether we use 'accounted for' or 'coherent with'. We can either say (III) that a, b, c, d... cannot be accounted for if p, i.e. that a, b, c, d...x are only true if p is false, which gives us: 'If a, b, c, d... then p is false; but a, b, c, d...x; hence p is false', or we could speak in terms of coherence by saying (IV) that p is incoherent with a, b, c, d...x.

164a) It might also be what Aron, 'De la vérification...', p.373,

a, b, c, d, ...x which would allow the argument: 'If a, b, c, d, ...x then p cannot be true (must be false); but a, b, c, d, ...x; hence p is false'.

There is no difference between (III) and (IV) but there is a decisive difference between (I) and (II) in that in the first case it is concluded that p is true or must be true while in the second case it is only concluded that p may be true. But is the stronger argument the better one and can we say that the conclusions in this kind of argument are as certain as the conclusions of mathematical arguments? This is not a problem of formal validity (the arguments are all valid) but a question of the truth of the premisses and of the knowledge of this truth. There is first the problem whether the second premise is true, i.e. whether a, b, c, d, ...x are really all true. These are empirical statements and we can never be absolutely certain (certain in the logico-mathematical sense) about their truth. New evidence may prove any or all of them false. But if this is so, then we can never be absolutely certain about the truth of the conclusion (and since the truth of a, b, c, d, ...x is asserted in the premisses of each of the four arguments this holds for every one of them). However, let us waive this objection and let us assume that we can be absolutely certain about the truth of the second premise. There still remains the question of the truth of the first one.

has in mind when he writes that the verification of a historical reconstruction consists in showing, not only that it accords with the documents, but that it is the only reconstruction which so accords.

How can we be sure that a, b, c, d...x are true only if p is true? The answer is, regrettable as this may be, that we cannot be completely sure about it. The fact that we cannot think of any statement different from and incompatible with p which accounts equally well for a, b, c, d...x is no guarantee that there is no such statement. As we have said before, it depends very much on ingenuity and power of imagination whether one finds such a statement if there is one. An argument of type (II), however, is not dependent on accidental imaginativeness. For whether statements are compatible or incompatible with each other is a matter of logic. Therefore, (II), although it is weaker and much more modest, is better than (I); the conclusion that p may be true is more tenable than the conclusion that p must be true.

We have come to this result by way of criticism of Collingwood. However, it might be objected that we have misrepresented Collingwood's position. For while we talk about the certainty of historical conclusions he speaks about the conclusiveness of historical arguments. His thesis is that there are deductive or 'exact' sciences and inductive sciences or sciences of 'observation and experiment' and that history belongs to the former, not to the latter, in that historians (genuine historians, that is) reason deductively: 'Assuming that such and such is the case, then this must be the case too.' The conclusion here follows with necessity from the premisses, although what is concluded may be false because what is assumed in the

premisses may be false.¹⁶⁵⁾

Against this, however, several objections can be raised. One we have already mentioned when we criticized the dissolution of 'disagreements through relativization',¹⁶⁶⁾ namely that historians normally proceed categorically and not hypothetically. But there is also the point that if any historian argues in this way he must dispose of certain laws or lawlike statements. Looking once more at our argument of type (I) what is asserted here is that if a, b, c, d, ... x are true then p must also be true and any other statement incompatible with p, e.g. q, cannot be true. But such an assertion can confidently be made only on the strength of one or more universal statements. However, and that is the thesis here defended, we never have such statements at our disposal (and, therefore, we can never be sure that p and only p is compatible with a, b, c, d, ... x) while we do have universal statements on the strength of which we can assert that if a, b, c, d, ... x are true, p need not be false. And this is why we think that Collingwood is mistaken.

So it is out of the question that statements of history can have absolute certainty. But then this is not a feature of history alone but of all empirical disciplines. Nevertheless, there is a prevailing opinion that historical statements are less certain and more subject to revision than statements of the

165) See Collingwood, The Idea..., pp. 253 ff., 261 ff.

166) See above, pp. 136-138.

empirical sciences.^{166a)} This, however, is a questionable thesis (and Collingwood aimed in the right direction with his criticism) which may be explained by the fact that historians as well as the more sophisticated public for whom they write are so fascinated by the points about which no agreement is reached, or which are liable to be 're-written' by different generations of historians, that they tend to forget the vast and steadily increasing field in which facts are not subject to dispute. One sometimes gets the impression that only uncertain historical facts are regarded as interesting and worthy of attention and that, as soon as a fact has been established with virtual certainty, it is so much taken for granted that one forgets its previous controversial and insecure character. In this way, historians are very much conscious of what they have not achieved while all they have achieved is apt to fall into oblivion.

But in spite of all self-denigration there can be no doubt that there are large numbers of historical facts which are as certain as any empirical fact can be certain. There is even a good case for saying that many statements of history are more certain than many statements in the empirical sciences and that they approach the certainty found in mathematics, although they do not reach it.¹⁶⁷⁾ And it is not true, as some writers have

166a) One reason which is usually adduced here is that historical events are unique and non-repeatable whereas the subject matter of science lends itself to freely repeatable experiments. But this is certainly an oversimplification.

167) See also Kraft, Die Grundformen..., p.277; Strayer, 'Introduction', p. 11; A.L. Burns, 'Ascertainment, Probability and Evidence in History', Historical Studies, Australia and New Zealand, Vol.4, 1949/51, pp.327,336.

maintained,¹⁶⁸⁾ that such a high degree of certainty is bought at the price of triviality,^{168a)} i.e. can only be reached in respect to very elementary and primitive facts, unless the decision of whether a fact is trivial or primitive is analytically made dependent on whether historians are sure about it, such that whenever something is known with a high degree of certainty it is insignificant. It is not only statements such as 'Caesar existed' or 'the battle of Waterloo took place in 1815' that are virtually certain, but also more complex ones, e.g. the statement that 'France was the dominant power on the European Continent in the second half of the seventeenth century' or that 'technology has progressed enormously in the last three hundred years' (and this holds even for some statements of causal or other dependencies, such as, for instance, the statement that this progress in technology was dependent on progress in science, so that it is also incorrect to maintain that only statements of facts can be virtually certain, but never statements of connexions between facts¹⁶⁹⁾).

The degree of certainty reached in respect to a certain fact is, of course, also dependent on the description we choose.

168)Gottschalk, Understanding..., p. 140; Dovring, History...,p.73.

168a)W.O.Aydeloffe, 'Notes on the Problem of Historical Generalization', L. Gottschalk (Ed.), Generalization in the Writing of History, 2nd impr., Chicago, 1964. p.161, speaks of an inverse relationship between certainty and significance, and C.L.Becker, 'What are Historical Facts?',E.Meyerhoff(Ed.), The Philosophy of History in Our Time, Garden City,N.Y.,1959, p.123, makes a similar point.

169)Aron, 'Evidence...', p.32, holds that 'the judgment that an event occurred is indisputable. The judgment that it was the effect solely of a given situation is not indisputable.'

By greater specification we risk more, make our statement more liable to be false and make it easier for our opponent to refute it. The same event can be described by saying 'X died', 'X was assassinated', 'X was shot dead', 'X was shot dead with a .22 revolver', etc., and the greater the specification the more we stick our neck out, i.e. the more we expose our statement to falsification.¹⁷⁰⁾ If we take only this feature into account, then it is indeed true that the smaller the informative content of a statement (and, in this sense, the more 'primitive' the statement) the more likely it is to be true, i.e. the greater its degree of certainty. But (apart from the fact that it is not this which induces people to say that only elementary statements are certain in history) this is a formal feature which cannot be separated from other criteria, e.g. from the criteria of evidence. Only if all other things are equal does it hold true that the greater the specification the greater the likelihood of falsity, and therefore it cannot be used as an argument in favour of the view that we can only be certain in respect to elementary facts.

Finally, we should not forget that there is a difference

(The second statement is false, at least if we omit the word 'solely'). For a similar opinion see G.M. Trevelyan, 'Clio, a Muse', F. Stern (Ed.), The Varieties of History, 11th printing, Cleveland & New York, 1964, p.231.

170) This holds for statements of individual facts. As far as general statements are concerned, the position seems to be just the other way round. The less specified and the more sweeping, the more likely to be false. In the series 'all French officers were noblemen', 'all officers in the French navy were noblemen', 'all officers in the pre-revolutionary French navy were noblemen', etc. the likelihood of falsity progressively decreases.

between certainty and certitude, between the objective likelihood of truth and the subjective conviction of truth. For instance, as we have seen before, in respect to a remote historical period for which we have little evidence our demands as far as stringency is concerned are less than in respect to a period for which evidence is abundant. Therefore, relatively few disputes arise in the one case as to what actually happened while in the other case historians may disagree persistently, and this gives rise to a feeling of uncertainty. For the less evidence and knowledge we have of a period or field the smaller the opportunity for a clash between this evidence and knowledge on the one hand and a statement asserting a fact on the other, whereas the more evidence there is the more opportunity for incompatibility, incompatibility within the evidence, incompatibility between evidence, known historical facts and general presuppositions, and incompatibility of the statement made with all the rest. In this respect, statements about more recent periods for which we have a lot of evidence are subject to much more rigorous 'tests' and a statement which survives them can be awarded a higher degree of certainty or likelihood than a statement which is not subjected to them in the first place. Many statements, however, do not survive those tests at all while statements which are not exposed to tests of similar strictness survive in relatively greater numbers. Hence, our feeling of certainty is greater in respect to the latter than in respect

to the former. But this does not mean that objectively their certainty is also greater than (or even as great as) the certainty of statements relating to more recent periods which are based on greater amounts of evidence and previous knowledge.¹⁷¹⁾

171) We have, for simplicity's sake, talked here only in terms of quantity of evidence and knowledge but it is obvious that quality also is important.

Chapter III: SELECTION AND IMPORTANCE

1. The Problem of Selection

Truth is not the only standard for judging works of history. The truth of a whole historical account is not the only criterion for deciding on its value. We may have two historical works, A and B on the same subject, and everything asserted in each of them is equally true (or is considered to be equally true because it is equally supported by evidence) but nevertheless we judge A to be a better work than B, in a way similar to which one scientific theory may be judged to be better than another although both are equally regarded as true.¹⁾ On what ground or grounds is such a judgement based? And are there any objective, i.e. intersubjective, grounds at all?

Assumed that the works in question are not chronicles and do not consist only of statements of individual facts but also of statements of connexions between facts, a rough list of the reasons why one is judged to be better than the other may be the following: (1) There is a greater proportion of true statements of individual facts in A than there is in B. (2) There is a greater proportion of true statements of connexions between facts in A. But what, as we have assumed above, if there is no difference in respect to these two relationships between A and B,

1) This comparison is made by M.G. White, Foundations of Historical Knowledge, New York & London, 1965, p.11.

what, for instance, if both contain only true statements? In that case (and not in that case alone) other criteria come into play, e.g.: (3) The completeness of each work: if A is more complete than B and states more facts and connexions than B, then, other things being equal, A is better than B.²⁾ (4) What is included and what is omitted: if A includes items which are important while B leaves out those items (although it may include other unimportant or less important ones) then A is given preference to B. (5) The emphasis (even if it is only an implicit emphasis by arrangement and allocation of space) put on certain facts and connexions: A and B may include exactly the same items but whereas A emphasizes the important, B emphasizes the unimportant or gives the same emphasis to important and unimportant items alike. Consequently, A is the better of the two. (6) The conceptualization and choice of description of events, things and situations as well as of their connexions: how are they delimited and identified, what terms are chosen for their description, are these terms too specific or too general or just right? Given the topic and context in question, A may be better than B in these respects. (7) The aesthetic qualities: which of the two works is better as a work of literature? Which has the better style, the more pleasing phrases?

2) However, it is important to note that there is a point of diminishing return as far as completeness is concerned. Many books of history are criticized because they are too bulky, because they include too many details. 'The writer's head' (this is a quotation from a recent book review) 'may be crammed full of facts and ideas... but without some selectivity, some effort to reduce it all to order, the result is bound to be disappointing.'

Other points could be added to this list, e.g. moral qualities, but it is not necessary to go any further. What is important is that each of these criteria is decisive only if all other things are equal, i.e. that none of them can be applied independently of the others. The order of our list is also not necessarily an order of importance. Truth, of course, must have pride of place in any field of knowledge. But even then it may happen that A contains more false statements than B, i.e. is inferior to B in respect to points (1) and (2), but that A is nevertheless preferred on the strength of some other point or points. This, however, holds only within limits, and if a very large number of statements in A are false then the selection may be as appropriate as one can imagine and the style may be the most beautiful possible, we shall still prefer B to A as a work of history (although not as a work of literature). Of course, we usually do not make separate judgements for each of these points; we do not give individual marks, one for truth, one for emphasis, etc., but we make a compound judgement which takes all those factors into account at once,³⁾ Nevertheless, there is some justification for viewing point (7), the aesthetic factor, as extra-theoretical and, therefore, as of no consequence in an account of historical knowledge, whereas the remaining factors have a direct bearing on this aspect.

We then can say that the quality of a historical account

3) So also White, Foundations..., pp. 265/66.

as a work of knowledge depends not only on the truth of the statements contained in it but also on factors such as inclusion, emphasis, conceptualization, etc. of the facts and connexions stated. Has the essential been included, has the inessential been excluded, has every item been given its proper weight? The purpose of historical enquiry is not only to state facts of the past but also to make clear 'which are the big facts and which are the little ones'⁴⁾ and any individual historical statement should be 'significant' in addition to being true,⁵⁾ i.e., the question to be asked is not only 'is it true?' but also 'should it, rather than another true statement, be included in this account?',⁶⁾

This involves discrimination and selection but in a rather wide sense which does not only include the selection of individual facts⁷⁾ but also the selection of connexions between facts and the selection of some facts for the 'foreground' and others for the 'background',⁸⁾ i.e. the allocation of emphasis.

4) G. Barraclough, History in a Changing World, Repr., Oxford, 1956, p. 28 (quoting J.R. Green).

5) So S.P. Lamprecht, Nature and History, New York, 1950, p.64.

6) Similar¹⁾ White, Foundations..., p.13.

7) It is a weakness common to many writers that they only think of selection of individual facts. For instance, when White speaks of the truth of a historical account he has in mind only the truth of the statements of individual facts contained in it or implied by it (the truth of the 'implied chronicle', as he calls it), not, however, also the truth of statements asserting connexions between facts. This leads him to the view that the only criterion for judging two equally true accounts consists in ascertaining which of the 'implied chronicles' is the better one, i.e. which of the two totals of individual fact statements is to be preferred. See White, Foundations..., pp. 225/26 (although in an earlier article²⁾ he lists other criteria as well: M.G. White, 'The Logic of Historical Narration',

What is more, it includes the choice of the delimitation of the items concerned, i.e. the decision of what is to be regarded as an event, thing or situation, and it also includes the selection of aspects. The fact that a certain event E took place can be stated in many different ways in each of which a different aspect of E is emphasized, and there is no possibility of taking all aspects into account in one statement.^{8a)} The number of facts, of connexions between facts and of aspects of any single fact or connexion is infinite⁹⁾ whereas any historical account is finite. Consequently selection is inescapable.

Even an eyewitness account is necessarily selective. A person participating in a battle cannot be everywhere all of the time. His contact with what happens is necessarily restricted. But quite apart from this physical impossibility as far as large-scale events are concerned, there is also the theoretical impossibility of describing or stating what happens or exists

S. Hook (Ed.), Philosophy and History, New York, 1963, pp.77 ff.)

- 8a) The selection of aspects already manifests itself in the choice of terms. Someone who speaks of the Middle Ages as 'the age of faith' has opted for one aspect of this period, and he has done so because he regards this aspect as of particular importance. See also White, Foundations..., p.10; and W.H. Dray, 'The Historian's Problem of Selection', E. Nagel, P. Suppes & A. Tarski (Eds.), Logic, Methodology and Philosophy of Science, Stanford, Cal., 1962 p.601.
- 9) Similar) K.R. Popper, The Open Society and Its Enemies, 4th ed. (rev.), Vol. 2, London, 1962, p.259.
- 8) This expression is used by W.B. Gallie, Philosophy and Historical Understanding, London, 1964, p. 79.

exhaustively in all its details and all its aspects. What goes on can never be described completely in finite time, and any event, thing or situation is richer in content than the account of it.¹⁰⁾

Now it is obvious, and it has often been pointed out, that not only history but all knowledge (at least all empirical knowledge) is selective in character. It is selective for two reasons. The first is, as we have seen, that reality is so manifold and varied that coming to grips with it is only possible by discriminating and concentrating on certain parts or aspects of this infinite variety. A non-selective representation of everything that happens or exists is impossible. What is more, and this is the second reason, if it were possible it would not be called knowledge. It is not the task of any enquiry, scientific or otherwise, to give a symbolic reproduction of its subject matter, even if such a reproduction were possible.¹¹⁾ But selection does not entail falsification or distortion. A partial truth is still a truth and one need not know everything about a certain subject matter in order to know something about

10) So also M.R. Cohen, The Meaning of Human History, La Salle, Ill., 1947, p.24; and M. Mandelbaum, The Problem of Historical Knowledge, New York, 1938, p. 21.

11) The same or similar view can be found in C. Frankel, 'Philosophy and History', Political Science Quarterly, Vol.72, 1957, p. 356; E. Nagel, 'The Logic of Historical Analysis', H. Feigl & M. Brodbeck (Eds.), Readings in the Philosophy of Science, New York, 1953, p.693; E. Nagel, The Structure of Science, London, 1961, pp. 484, 577; K.R. Popper, The Poverty of Historicism, 2nd ed., Repr., London, 1961, p.77; R.S. Rudner, Philosophy of Social Science, Englewood Cliffs, N.Y., 1966, p.69.

it. I might know that Jones is a certified accountant without knowing that he underwent an appendectomy and my ignorance of the second does not affect my knowledge of the first.¹²⁾

It is, therefore, not a defect of history, as it is not a defect of any other field of knowledge, that it is selective. In fact, incompleteness is one of its essential features as it is an essential feature of a map not to show everything. A map drawn to scale and omitting nothing would serve no purpose, a picture of a landscape, life-size and including every single item, would be without point.¹³⁾ As a real map and a real picture need not be distortions of what they represent, in spite of the fact that they are on a smaller scale and leave out many things, so a work of history need not be a distortion of historical reality in spite of its selective character. In fact, it is a necessary precondition of the possibility of history that selection be possible without distortion.¹⁴⁾

However, the comparison between a picture or map on the one hand and a historical account on the other is not quite adequate. For whereas it may be theoretically possible, though

12) So also S. Hook, 'Objectivity and Reconstruction in History', S. Hook (Ed.), Philosophy and History, New York, 1963, p. 260; A.O. Lovejoy, 'Present Standpoints and Past History', H. Meyerhoff (Ed.), The Philosophy of History in Our Time, Garden City, N.Y., 1959 p.182; Mandelbaum, The Problem..., pp. 84/85, 189; Nagel, 'The Logic...' p.692; W.H. Walsh, 'The Limits of Scientific History', J.Hogan (Ed.), Historical Studies III, London & Cork, 1961, p.50.

13) These comparisons are made by Nagel, The Structure..., p.577, and A.C.Danto, Analytical Philosophy of History, Cambridge, 1965, p.114. E.Berheim, Lehrbuch der historischen Methode
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pointless, to produce a map or picture of a limited section of reality which is in scale and complete (complete as far as the vision of the normal person is concerned, not complete in respect to micro-phenomena), it is not possible to give an account even of a minute segment of history which is complete in any sense. This is already apparent from the fact that completeness here would involve the description of all the relations and all the aspects of an event, thing or situation, including relations and aspects which by their very nature can only be known in times to come, e.g. the relation between a historical event of the past and an event in the distant future. In this sense, one can say that our knowledge of the past is limited by our ignorance of the future and that a complete account of the past would presuppose a complete account of the future.¹⁵⁾

In short, it is theoretically impossible for a historian to know everything about the past, or even about a small segment of the past. It is, of course, also practically impossible. For instance, for many past events there is no evidence, either direct or circumstantial. Many events have left no trace and so cannot be known to anyone. But a historian usually does not even include all he does know; he leaves items

und der Geschichtsphilosophie, 3. ~~2.~~ 4. Aufl., Leipzig, 1903, p.724, uses the example of a pianoforte arrangement which is made to represent a whole orchestral work.

- 14) So G.C.Field, 'Some Problems of the Philosophy of History', Proceedings of the British Academy, Vol.24, 1938, p.77.
- 15) This is the formulation of Danto, Analytical Philosophy..., pp. 16/17. There is another point. Since a complete description of an event presupposes the knowledge of all its consequences it entails the knowledge of what would or would not have happened if the event had not taken place (so also

out of his account because he regards them as unimportant. In other words, we have to distinguish between the preselection of facts made for the historian and the selection of facts made by him. The preselection is made for him, e.g. by the informants or witnesses who drew up the records. These people could not, and did not wish to, record everything. They selected what they thought worth recording, and their standards in this respect are not necessarily the historian's standards.¹⁶⁾ But not only is he dependent on preselection in this literal sense, he is also dependent on the preselection made for him as it were by fate. An event might have left direct or circumstantial evidence behind it, but this might have perished before it reached the historian. The survival of evidence is a matter of chance.¹⁷⁾ And it is also a matter of chance, at least to a certain degree, whether evidence which has been preserved is known to the historian. He may not have looked in this or that archive, he may have forgotten to dig in this or that locality. Or, if we think of

Cohen, The Meaning..., p.81) which in turn must rest on the knowledge of causal laws governing such counterfactuals. Needless to say we do not possess such knowledge.

16) So also J. Dewey, 'Historical Judgments', H.Meyerhoff (Ed.), The Philosophy of History in Our Time, Garden City, N.Y., 1959, p. 168; J.R.M. Butler, The Present Need for History, Cambridge, 1949, p.25; E.H. Carr, What is History?, Harmondsworth, 1964, p.14.

17) So also W. Bauer, Einführung in das Studium der Geschichte, Tübingen, 1921, p.14; and Field, 'Some Problems...', p.80. - But perhaps it is not entirely a matter of chance. For large-scale historical events tend to leave a large amount of evidence behind (remains as well as records) and the more evidence there was originally for an event the greater the likelihood that at least some of it has been preserved into present times. In short, events which are normally regarded as important tend to be better documented than those which are not.

circumstantial evidence alone, he may know of the existence of certain data but he may not be aware that they constitute evidence for a certain fact. Accident plays a role here as well, but so does experience and ingenuity.

Therefore, his selection of items is, properly speaking, not a selection from the items of the past as such, but a selection from the items of the past that have left some evidence, evidence which has moreover been preserved and which is known to him. He selects certain facts from the totality of facts known to him for inclusion in his account. He knows much more about his subject than he mentions in his work but for one reason or other he does not put down everything he knows. For instance, he does not wish to make his work top-heavy with details which he judges to be of minor importance for his topic. Others may be so similar to each other that he thinks it sufficient to mention only a few examples or to make a general statement to the effect that circumstances in general were such and such.¹⁸⁾

But are there not situations where a historian does not select from what he knows but includes all he knows? If only a very small number of facts are known to him and he regards

18) In saying all this we do not wish to imply that a historian first 'collects' as many facts as he can and only afterwards starts weeding out the unimportant ones. Criteria of importance or relevance are, of course, applied right from the beginning, and if a historian is convinced of the irrelevance of something he does not go to the trouble of establishing it as a fact or of supporting it by evidence.

them all as important enough to deserve inclusion, will he not mention every single one? This is possible, at least theoretically, but only in respect to recorded facts, and the total of recorded facts is not equivalent to the total of known facts. For instance, we know of every man what the physical sciences teach about bodies, but as historians we would not dream of including all this in our account. And if somebody were to reply that this is only so because a historian is not interested in physical properties, we can make the same point in respect to historical features. A writer on the early Middle Ages can be quite certain that a person living in those days did not know anything about gunpowder or about printing with movable types but most probably he will not mention this in his account. So even in cases where there is very little evidence so that a historian knows too little of his subject, he at the same time knows too much of it; he can never include all he knows but has to make a selection.¹⁹⁾ This is still more obvious if we think not only of individual facts but also of connexions between facts, of the relative emphasis given to each item and of the aspects under which the items are described. It then becomes self-evident why two different accounts, even if their authors have knowledge of exactly the same recorded facts and have both included all of them, may still vary considerably so that one may be judged to be better than the other.

19) This point has already been made by H. Rickert, Die Grenzen der naturwissenschaftlichen Begriffsbildung, 5. Aufl., Tübingen, 1929, p.295.

2. Relevance and Importance

If selection is inescapable the question arises as to what constitutes a good or a better selection. If it is true that the value of two competing works of history in respect to the knowledge conveyed by each of them can differ although both contain only true statements and that this difference is dependent on the selection made in each of them (selection in the wide sense we have explicated), then we have to ask why the selection must be regarded as better in one case than in the other. A general answer in negative terms would be that a selection is a good selection if it is not misleading (and that it is a better selection if it is less misleading). It is a generally known fact that because of omission and emphasis a description of what is or was the case can be extremely inadequate although every statement contained in it is true. This is one of the reasons why witnesses in courts of law have to swear not only to speak the truth and nothing but the truth but also to speak the whole truth. In the sphere of religion, of politics and of ideology some people are extremely skilful at the game of giving misleading pictures favourable to their cause without actually saying anything false. Often, however, this is quite unintentional if not unconscious, and in this form it may even be regarded as a normal characteristic of human nature; the average person is apt to think well of himself and his causes and thus tends to overlook or to minimize anything which could put them in an unfavourable light. It takes some self-discipline and mental

training to overcome bias in this sense. But not all faulty and misleading selection is a matter of bias. A child who gives an account of something witnessed or experienced may easily relate the inessential and omit the essential, and this is not due to bias but simply to not recognizing what is important and what is not.

Likewise in history. Historians, too, may select in a misleading way from recognized or unrecognized bias or from mental confusion and lack of experience. In effect, it does not matter what the reasons are; what is important is that the account given is inadequate. And there can be no doubt that some historical works are inadequate in this respect, e.g. when the author dwells on a few cases of miscarriage of justice in a judicial system without mentioning the much more numerous cases where justice was done²⁰⁾ or when he writes a history of Nazi Germany without saying anything about the persecution and extermination of the Jews. In such cases we would not regard it as an excuse if he defends himself by saying 'well, one can't include everything',²¹⁾ and we would not accept this because we believe that any account of the topic which leaves out or underemphasizes such an item amounts to a falsification of the historical picture in question. It is a falsification in the

20) This example is taken from J.R. Strayer, 'Introduction', J.R. Strayer (Ed.), The Interpretation of History, Princeton, 1943, p.12.

21) So Dray, 'The Historian's Problem...' p.598, from whom the second example is taken.

sense that it is unrepresentative of the historical reality it is about. And here we come at last to a positive description: no work of history can be complete, selection is unavoidable, but the selection should be such that the work is still representative of the totality of facts and relations as far as it is known to the historian, that it is a 'true sample'²²⁾ of this reality. If we use the term 'sample', however, we must beware of thinking of something in the nature of a statistical sample.²³⁾ For statistics is a matter of quantitative distribution within a population, and if the sample chosen has the same distribution of properties as the whole population it is a good sample. But selection in history is usually not a matter of finding a sample with the same proportionate quantities as the stretch of historical reality in question. Historical subjects are usually not quantifiable so that no statistical sampling is possible. Therefore, if we insist on using an analogy that of a map or picture is better than that of a sample. A map is representative of the area of which it is a map, but it is not a sample of this area.

However, there are clear criteria for deciding whether a map is a good map, i.e. whether it is truly representative of the area concerned and in how far it is so representative. One only needs to survey the area in question in order to find this out.

22) This phrase is used by I. Berlin, 'History and Theory - The Concept of Scientific History', History and Theory, Vol.1,

23) This is exactly what White thinks when he says that 1960/61, p.17. a historian has to present a briefer list or sequence (briefer than the sequence of reality) which is representative of the complete list as a good statistical sample is representative of an infinite population. See M.G.White, 'Can History be Objective?', H. Meyerhoff (Ed.), The

But are there similar criteria for deciding whether a historical account is representative of its subject matter? In short, when is a work of history representative? The usual answer is that it is representative if it includes all the essential, significant, important or relevant facts, aspects and relations and gives the right emphasis to each of them. But this leaves us where we were before, for now we have to ask how we can decide whether and to what degree something is essential, significant, important or relevant. In short, the question is now whether there are any intersubjective criteria of relevance or importance (to use only these two terms), and an answer would be at the same time a solution of the problem concerning the criteria for deciding on the adequacy of a selection, either absolutely or relative to a competing selection.²⁴⁾

It is often maintained that 'relevance' and 'importance' are relational terms. As far as the first is concerned there can be little doubt that this does express a relation. Relevance is always relevance to something. Some writers go further and say

Philosophy of History in Our Time, Garden City, N.Y., 1959, p. 195; and M.G. White, 'Toward an Analytic Philosophy of History', M. Farber (Ed.), Philosophic Thought in France and the United States, Buffalo, N.Y., 1950, p.718.

- 24) It has been said that if there are no objective criteria for selection and importance then history is subjective (J.A. Passmore, 'The Objectivity of History', Philosophy, Vol.33, 1958, p. 104; also Hook, 'Objectivity...', p.267). But this is an overstatement. For even if there exist no such criteria there are still criteria for the ascertainment of truth in history, and as long as that is the case history cannot be completely subjective.

that the relation in question is always a causal relation²⁵⁾ but it does not need much mental effort to see that this view is mistaken. We do not use 'relevance' and 'relevant' only when we want to state a causal connexion ('Robespierre's death was relevant to the outcome of the French Revolution') but we also say that something is relevant to a topic or subject ('Renaissance painting is relevant to the history of European art') in the sense of being part of it or of properly belonging to it, and we also sometimes use the terms in order to indicate a logical connexion or relation ('the fact that a triangle is equilateral is relevant to the fact that it is equiangular').²⁶⁾ Causal relevance, therefore, can be viewed only as a special case or special kind of relevance.²⁷⁾

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- 25) F. Kaufmann, Methodology of the Social Sciences, London..., 1944, p. 194; M. Mandelbaum, 'Causal Analysis in History', Journal of the History of Ideas, Vol. 3, 1942, p.39; Mandelbaum, The Problem..., pp.221,241,260. The latter connects this with the thesis that a fact a is relevant to a fact b if a and b are so related that the mind cannot apprehend the nature of b without understanding the nature of a thus implying that all understanding of facts is causal understanding (ibid., pp.3, 211, 213, 241). This, however, is wrong for - as pointed out by L.J. Goldstein, 'A Note on the Status of Historical Reconstructions', The Journal of Philosophy, Vol. 55, 1958, p.477 - a fact a ('Billy punched Johnny in the eye') may be (causally) relevant to a fact b ('Johnny is crying') without it being in the least necessary to know or to apprehend a in order to know or to apprehend b.
- 26) But 'relevance' does not always express a logical relationship, as P.P. Wiener, 'On Methodology in the Philosophy of History', The Journal of Philosophy, Vol. 38, 1941, p. 313, seems to think when he says that one historical fact is objectively relevant to another 'only if the first logically implies the second'. (Wiener equates here 'is objectively relevant to' with 'explains').
- 27) One could say, of course, that it is only as applied in history that 'relevance' (and 'importance', too) is

What is usually understood by 'a is causally relevant to b' is that a and b are in fact causally related, i.e. that a is a cause or effect of b. But it is questionable whether we always want to commit ourselves so far when we use 'relevance' in its causal sense. Perhaps we sometimes wish to indicate only that there is a possibility of such a causal connexion, that it is not completely out of the question that a is a cause or effect of b. So we may say that the family structure in a society is relevant to its birth rate, meaning thereby only that we can imagine the existence of a causal relationship between these two factors and that we would not be surprised if such a relationship were indeed established one day.

However this may be, these few remarks indicate sufficiently that the concept of relevance is not as clear as one could wish. The same is true of 'importance' (and of 'significance' although we shall not analyse this term here). 'Importance', as opposed to 'relevance', is not necessarily used in a relational sense. We can regard something as important in its own right, just as we can regard something as important for something else. Human life is usually viewed as of absolute importance, not as important relative to something else, whereas the problem of whether truth-functional logic can be applied to counterfactual statements is important only in relation to some other problems of philosophy such as the problem of what constitutes a scientific law. (As this example shows, similar to relevance, importance
exclusively causal, whereas in other fields it is causal or non-causal. But, as we shall see later, even in history 'relevance' is not always equivalent to 'causal relevance' (and 'importance' does not always mean 'causal importance').

in the relational sense need not be causal.)²⁸⁾ But whether relational or absolute, this does not affect the comparative character. As we can say that something is more relevant than something else so we can say that an item is more important than another item, even where the importance is an absolute importance. I regard my own well-being as important in itself, not as important for something else, but I nevertheless think that it is less important than the well-being of the community of which I am a member.

When 'importance' is used to express a relation it can be replaced by 'relevance' (and 'relevance' can be replaced by 'importance') without altering much in the meaning of the statement concerned. It does not matter whether we say that the assassination of Sarajevo was relevant to or that it was important for the outbreak of the First World War (an example of a causal relation), that the problem of counterfactuals is relevant to or that it is important for the problem of scientific laws (a non-causal relationship). On the other hand, when expressing the non-

28) This is why E.J. Tapp, 'Some Aspects of Causation in History', The Journal of Philosophy, Vol. 49, 1952, p.70, is wrong when he says that the importance of something is always measured by measuring its causal effects. R.M. MacIver, 'History and Social Causation', The Journal of Economic History, Vol.3, 1943, Supp., p. 136; and J.H. Randall, 'Controlling Assumptions in the Practice of American Historians', Theory and Practice in Historical Study, New York, 1946, p. 18, also seem to think that significance is always causal significance. Others, instead of speaking of a causal relationship, maintain that it is a relation which depends on counterfactuals. 'We can understand the significance of what did happen only if we contrast it with what might have happened.' (Cohen, The Meaning, p.80; similarly L. Gottschalk, Understanding History, New York, 1950, p.242). But in practice this amounts to saying that importance (or significance) is a causal concept.

relational sense we can use 'importance' only. 'The importance of religion' is ambiguous in that it may refer to importance as such or to importance for something, e.g. for art, whereas 'the relevance of religion', although it may be ambiguous in other respects, is unambiguous in that it can only refer to the relevance to something.²⁹⁾

There is no established custom as to when one should use 'relevance' and when one should use 'importance' (and there is also no firm distinction between 'importance' and 'significance') although some writers may establish a difference by means of a definitional fiat. This is the reason why we also will not introduce any distinction (although we will always regard 'relevance' as a relational term) and will usually speak of 'relevance' and 'importance' as if they were one and the same.

To return to the problem of whether there are any intersubjective criteria in history for deciding on the relevance or importance of an item and thus on the quality of a historical selection. There are two views which, if they were correct, would provide us with an easy solution (or would at least simplify matters considerably). According to the first, it is the historian's task to regard as relevant or important that which was regarded so by the people of the period concerned,

29) It is true that 'relevance' and 'relevant' are sometimes used in the absolute sense. But then it can be argued that this usage is incorrect by reference to a work such as The Concise Oxford Dictionary where 'relevant' is defined as 'bearing upon, pertinent to, the matter in hand'.

and to the same degree.³⁰⁾ If in a certain age people viewed a religious and dogmatic topic such as the immaculate conception as important and as more important than, say, the constitutional struggles between monarch and parliament, then a historian has to adopt the same position when he writes the history of that period. In this way it seems that no problem arises and that the principles of selection are given with the evidence on which an account is based. But there are strong objections. For not only would historians make themselves completely dependent on what was recorded and preserved in their judgements of importance, they also would still have to decide for themselves whether and in how far any or all records to the effect that something was important, or more important than something else, are representative of the general view of the age. After all, different persons may have regarded different items as important³¹⁾ and there is no guarantee that what is contained in the records is not only a minority opinion. But even if it were possible to ascertain with certainty what was generally viewed as important in the past, there is still the question of whether it is the task of history to do no more than to follow and to reproduce the opinions of dead people in this respect. As history is usually understood this is

30) This is the view of Lovejoy, 'Present Standpoints...', p.179, according to whom the intellectual historian's selection 'should be determined, not by what seems important to him, but by what seemed important to other men; for it is precisely this that differentiates historical from any other type of relevance and significance'. It is true that he is speaking of the 'intellectual historian', i.e. of the historian of ideas, but in the last part of the quoted sentence the application seems to be to history in general.

31) Barraclough, History..., p.22.

certainly not or not its only task. Historical knowledge has an element of hindsight and is thus essentially different from the knowledge and opinions of the contemporaries of the period under study. One respect in which it is different is in what is regarded as relevant and important, and if this difference is eliminated history loses one of its most telling characteristics. A historian writing on thirteenth century England who adopted the criteria of importance of the thirteenth century would have to give a recital of miracles, tempests, comets, pestilences and other 'wonderful things',³²⁾ and such a work would rightly be regarded as thoroughly unsatisfactory in the twentieth century, even if it contained only true statements and cited extensive evidence for the occurrence of all these events.³³⁾

The other view mentioned is the view that importance and relevance are objective categories which can, so to speak, be read off historical reality. Historical phenomena are relevant or important independent of all thinking about them, and when looking at the facts everything falls into pattern by itself; the relevant and important items sort themselves out from the irrelevant and unimportant ones of their own accord. If this view

32) Ibid.

33) For a position similar to ours see W.H. Dray, Philosophy of History, Englewood Cliffs, N.Y., 1964, pp. 37/38, who, however, does not seem to distinguish clearly between the question of importance and the question of truth; thus, in the context of importance, he points out that a historian does not only tell how things seemed to the protagonists but how they actually were.

is combined with the relational position according to which relevance and importance always refer to relations, relevance becomes an 'objective relation between facts', not based on the mind but grounded in the phenomena themselves, and it is no longer necessary for a historian to select what is relevant; he only needs to follow where 'his material leads' him.³⁴⁾ The trouble here is that we do not really gain anything if we call the relationship of relevance 'objective' or if we say that the importance of facts is grounded in reality. It may very well be that objectively certain facts are more important or relevant than others but this does not help us as far as the criteria of relevance and importance are concerned. Even if it is true that importance and relevance are objective properties or relations, the relevant and important facts do not therefore 'of their own account separate themselves from all the others, nor do they come with all their significant characteristics duly labelled for us',³⁵⁾ and historical evidence cannot show that one item is more important and, therefore, more worthy of being selected than another item.³⁶⁾ In short, objective existence here does not entail the existence of criteria of recognition, i.e. the problem remains of how we can recognize the presence of such properties and relations. Therefore, the issue of whether historical relevance and importance are objective features of

34) Mandelbaum, The Problem..., pp. 200, 207, 210, 241, 257/58.

35) M.R.Cohen, Reason and Nature, 2nd ed., New York & London, 1964, p. 76.

36) It also cannot show, as White, Foundations..., p. 263, points out, that one purpose in writing history is superior to another.

reality or are, in some way or other, dependent on our thinking about reality, or both³⁷⁾, does not affect the question of the criteria according to which something is judged to be important or relevant (or more important or relevant than something else).

3. Consequentiality as a Criterion of Relevance

One respect, and perhaps the most important one, in which historical knowledge differs from knowledge of the present, is that it includes the knowledge of effects and consequences of events. The contemporary is usually not in a position to know what will happen in consequence of some occurrence which is just taking place (or which has just taken place)³⁸⁾ and there are no laws which would allow him to make predictions although he may have certain expectations which are based on experience and which are, therefore, something more than mere guesswork. As more and more time elapses after the occurrence of an event, more and more consequences become manifest, but there is no point in time where one could say that their number has been exhausted and that no further consequences will make their appearance.³⁹⁾ This means,

37) That they are both seems to be the opinion of W.H. Walsh, An Introduction to the Philosophy of History, 7th impr., London, 1964, p. 99, who holds that the idea of importance is relative to what happened independently from present thinking and to the person who makes the judgement of importance.

38) This, according to Randall, 'Controlling Assumptions...', p.20, is the reason why present history cannot be fully understood by the actors.

39) But see J.H. Hexter, Reappraisals in History, London, 1961, p.12, who thinks that some events have exhausted their consequences, e.g. the Treaty of Madrid of 1527.

at least in theory, that the later in time a historian writes his work, the more consequences can be known to him and can be taken into account, which is one reason why no work of history is ever final and why new accounts of the same subject become necessary as time goes on.

This obvious feature of the gradual unfolding of the consequences of past events has been taken as the criterion of selection and importance. 'New consequences flowing from past events change the significance of the past...',⁴⁰⁾ and it is self-evident that for those who believe that all relevance is causal relevance it must be the only criterion. In this view, historians select for inclusion in their works those items which have turned out to be efficacious while anything which has remained without consequences is rightly ignored or omitted. The matter then becomes relatively neat and simple in that the justification of the inclusion of an item in a historical account consists in pointing out its effects or consequences (whereas its explanation consists in pointing out its causes or reasons).

The trouble is that it is too simple and that a large number of objections can be raised. Apart from the most obvious one, namely that historians actually do not proceed (or do not

40) Randall, 'Controlling Assumptions...', p.20; similarly (from a Marxist point of view) A. Schaff, 'Why History is Constantly Rewritten', Diogenes, No. 30, 1960, p.12. It has also been taken as providing a characterization of history, so by the German historian E. Meyer ('historical is whatever is effective or has become effective', quoted in E. Cassirer, An Essay on Man, 3rd printing, New Haven, 1945, p. 196) and Dewey, 'Historical Judgments', p.171, who writes that there

always proceed) in this way, there is first of all the point that this view presupposes that a historian can recognize and demonstrate without great difficulty that something is a cause or effect of something else, that it is easy to distinguish between post hoc and propter hoc, and that causal knowledge (in general, and in history in particular) does not raise any serious problems.⁴¹⁾ Historians, it is assumed, are able to ascertain without much trouble that an event E happened in consequence of an event C and are so in a position to declare C to be important and worthy of selection. This is a large claim but let us assume for the moment that it is justified. There still remain other difficulties. For instance, an event has numerous consequences and is itself the consequence of a large number of events (in both cases the numbers may even be infinite). On which of these do we base our judgement of relevance? To be more precise, an event C is said to be important because an event E happened in consequence of it. But, and this is the first argument, E did not only happen in consequence of C but also in consequence of many other events, A, B, D, etc., at least some of which are known to the

is no history except in terms of movement towards some outcome. For a more recent opinion see L. Krieger, 'Comments on Historical Explanation', S. Hook (Ed.), Philosophy and History, New York, 1963, p. 141.

41) This can clearly be seen from Mandelbaum, The Problem..., pp. 260/61 & passim.

historian.⁴²⁾ Why then pick on C instead of any of the others? The answer can only be 'because C is more important than the rest'.⁴³⁾ But it was just our purpose to find a criterion of importance, and if in the course of this endeavour we are once more left with importance it is not of much use. The second argument goes in the other direction. C is said to be important because E happened as one of its consequences. But many other events, F, G, H, etc., also took place in consequence of C. Why then is the statement 'C is important' supported by reference to C's consequence E and not by reference to any of those other consequences? Again, we can only say 'because E is more important than any of the others'. In short, C is selected because it is important, and it is important because it had a consequence E which is important. The importance of C turns out to rest on the importance of E, and all we have done is to reduce ^{the} one to the other.⁴⁴⁾

42) Here as elsewhere, we take for granted the conjunctive plurality of causes. But it is difficult to see how any other view could do in history. A mono-causal theory seems so improbable, not to say absurd, that it can safely be excluded.

43) A similar point is made (if we understand the passage correctly) by F. Meinecke, 'Values and Causalities in History', F. Stern (Ed.), The Varieties of History, 11th printing, Cleveland and New York, 1964, p. 273.

44) This is recognized by Danto, Analytical Philosophy..., p.134, when he writes that an event has 'consequential significance' if it has certain consequences to which a historian attaches importance and that calling an event insignificant does not mean here that it has no consequences but only that it has no important ones. A similar point is made by Hook, 'Objectivity...', p. 270. - There is a further and perhaps related question, mentioned by R. Aron, Introduction to the Philosophy of History, 2nd impr., - London, 1961, p.130, and indicated by Meinecke, 'Values...', p.271, as to the point

It seems that the protagonists of the causal view have been vaguely aware of these difficulties for sometimes they introduce a further criterion (or rather narrow down the existing one), e.g. that of social or 'societal' efficacy. Only what has consequences in the social (or cultural) field is relevant or important.⁴⁵⁾ This, however, will not do either. For apart from the fact that historians actually do not only regard as important what has social consequences, the criterion is still far too wide to serve the purpose it is intended to serve. Even if we restrict consequences to social consequences their number for any historical event remains very large.⁴⁶⁾ Still, one could say that now we have at least got hold of a criterion to which quantitative terms can be applied. For instance, we may take the number of people affected into account⁴⁷⁾ and say that an event E is more important than an event F is E affects more people, and this importance can be transferred to an event C of which E is a

in time, i.e. the point in the causal chain, which is taken into account when judging the efficacy and so the importance of an event. C might have had important consequences some hundred years ago but not today. Should we still regard it as worthy of being included in our account?

- 45) Mandelbaum who, as we have seen, believes that relevance is always causal relevance does this by restricting historical facts to those facts which are seen in the light of their consequences for the social structure. See Mandelbaum, The Problem..., pp. 10, 290.
- 46) So also Dray, Philosophy of History, p.28, according to whom it only excludes the private sphere. P.O. Kristeller, 'Some Problems of Historical Knowledge', The Journal of Philosophy, Vol. 58, 1961, p.87, makes a different criticism: 'the term "social" is much more vague and ambiguous than most people seem to realize: if construed in a specific sense, it will be too narrow to characterize historical events; if taken more broadly, it will mean the same as human...'

consequence. But (forgetting now that it still would not explain why just C is selected and not A, B, D, etc. which also have E as a consequence) this is completely inadequate in that it does not take into account the duration, intensity and quality of such influences. The adoption of the use of the tooth-brush has probably affected many more people than, say, the Franco-Prussian war of 1870, but nobody in his senses would ascribe greater historical importance to it. And even if we narrow down the field still further, e.g. to political matters, the difficulties remain. Historians often regard some item which affects relatively few people, such as a social or cultural elite, as of much greater importance than one which affects millions.

It is true, the grading of importance or relevance is possible; we can often say that one item is more important than another, even if the concept of importance adopted is an absolute and not a relational one. But this grading cannot be done according to the number of consequences, whether social, cultural or political.⁴⁸⁾ In fact, it cannot be done in any

47) This is mentioned as a possibility by Cohen, The Meaning...,

48) D.C. Williams, 'Essentials in History', S.Hook (Ed.), Philosophy and History, New York, 1963, pp. 385/86, is one of those who think that 'we can define the importance or essentiality of a character... objectively, in terms of sheer number of factual consequences' forgetting that there are important and unimportant consequences, large and small ones, consequences of long and of short duration. Are all those to be treated on an equal footing? And the issue is not, as Williams thinks, whether every kind of event has as many consequences as any other (which he denies) but whether these differences in the 'quality' of consequences can be neglected.

numerical or quantitative terms. We cannot assign a number to the importance or relevance of a historical event, e.g. a revolution,⁴⁹⁾ in spite of the fact that 'importance' and 'relevance' are what could be called comparative concepts so that we can say that Barère was an unimportant figure in the French Revolution compared to Robespierre, Danton or St. Just,⁵⁰⁾ or that the Second World War was more important than the Korean War. The possibility of comparative grading (which, of course, does not exist in borderline cases) does not entail the possibility of quantification and the assignation of numerical values.

It seems, therefore, that there is no way out of the difficulties if relevance and importance are regarded as consequential relevance and consequential importance^{50a)} There

49) As at least one social scientist has done who is criticized in passing by G. Salvemini, Historian and Scientist, Cambridge, Mass., 1939, p.107. The possibility of quantification of importance is also denied by Lamprecht, Nature and History, p.69, and (at least in respect to absolute importance) by W.H. Walsh, 'The Limits...' p.53.

50) This example is taken from Hook, 'Objectivity...', p.273, who regards it as a statement which is 'obviously true or false'.

50a) This also holds if we speak in terms of potential rather than actual consequences. Assuming^c that the atomic bomb had never been used. One could then very well say that the invention and construction of this weapon had very great consequences, but only potential consequences. For it could have been used, and if it had been used the course of twentieth century history would have been very different. Therefore, a historian of this period is justified, if not obliged, to mention its invention in his account. This, however, is only a different way of saying that the renunciation of use had important actual consequences and so is itself of importance. I.e., this type of case is not different, in principle, from the type of case we have discussed above.

remains the question of whether perhaps the causal conception as a whole can be saved if we take into account not only effects and consequences but also causes and reasons, in such a way that whether something is important and worthy of being selected depends not only on its consequences but also on its causes, not only on what it led to but also on what led to it. If a mountain gives birth to a mouse, importance may be attached to the mouse, not as a mouse or because it gives birth to another mouse or another mountain, but because of the disproportion of cause and effect, effect and achievement. Or, to give an example, where disproportion does not come in, that Nietzsche was insane during the last years of his life is not important because it had certain consequences, but because it helps our understanding of what went before, namely Nietzsche's last writings.

Without doubt, this more comprehensive view is more acceptable than the narrower thesis according to which only the consequences provide a criterion of relevance or importance. But even if supplemented in this way the causal view is still inadequate, i.e. it will still be false to say that the only criterion of relevance or importance, and so the only criterion of selection, is a causal criterion.⁵¹⁾

51) We have neglected here certain variations of the causal view which are all open to the same or to similar objections as the causal view pure and simple. To mention just two of them, there is the thesis that the criterion of relevance is supplied not so much by the causal consequences as by the generalization, law or theory on which the causal nexus in question is based. The assertion that C is relevant to E, it is said, can only be justified by reference to a general law which connects the two with each other. (See Goldstein, 'A Note...', pp. 477/78; also C.G. Hempel, 'The Function of

4. Context as a Criterion of Relevance

The causal view is very common but perhaps still more common is the thesis according to which it is not, or not so much, the consequences of an item which provide a criterion of its relevance or importance but rather the context in which it appears, where 'context' may refer either to the topic, subject or field a historian is dealing with (as well as the aspect under which he deals with it), or to the question he wants to answer, the problem he wants to solve, the hypothesis he wants to test.⁵²⁾ In this view, too, relevance and importance are relational concepts; and to say that an item is relevant or important means that it is relevant or important for the treatment of a subject or the solution of a problem. What is important to the history of banking in England is unimportant to the history of English painting; what is relevant to the problem of the causes of the French Revolution may be irrelevant to the problem of the influence of the Revolution on European history in the nineteenth century. It is not necessary to think only of instances where the topic or problem provides completely different criteria

General Laws in History', H. Feigl & W. Sellars (Eds.), Readings in Philosophical Analysis, New York, 1949, p.469, and Kaufmann, Methodology..., p.194; on the other hand, it is pointed out by Popper, The Open Society..., pp. 263/64, that in history there are no laws which provide selective principles). Since the generalizations in question are thought to be provided by the sciences, it follows that the criteria of historical selection change with scientific progress. (So L. von Mises, Human Action, London..., 1949, p.53, who, however, thinks that the selective principles are only partially provided in this way). Another possibility (considered but finally rejected by Cohen, The Meaning..., p. 227) is to regard those items as more important which are more fundamental in explanation (and 'explanation' here usually means

for the selection of what is important. The more normal cases are those where there is a partial overlapping. For instance, the social historian who has a wider 'frame of reference' will include items which are omitted by the historian of prices, who has a narrower one, and vice versa, but there may be items which will be included by both.⁵³⁾

If this view is correct then it seems that the problem of selection can be reduced to the problem of the initial choice of a topic or problem. And this, if it is a problem at all, is a sociological or psychological problem, not a problem of the theory of historical knowledge.⁵⁴⁾ Whether a historian decides to treat a subject a

'causal explanation'). If C can explain why E happened while B cannot explain this, then C is more important than B, and in general, the more numerous the phenomena that can be explained by reference to C, the greater C's importance. It is easy to see that this is only another way of saying that the degree of importance depends on the number of consequences.

- 52) Of course, the causal thesis and the contextual thesis are by no means mutually exclusive and are often combined with each other, as by Mandelbaum who generally defends the causal view, but also holds that selection is preconditioned by the context or subject. See Mandelbaum, The Problem..., pp.206,258; and M.Mandelbaum, 'Objectivism in History', S.Hook (Ed.), Philosophy and History, New York, 1963, p.50.
- 53) This example is taken from S. Hook, 'Problems of Terminology in Historical Writing: Illustrations', Theory and Practice in Historical Study, New York, 1946, p.126.
- 54) Of course, there would still be a problem as to the importance, absolute or relational, of a subject itself, whether it is worthwhile to treat it and whether it is more worthwhile to treat this rather than that subject. Historians, e.g. J. Huizinga, 'The Idea of History', F. Stern (Ed.), The Varieties of History, 11th printing, Cleveland & New York, 1964, p.300, often insist that the size of a subject does not affect its importance and that the history of a village can be as important as that of a nation. But it is doubtful whether this is generally true. A historian who writes on a small subject in an excellent way is often regarded as having wasted his talents. 'How much better if he had applied his

instead of b, c or d depends on many factors. It depends on his general psychological make-up, on the social and cultural environment in which he lives, on the education he has received, etc. etc. Last not least it depends on chance. For instance, a historian may select a field simply because so far nobody has cultivated it or because he has discovered a heap of unused source materials (for Ph.D. candidates a real godsend). Having selected a and having decided furthermore on the aspect of a which is to be treated, e.g. an economic aspect,⁵⁵⁾ and the scope or level, i.e. the degree of detail he wishes to include, there is no further problem as to the selection of items which have to be mentioned in his account because of their importance.⁵⁶⁾

gifts to something more deserving.' This is even more obvious where the scope is small not only spatially (village instead of country) but also temporally (six months instead of sixty years). On the other hand, it cannot be put down as a general rule that the larger the subject the greater its importance.

55) The aspect of the topic is emphasized by L. Gottschalk, 'The Historian and the Historical Document', L. Gottschalk, C. Kluckhohn & R. Angell, The Use of Personal Documents in History, Anthropology, and Sociology, New York, 1945, pp. 49/50, according to whom what is selected is what is relevant to such an aspect (biographical, geographical, etc.).

56) The view that importance and selection depend (and, by implication, depend alone) on the topic or problem or question or hypothesis a historian is concerned with, is expressed by many writers, e.g. by Lovejoy, 'Present Standpoints...', p.176 (the initial selection of a question determines the selection of the material relevant to it); F. Dovring, History as a Social Science, The Hague, 1960, p.80 (once a problem has been selected everything that is essential for an answer is relevant); Passmore, 'The Objectivity...', p.103 (those facts are relevant which assist the historian to test a hypothesis); E.W. Strong, 'The Materials of Historical Knowledge', Y.H. Krikorian (Ed.), Naturalism and the Human Spirit, 2nd printing, New York, 1945, p.164 (a historian starts with a query, i.e. a hypothesis, and the criterion of relevance is originally supplied by this hypothesis; but Strong is one of the few who make an explicit distinction between the selection of a field of study and the selection of the questions or problems

This, in a very simplified version, is the view under discussion. Several critical remarks are in place here. The first is that undoubtedly the choice of a subject determines the selection of the items included in the account and so provides a criterion of relevance or importance, but only to a limited degree. By confining history to a 'history of something' a selective principle is indeed provided, but only to a certain extent.⁵⁷⁾ A man who writes on the history of banking need not include parts of the history of painting. But this criterion is still too wide, for even within the restricted field selection is necessary. Although there is some justification for the belief that the narrower the subject the more it supplies us with criteria of relevance and importance, it is very questionable whether we can ever restrict it so far that selection becomes completely determined by the topic. Even if someone wrote a history of banking in, say, Bristol on April 4th, 1780, he would still have to select and so make judgements of importance (we can here refer back to what we said about cases where only very few recorded facts are available to the historian), not to mention that such an atomization would be an uninteresting enterprise. When it comes to a non-specialized work where a historian does not

which are to be investigated within this field; see E.W. Strong, 'How is Practice of History Tied to Theory?', The Journal of Philosophy, Vol. 46, 1949, p.640). For similar views compare also Randall, 'Controlling Assumptions...', p.22; Gottschalk, Understanding History, p. 143; Gottschalk, 'The Historian...', p.36; Hook, 'Objectivity...', p.268; F.A. von Hayek, The Counter-Revolution of Science, Glencoe, Ill., 1952, p.69.

57) So Popper, The Open Society..., p.265; see also Dray, Philosophy of History, pp.31 ff.

write about the painting or the banking or the foreign policy of a period but about the period in general (or, if we think of world history, about all periods in general), the matter is still more obvious. He will then have to decide on questions such as whether the invention of the wheel should be included and the invention of tragedy excluded, or vice versa, or, if both are to be included, whether both should receive the same or different emphasis.⁵⁸⁾ In short, specialized or general, 'the need to select arises in the course of, not just in the choice of' the historian's inquiry.⁵⁹⁾

However, the proponent of the contextual view may grant that some selection is necessary over and above the selection of the topic or problem, but he may say that this selection is irrelevant as far as any judgement on the quality of a historical work as a work of knowledge is concerned, especially in relation to another work on the same topic in which a different selection has been made.⁶⁰⁾ In other words, if there are two competing

58) The example is taken from Walsh, 'The Limits...', p.54. This, incidentally, is one of the reasons why some writers are hostile towards general history, e.g. Passmore, 'The Objectivity...', pp. 103/04, who regards a topic such as The History of England as a 'fraud'.

59) Dray, Philosophy of History, p.31 (See also Dray, 'The Historian's Problem...', p.598). But Dray seems to believe that this is a feature peculiar to history and not to be found elsewhere, and here he is certainly wrong.

60) There is also the view, indicated by Mandelbaum, 'Objectivism in History', p.51, that as soon as two authors writing on the same subject select different items for inclusion in their accounts they do not really have the same subject at all. This, of course, transforms the assertion that selection is completely determined by the choice of topic into an analytic statement.

accounts of the same subject which are both true or false to the same extent and in each of which only items which are relevant to the topic have been included, although these items are not completely the same, then there remains nothing to choose by; there is no reason left for preferring one to the other as far as its value in respect to the conveyance of knowledge is concerned (in non-theoretical, e.g. aesthetic respects it may be a different matter, but this is irrelevant here). Of course, neither of the two is complete, but then no account can ever be complete, and this is no disadvantage. Both can be viewed as complementary to each other, as contributions to the topic or problem in question.

But even in this revised form the thesis is untenable. It denies, in effect, that there is a problem of importance and selection at all. It denies that any judgement of preference is possible or is justified. But since as a matter of fact such judgements are being made it amounts to their proscription. It amounts to the demand that we should not choose at all if two competing accounts are equally true and if everything contained in them is relevant to the topic or problem in question and that if we choose nevertheless our choice is subjective and non-theoretical. But is it? Is it true that if we judge an account of Nazi Germany as inadequate because it does not mention the persecution of minorities (although everything it does mention is relevant to the subject), and if we judge it as more inadequate than another account which does mention it, is it true that this judgement has nothing to do with knowledge but is 'extra-theoretical', is, for

instance, a purely moral judgement? Is it not rather that such an account gives us a wrong picture of the subject and that having a right or wrong picture is a matter of having adequate or inadequate knowledge? These are rhetorical questions and the answer is obvious. Even if we regard every true account all parts of which are relevant to the subject in question as a contribution to the history of this subject, the fact remains that there are good and bad contributions, better and worse ones, and 'good' and 'bad', 'better' and 'worse' refer here to the property of conveying knowledge, not to aesthetic or moral or any other practical matters.

However, this is not all. There is the phrase 'relevant to the subject (or topic)' and this raises the question of how we decide on this relevance. How do we decide that eighteenth century English painting is irrelevant to the history of eighteenth century English banking? One might say at a first attempt that there is no difficulty here in that it follows already from the subject's name ('the history of banking') that it excludes everything which is not banking. Painting is not banking; therefore painting must be excluded. But this presupposes that a historical work only mentions items which, by definition, belong to or are part of its subject, so that a history of banking only mentions facts of banking (and connexions between such facts), and although it may happen that, so to speak, by accident a fact of banking is at the same time also a fact of, say, politics, any fact which is not at least in part a fact of banking has no place in such a work. This, however,

amounts to an untenable departmentalization to which nobody adheres (or could adhere even if he wished to). For there are facts from other fields which are certainly not facts of the subject in hand but which have a decisive influence on it. The colonization of an overseas territory is most probably not a fact of banking but it may profoundly affect banking, and if it does, then it is relevant to the subject of banking.

In short, when we speak of the relevance or importance of an item to a subject or problem we cannot simply adopt a strictly departmental view and exclude causal relevance. An item is relevant to a topic not only if by definition it is part of this topic. Therefore, it would be a mistake if one were to think that by saying 'relevance is relevance to a topic' one has said something completely different from saying 'relevance is causal relevance' and has avoided the difficulties associated with the causal view.

Our criticism can be further supplemented if we consider in particular the thesis according to which it is the problem (or question) a historian wants to solve or the hypothesis (or theory) he wishes to confirm which supplies the criterion of importance and selection. As we have pointed out in another chapter, it is questionable whether the historian's work can be adequately described in terms of the answering of question, the solving of problems or the testing of hypotheses^{60a)}. Not only is

60a) There is an influential school in present-day philosophy which sees in problem-solving a defining characteristic of knowledge. For instance, Nagel, The Structure..., p.577,

the illustration or confirmation of a general theory, e.g. of a theory about revolutions, a non-historical task,⁶¹⁾ but the solution of a special problem or the confirmation of a special hypothesis can also be viewed as external or ancillary to the historian's proper purpose of giving an account of 'how things really were'. (Of course, every task or purpose can be formulated in terms of a problem. A historian may make it his 'problem' to give a true and adequate account of the living conditions in thirteenth century rural England and to answer the question 'how did the peasants live in those days?' But this is a trivial sense of the thesis that all history answers questions and solves problems.)^x And if relevant is everything which helps to solve a problem or to confirm a hypothesis, there is always the danger of those items being picked out which are suitable for solving or confirming it in one way rather than in another, while what is unsuitable for this task is ignored. History is sometimes compared with technology in that both, the historian and the technologist, are said to be interested not in the establishment of general laws but in the solution of specific problems, and that both select what is relevant to such solutions.⁶²⁾ But this is a

writes, when he discusses history, that 'all discursive knowledge is the product of research instituted for the sake of resolving determinate (and hence delimited) questions'. But unless 'discursive knowledge' is given a very peculiar meaning, it is not true that it is always the product of research, and, if history is to count as a branch of discursive knowledge, it is even less true that determinate questions are needed in order to acquire such knowledge.

61) So Danto, Analytical Philosophy..., p.138.

62) So Passmore, 'The Objectivity...', p.105. Against this it has been asserted (Dray, 'The Historian's Problem...', p.596; and Dray, Philosophy of History, p.30) that the important point in history (as opposed to the natural sciences) is the

misleading comparison. The problem of a technologist is a practical task, e.g. the construction of a machine which is capable of a certain performance, and as such it can be compared only with other practical tasks. An analogous case in history would be the practical task of writing a work which is suitable to boast the self-confidence of a class or nation. But then we would accuse a historian who had such a purpose of engaging in propaganda instead of writing history. It may very well be that even in such cases the 'hypothesis' put forward can be 'tested',⁶³⁾ i.e. that we have the means of finding out whether and to what extent such an account is biased due to inadequate selection (assuming now that in respect to the truth of each statement it is perfectly adequate). But this just shows that we need another criterion of importance and selection in addition to that provided by the 'problem' or 'hypothesis', and again we have to conclude that it is not the case that once a problem is formulated the question of whether something is important or not depends on this problem and on this problem alone.⁶⁴⁾

selection of what is to count as the solution of a problem rather than the selection of a problem itself (and thereby the selection of what is relevant to its solution). But this is likewise inadequate for not only has the critic taken over the terminology of problem-solving, it is also unclear what sense can be assigned to the phrase 'selecting what is to count as the solution of a problem'. After all, problems are solved, solutions to problems are found, but nobody, and least of all a historian, 'selects' a solution, i.e. takes his pick from a number of available possibilities. Of course, disagreements can arise as to whether something does or does not constitute a solution of a certain problem, and it may very well be that (as Dray insists) the decision here is sometimes influenced by value-judgements. But it is difficult to see what this has to do with the topic of selection in history.

63) As maintained by Hook, 'Problems...', p.126.

64) As maintained by Hook, 'Objectivity...', p.268.

There is a further view which can be seen as a special version either of the causal or the contextual thesis. This starts with the assumption that the typical form of historical presentation and organization is narrative, that history, in short, is always 'story'. This is then made into a criterion of historical relevance: what is selected is what belongs to the story in question. But the story of a subject is its portrayal over time, the description of how it developed from earlier stages into later states. Therefore, it is the influence of an earlier item C on a later item E which confers historical relevance, importance or significance on C and 'the identical event will have different significance in accordance with the story in which it is located'. Stories are thus the 'natural context' in which events acquire historical significance and 'if an earlier event is not significant with regard to a later event in a story, it does not belong in that story'.⁶⁵⁾

This view, too, is unacceptable. For, first of all, it is not true that all history is narrative in character. Whoever says so leaves many important works in the wilderness, works in which past states of human affairs are described without any consideration of their change in time and which certainly are not works of sociology or any other social science because their authors are not interested in universal generalizations but in

65) Danto, Analytical Philosophy..., pp.10/11, 134, 138. According to Gottschalk, Understanding History, p.196, those items are relevant which are relevant to a 'unifying narrative'. See also Mandelbaum, The Problem..., p.258; and G.J.Renier, History. 7 Its Purpose and Method, London, 1950, p.95.

historical individualities. But even if we assume for argument's sake that history cannot be anything but narration, this does not provide a sufficient criterion of importance and selection. Here our criticism of the causal view comes into force again. It is possible for two historians to write the 'story' of the same subject but to select in very different ways. Whereas one regards certain items as belonging to the story, the other thinks they are outside it; while one holds that C has influenced a later item E sufficiently to be worthy of inclusion, the other believes that this influence is not strong enough, or that E itself is unimportant within the framework of the story as a whole.⁶⁶⁾ Of course, one can reply here that if the selection is different in two accounts, they do not really 'tell the same story' but two different stories, and so can save one's assertion that what is selected depends on what story one is telling.⁶⁷⁾ But then the ^{crit}erion

66) To be just, it must be mentioned that Danto is not unaware of these points, as when he writes that an event to be significant must have certain consequences to which the historian attaches significance in turn, i.e. that the concept of significance here is connected with an independent concept, with 'intrinsic' significance (Danto, Analytical Philosophy..., pp. 10,15,134). But, one may well ask, what is the point of introducing the story-element at all as a criterion of significance if it turns out in the end that the concept of significance gained in this way is dependent on a different concept of significance which is quite independent of the narrative character? And why call the one historical and the other non-historical significance, implying thereby that in history the first is the only appropriate concept of significance?

67) Such a view is at least indicated by Danto (ibid., p.136) when he says that if two historians write the same story and disagree with each other, the dispute can only be a factual dispute, i.e. a dispute about what really happened. For if they agree about the facts but disagree about anything else (e.g., so we can add, about the selection of facts) they are really writing about different things and their disagreement is no longer historically relevant. A similar point, although

of whether two accounts represent different stories is made to consist in whether they make the same selection, and the whole matter becomes analytic.

5. 'Intrinsic Importance'

The main opponents of the two views discussed, the causal and the contextual views, are those who hold that selection is a matter of evaluation and that judgements as to the relevance or importance of an item are value-judgements. The values in question are the historian's own values; he includes in his account what he thinks is valuable, i.e. what he thinks is worth including and what ought to be included. The matter is frequently given a pragmatic twist in that the values are associated with present problems, with questions which in the historian's own time are felt to be in need of an answer, and selection is said to grow out of such problems.⁶⁸⁾ The problems concern the future; they are problems of what is going to be the case and whether one thing ought to be the case rather than another. It is, therefore, the

without reference to the story-aspect, is made by E. Nagel, 'Problems of Concept and Theory Formation in the Social Sciences', M. Natanson (Ed.), Philosophy of the Social Sciences, New York, 1963, pp. 198/99, who writes that once the meanings of terms have been established and a principle of selection has been adopted, questions of importance can be settled by empirical investigation. But, we may say to this, the snag is just that there are better and worse principles of selection and that there are no empirical criteria for deciding in this matter.

68) So B.J. Loewenberg, 'Some Problems Raised by Historical Relativism', The Journal of Modern History, Vol.21, 1949, p.19.

future (or rather the picture a historian makes for himself of the future) which affects selection and judgements of importance. Selection, it is said, involves an 'act of faith' in one kind of future rather than another, and it changes with the emergence of new goals which are dependent on presently adopted values.⁶⁹⁾

But stated in those terms the view expresses hardly more than a triviality. There can be no doubt that selection involves evaluation, i.e. that a historian includes in his account what he thinks is worth including, and, in most general terms, he thinks it worth including because he believes it to be interesting in one way or another. 'Interestingness' (or memorability) is certainly a category of value but a very wide and a very general category,⁷⁰⁾ and any attempt to narrow it down will be doomed to failure. It is usually taken for granted that the values in question are moral values. But it is easy to see that what is selected by a historian is not always interesting to him in a moral respect. There are people who leave out of account whether something is morally good or bad, better or worse, but who are interested in an event because it is bizarre and unusual, in an action because it shows intelligence or efficiency (or, for that matter, stupidity or inefficiency). There are, of course, ways of bringing all this under a moral category, but then there are ways of bringing almost everything under a moral category. In

69) Randall, 'Controlling Assumptions...', p.21; Carr, What is History?, p.124.

70) So also Lovejoy, 'Present Standpoints...', p.176.

short, if someone regards something as interesting and worth recording it does not necessarily mean that he attaches positive or negative moral value to it, that he thinks it to be morally good or morally bad.⁷¹⁾ And on the other hand, it is also not the case that a difference in moral evaluation must always lead to a difference in selection and judgement of importance. After all, historians may morally judge an event or person quite differently but may agree that it is so important that it cannot be omitted from any account of the subject in question.⁷²⁾ And this may happen not only because such an event or person had consequences about whose importance there is agreement but also because there is agreement on their importance in a non-causal sense.

So the assertion that our standards of importance are our standards of value⁷³⁾ or, more generally, that all judgements

71) This is why C. Frankel, 'Explanation and Interpretation in History', Philosophy of Science, Vol. 24, 1957, p. 151, is mistaken when he writes that interestingness is dependent on values which ought to be held implying thereby that it is a moral category. There are, as I. Berlin, Historical Inevitability, 2nd impr., London, 1955, pp. 56/57, points out, 'non-moral categories of value' which as far as selection is concerned are on the same level as moral categories. Another question is whether interestingness squares with representativeness. A historian may select the bizarre features of a period but may be aware (and may even explicitly say so) that what he has selected is not representative. However, if he is a historian in the proper sense he will still believe that these bizarreries are somehow necessary in order to give us the right picture of the period (and not necessarily for moral reasons), and he may regard his account as complementing or correcting other works in which these features have been omitted. One can, therefore not follow White, 'Toward an Analytic Philosophy...', p.720, who implies the existence of an opposition between what is representative and what is interesting, although it is true that in history representativeness is the more fundamental notion.

72) So also von Mises, Human Action, p.4.

dealing with facts rest on generalizations of value⁷⁴⁾ is only true if 'value' is not equated with any specific kinds of value, e.g. with moral values. But then by making this assertion we do not really say very much. And even if we adopt the pragmatist version and speak in terms of present problems, if what we say is true we hardly say more than something which is trivial. It is certainly not true that present problems determine the historian's judgement of importance if this means that all historical work, and therefore all historical selection, is done in order to determine a present programme of action or in order to answer present religious, philosophical or scientific questions. Relevance does not imply usefulness,⁷⁵⁾ at least not usefulness in the normal sense of the word. History, if it is proper history and not something else in a historical garb, is distinguished from certain other disciplines just by the fact that the interest here is in the past for its own sake and not because a knowledge of the past may assist in solving present problems. Of course, we can give the expression 'present problems' such a wide meaning that it can truly be said that

73) Renier, History, p.174. See also B. Russell, Understanding History and Other Essays, New York, 1957, p. 41, according to whom 'selection must be guided, at least in part, by a sense of values'.

74) Berlin, Historical Inevitability, p.53.

75) As is maintained by Renier, History, p.174. - It is also questionable whether Barraclough, History..., p.13, is right when he holds that some phases of the past are more important than others because we find in them certain affinities or similarities in circumstance with the present. What is implied here is not only the old view that history can teach us lessons (which may be true), but also that it is the task or purpose of history to do so (which is wrong).

selection is dependent on present problems. But then the matter again becomes trivial, for now it means no more than that the historian's interest is a present interest and that what he thinks is important, either as a subject to be treated or as an item to be included in the treatment of a subject, is dependent on this present interest, an interest which, as everyone knows, is determined by all kinds of contingent factors. It amounts only to the platitide that subjects of the past are treated because somebody in the present has an interest in treating them and that certain items are included in such accounts because somebody thinks that they should be included. The fact that somebody has such interests and makes such judgements of importance 'is no doubt a fact about "the culture of the period"; but this statement is little more than another way of saying that in the period certain histories do in fact get written and read', and the insistence on the role of present value-judgements is 'so all-comprehensive that it excludes no specific principle of selection whatever'.⁷⁶⁾

This treatment of the problem of selection in terms of values and value-judgements is often associated with a distinction between intrinsic (or inherent) and instrumental (or extrinsic) importance,⁷⁷⁾ a distinction which at a first

76) Lovejoy, 'Present Standpoints...', pp. 176, 181.

77) This is a very common distinction which is made, for instance, by Dray, 'The Historian's Problem...', p.599; L. Reis & P.O. Kristeller, 'Some Remarks on the Method of History', The Journal of Philosophy, Vol. 40, 1943, p.243; Walsh, 'The Limits...', p.51; White, 'The Logic...', p.25.

glance seems to correspond to our distinction between absolute and relational importance. The importance of an item \bar{C} is instrumental if \bar{C} is important to some other item \bar{E} , it is intrinsic if it is important in itself. But the gist of our analysis of the causal and contextual views was that relations cannot supply a final criterion and that the second item \bar{E} must itself be of importance. Nobody would bother to include \bar{C} in his account because \bar{C} is important to \bar{E} , if he regards \bar{E} as unimportant. If \bar{E} in turn is of instrumental importance, then there must be another item \bar{F} to which it is important and which, therefore, must have importance itself, etc., etc. In other words, it very much seems that if an infinite regress is to be avoided any instrumental importance must sooner or later, at some point or other, lead to an intrinsic importance.

On the other hand, if we analyse in greater detail what is usually regarded as intrinsic we find that it is always possible to push the locus of importance further back so that what seems intrinsic becomes relational and instrumental (although not necessarily causally instrumental). To show this let us look at some cases of apparently intrinsic importance (we do not claim that our list is exhaustive).

(1) Say we include the item 'extermination of the Jews' in our account of Nazi Germany, and we do not do so because it had important consequences or important causes.⁷⁸⁾ In that case one

78) Dray, 'The Historian's Problem...', p.599, from whom this example is taken, seems to think that this fact is of intrinsic importance only because it cannot be said to have had important historical consequences. This, however, does not follow for one can easily imagine that a historian selects

will say that it has been included because of its intrinsic importance. But then somebody may ask why it is intrinsically important. Now in a case of genuine intrinsic importance one would expect that no answer to this can be given, or rather that the only possible answer would be 'because it just is important'. But as a matter of fact this is not the only possible answer. For instance, we could say that we have included ~~this~~ item because it is a 'monument of human depravity'.⁷⁹⁾ But if so, then the mass-murder itself is not the important thing. It is only used as a manifestation of human depravity, and one could imagine that some other and equally striking case, if such a case can be found, would do just as well. For instance, if we think for a moment not of a history of Nazi Germany but of a history of twentieth century Europe, the destruction of the kulaks in Russia could be said to serve equally well as a monument of depravity, and there would be no need to cite the destruction of the Jews as a second case. But there can be no doubt that a historical account which omitted either of the two cases would be regarded as inadequate. Consequently, it cannot be the property of being a manifestation of depravity alone which obliges us to mention these facts. On the other hand, there is the further point that any historical phenomenon can in one way or another be seen as an

it because it had important causes, e.g. the fact that a whole people embraced an antisemitic and racialist ideology.

79) So ibid., p.599. Walsh, 'The Limits...', p.51, uses the example of the French Revolution but makes a similar point when he says that this event is of intrinsic importance if it is regarded as, say, 'marking a significant manifestation of the free spirit of man'.

expression or manifestation of something, which would mean that every one of them had to be included as an item which possesses intrinsic importance. Not only is the murder of a whole people a manifestation of human depravity, but also the murder of a single person. Are we therefore obliged to list every single case? And if not why are we obliged to include the 'big' cases and are allowed to omit the 'small' ones?

No, the fact that we have to use expression such as 'a monument of', 'a manifestation of', 'an example of', 'an expression of', 'an indication of' whenever we want to explain why a historical phenomenon is of intrinsic importance shows that the importance here is after all not intrinsic but relational. One could object by saying that this is just a play with words and that if B is intrinsically important and A is an expression or manifestation of B then A itself is intrinsically important. But this would force us to regard any expression, manifestation, indication, etc. as being of the same importance as that of which it is an expression, manifestation or indication. The frown on a man's face indicates that he is annoyed. Few people (perhaps not even philosophical behaviourists) will insist that the importance of the frown is identical with the importance of the state of mind of which it is an expression. Why then should we think that whoever sees in the mass-murder of the Jews an expression of human depravity is bound to believe that the importance in both cases is the same and identical importance?

Another possible objection against our view would be

that the importance here is nevertheless intrinsic in the sense that it is not instrumental in respect to any other historical item. Depravity is an eternal characteristic of man's nature, not a historical feature, and if we view the genocide of the Jews as important we, so to speak, step outside the field of history. There is something in this but it will not do in the present context. For it is possible for a historian not to regard the extermination as important because it is a manifestation of human depravity but because he sees in it a striking expression of, say, the twentieth century revolt against the spirit of humanitarianism, rationalism and tolerance, and this revolt is certainly a historical phenomenon. (Nevertheless, as we shall point out later, it is true that at some point or other the chain of importance will lead out of the field of history).

Finally, there would be the possibility of taking a purely formal position by saying that the term 'intrinsic importance' (or 'intrinsic significance') was coined to designate non-causal (or even non-consequential) importance, not, however, non-relational importance, and that, therefore, our remarks are beside the point. But then we could shift our criticism and reply that in that case the matter has been oversimplified and the wrong impression created that the dichotomy of causal and non-causal is equivalent to the dichotomy of relational and non-relational and that it is the latter which is the important dichotomy. However this may be, the crucial point is that what is usually regarded as intrinsic is relational in character, and

this can be made still clearer if we look at some other cases which are sometimes listed under the heading of intrinsic importance.

(2) An item may be selected because it is exemplary of the subject in question in the sense that it is a specimen of a whole series of items which have many properties in common. Since they are all similar, only one of them is selected, and in this way one avoids cluttering up one's account with repetitions. It does not matter very much which item is chosen, and theoretically any would do (although perhaps not every one is well enough documented to serve the purpose). For instance, a Greek city in the first century A.D. can be made to represent all other Greek cities of that time.⁸⁰⁾ It is a 'typical' city because it constitutes an average. Even an event such as the killing of a large number of people may after all be cited only as an example in this sense, namely when in the period concerned such atrocities were more or less regular occurrences.

(3) An item may be selected because it is typical, not in the sense of representing an average but typical in the sense of being highly characteristic, a kind of summary which focuses the features of a subject in one sharp point.⁸¹⁾ For instance, a person's remark⁸²⁾ which is not a remark this person usually

80) This example is taken from Bauer, Einführung..., p.15.

81) White, Foundations..., p.255, speaks here of a 'colligation' of features.

82) Bauer, Einführung..., p.15; and Cassirer, An Essay..., p.196, both mention this case but they do not seem to distinguish between typicality in this sense and in the sense of

makes (and which, moreover, may in itself be rather trivial and may not have had any perceptible consequences) may at one stroke elucidate the general character of this person. Similarly for other facts. A historical event, in spite of being a typical in the sense that no other events of essentially the same kind happened in the period concerned, may be highly characteristic of that period and may be included in a historical account for this reason alone.

(4) But something may gain importance also just because it is neither average nor characteristic, because it is exceptional in both these respects. Assuming a manuscript of the eleventh century is discovered in which the author clearly and intelligently propounds an epistemological theory very similar to that of Kant, and assuming further that it contains a preamble to the effect that the work has not been shown to anybody (which allows us to exclude consequential importance from the start).⁸³⁾ It is very probable that this work would have to be mentioned in any good history of mediaeval philosophy as well as in any comprehensive account of the mediaeval history of ideas, although it is neither exemplary nor typical of mediaeval thinking. But this, the fact that it is an exception to the rule, is just the reason why it would have to be included. For its inclusion would cause us to modify or supplement, at least to a certain degree,

constituting an average. Neither does Bernheim, Lehrbuch..., pp. 729 ff, who however points out that the end of making one item stand for a whole series can also be achieved by the use of general terms.

83) An example of this kind is indicated by Meinecke, 'Values...', p.272.

our general picture of the Middle Ages (or at least our picture of the eleventh century). While so far we had assumed a very homogeneous intellectual climate we would see now that it was not quite so much of one piece as we thought it was. Although it may seem at first that what is typical or exemplary is identical with what is representative, this example show that there is a difference. In order to give an adequate account, i.e. a representative picture, of a piece of historical reality, it is sometimes necessary to include items which are exceptional and atypical.

One could object that the importance involved here is after all of the causal type in that we are interested in such a work only because it is a product of mediaeval circumstances. Only because it is a consequence which throws light on the energies from which it arose can it be of any interest.⁸⁴⁾ This, however, would widen the bounds of what can be regarded as a cause or reason beyond all acceptable limits. In a trivial sense alone is it true that an event or thing which takes place or exists in a historical period is the result, product, consequence or effect of this period. Therefore, it can also be only in a trivial sense that a work written in the Middle Ages is important because it was 'caused' by the Middle Ages. There are, of course, cases where an item is legitimately regarded as important because it is

84) The same objection is considered ibid., p.273, but Meinecke rejects it with the remark that only by virtue of the work's intrinsic value is this causal consideration at all possible. But it is not necessary to have recourse to values in order to reject the causal claim in this case.

an effect or consequence of another item, but this is not one of them.

The cases discussed would usually be regarded as exemplifying intrinsic importance. But although they doubtlessly are cases of non-causal importance they are, strictly speaking, not cases of intrinsic importance. For the latter usually means as much as importance in itself without any reference being necessary to the importance of another thing. But such a reference is necessary in each of the four cases, and this is why we cannot speak here of intrinsic importance. If an item is selected because it illustrates or manifests a human characteristic such as depravity (or goodness or intelligence or whatever one can think of) it is selected because it is suitable for such an illustration, not because it is important in itself. If an item is selected because it is an example of a whole set of similar items it is selected because it can be made to stand for, or to represent, those other items, not because it is important as such. If an item is selected because it concentrates or colligates the features of the subject it is selected because it is suitable for making a general point about this subject, not because it is intrinsically important. And if an item is selected because it is atypical and exceptional it is selected because it, as it were, contradicts the general character of the subject, and so provides a reason for qualifying a general statement about it, not because it is important in its own right (a work expressing thoughts of a Kantian type but written, not in

the eleventh but in the nineteenth century, would hardly raise an eyebrow).

Are we then left with an infinite regress after all, with a position where every item is important to something else but nothing is important in itself? The answer to this is that in history we shall indeed not meet with anything that is of absolute importance. But if we follow the regress far enough we shall find some Archimedean point outside history that is absolutely important.^{84a)} The chain may be short or it may be prolonged so that a historical phenomenon A is important relative to a historical phenomenon B which in turn is important relative to a historical phenomenon C etc., etc., and even when at some point, say F, the chain leaves the field of history it may not come to an end yet, for if F is important relative to a non-historical item G, G may in turn be important relative to some other non-historical item H. Be that as it may, at the end there will be a non-historical item Z which constitutes the limit beyond which we cannot go and which we have to view as

84a) It is obvious that whether an item is regarded as historical or non-historical may depend on metaphysical or other assumptions. The depravity of man which we have used as an example of a general disposition (which, although in itself non-historical, becomes manifest in history), is under certain eschatological or messianic points of view a purely historical phenomenon. This however, does not affect our argument. For it does not matter where one has to step outside history as long as one has to do it somewhere. A person who views human depravity as historical will have to relate it, directly or indirectly, to some other item if he wishes to ascribe importance to it, some item which he cannot regard as historical. This even holds for an extreme historicist. Try as he may, he cannot consistently hold that everything is historical in

important in itself, an item such as the feature of depravity in human nature.

That there is a streak of moral evil in man can be regarded as a non-historical fact which is important in its own right, not important relative to something else, e.g. to happiness or unhappiness. (If it should be possible to define good and evil in terms of happiness and unhappiness, then, of course, it would be happiness and unhappiness which are of absolute importance).

We can say, although with restrictions to be mentioned shortly, that the greater the extent to which a historical phenomenon, directly or indirectly, can be viewed as an indication of such a non-historical fact of absolute importance (and, as we have said before, there is no need to think here only of moral facts such as human depravity), the greater its relational importance and the more worthy it is of being included in a historical account. The cruelty or ruthlessness shown by one man towards another is usually not as good an indicator of depravity ^{as} ~~than~~ that shown by a whole society towards a minority of millions. And this is why the former is not as important as the latter.

But in saying all this are we not adopting after all the view we have previously criticized, i.e. the view that the notion of importance or relevance is in the end a notion of value and that selection in history is in the last resort based on

character for this would leave him without any basis for ascribing importance to anything.

value-judgements? By way of an answer we can only repeat what we have said already. The thesis according to which what has intrinsic importance is what is of positive or negative value is a trivial thesis. (It may even be tautological for it is possible to define what is intrinsically important in terms of values). Further, there is a difference between saying that all or some historical items are selected because they are intrinsically important and saying that no historical item is ever selected for this reason, but that every one of them is selected because it is directly or indirectly important to some non-historical item which is of intrinsic or absolute importance. It is the latter thesis which we have defended here.

6. Representativeness

All this may help towards the solution of our problem as to the criteria of selection but it does not in itself constitute such a solution. For even if we were to assume that there is complete clarity about what is of non-historical intrinsic importance (e.g., that we know this by intuition) and that there is general agreement about what is and what is not, we would still be left with many questions; can there, for instance, be equal agreement as to whether and in how far a given historical phenomenon is relevant to such an item of intrinsic importance (whether, for instance, it is indeed a manifestation of an eternal human characteristic), or about whether one item is more relevant to it than another and so more worthy of being

included:

But still more fundamental is the problem posed by the fact that it cannot simply be a matter of selecting historical phenomena which are relevant to non-historical items of intrinsic importance and of ordering them according to the degree of their relevance. For this alone does not guarantee the representativeness of an account. In other words, a historian may select according to these principles but his work may still be far from adequate in that it gives a distorted picture of the subject. Whatever he includes may be true and may be relevant to some item of intrinsic importance, and he may have his priorities of values completely right, but what he writes may still amount to a distortion of historical reality. This means that we cannot simply say that an account is representative, and therefore adequate, if, apart from being true, it includes what is important (or relevant or significant), although it is certainly the case that an account which omits one or more important items is not representative, i.e. not completely representative. The selection of the important is not a sufficient condition for the representativeness of an account.

Representativeness⁸⁵⁾ is a complex notion which comprises several elements, and the best way of analysing it is perhaps by means of our old analogy, that of a map. To make things

85) This term, although it can be used of individual statements, is applied here only to whole accounts of a subject.

simpler we ignore the differences between specialized maps (geographical, political, etc.), differences which would correspond to the differences between specialized histories (social, economic, etc.), and confine ourselves to general maps which attempt to show something of all these specialities (as general history seeks to take into account items of the most diverse fields). We can safely do this because the problem of representativeness is not the problem of whether and in how far a subject is representative but whether and in how far an account of a subject is representative of this subject, and the latter is not affected at all by its specialized character. A geographical map of a country should be representative of the country's geography, not of its political features. An economic history of nineteenth century England should be representative of the English economy in the nineteenth century, not of English art and literature during that period. This is so obvious that it hardly needs stating.⁸⁶⁾

We can say, then, that a map is representative of the area of which it purports to be a map only if the following conditions are satisfied:

(1) Any details shown on the map should correspond to some feature in reality. If there is a river indicated on the map of

86) There is the further point that many works of history are deliberately unrepresentative because their authors only intend to make a contribution to a topic and to supplement previous accounts or to correct their balance. With this we are not concerned here.

an area there should be a river in the area itself, i.e. the map should not show a river if there is none. This, of course, is a condition of truth and is analogous to the demand that every statement of fact in a work of history should be true. If a historian asserts that a certain event occurred it is demanded of him that this should really have occurred. From this we can already see that conditions of truth are included in conditions of representativeness and are not something separate. A historical account may be true without being representative but it cannot be representative without being true.

(2) Having stated the first condition we are now tempted to formulate its complement: (a) Any feature of reality should be shown on the map. This, however, is to demand the impossible, and even if it were possible to produce a map which satisfied it, this map would be so filled with details that our ability to read and understand it would be seriously impaired. Therefore, we must modify our demand. It is obvious that the amount of detail shown on a map depends on its scale. We do not expect to find villages and small streams represented on a large-scale map, just as we do not expect to find certain events, persons or institutions mentioned in a history of the world in three hundred pages. If we think of the pilot of a man-made satellite flying over an area of the globe at such a height that everything he sees is reduced in size by 100,000, then, roughly speaking a map in the scale 1:100,000 of this area should show everything the pilot is able to notice (forgetting now about invisible features

such as political frontiers). If we refer to what he can notice as 'falling within scale' we can say (b) ~~any~~ any feature of reality which falls within the map's scale should be shown on the map.

But this is still not good enough. For our pilot would probably see many things which do not appear even on the best of maps (while many things he does not or cannot see will appear on it). He might see part of the country streaked or shaded in a certain way because the soil there is clay or because there are large areas where wheat is grown. But a map, unless it is a specialized one, does not show the kind of soil or the crops grown in an area, even if such features do fall within its scale. The reason is that geographically such properties do not pull much weight. The growing of wheat is a transient feature which can vanish almost overnight (whereas a river or mountain is much more permanent) and the character of the soil, although this is a stable trait which might even determine geographical features proper (e.g. the course of a river), is in itself not a geographical but a geological property in which the map-maker as well as the map-reader is not interested (again forgetting about specialized maps). An analogy from history would be the example of the adoption of the tooth-brush which is certainly a large-scale phenomenon (and so falls within scale) in that it has affected many people, and there may even be a case for arguing that, as part of the general improvement in conditions of health, it has influenced the course of history. Nevertheless, it is not a fact which would be included in a representative

historical account (again excepting specialized histories).

Returning to the pilot's picture, it is probable that the markings he sees where the soil is clay or where wheat is grown are not as pronounced as the markings he observes where there is a large river or mountain or where land borders on to sea. In other words, there are differences in the intensity of the markings and if we adopt this term we can say at last:

(c) Any feature of reality which falls within the map's scale and which reaches a certain degree of intensity should be shown

on the map. The phrase 'a certain degree of' cannot be avoided, which means that there will always be marginal cases of unresolvable disagreements as to whether something should be shown on a map, as there will always be unresolvable conflicts of opinion as to whether something should be included in a work of history. But, here as anywhere, the existence of borderline situations does not imply that everything is borderline and that we can never say with certainty that an item should be included or should be excluded.

(3) But the answers to the questions of what should be shown on a map and what should not be shown are not sufficient for deciding whether a map is representative or not (or in how far it is representative). After all, a map may satisfy the first two conditions but may still give us a distorted picture because the relations between the rightly included items may not accord with the relations between the corresponding features of

the landscape. Where according to the map the distance between two points is fifty miles it may actually be sixty miles; where the map marks a town as being NE of another town in reality it may be NW of it. In such cases the map, although it does not show anything which is not there and although it shows everything it should show, would still be unrepresentative. Consequently, we have to add as a further condition: the relations shown between the items marked on the map should correspond to the relations between the respective items in reality. For history this amounts to the demand that statements of connexions between facts should be true. In other words, we have here another condition of truth which supplements the first condition under (1). If in a work of history it is stated that an event C took place after an event E, whereas actually E took place after C or both took place simultaneously, or if it is asserted that a phenomenon E was influenced by a phenomenon C, although in reality there was no influence at all between C and E or the influence went in the other direction, then the historian has made a false statement and his account is not representative.

(4) However, relations of this type are not the only relations which are relevant to representativeness. There is at least one further condition which could be called a condition of relative size or emphasis. Let us assume that there are two rivers, A and B, and both are shown on the map exactly in the localities where they can be found in reality. But B is marked

with a thicker line or in blacker ink than A thus implying that B is the larger of the two, whereas in the landscape it is B which is smaller, or A and B are of the same size. Again we would regard the map as misleading for it gives a wrong relative emphasis. So we have to put down as a last condition: the relative emphasis given to items shown on the map should correspond to the relations holding between these items in reality.⁸⁷⁾ Again, it is not difficult to find analogies in history. If a historian makes a mountain out of a molehill, if he emphasizes one feature at the expense of another, e.g. by allocating much more space to it and be describing it in much greater detail, then his account is not representative. He may dwell at length on a few cases of the miscarriage of justice and only mention very briefly that in many other cases there was no miscarriage, so making his account lop-sided.

This is as far as our comparison of a work of history with a map will carry us. The analogy is, of course, inadequate in many respects. For instance, whereas in the ~~making~~ making of a map only the dimension of space and spatial relationships have to be considered, in the writing of a historical account time and temporal relations as well as relations of dependence and influence have to be taken into

87) This could also be called the condition of consistency of scale and intensity for, in effect, it amounts to the demand that the criteria as to what is to be regarded as falling within scale and as having the necessary degree of intensity should remain stable throughout the work of drawing the map (or of writing the historical account).

account. This is why on a map relations between items need not be made explicit but can be read off, whereas in history they very often have to be stated explicitly. With the correct positioning of marks on a map the correct relations between the marks, and so between the phenomena of reality they represent, are given automatically. But in history this holds at the most for certain relations, e.g. those of time, while others, e.g. connexions of dependence, have to be stated (or have to be implied) separately. This means (since the number of those relations which can be stated is very large, if not infinite) that in history it is also a question of selecting the right connexions, not only the right facts, and of giving them the right emphasis, problems which do not arise in respect of maps.

In spite of these and other limitations, our comparison elucidates some important points concerning the problem of selection. It shows for one thing that the issue of selection and importance is only part of a wider issue, that of representativeness, and so cannot be completely divorced from the issue of truth. Further, it helps us to recognize that the problem of selection consists of two parts, the problem of how the condition under (2) and the problem of how the condition under (4) can be satisfied.

The condition under (2) itself is a compound of two requirements, the requirement of scale and the requirement of intensity. The first poses few problems in history. It is

obvious that what is selected for inclusion is partly dependent, not only on the subject chosen (a history of England instead of a history of France, a political history instead of an economic history, etc.), but also on how large and how detailed the historian wants his work to be (a political history of England in 200 or in 2000 pages). Scale does not necessarily affect the quality or interest of a work (a book of 200 pages may be better history than a book of 2000 pages) and as we cannot say that the smaller the scale the better the map, so we cannot say that the more detailed the work of history the better it is. There is also no sharp line to be discovered which divides those items which fall within the scale of a historical account from those which do not but, as we have indicated already, as we can normally decide without great trouble whether an item belongs to a subject, so we do usually know very well whether something falls within the scale of a work.

In respect to intensity the matter is not quite so simple. Some phenomena which certainly fall within scale, e.g. because they directly or indirectly affect many people or large territories or because they last for many years, are not intense enough to be worthy of inclusion. Roughly speaking, while scale is a matter of quantity, intensity is a matter of quality, and it is notoriously more difficult to decide on questions of quality than to decide on questions of quantity. Let us take a fact such as the enclosures in eighteenth century England, a fact which

usually satisfies the requirement of scale. Is it worthy of inclusion in a history of eighteenth century England? The answer will be in the affirmative because the enclosures did not only affect many people and large areas but affected them in certain crucial respects which, directly or indirectly, are important to human life in a way in which, say, the adoption of the tooth-brush is not important. The judgement here rests on what in another chapter we have called general experience. We know from our own lives that whether we brush our teeth or not has not a very great bearing on the life we are leading and the thoughts we are thinking, whereas a fact like the enclosures has very great bearing, either immediately or in the future or both. This can be viewed as a matter of evaluation in the sense that what affects human existence is loaded with positive or negative value. But one may very strongly disagree as to whether an item affects human life beneficially or detrimentally, while nevertheless agreeing that it does affect it. Only the latter agreement or disagreement is of importance here.

Similar considerations apply in respect of the condition listed under (4), the condition of emphasis. If we have decided that two or more historical phenomena satisfy the requirements of scale and intensity and so should be included in a historical account, there still remains the question of how far they satisfy them, i.e. of how much emphasis they should be allocated in relation to each other. It is obvious that this cannot be settled in a mechanical way, e.g. by an equal

allocation of space to a time-span or field (5 pages for each year, 50 pages for politics and 50 pages for art). There are times in which nothing of importance happens or which are poor in one field (e.g. art) but rich in another (e.g. politics). Therefore, anything which resembles an arithmetical distribution is out of the question. Instead we have to consider the degree of scale and intensity of each item in relation to all the others and have to distribute space and amount of detail accordingly. The decision that some items should be included does not entail any decision as to how they are to be balanced. Two historians may be in complete agreement as to the first, but in complete disagreement as to the second decision. But the second, like the first, rests on general experience.

We asked towards the beginning of this chapter whether there are any objective grounds for preferring as a work of knowledge one historical account A to another historical account B although A and B are equally true. To this we can give now an answer of sorts. We have seen previously that the decision as to whether an individual historical statement is to be regarded as true depends on general assumptions or presuppositions.⁸⁸⁾ Only in as far as those presuppositions are shared by different people can there be agreement on whether something constitutes sufficient evidence for it. Similarly for the question of whether a whole historical account is, apart from

88) A statement about an individual fact, that is, for we have not said anything in this respect about statements asserting connexions between facts.

its truth, a good account or a better account than another one. The answer to this, too, depends on presuppositions, and the same answer will be given by different people in as far as these people share the same presuppositions. The presuppositions are general ^massumptions about human existence, not, as in the case of truth and evidence, assumptions about regularities in nature and society. They are assumptions of value if this term is not confined to moral values. They are presuppositions as to what non-historical items are absolutely important, or more absolutely important, in the sense explicated before. And they rest on experience in the sense that they are developed with experience. But this does not entail that they are arrived at by a process of inductive inference. Empirical knowledge is necessarily selective, and this means that principles of selection are needed in order to acquire any empirical knowledge at all. But then these principles cannot themselves be derived by induction. On the other hand, by their very nature they cannot be of a formal and non-empirical character and so independent of experience. After all, they grow with experience, experience of human existence. In fact, they are the quintessence of this experience, and if x is the quintessence of y , x cannot be inferred from y , even if we adopt a very wide notion of inference which allows us to speak, for instance, of 'unconscious inference'.⁸⁹⁾

89) Our position here is very similar to that of Berlin, 'History and Theory', p. 26: '...such knowledge... is not confirmable or corrigible by the normal empirical methods, to which it functions as a base... but neither, of course, is it a priori... if by that is meant that it is obtainable

However, when we deal with a historical account as a whole, as opposed to an individual historical statement, we had better not forget the artificiality of separating truth from the other marks of adequacy which we have referred to as importance and emphasis. The adequacy of such a whole, i.e. its representativeness, is a whole itself, and a judgement of adequacy consists in one complex unity in which the issues of truth and of the right selection and emphasis are fused together. Making such a judgement can be said to be dependent on two sets of presuppositions, presuppositions in respect to evidence and presuppositions in respect to importance and emphasis.

The problem is in how far these presuppositions are in fact shared by all or at least by most men. What is usually called the 'objectivity' of history is completely dependent on the existence of such common assumptions, on a kind of 'uniformity of human nature' in at least some respects.⁹⁰⁾ As far as the presuppositions of evidence are concerned, i.e. the assumptions which allow us to infer from certain data that something was the case, we came to the conclusion that by and large these are shared so that disagreements are relatively rare, although when they do occur they cannot be resolved by appeal to a 'logic of

in some special, non-naturalistic way. Recognition of the fundamental categories of human experience differs from both empirical information, and deductive reasoning; they underlie both; and are the least changeable elements in our knowledge.' (But Berlin writes this, not in the context of historical selection, but in respect to the recognition of historical succession).

90) 'This common ground is what is correctly called objective...', Berlin, Historical Inevitability, p. 65.

non-demonstrative reasoning'. The position is different only in degree in respect to the presuppositions of importance and emphasis. It is certainly more difficult to come to a consensus as to whether a fact expressed in a statement is an important fact (or is more important than another fact), than to agree on whether the statement expressing this fact is true or false (or to what degree it has to be regarded as true or false).^{90a)} But this does not mean that there is no agreement at all (or that there cannot be any agreement) and that in respect to importance and emphasis history is a free-for-all, as many authors seem to think.⁹¹⁾ In fact, there is a large field where agreement does exist, i.e. where the relevant presuppositions are shared. In cases far removed from the borderline area we can find a constant consensus unaffected by psychological dispositions or cultural and social environments. Phenomena such as a great pestilence or a great war have always been viewed as important by historians, whether European or Chinese, whether in antiquity or in modern times.⁹³⁾ And where there is disagreement between historians living at different times, this can often be put down to the

90a) ~~Historical Inevitability, p.65.~~ But it may be, as Hook, 'Objectivity...', p.271, maintains, that there is more disagreement on the truth of statements about connexions between facts than there is on importance and emphasis.

91) For instance, Renier, History, p.173, according to whom relevance 'is and remains subjective'.

93) But we have to take into account the fact that in certain periods the sensitivity towards such events may be blunted because of the frequency of their occurrence. A century in which a plague breaks out every five years or so will probably not think that each of these events is important enough to be included in a work of history.

gradual unfolding of the consequences of past events so that one could say 'if this historian of the past had known what came of this event, he would have attached to it the same importance and would have given it the same emphasis as a historian of the present'.

Nevertheless, it would mean closing one's eyes to reality if one were to insist that there is always consensus or, where there is none, that this can always be attributed to the fact that the consequences had not yet become obvious. It is simply a fact that frequently historians (and maybe even one and the same historian at different times of his life) are in dispute with each other and change their opinions as to what is important and unimportant or as to what needs to be more or less emphasized. Even for past periods which to all intents and purposes have exhausted their consequences, different selections will sometimes be made and different items will be emphasized. For the interests and outlooks of men change with the changes in their lives and environments, and it would be a pity if they did not change in this way. Therefore, not only is it useless to deplore this fact, one can even turn the tables and demand that historians should constantly reassess their judgements of importance and emphasis instead of just taking over the judgements of their predecessors or holding on tightly to a position adopted in the prime of their youth.⁹⁴⁾

94) A similar point is made by Dovring, History..., p.7. - In fact, historians even change their criteria of selection while they are engaged on one and the same work. See Carr, What is History?, pp.29/30.

It is sometimes said that history can be 'objective' as far as the establishment of facts is concerned, not however in respect to judgements of importance and emphasis.⁹⁵⁾ But the difference here is at the most a difference of degree and should not be construed as an absolute opposition. It is still more mistaken to see in the lack of unanimity in respect to judgements of importance and emphasis a characteristic confined to history and to contrast it with an alleged intersubjectivity in other fields of knowledge. In science (and this for most people means the sciences of inanimate nature, if not physics), we are given to understand, there is no problem as to importance and emphasis, and no disagreements arise in these respects, because the criteria of relevance and importance are unambiguously supplied by scientific theories. But this is an oversimplified view. Since a pure science is not concerned with descriptions of individual matters of fact and states of affairs, it is obvious that the problem of representativeness does not arise here in the way in which it arises in history (it arises, so to speak, within the theories themselves), and it is even questionable whether the term 'representativeness' in the sense in which we have used it is at all applicable in such a discipline. For it can be doubted that it is really the aim of a modern physical science to provide a picture of physical reality which is representative of this reality, whereas it is certainly the aim of history to provide such a picture of the human past. The basic interest of

95) So E.W. Strong, 'On Judging History', Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association, Vol. 26, 1952/53, p. 48.

a physical science is after all, and has been for the last three hundred years, an interest in the computation and manipulation of natural phenomena. Such an overriding preoccupation concentrates the mind wonderfully and provides an admirable criterion of what is important or needs emphasizing. Even where it is a question of describing an individual piece of reality, e.g. a certain apparatus or machine, the question of what items have to be included in such a description and of what relative emphasis has to be given is settled by reference to this confined purpose, and variations can arise only if there is disagreement about what serves this purpose best.

This confinement of interest explains why in the physical sciences problems of importance and emphasis do not arise, or hardly arise (some people will say that their 'objectivity' in this respect is bought at a heavy price, the price of narrow-mindedness) and if history were equally restricted, then here, too, there would be no difficulty (although then it would no longer be history either). However, if we wish to make comparisons at all we must not forget that the alternative is not only between history and the physical sciences. After all, there are branches of knowledge apart from physics and chemistry. There are the biological sciences, there are the social sciences, there is geography, there is philology and there are many more disciplines which do not adhere, or do not exclusively adhere, to the model of physics. And if

we look at some of those we find that it is by no means certain that the position in respect to intersubjective criteria of importance and emphasis is so very different, and so much better, than it is in history. Would one really like to say that it is easier to decide whether and in how far the geographical description of an area is representative, or whether it is more adequate than a rival description, than it is to make a comparable decision in history? The answer is 'no' and it cannot be otherwise. For whenever it is a matter of portraying a piece or stretch of reality without a generally shared preselected purpose (the only purpose being to give a representative account), there will be questions as to importance and emphasis and there will be disputes as to how these questions are to be answered.

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