A PLEA FOR THEORETICAL HISTORY *

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Geoffrey Barraclough, in an essay whose candor of expression attracted much attention and instigated a lively debate, speaks of a "false conception of historiography". An untenable conception of the meaning and purpose of historical science has led to a quandary; the commandment of the hour compels us to find a way out.[1]

The significance of this remark is obvious. The author of this article is, after all, one of England's most respected contemporary historians. Not long ago, he was called to the Chair for International History at London University as Toynbee's successor. Also, Barraclough was educated in the Rankean tradition of classical historiography, of which he is an exemplary representative. This is not the voice of an outsider, revolutionary, iconoclast, or misfit, who might raise personal incompetence to a claim of principle. Rather, it is the mature insight of a researcher, who has participated actively in, and is partly responsible for, the previous development of the discipline. The impact of this insight is much increased by the fact that this same "note of misgiving and disenchantment" which the author insists is indicative of the prevailing attitude in historiography, receives expression in essays, written for the same issue of the *Times Literary Supplement* by other leading English historians.[2]

This atmosphere of misgiving and disenchantment is not restricted to English historiography. Its victories have been considerable in Italy and France.[3] It has also split American history into two camps; while the smaller has adopted an approach so conservative that it might even be called re-

* The original, more extensive version of this article appeared as "Theoretische Geschichte" in the *Historische Zeitschrift* CLXXXV (1958), 1-54; permission to translate and publish it in edited form is herewith gratefully acknowledged.

[1] "The Larger View of History", in *Historical Writing* [cited hereafter as *HW*], *The Times Literary Supplement* (London), Jan. 6, 1956, p. 2.

[2] The agreement on this in the essays in *HW* of Toynbee, Wedgwood, Postan, and Commager is obviously spontaneous and not prearranged by the editors.

[3] See R. Caillois in *Diogène,* XIII (1956), 3f., and D. A. Leca in *La France,* XII (1946), 367.

actionary, the larger is in danger of losing its self-sufficient method and becoming simply a 'department' of sociology or anthropology.[4] This disillusionment has been very effectual in Scandinavia as well. Scandinavian historians, who used to emulate classical German historiography, are now adopting the sociological formulas of their Anglo-Saxon colleagues.[5]

Even in the home of classical historiography, Germany, this sentiment, preconditioned, indeed, by first-hand experience of dictatorship, war, and collapse, found its devastating expression in Gerhardt Ritter's well-known address at Munich. Ritter, anticipating Barraclough, decided that the public "for good reasons, had lost its trust in the clan of historians" and accused the latter of "scholasticism, unable to see the woods for the trees . . . narrow-minded arrogance . . . naiveté and ignorance"; he called upon historians for "less superficial insights" and a "new kind of historical questioning . . . a higher form of historical writing, capable of grasping and interpreting meaningfully the relation of things".[6]

Criticism of this sort is directed against all that which, until now, constituted the foundation of scientific historiography. One could even use Fritz Wagner's phrase and say that historical science is undergoing a *crisis of principles.*

The passionate attraction to the past for its own sake, what Ranke called the desire to find out "how it really was", is, after all, simply a manifestation of the eminently historical predisposition of European man. Today, even this desire is viewed with suspicion. The discipline is accused, out of the ranks, of "arid professionalism, which treats history as if it existed only for the historian." Complaints of the "contrived and trivial nature of scholastic arts and problems", of "scientism" and "scientific virtuosity" are heard everywhere. Positivistic idolatry of "brute fact" has robbed history of its meaning; the "cult of the particular" has fragmentized it.[7]

Specialization, actually an inevitable consequence of an unending increase in historical source material, is quite generally condemned. It is made responsible for the shortsightedness of modern history, which refuses, as Barraclough, Toynbee, and Ritter agree, "to see the woods for the trees". Suddenly everywhere voices can be heard, accusing the discipline of failure. Specialization is, in fact, made responsible for the schism between learned historical writing and the public's consciousness of history. Eugen Rosen-

[4] See Social Science Research Council (New York), *Bulletin,* 54 (1946) and *Bulletin,* 64 (1954).

[5] See A. V. Brandt, "Neuere skandinavische Anschauungen . . .", *Welt als Geschichte,* X (1950), 56-66.

[6] "Gegenwärtige Lage und Zukunftsaufgaben deutscher Geschichtswissenschaft", abridged in *HW,* CLXX (1950), 1-22.

[7] For examples of such attacks see Barraclough, *loc cit.,* Ritter, *op. cit.* 21, K. W. Thompson's and G. Catlin's essays in *Toynbee and History,* ed. A. Montagu (Boston, 1956), 161-171.

strock-Huessy even makes this schism responsible for the current historical crisis.[8] According to Jan Romein, the immense accumulation of facts and the "critical-philological" method have had a disruptive effect on historiography: the progressive specialization of historical research, the destruction of the old prescientific concepts of interpolation, and the infinite number of conceivable interpretations constitute "a real threat to modern historiography".[9]

In the debate on Toynbee, which has lasted already several years, attacks against specialization have also appeared with persistent regularity. This debate is, incidentally, particularly relevant to our topic. These attacks are used to support, justify, or at least explain, Toynbee's project, and are used to explain it even by those critics, who, on the whole, reject Toynbee's efforts.[10] It is symptomatic that historians who in this debate have held firmly to the principle of specialization are a small minority.[11]

These attacks against specialization acquire their force from a pragmatic attitude new, at least in emphasis and extensiveness, to the classical tradition. The classical historian considered his discipline as an end in itself. He thought of it idealistically as an infinitely perfectible objectification of "Absolute Spirit". He felt as a Hegelian, even if he did not think as one. He would have rejected and abhorred a practical or pragmatic position. This idealistic attitude was, in fact, the source of his scientific self-respect. Our generation of historians, under pressure from several quarters, is about to give up this venerable point of view. This pressure arises not only out of the crisis itself but also from public opinion, desiring from historians a committed attitude, enlightenment, advice, comfort, and encouragement, as well as from revolutionaries and the opposition out of the historians' own ranks. Perhaps something great and irreplaceable is about to disappear. Time is the cause of this as of so much else.

Though the idealistic approach is still widely acknowledged, the *avant garde* has already rejected it. It is now thought, as for example by Werner Näf, that every science ultimately must satisfy a biological function of humanity. Man is a being moving freely within a series of free decisions. Science must supply him with the *world picture* he needs, if his decisions are to be meaningful. This world picture of Nature or History must be adequate both to his own reality and to the reality of the object.[12] This is a far cry

[8] "Laodizee. Wie rechtfertigt sich ein Volk?", *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Aug. 14, 1954.

[9] "Theoretical History", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, IX (1948), 53-64.

[10] See Louis Renou, "La Civilisation de l'Inde . . .", and Caillois's essay in *Diogène* XIII, and G. Stadtmüller, "Toynbee's Bild . . .", in *Saeculum*, I (1950).

[11] See P. Geyl, *Debates with Historians* (Groningen and Haag, 1955); and L. Stone, "Historical Consequences and Happy Families", in *Spectator*, London, Oct. 29, 1954, pp. 526-28.

[12] W. Näf, "Vom Sinn der Geschichte", *Schweizer Beiträge zur Allgm. Geschichte*, XII (1955), 5-15.

from the detachment and "spirituality" of Idealistic History; something primitive and elemental comes to the fore. That, as well, belongs to the trend of our times.

This pragmatic tendency can already be observed in *The Decline of the West* where Spengler attempts to predict history, "to discover what must be done if we wish to do anything at all". The same intent is also expressed by Toynbee in his *Study*, by Sorokin in his *Social Philosophies of an Age of Crisis* and his *S.O.S. The Meaning of our Crisis,* by several Englishmen and by a large number of American social scientists.

Historical prediction is, however, not the only form which this new pragmatic attitude among historians has taken. A number of social scientists – and also the historian C. V. Wedgwood – agree with the arguments of Dehio, Jaspers, Rüstow, and Freyer, that history should throw light on human existence and orient man in his factual situation. Barraclough combines this argument with a criticism of modern historical writing of which he concludes that: "it is neither committed to the present nor has it prepared us for the world in which we live." [13] (Whether historians can be made responsible for political events in their countries is another question, and one which cannot be discussed here. In any case, historical writing is important as a source of political education for the general public only as long as it is capable of dealing with the problems of its own time.[14])

At the root of these complaints against the remoteness, irrelevance, and uselessness of historical writing is a wish for synthesis, synopsis, or integration. The more reasonable critics do not object to specialization as such. Only the pseudo-scientific dilettantes, who fail to realize the nature of history, tend to make specialization responsible for all the failings of modern historical writing. The common complaint is that research, instead of going beyond specialization, restricts itself to it. The established methods are sound enough provided they are subordinated to the right ends.

We can see from the debate on Toynbee, of which I have already spoken, that historians have, at least to a certain extent, accepted the demands for synopsis. The majority of those in the debate, even those who reject Toynbee's theory of history and consider his treatment of historical particulars unsuccessful, agree not only with his attacks on specialization but also with his attempt to achieve a synopsis. This is, however, hardly surprising, as criticism of specialization and demand for synopsis are two sides of the same coin.

It is clear from the results which are expected of it, that what is meant by this synopsis is a historical world-picture. We have a "natural world-picture" which is fundamental to, and necessary for, our conquest of physical

[13] *Loc. cit.*

[14] Ritter, *op. cit.* 5, 22-25. See also Ludwig Dehio, "Ranke und der deutsche Imperialismus", *HZ,* CLXX (1950), 328.

reality. Similarly, we need a closed systematic historical world-picture, sufficient both to our own needs and to the factual situation of our environment. I have tried to show that the demands for a synopsis are not unjustifiable. Historians cannot let these demands stay unfulfilled much longer. The only legitimate question to be raised, then, is whether the methods of contemporary historiography are sufficiently developed to permit the step from specialized research to a synopsis.

Even if guided by previously-established directive principles, such a world-picture is not simply the product of a quantitative summary of particular insights, but requires reworking of a qualitative sort, which not only comprehends its material but fuses and integrates it.[15] Therefore as soon as the demands for a synopsis are acknowledged, the methodological problem of integration acquires acute significance, outranking all other problems in importance. The methodological problem assumes, in fact, continually, a more central and critical position in the current crisis of principles of historical science.[16]

Is – and if so, how is – the ascent from the lower level of factual knowledge to the higher, of insight and meaningful comprehensive interpretation of historical relations, possible? Some historians think that such a move is impossible in any case; others, that historiography, at least, cannot make it; still others – particularly some American social scientists – that it belongs to the province of sociology.[17] C. V. Wedgwood, following her teacher G. M. Trevelyan, considers "History as Art", guided by "imaginative insight" capable of achieving the desired results. But almost all students of historical science reject "imaginative insight" as a principal tool for the historian's business. As to other tools, Barraclough and, even more, Toynbee comment on the difficulties of "team-work" and though Barraclough has hope in the use of statistical methods, the arguments against them, presented by Toynbee, are certainly convincing.[18]

Many historians, on the other hand, would be willing to let specialized research and its methods be the basis for a synopsis. They would even accept the exclusive use of secondary literature for such a purpose, as otherwise a comprehensive historical synopsis is quite inconceivable.[19] The chief obstacle to a synopsis is, however, the (recently almost dogmatic) belief in the individuality and uniqueness of all historical phenomena and in the subse-

[15] See Henri Berr, *La Synthèse en Histoire, essai critique et théorique* (Paris 1911). I think that the word 'synthesis' for the above reasons is misleading and should not be used in this context.

[16] See my "Die Geschichtswissenschaft in der Krise", *Festgabe Joseph Lortz*, ed. E. Iserloh and P. Manns, (Baden-Baden, 1958), 491-550.

[17] See T. C. Cochran, "The 'Presidential Synthesis'...", *American Historical Review* 53 (1948).

[18] Wedgwood, Barraclough, and Toynbee in *HW*.

[19] See J. K. Feibleman, *T'ien Hsia Monthly* II (1944), 18f.

quent sole applicability of the idiographic method. As it was thought that the methodological self-sufficiency of the historical and social sciences could be established only on this basis, many historians, especially Europeans, are of the opinion that generalization is foreign to history and should not be used in the treatment of historical facts.[20] A synopsis capable of conveying a world-picture need not, however, be based on generalization. Still the prejudice is current that, as synopsis ostensibly involves generalization, a synopsis cannot be attained with scientific means. Since the historian is committed by his method to particulars and unique facts, the only way in which he can present a comprehensive "picture" is through summation of fact.

The idiographic method, moreover, involves the greatest possible concentration on the unique quality of a given incident; every attempt, on the part of the historian, to be comprehensive, stands in opposition to this method and causes a less thorough and accurate investigation and description of fact.

Though this concentration on detail has led to new and valuable insights, the "widening of perceptions" has been bought at a "stultifying cost"; the awareness of the whole of history has been lost. It would seem as if the historian must either accept the fact that he is, by nature, nearsighted, or be willing to be accused of superficiality.[21] This *dilemma of specialization,* as Hayek has called it, is insoluble if the form and the uncritically-adopted methodological and epistemological premises of the argument are accepted. Historical science is apparently in an inescapable quandary which would explain the apologetic tone and unsure position of recent research.[22]

This dilemma constitutes a crisis in the self-confidence of history by making the essential correctness of accepted procedure the object of skepticism. It is hard to say whether such an atmosphere of crisis results from real inadequacy or just from a momentary giddiness. If the latter is true, the important thing is to remain resolute and not let oneself be deflected from one's intentions; healthy optimism will help one in regaining stability. If however, the former is true, such a therapy would be misapplied and would result in self-deception of serious consequence.

A small minority among historians, whose number, incidentally, is quickly shrinking, still think that the crisis of principles in historical science is a temporarily unbalanced condition to be encountered with firmness and reason. But the large majority tend to consider the crisis grounded in fact, and the consequence of concrete failure on decisive issues. This I have tried to show in my introductory remarks.

[20] See Barraclough, *loc. cit.,* and Geyl, *Debates,* 134f.

[21] Toynbee, *HW,* 4.

[22] See F. A. Hayek, "The Dilemma of Specialization", *The State of the Social Sciences,* ed. L. C. White, (Chicago, 1956), 462-473 and L. Gottschalk, "A Professor of History in a Quandary", *AHR,* 58 (1954), 274-286. See also my "Die Toynbee-Kritik" in *Saeculum* 9 (1958), 189-259.

II

The situation is so grave that only forthright consideration of its real causes can resolve it. This is confirmed by the long-standing opposition, beginning with Vico and culminating in our time in the thought of Arnold Toynbee, against "official" or "technical" historiography. The general public is aware of certain aspects of this opposition; the entire phenomenon is, however, rarely understood as a whole in its internal structure.

My older colleagues will still remember the assuredness and unconquerable self-confidence which our discipline manifested at the turn of the century. The philological-critical and the idiographic methods, developed in the preceding age, were expanded and intensified by the "*geisteswissenschaftliche verstehende*" psychology of Dilthey and his followers and theoretically established by the definitions of Windelband and Rickert. The attacks from natural science and from other directions inspired by it seemed successfully parried. It looked as if the methodological independence of historical science was established beyond any conceivable doubt. All formal problems seemed solved. The discipline seemed to have entered into a fully mature stage where consolidation and stability were possible. Infinite progress on the road which had been taken seemed sure.[23]

German and German-influenced historiography gave the impression of having too much rather than too little self-confidence. Perhaps conventionalism and methodological dogmatism were imminent. In any case, the quiet was only seeming. Classicist ossification affected only the surface; underneath was a lava-bed ready to erupt at any time. Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West* marks such an eruption; the discipline tried to ignore it but could not hinder its influence from being felt everywhere. Though the situation seemed to stabilize itself, the same reaction, only with far greater intensity, followed Arnold J. Toynbee's *A Study of History*. The similarity of the effects which were caused by Spengler's and Toynbee's work points to a subterranean relation between, and identity of, the moving powers in both cases.

These two events mark a seismographic trend which can be followed back at least deep into the nineteenth century. Danilewski, Burckhardt, Lasaulx, Vollgraff are so many volcanic events in this trend, which began with Vico's *Scienza Nuova*. The volcanic activity becomes more pronounced at the turn of the century as is shown by Lamprecht's struggle in the debate concerning method, Brooks Adams' gloomy vision of cultural decline and fall, and by Robinson's, Teggart's, Frobenius', and Koneczny's work. Between and after the two world wars this seismographic trend becomes a phlegrean field; one

[23] See, for example, G. v. Below's *Deutsche Geschichtsschreibung* . . . , (Munich and Salzburg, 2nd ed., 1924).

need only refer to Breysig, Ligeti, Schubart, Kroeber, Northrop, Jaspers, Rüstow, next to Spengler and Toynbee.[24]

All these men are, more or less, outsiders, iconoclasts and revolutionaries in opposition to the aims, methods, and standards of the official academic discipline. They constitute an "Historiographical Fronde", running parallel to the development on the surface. All put on their banners in different colors the synopsis which the public desired and claimed, in vain, from orthodox historical science.

This Opposition turned, quite consciously, to the public and made it concessions of all kinds. In the applause of the public they found solace for the neglect, contempt, and mockery with which they were greeted by the official discipline. They do not hesitate to use methods which the discipline rejects; they use intuition, phantasy, symbolism, rhetoric, and mythology as it suits them. According to their mood, they are empirical or a priori; often in the same sentence both scientific and artistic. They cross the boundaries of the discipline and appeal to sociology, anthropology, philosophy, theology or even biology and physics, combine or confuse areas which the academic discipline has clearly distinguished, such as cultural, economic, and legal history. They can be metaphysical at one moment, and dry and unpretentious the next, in a discussion of Roman agrarian law or of the instability of modern economies in the world market. All this is done with little hesitation, if it helps or seems to help in attaining their goal of offering the synopsis which our time requires, namely, a comprehensive historical world-picture.

Once noticed, it is astonishing how closed the phenomenon of this Historiographical Opposition is. Perhaps life's unconquerable stubbornness in creating the instruments she needs for her purposes is an explanation for this – *naturam expellas furca, tamen usque recurrit.* In any case, the geometric progression of this trend points clearly to a still unsatisfied need of vital significance and to a still unsolved problem of great moment. It would also explain how the self-confidence of historiography before the last war, apparently so deeply rooted, could suddenly give way to a position suspiciously near to moral collapse and scientific bankruptcy. Historiography is about to capitulate to the Opposition; at least, this would seem to be the way in which its crisis of principles is going to end.

As the situation is now, no end to the attacks against historical science can be foreseen. Toynbee was certainly not the last of the Opposition; others perhaps weaker, perhaps stronger, will follow as long as this problem is still

[24] While the interpretation of history underlying Sorokin's most important work, *Social and Cultural Dynamics* (1937-41) is part of the trend referred to above, his later book, *Social Philosophies of an Age of Crisis* offers a fine interpretation of the trend. See also my "Giambattista Vico als Vorläufer einer morphologischen Geschichtsbetrachtung", *Welt als Geschichte*, XVI (1956), 85-97, my "Umsturz im Weltbild der Geschichte", *Diogène* VI (1955), 767-780, and my *Das universalhistorische System Arnold J. Toynbee's* (Frankfurt/a. M. & Vienna), 13f.

raised. But since such attempts by the Opposition always start again from the beginning, they show not only that there is a problem but also that the Opposition has not yet succeeded in solving it.

It is naive to think that the arguments against Toynbee arise solely out of the envy and bad temper of his colleagues, or that Spengler succumbed to the narrow-mindedness of the academic discipline. Nothing would be won if official historiography simply adopted the aims, opinions, and methods of the Opposition. Such a capitulation would rather be, in the present state of affairs, total surrender, and would be as senseless as it would be out of place. The discipline should, rather, try to see the significance of the Opposition in its true gravity and breadth.

The only possible inference which we can make from the existence of the Opposition is that the crisis which we are in has objective, real causes which should be recognized and overcome without giving up anything of the solidity and seriousness of the science. If in this the work of the Opposition can be of service to us, all the better; if not, we shall have to go our way alone.

The aim of the efforts made by the Opposition to the "academic" discipline is a synopsis, or picture of the world as history. The discipline is now ready to recognize the principal legitimacy of this claim. It cannot, however, accept the means, or perhaps better, the unscrupulousness in selecting means, and the undisciplined methods of the Opposition.

III

If history is to be a science, even a synopsis, if it is to be of any value – not to speak of practical value – it must have a solid empirical foundation and must be developed with the help of rational and logical principles. It must be capable of being verified by anyone. Also, it should be organically related to the work which has been done before; a science which rejects its tradition loses its character and inner structure.

Even if the best intentions are presupposed, the already mentioned dilemma of specialization and the apparently insoluble "Heisenberg problem of historiography" (as I call it) would seem to impede such a scientific synopsis. A historian cannot be at once exhaustive and comprehensive. The particular, unique, or individual qualities lead him to depth, while the synopsis seems to force him to move freely on the surface. This paradox would seem to be unresolvable. It is indeed insoluble as long as the axiom of the uniqueness and the individuality of all historical facts and the idiographic method are considered to be the only principles by which history legitimately can be practiced.

Historical science has never resisted synopsis as such; it recognizes its urgency and has always striven towards it. It is, however, incapable of producing it with the means it has on hand. As long as these means are con-

sidered to be canonic, the disciplines must abjure a synthesis, giving free way to the opposition, even in its pseudo-scientific and dilettante form. The possibility should, however, be considered that these scientific methods are generally inadequate and require revision and extension. The new problems require new methods. In other words, historiography is faced with the problem of developing a specific methodology capable of leading to a synopsis.

Historians are beginning to accustom themselves to the possibility of establishing a new methodology. Much, at least, in the considerations of Barraclough, Callois, Catlin, Köhler, Stadtmüller, Postan, and Thompson points to this.

The axiom of uniqueness of which idealist historians are so proud, in which they see the Magna Carta of their independent method, is itself dubious. Not only "historical" occurrences, understood as events in the "higher" or "cultural" sphere of the human world, are "individual" and "unique" but, to be quite accurate, natural occurrences as well. The impression of identity made by a series of appearances, be they structures or processes, is always subjective in nature and can be reduced to a sufficiently great difference of time, place, or size. The impression of identity replaces the impression of more or less distinct individuals as differentiation decreases.

Every coin or stamp collector knows that the frontier between "norm" and "deviation" is a convenient fiction. At least under the microscope, each example of a particular coin or stamp is unique and has its individual appearance. Only for the human senses is the continual fall of drops, hollowing a stone, or building stalagmite, one event, having at all times the same form; in an atomic perspective, each drop is an unmistakably unique "historical" incident. Far more important is the fact that recently even the exact natural sciences have had to recognize and include as a cosmic factor in their calculations something very like historical time. As this "time" is a directional and irreversible dimension, all the places in this dimension are singular and irreversible. These qualities are of course transferable from this time dimension to the events which occur in it. Even in nature, therefore, there are, strictly speaking, no identical forms.[25]

The impossibility of exact repetition, which H. G. Wood considers characteristic of historical events, applies equally to natural occurrences.[26] Every new formation changes, by its very nature, not only the whole cosmos, if only infinitesimally, but itself as well. A formation can neither be identical with itself at the same time nor can the same situation happen twice. Physics and chemistry, moreover, not to speak of biology, know of irreversible

[25] See H. Reichenbach, *The Direction of Time,* ed. M. Reichenbach, (Cal. Univ. Press. 1956) and E. Wind, "Some Points of Contact between History and Natural Science", in *Philosophy and History. Essays presented to Ernst Cassirer* (Oxford, 1936).

[26] See H. G. Wood, "Christianity and the Nature of History", *Hulsean Lectures, 1933-1934* (Cambridge, 1934).

directional processes, which the "half-life" of radioactive elements and the law of entropy, for example, describe.

Even the natural sciences cannot avoid using scalar numbers or vectors; spatial analysis is possible only with the aid of a system of coordinates in which the locations in space, or, more abstractly put, point sets are unmistakably unique. Of course, it is possible to ignore these individual traits for pragmatic or pedagogical reasons. The result is, then, a "natural" world-picture full of general trends, recurrences, general laws. In truth, however, even in nature, not the individual fact as such recurs, but the type. Put to the question, this would be all which the scientist could assert.

Similarly, a "generalizing" historian, approaching his material with the spirit of natural science, can grasp, at best, the typical in the "river of experience". Here, at least, it would be illusionary to expect more. It is, however, obvious that, like the scientist, the historian can, in order to grasp general trends, ignore certain individual aspects. It would be just as foolish to deny the existence of general trends in the "historical world" – incidentally, a bad concept – as to claim that nature is essentially constituted by identical forms. Even if "historical" be understood – as it usually is – as the sphere of "higher man", there are identical forms, typical situations and phenomena, schemata, patterns, rules, and laws in the historical as in the natural world. If that were not so, if in history really "just one damned thing followed another", if history really were only a sequence of completely unique cases, if its processes were totally accidental and incalculable, history would appear to be *acosmia,* total chaos. Meaningful planning, prudence, organized activity, work towards the future, education, society, the state, the sciences, and culture would be inconceivable. It is hard to see how such an acosmic attitude can be consistently defended. Only, however, in a consistent form is this argument usable and telling, against generalization, for an exclusively idiographic treatment of history.

Clearly, the problem is one of utility: To what extent is it useful to abstract from the unique qualities, while treating of nature, and from the common, while treating of history? Though we do not have to deal with this problem here, it would seem obvious that relatively primitive structures, such as those with which a natural scientist concerns himself, would suggest generalization; while the relatively highly developed structures, which are of historical interest, would suggest an approach which stresses unique qualities. It is, however, of interest that in both cases we are faced solely with a pragmatic problem of methodological accent and not with a dichotomy, rooted in the nature of Being itself. That nature and history are not clearly distinct in their Being, is illustrated by the arbitrary and uncertain "boundary line" which is drawn between them.

It is, moreover, grotesque *hybris* of "higher" or literate man, to suppose that he alone has "history". Nowadays, this view is being relinquished, at

least, in regard to primitive man. Even Spengler was of this opinion, though it contradicted his view that historicity was the mark of organic things. If primitive man is to have history, it is not clear why one cannot speak, with similar justification, of the history of animals and plants. Spengler should here have defended more consistently his powerful vision of the "world as history".[27] If the word "history" is to have any factual significance, it must be thought of as an attribute of all temporality. Where there is "living time", and, as time is a dimension of the cosmos, that would be everywhere, there is history. In this sense, nothing in the world is ahistorical.[28]

We can conclude then, that Nature and History are not two different kinds of Being but two ways of looking at one and the same thing, which offers a continuum and a scale of transition between a maximum and a minimum degree of complexity of organization, suggesting a corresponding distribution of emphasis in research.[29] If, however, this is granted, neither the axiom of historical uniqueness nor the idiographic method – the chief obstacles to scientific synopsis and the source of the "dilemma of specialization" – need be acknowledged. The decision which point of view and which method should be applied, in each case, can be left to the particular circumstances. If an historian interested in comprehending a given event can, with advantage, emphasize those unique qualities which distinguish this individual event from all similar ones, he will use the full armory of historical methods which he has at his disposal. The researcher, however, who wants to make a synopsis of a large or small area of history or wishes to derive, from the typical qualities of things, the laws and forces of all historical happening, will have to use generalization.

IV

The originators of the idiographic method, Windelband, Rickert, Dilthey, thought that it alone distinguished moral science, i.e., historiography, from the natural sciences. This opinion, which was still held by Croce, Collingwood, and others, is highly misleading, as it gives the dogma the cloak of infallibilty. If the one reality is, in fact, a continuum, in which complex formations evince simply a different degree of structural organization, both an approach which emphasizes generalities and one which emphasizes uniqueness can, in principle at least, in all cases be applied. The method-

[27] The argument would seem to be that to have history implies memory or knowledge of history; thus only a historian has "history" in its fullest sense.

[28] See J. Madaule in *Diogène* XIII (1956) and H. W. Carr, "'Time' and 'History' in Contemporary Philosophy", *Brit. Acad. Pro.* VIII (1917-18), 331-349. (Though Carr's paper needs revision on some points it is still valuable.)

[29] Rickert already considered the possibility that 'Nature' and 'History' imply two different ways of looking at things and nothing else. See his *Kulturwissenschaft und Naturwissenschaft* (2nd ed., 1910), 86.

ological difference, then, between the natural and the moral sciences is not the exclusive but rather the preferential use of either the nomothetic or the idiographic method. Also, since the idiographic method is only one approach, as such arbitrary and not rooted in the nature of things, it alone is not enough to establish historiography as a self-sufficient discipline. There is, however, a real distinction of Being between two complex structures of different degree of organization in the continuum of reality.

In the scientific and theoretical establishment of the "natural" and "moral" sciences, the problem of how to deal with these complex structures is of great importance. As the natural sciences are concerned with the bottom of the scale, where there are structures of a relatively primitive order, the similarity of their objects permits, though by no means compels, a high degree of abstraction. Modern technology has shown that the decision of the natural sciences to adopt an inductive, atomic, synthetic method, leading from the parts to the whole, has been eminently successful. History, a typical moral science, has not accomplished anything comparable, which would explain both its inner instability and the difficulty which it is having in solving the problem of synopsis.

The highly organized integral structure of the objects of historical science would seem to suggest a deductive, holistic-analytic method diametrically opposed to that of the natural sciences. Such a method, first suggested for historical science by Vico, was in fact developed for botany and zoology, at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century, by the school of idealistic morphology. The use of this method by modern biology, and even psychology, has also been highly successful. After psychology had established its epistemological premises by exact experiment – which led to the psychological *Gestalttheorie* – and by a philosophic *Ganzheitstheorie*, this method gave the science a new foundation which has made *Ganzheitpsychologie* possible.

Though the attempts of historians in this direction have been sporadic, it is unlikely that historical science will be in a position to oppose this trend of development much longer. It will most likely follow the example of psychology and reorient its method. Only after that has been accomplished will it be possible to speak of an independent historical method. In fact, historians do now admit that generalization, at least as a supplement to the idiographic method, is acceptable and perhaps necessary to historical research. The trend is to accept a compromise and avoid a sharp opposition of idiographic and nomothetic method.[30]

This trend is also observable in the current Toynbee debate where the problem, whether generalization is legitimate in history, is central. Many

[30] See K. R. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (London, 1945), II, 338, and Hugo Hantsch, "Zur Methodik der neueren Geschichte", *Veröffentlichungen des Verbandes Österreichischer Geschichtsvereine*, II (1952), 38-41, and Ritter, *op. cit.* 8.

critics, even those who feel they must reject Toynbee's approach, agree to the use of generalization. Callois explained the legitimacy of a *nomian* way of defining a problem particularly well. He argues very convincingly that the *antinomian* position rests on premises which, unverified, involve as much prejudice as the far more likely view of the "nomianists" that history is ordered and follows certain rules, schemata, or laws. Callois quotes at this juncture a remark of Buckle's which merits even closer attention today than it did before: "... it is clear that they who affirm that the facts of history are incapable of being generalized, take for granted the very question at issue." That Buckle later fell in bad repute as a positivist is of course true; this label neither solves our problem nor detracts from the general validity of Buckle's remark.[31]

Any attempt, then, to avoid generalization and theorization in history is epistemologically untenable. Such an attempt evinces ignorance of basic insights of philosophical criticism and signifies that the science in question has reverted to a "naive" and "precritical" stage in its development. Such a point of view fails to realize how much generalization is in fact involved in observations even of the simplest sort. Goethe once said, "Every fact was once a theory." In a way it always remains one.

Every science rests on a systematic development of this theoretical element. A science is as 'scientific' as it is theoretical. Historians, restricted by their idiographic method, have fearfully avoided explicit theorizing. The extent to which history, unconsciously for the most part, has acquired theoretical content, is a question with which we shall deal shortly. Still, to judge either from the methodological program which historians promulgate or from the "gross factual product" of the discipline, historical science has still not left the purely descriptive phase in a science's development, which the natural sciences outgrew with Galileo. The conclusion that history is 'retarded', or better, 'immature' is fair. The defense which historians bring against this, namely, an allusion to the unique structure of its object, is not convincing. We have seen that the decision to use an approach which stresses uniqueness is not forced upon the historian by the nature of things but is optional in character.

Though the canonization of the idiographic method is supposed to establish the independence of the historical from the natural sciences, it really just

[31] R. Caillois, *op. cit.* 3-4. See also Leca, *op. cit.* 12, J. K. Feibleman, *op. cit.* 171f., K. D. Erdmann in *Archiv f. Kulturgesch.* XXXIII (1951), 181. Some scholars reject any form of historical generalization. See Sir. E. Barker's review of Toynbee's *Study*, *Int. Affairs,* III (1955), 10, P. Geyl, *Debates,* 171, and H. Frankfort, *The Birth of Civilization* ... (London, 1951), 31. Compare Toynbee's *Study* (London, 1954), IX, 175-216. Other scholars object not only to generalization but also to theorizing of any kind. See E. Zahn, *Toynbee und das Problem der Geschichte,* (Köln and Opladen, 1954), H. Werner, "Spengler and Toynbee", *D. Vierteljahresschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgesch.* XXXIX (1955), 528-554.

commits the former to an earlier stage of the latter. Descriptive historiography is not a new science with an independent method but just an antiquated form of natural science. All the nonsense about the specific nature of history's object and the historicity of historical things, the inalienable uniqueness and particularity of all elements of historic processes, serves only to obscure this humiliating fact. Though this descriptive phase is a stage of development through which all sciences must pass, it is only a phase and not the final form of the discipline. "Science," is rather as Einstein said, "the attempt to make the chaotic diversity of our sense experience correspond to a logically uniform system of thought. In this system single experiences must be correlated with the theoretical structure in such a way that the resulting coordination is complete and convincing." [32] "In the beginning of a science", says Kleinwächter, speaking of theoretical economics, "its first step as a science involves the quest for regularities in the midst of manifold experience, and for ruling ideas in the midst of facts." [33] This insight applies of course not only to economics but history as well. The *homo oeconomicus* is but an abstraction from *historical man* in his totality and versatility. Or, as Rothacker said: "The social sciences must attempt to show orderly patterns amidst the wealth of forms of human life. The beginning of all science is the discovery of such patterns." [34]

The natural sciences, especially physics, began to be mature sciences long ago. Theoretical physics, for example, though it acquired its classical form as late as 1864 with Maxwell's *Electromagnetic Theory of Light,* started on the long road to maturity with Galileo. In the generation which followed Maxwell, William Oswald established the field of theoretical chemistry; other subdivisions of natural science followed his example such as astronomy, mineralogy, geology, petrology, and anthropology. In the twentieth century, theoretical biology became a mature science. Theoretical psychology is presently being established as a discipline of research. Theoretical sociology has existed, at least in content, since the beginning of the century.

Theoretical economics is, however, considerably older. Its first consistent system was promulgated by the physiocrat Quesnay; its first classical author was, as is well known, Adam Smith. The history of economics is particularly relevant to our topic. Economics is the most developed of all theoretical disciplines which are not natural sciences. Also, its object ("man as creator of civilization") is essentially the same as that of history. This is not affected by the high degree of abstraction, and restriction to certain aspects of its object, which economics exercises. Of great interest to us is the crisis which has gone down in the literature as the 'method controversy of economics' which this science, like history, underwent at a decisive moment of its development.

[32] Cited in F.C.S. Northrop, *The Meeting of the East and West* (New York, 1946), 443.
[33] *Lehrbuch der theoretischen Nationalökonomie* (4th ed., Leipzig, 1923).
[34] "Toynbee und Spengler", *D. V. f. L. u. G.* XXIV (1950), 390-401.

In the crisis, instigated by Carl Menger and similar in many ways to the current *crisis of principles* in historiography, the historical school led by Schmoller opposed the advocates of exact theory. It was, in the terminology of Toynbee, an encounter of "antinomianists" and "nomianists". It ended with a compromise between both parties. While the historical school admitted that exact formal knowledge is, in principle, possible, the supporters of theoretical research admitted that an historical basis for the solution of certain economic problems and the examination of certain economic cases might be necessary.

From this it should be clear that a science which has as its object highly structured complexes, like cultural phenomena, requires both an approach which stresses the universal and one which stresses the unique. As Kant would have put it, individual insights must offer "intuition" without which "concepts" are "empty"; generalization, the "concepts" without which "intuition" is "blind". The remark of one of the leading contemporary economists, Stackelberg, that a high degree of abstraction is required if the immense multiplicity of modern economic phenomena is to be adequately grasped, applies to historical research as well.[35] The only real difference between the two disciplines is that historians, oppressed by the sheer weight of the immense multiplicity with which they are faced, still do not see the need for abstraction in history.

Compared to theoretical economics, historiography is still a young, immature science, at the moment going through a crisis of maturation. This is, perhaps, the chief reason for what can only be called the sick condition of the discipline. The comparative immaturity of historical science would explain why the condition of the discipline is so universally considered to be unsatisfactory. Also it would explain the dilemma of specialization, history's failure to solve the problem of synopsis and so satisfy the legitimate practical needs of the public, the public's consequent dissatisfaction with orthodox historiography, and the consequent popularity of the Historiographical Opposition.

V

Theoretical history is in spite of all this, not even an officially recognized field of history, not to speak of its being a highly developed discipline like theoretical physics, biology or economics.[36] William James's angry judgment

[35] *Grundlagen der theoretischen Volkswirtschaftslehre* (Tübingen & Stuttgart, 1951), p. vii.

[36] I think the establishment by Jan Romein of a Department for Theoretical History under the Chair for General History at the University of Amsterdam a significant step in the right direction. Romein also, in 1941, reintroduced the expression "Theoretical History", which, though coined as early as 1793 for a general hypothetical history of mankind by Dugald Stewart, had fallen into disuse. (Romein died in 1962, but his work is being continued.)

on psychology – at his time, like history, a primarily descriptive science can be applied to the condition of Historical Science in our time:

> . . . a string of raw facts, a little gossip and wrangle about opinions; a little classification and generalization on the mere descriptive level . . . but not a single law in the sense in which physics shows us laws, not a single proposition from which any consequence can causally be deduced . . . This is no science, it is only the hope of a science.[37]

James's remark is a bit rough and ready. It reflects, as can be seen from the context, the dangerous exuberance of a Newtonian scientist, who thought that a science must obey laws operating with strict causality. There is, however, a grain of truth in James's prejudice; a given science is as "scientific" as it has theories which are obvious through epistemological, logical, or methodological investigation. History still has a great problem to solve. Perhaps Ortega y Gasset was right when he said to E. R. Curtius that history has still not seen its classical authors.[38]

Many historians still think that theory-building is out of place in history; theoretical considerations are said to be superfluous, or even harmful. They consider attempts at theorizing as frivolous and speculative aberrations which no respectable scholar should allow himself. The arguments which are raised in this connection are the same as those which were used against generalization. First, historical facts are unalterably particular and unique; also, the idiographic method is the only method which can legitimately be applied in historical science; moreover, historiography must be protected from the incursions of natural science; lastly, conceptual construction always involves a misuse of facts. Not entirely unjustly, they allude to the appalling precedent of Spengler, Toynbee, or other *terribles simplificateurs*.

As I have already offered my answers to the arguments against generalization, I need only deal here with the erroneous supposition that generalization is identical with theorization and that the introduction of a theoretical approach would be to accept without reservation the thesis that there is a "nomianistic" structure to history. While it is true that any generalization, be it observation of identities, recurring types and patterns, or the establishment of general concepts, does imply a theoretical method, the acceptance of a theoretical treatment of history does not prejudice the case whether there be objective historical laws or not and other similar issues. It is quite possible to conceive of a theory of history which stresses the unique nature of things and is strictly indeterministic in character; the attempt has even been made to establish a natural science on the principle of contingency. Though the execution is not consistent, Toynbee's theory of history is essentially indeterministic. Spengler's various cultures are described with concepts

[37] *Principles of Psychology* (New York, 1892), 468.
[38] E. R. Curtius, *Kritische Essays zur europäischen Literatur* (Bern, 1950), 378.

of comprehensive character and typical individuality. If one ignores his comprehensive concept of "pure culture", having a logic of its own, one could speak of individual comprehensive theories for a Faustian, Apollonian, or magical culture. A theoretical treatment of history would not, therefore, involve accepting the view that history follows (strict causal) laws. A theory is not a law. It need not even concern itself with laws.

Historians would do well to use a distinction which Menger introduced to theoretical economics, that between a "realistic-empirical" and an "exact" method. "Realistic-empirical research tries to discover in appearance, typical forms and relations as a rudimentary form for real appearance and as empirical laws illustrating factual regularity in the sequence of real phenomena; it allows more or less play to individual characteristics of phenomena. Exact research, on the other hand, strives for absolutely true theoretical insights, in the sense that under exactly the same conditions the same results must always follow."[39] The insights of exact theory are, of course, the only strict laws which apply without exception. Such laws cannot be established for history, as the precondition of exact theory, exactly similar conditions, is never given.

As theory-building historiography usually is accompanied by an approach prone to generalization, the argument that theory-building inadvertently acquiesces in historical determinism can often be found in the literature. Historical determinism, it is claimed, cannot be acknowledged by historical science, as it is irreconcilable both with the "dignity" of man and with the true nature of history as a "realm of freedom". Though this is obviously not the place to discuss the thorny problem of historical determinism, these arguments are completely ineffectual against theorization or generalization.

Indeed, every new law, schema, standard pattern, cycle, or rhythm would suggest a certain degree of historical inevitability. Still to reject in advance every law, schema, cycle, every kind of observation which might conceivably lead to the discovery of regularities in history, simply to avoid acknowledging determinism of any kind, because "man *should* be free" – whatever that means – is to subject research to a dictate of sentiment. If the theory of historical inevitability challenges the dignity of man, this prejudiced argumentation challenges the impartiality of science.

What would Einstein have said if anyone had suggested to him that he stop working on his theory of relativity as it might throw suspicion on the "axiom of causality"? Isaiah Berlin, one of the most passionate advocates of historical indeterminism, is of the opinion that determinism is a problem only for philosophers and theologians, for whom it is a live issue; the historian, however, has decided for the freedom of the will and so solved for his own purposes this problem.[40] Berlin's view seems to me to resemble more

[39] Gerhard Stavenhagen, *Geschichte der Volkswirtschaftstheorie* (Göttingen, 1941), 96.
[40] Isaiah Berlin, *Historical Inevitability* (London, 1955), 34.

a "theological" article of faith than a scientific statement; in this respect at least it resembles Toynbee's a priori theory, which was treated with cutting sarcasm by Geyl, Barnes, and Stone.

How can an historian decide on an issue, unclear even to philosophers and theologians? With what justification is it expected that he come to a decision before even beginning his investigations? To impute such prevision to him would throw rather dubious light on the activity of an historian. Scientific historiography must reject such claims. Whether historical occurrence is in any way regular, and consequently indicative of determinism, is not a philosophic or theological problem but an empirical problem; if anyone is capable of judging on this, it is the historian.

Historical science is just beginning a task which quite probably will occupy generations of historians, and require a theoretical apparatus which does not even exist at the moment. Still, it is neither possible nor permissible to predict in advance the results of these efforts. Experience is the only judge in this, as in every other respectable science dealing with sense experience. The time is still far distant when a decision on this matter will be possible. Whatever the decision will be, wishes may not, and will not, influence it unless historiography ceases to claim that it is a science.

Another error which has proven most detrimental to the development of theoretical history is the false identification of theory and speculation, of theorization and arbitrary construction. This confusion can be seen as early as in the controversy which the appearance of Spengler's *Decline of the West* instigated. Also, in the current controversy over Toynbee's *A Study of History*, it is of great moment. After the idiographic method had been developed, it appeared every time history or some other social science tried seriously to treat its material theoretically. Just a glance at the development, function, and limitation of theories in the natural sciences would be enough to eliminate this error completely. The argument that theories cannot be developed for history, since historical facts fail to evince the uniformity requisite to theorization, is arbitrary, narrow minded, and does not hold water. Economics for example, though it has as its object the same "individual man and his activity" as history, has long adopted a systematic establishment of theories.

The case of economics, since it is similar in nature to history, is unusually informative on the role which theories might play in historiography. Stavenhagen, a leading theoretical economist, concludes of economic theory: "The aim of economic theory is to recognize both the structural elements which constitute the relations between economic persons in the every day world of economic facts and the non-economic factors which might influence this relation."[41] Similarly, historical theory should recognize the structural ele-

[41] *Op. cit.* 12.

ments which constitute the relation of historical individuals in the historical world as well as the non-historical factors which influence this relation; or again: "The economic world manifests a wealth of economic forms, whose structure and essential qualities theory should determine." [42] Historical theory should also ascertain the structure and essential qualities of the wealth of historical forms which the historical world manifests; the same applies to political and anthropological theory.

Both economics and history concern themselves with an overwhelming mass of individual facts; economics becomes their master through theory. "Economics", Stavenhagen continues, "must take into account in its abstract analysis of economic reality unique historical aspects. Theory must develop these individual and unique aspects into clearly defined structural elements." Economics accomplished this task with what is called models. "Single aspects of concrete economic reality are accentuated as fundamental structural elements. Economic theory, in this way, attempts to find distinguishable pure economic forms".[43] The "cultures" which cultural morphologists use are similar models used to explain certain aspects of historical reality. Other such models are Spengler's "Historical Pseudomorphosis" or Toynbee's "Schism in the Body Social" with which Toynbee tries to explain certain aspects of the "phenomenon of Disintegration".[44] To take one of Toynbee's propositions as an example: A civilization begins to decay when its former achievements become an obstacle to the development of the fresh creative forces needed to conquer new situations. This sentence is, in its own right, a hypothesis, logical and meaningful, in itself. Just as in theoretical economics or theoretical physics, the verification of such an hypothesis with empirical fact is the business of practical – in the parlance of natural science, empirical – research. It is not clear why historiography has a lesser claim to such theories than any other science.

It is of course possible that if the right to theorize is once acknowledged, there will be much irresponsible construing. The less informed and the more ingenuous a writer is, the less inhibited he will be in the use of Procrustean methods on his materials. Still, this is a problem which every science has before becoming fully mature. In the long run, only what is properly verifiable will be significant, exactly as is now the case in the more mature natural sciences. The chaff will separate from the wheat; ultimately only those theories which are adequately verified will be acknowledged and taken seriously. This is certainly a desirable goal for historical research and, unmistakably, the trend is in this direction.[45]

[42] *Ibid.* 17.

[43] *Ibid.* 12f.

[44] Stavenhagen, *op. cit.*, 12f. See also W. den Boer, "Toynbee and Classical History", in *Toynbee and History*, 221, 225.

[45] American philosophical and historical research is particularly ready to accept the use of theories and hypothesis in historical science. See W. Coates, "Relativism and

The opponents of an abstract view of history not only hold these mistaken opinions of which I have just spoken; they also ignore the marked trend in historiography to treat history theoretically. They seem unaware of the rich theoretical content of historical science even in its present idiographic form. Indeed, without this theoretical content even the knowledge that we do have would not have been possible. Historical experience is ultimately sense-experience, structured by categories and theories. It would seem unnecessary to stress this point one hundred and fifty years after Kant, if it were not all too easily forgotten by historians who shy from theory. (It could easily be shown that those who attack theory nevertheless use it themselves. Wilhelm Dilthey's examination of the relation of Frederick the Great to the German Enlightenment – to take as an example a classical historian committed to the individualizing method – presupposes a "German Enlightenment", a concept ultimately a theory, or, perhaps more precisely, an idea resting on a theory.)

Toynbee is right in thinking that it would be more honest to admit the necessity of a certain degree of theorization in advance than to argue that a view of history entirely free of theory is conceivable.[46] All our historical thinking is permeated with theories, abstractions, general concepts, schemata, patterns, primal patterns, static and dynamic "types", extending from the economy to science, politics to art, from social relations to philosophy and religion.[47] Without this theoretical content, distilled from reasoning, largely not of an arbitrary nature, we could not have meaningful notions of historical facts, not to speak of such commonly used concepts as 'enlightenment' or 'culture'. History would be to the historian what a printed text is to an imbecile, who can see the characters as letters but cannot connect them into meaningful words.

VI

The role of categories in historical experience, important as it is, is still at the bottom of a scale of continually stronger theoretical permeation; the explication and analysis of these categories is one of the most important

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the Use of Hypothesis in History", *Journal of Modern History* XXI (1949), 23-27, esp. 24, with literature cited. Also W. Holt, "The Idea of Scientific History in America", *Journal of the History of Ideas* I (1940), 352-362, Morris R. Cohen and Ernest Nagel, *An Introduction to Logic and Scientific Method* (New York, 1934), C. G. Hempel, "The Function of General Laws in History", in *Journal of Philosophy* XXXIX (1942), 35-48, P. P. Wiener, "On Methodology in the Philosophy of History", *ibid.*, XXXVIII (1941), 309-324.

[46] See the BBC debate between Geyl and Toynbee (1948) in P. Geyl, P. Sorokin, and A. Toynbee, *The Pattern of the Past; Can We Determine It?* (Boston, 1949).

[47] See J. Romein, "Reason or Religion", and J. Randall, Jr., & G. Haines, "Controlling Assumptions in the Practice of American Historians", Soc. Sci. Research Council, *Bulletin*, 54 (1946), 15-52.

tasks of a criticism of historical reason offered by a theoretical historical science. Explicit historical theories are at the top of the scale; they permeate synoptic historical writing, from Vico to Toynbee, as mineral permeates rock.

Toynbee's *A Study of History* is the most recent and certainly the most impressive attempt which has been made to treat history theoretically. Toynbee tries to abstract from historical experience rules and schemata, to formulate universal concepts, to develop formulas for formal structure and development, and to launch heuristic hypotheses. This edifice of theory attempts total integration, while complying with the logical principles like non-contradiction and also with empirical verifiability. Admittedly, the criticism of Toynbee's work has shown that his system falls short in these respects. This does not, however, detract from the fundamental significance of this attempt; scientific method – empirical observation, theoretical abstraction, and empirical verification – which was allegedly confined to the natural sciences, is here applied as a principle of investigation.

The discussion of Toynbee's theses consequently belongs to a field of research which cannot be called by another name than theoretical history. The debate is not about historical facts but is concerned with a critical judgment of theories, established to interpret these facts, and with an investigation of the concrete and formal foundation, the verifiability and systematic adequacy of these theories.

To a lesser extent the same is true of the debate on Spengler's *Decline of the West*. This debate has become more lively since Toynbee's work appeared. This debate, significantly enough, did not begin as a discussion of theory but rather, at the price of its fruitfulness, as a problem in the philosophy of history. Recently, influenced by the debate on Toynbee, the weight has shifted to theoretical problems. It began, in fact, to be noticed that, quite apart from its contemporary relevance, Spengler's work can be considered and evaluated as a body of historiographical theories.

Spengler may not have been as good a theoretician and system-builder as Toynbee. Still, though he all too genially ignored the formal requirements of theory building, his principles are genuine theories and have the advantage over Toynbee's of being easier to verify and coordinate. Also, a new approach to history, exemplified by Toynbee's own work and an overwhelmingly large literature, bears witness to the great influence of Spengler's theories.[48]

Most of the other opponents of classical historiography can likewise be considered to be precursors of theoretical history. It was, after all, just this effort to go beyond the 'given', and through theory to arrive at more profound coherences, at more comprehensive interpretations and more effectual syntheses, which brought about the conflict between these men and official historiography.

[48] This new approach is thinking in terms of 'cultures' instead of 'nations'. See my "Umsturz im Weltbild der Geschichte", note 24 above.

Vico's *Scienza Nuova* was the first and most significant venture at a theoretical treatment of history. In this book, Vico tries, for the first time in the history of historiography, to conceive of history organically with the aid of comprehensive theories.[49] Vico, in fact, thought, as can be seen from his scientific writings, his autobiography, and the title of the book itself, that what the *Scienza Nuova* offered as a whole was a comprehensive, definitive theory of history.[50] As the *Scienza Nuova* has the intention of establishing a theoretical science of history as an independent discipline, it can be considered to be the first standard work of this discipline, being not only of historic but also, now even more than before, of genuine methodological significance. Vico is convinced that his theories are empirically derived and acknowledges the importance of verification. His '*assiomi*' or '*degnità*' are not a priori premises but laws of experience; his conclusions are not arrived at through speculation, but through logical operation, which, Vico emphasizes, must be of a strict and apodictic nature. He is in every way a scientist of what we would now call theoretical history and should be considered to be its founder and its first classical writer.[51]

Among the attempts to lift historiography from a purely descriptive to a theoretical stage and give it real scientific character, Droysen's *Grundriss der Historik* of 1868 is an anomaly. The lectures which led to this book grew out of research which Droysen did, independent of foreign research.[52] Before 1868, when they were reworked into a book, these lectures were primarily significant as a counterpart to the efforts of positivists such as Buckle and Taine, to make history an exact science with means and approaches borrowed exclusively from the natural sciences. As soon as Droysen became aware of this "naturalistic" trend, he opposed it vigorously.[53] He certainly did not oppose, however, the idea of making historiography more of a science; the approach of the *Historik* shows, in fact, that this was exactly what he himself had set out to do.

Against positivism, Droysen emphasized the decisive role of the individual, his freedom, responsibility, and creative activity in history. Long before Windelband and Rickert, he distinguished between the two ontological spheres of "history" and "nature". Anticipating Croce and Collingwood, he tried to grasp the historian's function in the establishment of categories for dealing with historical material and almost arrived at Dilthey's problem of

[49] See my "G. Vico als Vorläufer einer morphologischen Geschichtsbetrachtung", (note 24 above), 85-97.

[50] Note his often repeated phrase, "Storia ideal eterna", and see *Scienza Nuova*, ed. Masieri (1853), 91, 95, 98, 119, 152, 182, 397, 587.

[51] We are only concerned with the program of the *S. N.* here; the extent to which the work contains speculative and a priori arguments need not be considered here.

[52] These lectures are collected with other essays in *Historik*, ed. R. Hübner, 2nd ed. (Munich and Berlin, 1943).

[53] *Op. cit.*, 386-405.

how to derive a specific method for the moral sciences from a 'Logic of Understanding'.[54] Though a considerable portion of his *Grundriss* and his *Enzyklopädie* is concerned with technical questions of heuristics and criticism, his discussion of "Interpretation" belongs to what we would call pure theoretical history.[55]

Droysen, moreover, explicitly said in his inaugural address to the Berlin Academy of Science, that he was concerned primarily with the "theoretical question, what is the nature of our science". The most pressing problem of historiography was, in his opinion, to "develop its system, its theory".[56] In the chapters on "Systematics" in the *Historik*, he partially carries out this program by enquiring into the form and content of the historical world. Here, he anticipates more modern ideas on the essence and modes of appearance of objectified reality, by positing a theory of moral powers, represented by so-called natural, ideal, and practical societies. These passages, which suggest on some occasions a concrete philosophy of history and on others an extremely modern "sociology of history", would seem to suggest investigations of wider scope than those which might legitimately belong to theoretical history.[57] As the limits of theoretical history are by no means sharply defined, it would seem unfair to object to Droysen on these grounds.

We can conclude then that Droysen, though he did not call it by name, tried to establish a science of theoretical history and made decisive contributions towards its development. He should be classed, with Vico, among the most important precursors of our science. He should, moreover, not be blamed if the attempts which were made to continue and develop further his thoughts led to the quandary of Windelband's and Rickert's historical logic. For his opposition to a naturalistic and positivistic treatment of history and his subsequent demand for an independent methodology for the moral sciences could have been fulfilled in other ways than those his followers chose to take.

Also illustrative of the considerable theoretical content which is always latent in historiography, are the many attempts which have been made within the discipline to introspect on methodological and critical-epistemological matters. It is true, however, that this aspect of the science is by no means as developed as it is in the natural sciences, where emulation of theoretical physics is possible. The historical methodologies – the appropriate passages of Droysen's *Historik*, Bernheim's *Lehrbuch der historischen Methode und Geschichtsphilosophie* and Lorenz's *Grundriss der Geschichtslehre* – tend to be more concerned with "technical" aspects of "fact-finding" than with

[54] See E. Rothacker, "Johann Gustav Droysen . . .", *Mensch und Geschichte* (Bonn, 1950), 49-58.
[55] *Historik*, 149-187, 339-344.
[56] *Ibid.*, 427ff.
[57] *Ibid.*, 188-272.

something as problematic as the development of theories.[58] Still Dilthey laid the foundation; Rickert, Simmel, Spranger, Rothacker, Mandelbaum, Collingwood, and Croce developed, and Troeltsch, M. Weber, Teggart, Xénopol, Huizinga, and Petaccia made valuable contributions to a historical epistemology. There is now, at least in outline, what Rothacker has called the "Logic and Systematics of the Moral Sciences".

What is today called formal philosophy of history has often the same conceptual content as theoretical history.[59] Contributions like E. Keyser's *Die Geschichtswissenschaft*, Fritz Wagner's *Geschichtswissenschaft*, F. J. Hearnshaw's *The Science of History*, F. J. Teggart's *Prolegomena to History*, H. Sée's *Science et philosophie de l'histoire*, J. Ortéga y Gasset's *History as System* and N. Hartmann's *Das Problem des geistigen Seins*, all belong to the province of theoretical history, as does the literature dealing with historicism, with "historical causation", with the establishment of the social sciences, with the relation of historiography to the natural sciences, to biology, and to sociology, with cultural history and cultural morphology, and last but not least with the history of historiography.

The literature on the history of historiography brings to light the actual theoretical content of the significant accomplishments of previous historiographical research. It reveals the premises – applied consciously or unconsciously – the methods of research and presentation, the ideas which tie together a given whole in meaningful unity, the manner in which judgments and interpretations are made, and the underlying world-views of extant historical writing.

The large histories of historiography, oriented for the most part to intellectual history (such as Fueter's *Geschichte der neueren Historiographie*, Gooch's *History and Historiography in the Nineteenth Century*, Croce's *Teoria e storia della storiografia*, Moritz Ritter's *Entwicklung der Geschichtswissenschaft* or H. von Srbik's *Geist und Geschichte*) belong not only to practical but also to theoretical history.[60] They bring to light not only the attempts which have been made by historians to think about what they

[58] Romein thinks that what is commonly called "methodology", as it has to do with the technique of tracking historical truth and not with the nature of historical truth itself, is not part of theoretical history. I do not quite understand his distinction. The nature of historical truth, it might be argued, is a philosophical question, transcending theoretical history. See his "Theoretical History" (note 9 above), 57.

[59] I tend to consider even the concept "formal philosophy of history" superseded. It is simply no longer possible for a historian to relegate all questions dealing with a methodology and with the principles and axioms of his science to philosophy. Philosophy is more than a first science for ancillary sciences. After a science ceases to be purely descriptive and reaches a stage in its development where theoretical questions unique to the science are raised, such a relegation of responsibility becomes quite impossible. See Romein, *op. cit.*, 57.

[60] See also Collingwood's *Idea of History* and G. v. Below's *Deutsche Geschichtsschreibung* for the conjunction of historiographical and theoretical considerations.

are doing, but also how the goals and methods of historiography have changed in the course of its development. Of double value, as historical documents and as contributions to the establishment of theoretical history, are the testimonies of prominent historians in essays, autobiographies, and letters. Such testimonies are, for example, Ranke's and J. Burckhardt's *Letters*, B. Niebuhr's *Lebensnachrichten*, F. Meinecke's *Erlebtes*, E. Meyer's *Kleine Schriften*, and O. Hintze's *Gesammelte Abhandlungen*.

What is the difference between theoretical history and a material philosophy of history? Perhaps it is the emphasis which is given in theoretical history to empirical methods and empirical verification. It should be evident from our concept of theoretical history that the theories and hypotheses which have been established in philosophy of history, to order and interpret the facts, and to coordinate them into one view of the world, also belong to the domain of theoretical history. Theoretical history must, however, in contrast to material philosophy of history, conform with contemporary scientific standards; its validity as a science depends on its logical, rational, and empirical character.

Whatever be the origin of its theories and hypotheses, be it rational or irrational, outer or inner experience, logical deduction or fleeting insight, these theories must be capable of being understood by any reasonable person. They must evince consistent and homogeneous concepts, must be genetically related to one another, must be deduced in accordance with the principles of logic and must not contradict one another when confronted in a system. They must be empirically verifiable, both singularly and collectively (as system). Only such reasoning in material philosophy of history as conforms to all these specifications belongs also to theoretical history. That, however, which is essentially a priori or speculative in character and either does not acknowledge or claims to transcend empirical verification belongs solely to material philosophy of history.[61]

VII

A quick survey of the literature has tried to show that there have been noteworthy efforts to establish historical theories and that historiography, even in its present form, has much theoretical content. This literature, therefore, would also give no grounds for skepticism concerning the possibility of a theoretical treatment of history. There is no need, then, either to seek or artificially construe the subject-matter of theoretical history. This subject-

[61] The relation between theoretical history and a material philosophy of history is analogous to the relation between theoretical physics and a philosophy of nature.

matter has already been formed under the shell of the established approach and would in fact seem now to be breaking through it.

The subject-matter of theoretical history is: theorization as such, also, something which one might call a "Critique of Historical Reason", a historiographical epistemology, logic and systematics (in other words, formal philosophy of history), historiographical method, the history of historiography in its theoretical aspects, and the empirical part of material philosophy of history.[62]

The most important goals of this discipline would be: The conception, verification, and systematization of theories on the essence, interrelation, and meaning of historical phenomena, the building of heuristic hypotheses, the discovery and derivation of types of facts and processes, laws and regularities, the discovery, through abstraction, of useful schematas and patterns, the formation of general concepts advantageous to investigation and organization of historical study, the organization and interpretation of the facts discovered by specialized field study, and, ultimately, the synthesis of these factors into a historical world-picture.

If historical theorizing is to be exact in any way, a developed historical epistemology, logic, and systematics must be presupposed. A promising foundation has been laid by Droysen, Dilthey, Simmel, Spranger, Rothacker, Teggart, Croce, and Collingwood. One of the most important and pressing goals of theoretical history is to carry on and bring to fruition the "Critique of Historical Reason" implicit in the work of these men. In my opinion, this should be done by theoretical history rather than by formal philosophy of history.

Another important goal of theoretical history is the establishment of a methodology for the historical sciences. As a method contains much of the theory of a science and depends, in turn, on a solid epistemological foundation, this goal is closely related to the preceding. The theories, approaches, and methods which have been used until now in historiography, are matter for theoretical history, in building theories, criticizing our knowledge, and establishing a methodology. If, moreover, new theories, means of knowledge or methods are to be developed, this matter will have to be checked critically against the evidence, its historical development described, its lasting element

[62] Shortly before this essay went to press in its original version, Jan Romein's important essay "Theoretical History" came into my possession. Romein considers the subject matter of theoretical history to be: (1) purely theoretical problems, i.e., historical objectivity, value, historical causation, historical laws, cycles, historical facts; (2) investigation of the patterns and the rhythm of history; (3) moving forces in history and periodization; (4) topics dealing with the past which cannot be considered ordinary historiography, such as "dictatorship", "revolution", "the growing power of the state", "the function of historical myth", "fiction", and "phantoms"; (5) the history of historiography. Though I agree with much that Romein has to say, some of these problems seem to me to be extraneous to theoretical history. See Romein, 58.

separated from what is temporary. In this, the history of historiography will supplement pure theoretical history.

Theoretical history reaches its furthest limits in the aspirations of material philosophy of history. In so far as they do not go beyond the rational and do not lose contact with reality, they too, as was said, should be included in our science. The mission of theoretical history is to go as far as the principle of verification admits, to unite love of discovery with asceticism and scientific discipline. The tasks of universal historical synopsis, of interpretation and integration of various theories into a meaningful whole, in a word, the establishment of a historical world-picture, will offer theoretical history opportunity for the exercise of both these virtues. The failure, through insufficient means, of the persistent efforts of the Historiographical Opposition will teach us where the precipices lie and which perils should be circumvented.

If the existence of theoretical history can be justified by these problems and the start which has been made towards their solution, the necessity for its existence arises out of the crisis which historiography is now going through. I have tried to show that this crisis is caused by the inadequacy of the established viewpoints and methods of historiography. These are not capable of doing justice to the new claims which result from the changed condition of the world. Our science has been reminded of its elemental biological function; it must light man's way and offer him a world-picture. A desire for synthesis is compatible with this new pragmatic attitude, quite foreign to classical historiography. A synopsis, however, which is based on a way of looking at things in terms of individualization and on a dogmatic distinction between an idiographical and a nomothetic method, is impossible. The "dilemma of specialization" would be inescapable and the "Heisenberg problem of historiography" insoluble. The Historiographical Fronde is a result of this untenable situation. As conservative means have proven incapable of dealing with the situation, this Opposition tries to resolve it with more radical means.

Though the Opposition has taken the initiative, it still has not achieved a satisfactory solution. The problem, which the very existence of this Opposition points to, is still unsolved. Historical science is about to draw the necessary conclusions from this. History, like every other science, matures slowly. In the process of maturing it has arrived at the threshold of a new chapter in its development. History is about to leave a primarily descriptive stage for a theoretical one. This would mean a new approach to the old problems. This would be especially true if the singularity dogma of historical uniqueness and the axiom of the sole applicability of the idiographic method were abandoned and if the distinction between the methods of *historical* and *natural* science were based on a contrast between a *holistic-analytic* and a *meristic-synthetic* grasp of complexes.

If this distinction is accepted, the "Heisenberg problem of historiography" proves to be meaningless, the desire for synopsis, both theoretically and practically fulfillable, the "dilemma of specialization", no longer insurmountable.[63] The initiative returns to the conservatives, who have all the advantages of having an unbroken tradition. Scientific historiography, enriched by its own and vicarious experience, will acquire a truly objective way of looking at things. If it leaves its ivory tower and no longer relegates the solution of the large problems which time poses, to "quacks and columnists" (as Paul Sweezy put it) the Opposition will lose the ground on which it stands. Historical legends can grow only where the voice of scientific history can no longer be heard.

Historiography should follow the example of theoretical physics, chemistry, sociology, psychology, economics and courageously take the step from description to theoretical analysis; no longer should it leave its higher mission to opponents and outsiders. History is, in fact, compelled to take this step by its own difficulties, the new horizons, the unsolved problems, the pressure from the Opposition, the need of our time, and the irrefragable process of maturation of our science as a science. Every science rests, in the final analysis, on arbitrary decisions for or against certain forms of mental conquest of reality. History is in great danger of sliding into chaos. The need to keep inner form is more pressing than in any other area of culture. Tradition, inner correlation, and consistent development are nowhere of greater significance than in history.

The venerable scholar, Sir Ernest Barker, discussing Toynbee's *Study*, said: man needs the great coral-reefs slowly raised in time for his foundation – the bank and capital of accumulated reason and insight, expressed in the institutions which they built.[64] History too, like society, is a coral-reef, a capital of accumulated reason, and, again like society, requires endurance. The crisis of historical science does not challenge the existence of our science but is quite simply a crisis of development. The difficulties which historical science now faces are pangs of the birth of its next phase. Everything depends on accomplishing this transition from the old to the new with the least possible loss of form. It would be just as dangerous to ignore the new forces which have arisen as to capitulate and allow free play to them; both

[63] It would, however, be misleading to suppose that a theoretical approach alone would guarantee a solution for the synopsis problem. Only the formal preconditions for its solution would be satisfied by the establishment of theoretical history as a respectable field of research. How this problem will ultimately be solved, how long a satisfactory solution will take, even whether it is soluble at all, are open questions. First, historical science will have to develop its own methodology, especially suited to its own structurally complex subject matter. I expect that research on this will take considerable time. See my "Das Integrationsproblem in der Geschichtswissenschaft", *Schweizer Beiträge zur Allgemeinen Geschichte,* XV (1957), 209-248.

[64] "Dr. Toynbee's Study of History. A Review", *Int. Affairs* XXXI (1955), 16.

the New and the Old must complement each other. If we do not build on sand, but patiently lay stone on stone, brick on brick, even the rising flood of time will not be able to harm us. The very poverty and weakness of historiography is potential power. The youth of our science is an investment in the future.

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