

THE BEGINNINGS RENAISSANCE HISTORIOGRAPHY

THE FOUNDATIONS OF modern historical thought were laid in the period between the fifteenth and the early nineteenth centuries. Most of the ideas and methods associated with the practice of modern historiography were stated and refined during this period. Historical thinking and practice in these years gradually effected a break from the earlier forms of thinking. The process was slow, uneven, and dispersed, and no single scholar or methodological innovation was responsible for it. It was a cumulative process to which hundreds of scholars—historians, chroniclers, antiquarians, erudites, and philosophers—contributed. The peaks of scholarship were nurtured and sustained by the works of innumerable lesser figures. The broad social, intellectual, and cultural movements in the West responsible for the development of modern Western thought, including historical thought, were the Renaissance, Reformation, Enlightenment, and Romanticism. In this chapter we will deal with the first two, while the others will be taken up in subsequent chapters.

MAIN FEATURES OF MODERN WESTERN HISTORIOGRAPHY

Modern historiography was constituted gradually by selectively adopting some ideas from the ancient and medieval Western traditions, and by generating many new ideas of its own. For example, it rejected the cyclical Greek view of history, but accepted its theoretical separation between myth and facts, and its logocentrism, which meant that reality could be clearly grasped, as images in a mirror, by the rational human

mind. Similarly, it rejected the Judeo-Christian historiographic mixture of myths and history, but accepted its largely linear view of history. From the Roman tradition, it initially accepted the notion of usefulness of history. It rejected the religious and theological emphasis of medieval European historiography, but adopted its nation- and language-centric historical approach. In addition to all this, it originated the most powerful historical idea of continuous, almost linear progress, not found in any of the previous traditions anywhere in the world. Modern historiography, as it slowly evolved and matured from the fifteenth to the early nineteenth centuries, was an entirely new formation with its own ensemble of ideas and practices. The basic features of modern Western historiography may be outlined as follows.¹

1. A linear view of the past and a gradually developing belief in progress, particularly since the late eighteenth century. Although the idea of linearity coexisted for a long time with a cyclical view of history, the linear view of history almost became a norm in Western thought in modern times. However, the idea of decline was quite prevalent in historical discourses. Decline was seen in many spheres such as the cosmic, moral, religious, political, cultural, and economic. As Peter Burke remarks, 'In spite of the existence of all these terms [shift, transfer, progress, development, Renaissance, and Reformation], it seems fair to say that throughout this four-hundred year period [from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century], change was usually considered to be change for the worse.'² Nevertheless, the 'idea of progress' became a predominant element in late Enlightenment thought, which argued that the development of science and reason enabled human beings to reform themselves as well as society.³ The ideas of linearity and progress dominated Western historical thinking from the late eighteenth to the late twentieth centuries.
2. Periodization of history in secular mode. Right since the days of Petrarch in the fourteenth century, the characteristics of a period were largely determined not by divine and transcendental factors but by natural, economic, and social factors. The determinants could be climate, or geography, or forces and relations of production.
3. A 'concern with historical perspective' or a 'sense of anachronism' (the term 'anachronism' was coined in the seventeenth century) which emphasizes that matters of culture and society have to be seen historically and not in an unchanging manner. Thus, various things such as language, dress, law, buildings, and so on have to be identified with

each age. This is an awareness of the fact, for example, that an ancient Roman senator wore dresses that were different from the costume of the king and his courtiers in the seventeenth century. This sense of difference with the past in various matters was an important constitutive element of modern historical thinking. Although such an attitude did not develop immediately, and even till the eighteenth century, large areas of European consciousness did not realize such a periodicity, it can be said that it constituted an important element in modern historical thinking.

4. Developing sense of individuality in contrast to collectivity. Although this concern with the individual became more marked in the Romantic era, its beginnings may be discerned since early Renaissance in the fourteenth century, for example, in the autobiography of Petrarch.
5. A concern with epistemology or the theory of knowledge that also involved a search for the foundations of knowledge. René Descartes was the philosopher most famously identified with this quest. In history too, the concern to prove the validity of historical knowledge prompted various conceptual and methodological innovations. Science and law had been two sources from which the modern historical thinkers have derived their terminology of justification. The terms 'inductive method', 'deductive-nomological model', 'evidence', 'testimony', 'proof', 'witness', 'laws of history' are all derived from these two sources.
6. Preoccupation with causality and the laws of human behaviour. This mode of historical explanation has uneasily coexisted with the 'historicist' emphasis on meaning rather than causes. However, it is safe to say that the search for causes has been one of the predominant preoccupations of Western historiography. In the words of E.H. Carr, 'the study of history is a study of causes'.⁴
7. A belief in fact-oriented objectivity as the basis of historical profession. It has been pointed out that the notion of objectivity and truth in history-writing has existed in the West since the times of Thucydides in ancient Greece. However, it is only since the Renaissance and particularly in the post-Reformation period that this assertion became more marked. And later, under the influence of the Scientific Revolution, it became a matter of faith since the seventeenth century and the core of historical scholarship since the early nineteenth century.
8. Development of a quantitative approach to history. Although this approach became more common in the twentieth century, its beginnings may be traced to fourteenth-century chroniclers such as

Giovanni Villani in Florence, who included in his chronicle the figures of children attending schools.

9. Literary construction of historical narratives. Many Western historical works, particularly in the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, were mostly structured along the lines of epics and novels. This also involved an omniscient author and a coherent, logical, rational, and internally consistent story.

THE ITALIAN RENAISSANCE

Georgio Vasari (1511–74), an Italian historian of arts in the sixteenth century, used the term '*rinascita*' to denote the 'rebirth of the arts' in Italy.⁵ Jules Michelet, the great French historian, coined the term 'Renaissance' in 1855. However, it was Jacob Burckhardt who, in his classic work *The Civilization of Renaissance in Italy* (1860), interpreted it as the dawn of modernity and popularized this concept. The term refers to that momentous period in European history that began in Italy, particularly Florence, in the fourteenth century, spread throughout the European continent, and continued until the beginning of the seventeenth century. It was during this period that various developments in the intellectual culture of the West occurred and Western thought and culture underwent a gradual transformation. It was philosophically grounded in the humanist outlook. Humanism attempted to put 'Man' in the centre of worldly events and processes in a gradual shift away from the medieval emphasis on 'God'. This humanist outlook slowly permeated varieties of intellectual pursuits, including historical scholarship. Modern historical consciousness emerged in the search, preservation, and interpretation of the ancient past, often seen through its literary texts and monumental ruins. The ancient Greek and Roman writers were brought to limelight, and their works elucidated a radically different view of world, nature, and cosmos from that of medieval Christendom. History acquired a high position during the Renaissance as it was regarded among the seven liberal arts essential for an educated person.⁶ But it was distinguished from other arts, particularly poetry, in its commitment to 'truth'. History-writing became an important pursuit, even for persons of high status.⁷ There were also other developments facilitating a break from the medieval conception of society, polity, and the past. The state now emerged in relative autonomy from the church, determining several aspects of law, custom, and identity of people. Moreover, new and vast areas were 'discovered' by the Europeans which completely shattered their earlier conceptions of geography.

The Renaissance was an intellectual reaction against medieval religious scholasticism. This resulted in intense activities in almost all intellectual spheres. Philosophy, science, architecture, painting, and even religion were affected by it. Some of the well-known personalities associated with the Renaissance in various European countries were Petrarch, Raphael, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Thomas More, and Erasmus. However, it should be borne in mind that the changes were not sudden and despite their novelty, the ideas were only tentative; it was a period when the old and new mixed both in life and thought, and for a long time the medieval world view coexisted with the modern one. The new ideas generally associated with the Renaissance are as follows.

Humanism

The centrality of the human being in social, cultural, and political spheres in contrast to the centrality of either God or nature is the basic feature of humanism. It signified the most important belief in Renaissance thought. Historiography during the Renaissance is also known as humanist historiography. Humanism connotes the central role of human agency in the creation of various institutions, particularly the state.⁸ In the context of early Italian Renaissance, however, the term was limited to the study and imitation of classical Greek and Latin literature. Thus, 'classical humanism of the Italian Renaissance was primarily a cultural, literary, and educational movement'.⁹ Kristeller defines it as 'a body of scholarship and literature that was secular, without being scientific, and that occupied a place of its own, independent of, though not opposed to, both theology and the sciences'.¹⁰ Concern for human beings and their dignity was one of its central precepts. Petrarch (1304–74) asserted that nothing was more admirable than the human soul. This glorification of humans could be seen in various spheres. Paintings by Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519), Raphael (1483–1520), and Francesca (1415–1492), sculptures by Donatello (1386–1466), Verrocchio (1435–88), and Michelangelo (1475–1564), and works of numerous other artists and writers bear witness to this. Thus, the Renaissance began the process of replacement of God by the human being, although it took quite a while before it could be generally accomplished.

Secularism

Tentative beginnings in the direction of secularism were made during this period, which later advanced and spread into many areas of thought.

There was a gradual distancing from the religious modes of thinking. That it was a slow process is attested by the fact that in the 1420s only about 5 per cent of paintings could be considered secular in subject and even a century later in the 1520s just about 20 per cent were so.¹¹ Moreover, many, if not most, of the Renaissance humanists were religious, some even devoutly so. Petrarch and Michelangelo were the two most notable examples. But the beginning of the process of secularization was not in doubt. Intellectuals and the social and political elite were now becoming less prone to accepting the authority of religious institutions as was evidenced in the growing independence of the states from the church. The questioning of religious authority in the fields of scholarly activities and in the spheres of art and literature took place relatively frequently as time passed. However, the Renaissance humanists were not anti-God or anti-religion. It was not before the Enlightenment that the principle of secularism could be fully achieved.

Individualism

It is on this aspect of Renaissance idea that Burckhardt places most emphasis. For him, the discovery of the individual human being, the consciousness of the self, and the development of the individual were the basic features of the Renaissance that characterized it as the beginning of modernity. He thus identified modernity with individualism. It is true that during this period the works of art—paintings, sculptures, architecture and literature—were imprinted with the personal style of the artist. Both the artists and the public liked individual styles. However, it was just the beginning of a new process. As Peter Burke points out, the ‘point about individualism, like secularism, is not that it was dominant, but that it was relatively new, and distinguishes the Renaissance from the Middle Ages’.¹²

Realism

This era is also identified with the development of a realist perspective in arts and literature. However, in this matter also, as Burke remarks, the term has to be qualified in several respects.¹³ It would be more valid to say that the Renaissance society in Italy, particularly its artists and intellectuals, took more interest in the visible world and attempted to depict it in their works more than was the case in the medieval period.

HUMANIST HISTORIOGRAPHY

The term ‘humanist’ (or *umanista* in Italian) seemed to have originated in early sixteenth-century Italy, from where it got into other European languages.¹⁴ The main form of history-writing during the Renaissance has been termed as ‘humanist historiography’. The beginnings of modern historiography in the West can be traced to this trend. It originated in the Italian city state of Florence and was first expressed in the histories written by Leonardo Bruni who is considered as the first humanist historian. From there it spread to papal Rome and other Italian city states such as Genoa, Venice, Naples, and Milan. Its development can be divided into two phases: (a) from the beginning of the fifteenth century to 1494 when the French army invaded Italy and ended its self-contained state system; and (b) the period after the invasion.¹⁵ In the first phase, a spirit of civic humanism dominated, which was represented in the historiography of Bruni, his followers, and others, while in the latter phase, a sense of catastrophe caused by ‘fortune’ prevailed, finding its famous expression in Machiavelli. In both the phases, however, there was a significant interest in history. Humanist historiography in Italy emerged from the union of two different streams of scholarly activity—the earlier chronicles (which had begun in the twelfth century and culminated in the chronicle of Giovanni Villani [1276–1348] in the mid-fourteenth century) and the heritage of Petrarchan humanism.

Chronicles

This genre of retaining the past in the chronological form goes back to very early times, to the Old Testament.¹⁶ It continued in the ancient Greek and Roman periods, flourished in the medieval era, reached its climax in the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries in various European countries, and started declining after that until it faced extinction by the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of nineteenth centuries.¹⁷ A chronicle may be defined as an account of historical facts and events arranged in a chronological order. Although this form of writing has been prevalent in all literate cultures, chronicle in the Christian tradition has been a particularly useful form of historical writing where the course of human history was arranged in accordance with Christian time. Although it is difficult to count all of them, the *Encyclopedia of the Medieval Chronicles* (2010) enumerates that in the period between 300 and 1500 CE, about 2,500 noticeable chronicles had been written. They were to be found

in all parts of Europe in varying numbers. They were not analytical accounts and tended to incorporate mythical and legendary events in their lists. In this sense, they differ from history proper, particularly from the history that developed in modern times based on the critical study of the sources.

The chronicles that fed into the creation of early modern historiography started 'as a simple list of city officials' in Italy in the twelfth century.¹⁸ Soon after, it developed into 'an instrument for the expression of civic pride' by comparing contemporary events with great events of the distant past. These new forms of chronicles differed from the earlier monastic chronicles by their efforts to record the information and ideas produced by the 'knowledge explosion of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries'.¹⁹ Chronicles in Italy, France, England, and other European countries now contained ever-increasing material on secular affairs. Although most of the chronicles remained restricted to the locality, some of the more ambitious ones attempted to encompass the world. Thus, different categories of chronicles contributed to the growth of organized historical knowledge from the twelfth to fourteenth centuries. Although humanist historians derided the chroniclers, the latter provided invaluable material and the eloquent narratives of the humanist historians were mostly based on those earlier chronicles.²⁰

Petrarchan Humanism

The originator of the other stream was Francesco Petrarca, known in English as Petrarch, who is generally considered to be the 'father of humanism'. He is also regarded as 'the first modern man'. His influence on historiography consisted in his consciousness about the passage of time and his antiquarian activities. He was a pioneer in the exploration of ancient ruins and was aware of their significance.²¹ But history for him was the history of ancient Rome whose splendours he was never tired of contemplating. His study of the great men of the Roman past was a significant historical work. Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–75) and Coluccio Salutati (1331–1406) carried on Petrarch's work in the latter half of the fourteenth century. This notion of change in time and the awareness of the past gave rise to the idea of the difference between various historical eras which, in turn, created the division of history into the ancient, medieval, and modern periods, which became the standard periodization. This notion of the antiquity (classical Greece and Rome) as a period of light, the middle ages (fifth to thirteenth centuries) as the period of darkness,

and the new age dawning in the fourteenth century with a revival of the ancient learning, was central to the humanist outlook on history.

MAIN FEATURES OF HUMANIST HISTORIOGRAPHY

Humanist historiography may be described and distinguished from medieval historiography based on its concepts, form, methodology, and purpose.

1. In humanist historiography, the creative and the critical combined, and we can find a sense of the 'pastness of the past'.²² The novel ideas it brought to the study of history were 'the concepts of change through time, of the contingency of single historical events, of a succession of distinct historical epochs, of the independence of human affairs from divine or supernatural causation'.²³ A developing sense of the relativity of human experience in time and space and an awareness of perspective were also Renaissance contributions. Humanist historiography written by many historians during this period may be described as largely secular and practical, with a belief in human action.
2. Renaissance historians largely adopted the form used by ancient historians in terms of style, language, presentation, and structure. Historians such as Polybius, Sallust, Livy, and Tacitus provided the models that humanist historians followed. By adopting these ancient models of historical explanation, humanist historians implicitly questioned the prevalent medieval Bible-centred interpretation of human history.²⁴
3. It was during this period that the crucially important philological method of text-criticism originated for validation of sources. Lorenzo Valla, in his *Discourse on the Forgery of the Alleged Donation of Constantine* (1440), meticulously unearthed the forgery of this deed by analysing the language of the text. It was this practice of historical criticism that has been credited as an important contribution to modern consciousness.²⁵ Following Valla, other scholars such as Isaac Casaubon (1559–1614) and J.G. Bocanus (1519–72) used similar methods to question the authenticity of other supposedly 'ancient' texts.²⁶ Moreover, historians of this era also insisted on historical explanation by establishing the causal connection between individual facts. However, the emphasis on causal explanation was not general and many historians were satisfied just by describing the events.²⁷

4. The purpose of historical endeavour was supposed to be didactic. Humanist historians emphasized that history should be useful, purposive, and should provide moral and political lessons for people to follow. It is not that truthfulness of the narrative should be compromised; the important point was to pick up mainly those events in the past or the actions of the heroes that were memorable and could serve as examples in the present. This insistence led to the development of what has been termed as 'exemplar history',²⁸ which persisted for long until mid-eighteenth century, and which was decisively superseded only in the early nineteenth century.

SOME IMPORTANT HISTORIANS OF THE ITALIAN RENAISSANCE

There was a large number of scholars who wrote history during the Italian Renaissance and an even larger number of scholars with professional interest in this field. Eric Cochrane has calculated that between 1415 and 1615, there were 645 'individual authors in all the several branches of literature that were then regarded as historical'. The reasons for writing history were 'the desire to preserve a family or a civic historiographical tradition', patriotism, and professional honour.²⁹ Here we will discuss only a few of the important humanist historians.

Leonardo Bruni (c. 1370–1444)

Bruni is considered the first humanist historian. His *History of the Florentine People* (1442–4) was a stupendous achievement in this genre. It possessed the characteristics that were to define humanist historiography for the next 150 years. According to Bruni, 'History requires at once a long and connected narrative, causal explanation of each particular event, and the public expression of one's judgment about every issue'.³⁰ In the first volume of this work itself, Bruni demolished the mythical history about the foundation of the city state of Florence and attempted to write on the basis of 'hard evidence'.³¹ However, in the remaining volumes (2–12) of this book, such critical rigour is not in evidence. But it is beyond doubt that this work was crucial in establishing the course of humanist historiography. Much before the above work, Bruni's *Dialogues for Pier Paolo Vergerio* (1401) had set the tone for a rupture with the past by speaking in 'the voice of a peculiarly modern consciousness'.³² This trend continued with his *Cicero Novus* (New Cicero) (1415), *Commentary* (1419), and *Del Bello Italico* (1441). In these works, Bruni mainly based

his accounts on the classical sources so much that they were often regarded as translations rather than original histories. However, it is important to realize that he himself considered history as a form of translation, but of a kind in which many sources were used with freedom. His historical writings may be considered as 'textual montage'.³³ He regarded history as a literary genre that could be best presented as a narrative and whose purpose was didactic and patriotic. He was the first historian to make a three-phase division of human history—antiquity, Middle Ages, and the modern period. This idea had originated with Petrarch who had distinguished the classical period from the later decline, but it was Bruni who historicized it.

Flavio Biondo (1392–1463)

Biondo is reputed both as a historian and an antiquarian. Historians during this period were generally defined as scholars who constructed some form of rhetorical history that was mostly about political matters. On the other hand, an antiquarian was conceived of as the person who collected mostly non-literary remains of the past and wrote about them generally in a non-analytical manner. In the writings of Biondo, both these scholarly activities combined. With him, a serious scholarly investigation of Roman antiquities started.³⁴ As the main rival of Bruni and his mode of historical representation, Biondo questioned Bruni's method of almost total reliance on ancient historians and generally single sources for writing his histories. Biondo endorsed the 'conjectural model of historical reconstruction' developed by Bruni in his *History*, but which Bruni did not follow in his other works.³⁵ Biondo wrote three books—*Roma Instaurata* (Rome Established) (1443–6), *Roma Triumphant* (Rome Triumphant) (1452–9), and *Italia Illustrata* (Illustrated Italy) (written between 1448 and 1458, published in 1474). The first two books dealt with the monuments and literature of ancient Rome and remained standard works for over a century, while the third was a geography and history of contemporary Italy based on his personal travels through eighteen Italian provinces. Another important work by Biondo was *Decades of History from the Deterioration of the Roman Empire* (written between 1439 and 1453, published in 1483). In this work, he strongly reinforced the idea of a three-fold division of European history. In all these works, Biondo emphasized the 'pastness of the past', and insisted that facts should be separated from legends and myths, and that ancient remains should be studied as historical documents and should not be revered religiously.³⁶

Lorenzo Valla (1407–57)

As one of the most important Italian humanists, Valla's contribution to the development of modern historical method is two-fold—development of text criticism and relatively realistic history-writing. His method of text-criticism was brilliantly brought out in his most remembered work, *Discourse on the Forgery of the Alleged Donation of Constantine* (1440), which supported the campaign launched by his patron, king Alfonso of Aragon, against the papal authorities for the furtherance of his claim on certain Italian territories (see Box 6.1). But the fact that Valla had higher aims in his mind was clear from the first page of this text. He was aware that many would be 'shocked' by what he wrote against, not only temporal but also spiritual, authorities, and would charge him with 'rashness and sacrilege'. But, he said that he was not afraid because 'to give one's life in defense of truth and justice is the path of the highest virtue, the highest honor, the highest reward'.³⁷ He then proceeded to prove, through detailed criticism, that the so-called 'Donation of Constantine', by which large territories in Rome and the whole of the Western Roman Empire were supposed to have been given to the church by Emperor Constantine I in the fourth century, was a fake. It was 'absolutely self-evident' that 'Constantine [did] not grant such great possessions [to] the Roman pontiff'.³⁸ The crucial point that Valla made to discredit this document was that the language used in it belonged to a later period and not to the fourth century when Constantine reigned. It was, therefore, fraudulently created later in the eighth century by church authorities to gain possession of the Western Roman Empire. Valla's minute exercise in text criticism, which established that the language and culture of each age was different, provided great support to modern historical thinking. He was the first to enormously extend the scope of 'classical philology from a narrow preoccupation with the recovery and meaning of classical texts to retrieving and interpreting the whole past through all its surviving traces'.³⁹

At another level, Valla introduced realism in history-writing by including jesters and other common people in his account of the king and the court. Moreover, he argued against the rhetorical tradition by stating that 'I have not recorded what people ought to think, but what they do think'. He asserted that in historical writing 'everything is written with the aim of relating what happened, not of proving a point'.⁴⁰ Although he still followed the ancient Roman historians and accepted principles of rhetoric, Valla developed a personal style of language and, in several aspects, projected himself as different from them by arguing that history should also portray the particular and be true to the reality of the surroundings.

Box 6.1 From Valla's *Discourse on the Forgery of the Alleged Donation of Constantine*

I know that for a long time now men's ears are waiting to hear the offense with which I charge the Roman pontiffs. It is, indeed, an enormous one, due either to supine ignorance, or to gross avarice.... For during some centuries now, either they have not known that the Donation of Constantine is spurious and forged, or else they themselves forged it, and their successors walking in the same way of deceit as their elders have defended as true what they knew to be false.... They say the city of Rome is theirs, theirs the kingdom of Sicily and of Naples, the whole of Italy, the Gauls, the Spains, the Germans, the Britons, indeed the whole West; for all these are contained in the instrument of the Donation itself.

Who ever heard 'tiara' [phrygium] used in Latin? You talk like a barbarian and want it to seem to me to be a speech of Constantine's or of Lactantius'.... You say the 'shoulderband' is a 'strap', and you do not perceive what the strap is, for you do not visualize a leather band, which we call a strap, encircling the Caesar's neck as an ornament. [It is of leather], hence we call harness and whips 'straps': but if ever gold straps are mentioned, it can only be understood as applying to gilt harness such as is put around the neck of a horse or of some other animal. But this has escaped your notice, I think. So when you wish to put a strap around the Caesar's neck, or Sylvester's, you change a man, an Emperor, a supreme pontiff, into a horse or an ass.

'And at the same time all the standards and banners.' What do you understand by 'standards' [signa]? 'Signa' are either statues (... for the ancients did not paint on walls, but on tablets) or military standards.... In the former sense small statues and sculptures are called 'sigilla'. Now then, did Constantine give Sylvester his statues or his eagles? What could be more absurd? But what 'banners' may signify, I do not discover. May God destroy you, most depraved of mortals who attribute barbarous language to a cultured age! ... And what is this 'glory'? Would a Latin have called pomp and paraphernalia 'glory', as is customary in the Hebrew language? And instead of 'soldiers' [milites] you say soldiery [militia] which we have borrowed from the Hebrews, whose books neither Constantine nor his secretaries had ever laid eyes on! ... Does not that barbarous way of talking show that the rigmarole was composed, not in the age of Constantine, but later.... Boors commonly speak and write that way now. (Valla 1922: 25–27, 93, 107, 111, 121)

Thus, Valla added diversity and relativism to the humanism and individualism of Renaissance thought. For him, philological criticism was a means to understand that each culture had its own particularity, the historical process was irreversible, and classical sources should be interpreted on their own terms.⁴¹

Francesco Guicciardini (1483–1540)

A contemporary and critic of Machiavelli, Guicciardini also belonged to that generation of historians who witnessed the political decline of Italian

states. His writings reveal the influence of the events in the aftermath of the French invasion of Italy, which witnessed turmoil in the beginning of the sixteenth century.⁴² His most famous work *History of Italy* (1561), covering events from the first French invasion in 1494 to the death of Pope Clement VII in 1534, is regarded as an important advance in Renaissance historical scholarship, especially in its scrupulously critical use of sources. Immediately after its posthumous appearance in 1561, it was elevated to the rank of a masterpiece and the author was compared to the great historians of Roman antiquity, the greatest honour for a Renaissance historian. It was also praised as the greatest work of Italian humanist historiography.⁴³

Guicciardini, like Machiavelli, also believed that 'the world has always been the same', and this makes the future predictable. Nevertheless, his general insistence was that despite the underlying uniformity, the manifestations were so varied, deceptive, and uncertain that 'even the wisest of men is fooled when he tries to predict it'.⁴⁴ He also moved away from the Renaissance's infectious enthusiasm for the ancient Roman writers: 'How wrong it is to cite the Romans at every turn. For any comparison to be valid, it would be necessary to have a city like theirs and then to govern it according to their example.' Moreover, 'one should not praise antiquity so far that one condemns all modern uses which were not current with the Romans, for experience has revealed many things not thought of by the ancients'.⁴⁵ The scepticism about uniform human nature and cyclical historical movement emphasized some sort of historicism in Guicciardini's thought. His assertion of relative independence from humanist historiography can also be found in his doubt about the educational value of history: the characters in his *History* were mean and petty, without any generosity, without any value to serve as good examples. Even more importantly, in his use of sources, he advanced, from the usual humanist method of using one source at a time, to using a variety of sources, including family records. He tried to explain the events rationally placing them in their comprehensive context. In totality, while he was still a historian in the humanist framework, in several respects, he made significant departures in terms of ideas and method.⁴⁶

LIMITATIONS OF ITALIAN HUMANIST HISTORIOGRAPHY

Humanist historiography in Italy played the most crucial role in initiating modern historiography. However, it faced several constraints. These are as follows:

1. To begin with, Renaissance historiography suffered from a 'crisis of content'. The subject matter chosen by humanist historians was restricted to political and military affairs. Moreover, they held the belief that they could only write on topics not covered by any previous qualified historian. Thus, Bruni did not touch upon the banking and manufacturing activities in Florence and Machiavelli ignored the details of the wars written about by Bruni.⁴⁷ In addition to that humanist historiography usually sidelined related scholarly activities such as biographical writings, antiquarian activities, and sacred history, which might have supplied additional subjects.
2. Most historians, particularly in the fifteenth century, relied upon the authority of a single 'original source', which, in their case, would be one of the ancient Roman historians whose authority they would almost totally accept. It was mainly with Guicciardini that multiple sources were consulted for history-writing.
3. The general humanist belief in a relatively unchanging human nature restricted the scope of relativism that was evident in their works. Moreover, an acceptance of a recurring cycle of events circumscribed the notion of linear change. Thus, throughout the Renaissance, both the linear and cyclical views of history coexisted uneasily.
4. Similarly, despite having broken new grounds on the issues of secularism, realism, and individualism, the humanists did not go far because their world view was still under the influence of medieval ideas. Most Renaissance historians believed in the view of history as a branch of rhetoric, and valued form over facts, grammar over substance, and faith in ancient authorities over empirical investigation.
5. The need of historians for the patronage from the wealthy and powerful obliged them to respect the wishes of their patrons by presenting the latter's ancestors in a favourable light, by not taking an extreme position on religious issues, and by broadly agreeing to the needs of the regime. Even in more liberal states, historians and other scholars could be harassed for offending the rich and the powerful.

BEYOND ITALIAN RENAISSANCE

Emanating from Italy, the influence of humanist historiography was felt in other areas of Europe. In the 1480s and 1490s, some among the French intellectual elite got interested in the new genre of history practiced in Italy. Robert Gaguin (1433–1501) wrote his *Origin and Deeds of the French* (1488) on the Italian model. In England also, Italian humanist

scholarship influenced the work of Thomas More (1478–1535), who wrote the *History of Richard III* (1513), probably the first historical work in England bearing the marks of humanist historiography. Later, the Italian humanist Polydore Vergil (1470–1555), who has arrived in England in 1501, wrote a sympathetic history of England, published in 1534. His critical approach and style resembled that of Bruni. He commended the instructional role of history ‘because it informeth all sorts of people, with notable examples of living’, encouraged people to do noble deeds, and discouraged ‘wicked persons from attempting of any heinous deeds or crime’ as they knew that they would face perpetual reproach for that.⁴⁸ One of his lasting contributions was to demolish the national mythical view of the Trojan origins of the English people.⁴⁹ In Spain, Juan Luis Vives (1492–1540) was a well-known humanist who, in his encyclopedia, praised all kinds of history which, he believed, should be accorded a high status.⁵⁰ Similarly, humanist scholarship penetrated Germany, certain regions of Eastern Europe, and spread even across the Atlantic where the Europeans had begun their settlements.

Reformation

Donald Kelley has pointed out that ‘if the sense of history in general was the product of Renaissance humanism, the specific forms and interpretations of history were shaped in particular by the upheavals of the Reformation and by national rivalries’.⁵¹ The Reformation was a process of revolt against the Catholic church. It began when Martin Luther (1483–1546) published *The Ninety-five Theses* in 1517, and established Protestantism as a major branch of Christianity. The leaders of the Reformation criticized the Roman Catholic church for not adhering to the original doctrine of Christianity. Lorenzo Valla’s famous detection of forgery in the church’s document had influenced Luther’s understanding of the church. The Reformation played a significant role in shaping the Western notion of history. Its ideologues derived from the Renaissance conception of history in their urge to go back to the original sources, but they also opposed what they considered as the pagan implications of the Renaissance’s view of the past. Their call for a return to the Bible and the early Christianity gave impetus to a certain kind of historical research that attempted to prove the Protestant position by referring to history. Martin Luther, Martin Bucer (1491–1551), Jean Calvin (1509–64), John Foxe (1516–87), and other Protestant leaders emphasized the moral and practical relevance of history. Luther endorsed the Renaissance view of history as useful and exemplary. He considered

historians as ‘the most useful people and the best teachers’. But, according to him, ‘histories are nothing else than a demonstration, recollection, and sign of divine action and judgment’. They only show how God ‘upholds, rules, obstructs, prospers, punishes, and honors the world’. However, since most historians wrote in praise of their respective kings, countries, and friends, they produced ‘unreliable’ histories in which ‘God’s work is shamefully obscured’, as the Greeks did before and the pope’s flatterers were doing now. In order to avoid such partiality, Luther recommended that history ‘should therefore indeed be written with the very greatest diligence, honesty, and truthfulness’.⁵²

The impact of the Reformation on history was both direct and indirect. The search for a ‘pure’ Christian tradition unsullied by the accretions of the Catholic church prompted the followers of Martin Luther to delve into history. Moreover, hordes of manuscripts and books from the dissolved religious houses became available, most of which then found their way into individual libraries or the newly opened Protestant universities.⁵³ The attention of many critical historians was now directed away from the histories of kings and territories to the histories of institutions and ideas, as the history of the church and Christianity became the focus. A group of Lutheran scholars, inspired and headed by Matthias Flacius Illyricus (1520–75), compiled an entirely original work, known as *Magdeburg Centuries*, which presented the development of the church and its doctrines century by century. This enterprise began in the 1550s, and the group came to be known as Magdeburg Centuriators for their emphasis on periods divided in centuries. Flacius Illyricus collected a vast amount of material himself and with the help of his friends. Although the process was started for religious purposes, their meticulous collection and method of work were exemplary. Such an effort was unprecedented and its rigour was such that it still remains a reliable document.⁵⁴ One of its important contributions was its thorough indexing for the benefit of the readers. It also created a network of religious scholars closely interested in history and willing to contribute. However, despite its crucial contribution to the growth of the study of the past, history-writing induced by the Reformation remained largely restricted to theological issues.

The Catholic side also tried to justify its position through historical scholarship, and as the contest developed, increasingly more attention was given to method to point out the deficiencies of the other side.⁵⁵ A huge endeavor to collect data was started around 1588 by the Catholic church historians, and gradually it helped in extending the reach of church history to various parts of Europe. A detailed answer to Flacius’s *Centuries* was given in the form of *Ecclesiastical Annales* (1588–1607) by Cesare

Baronio (1538–1607), which put forward the Catholic church's version of history. Baronio claimed that he spent thirty years researching for the volumes and had cited his sources accurately. Thus, ecclesiastical histories, in all their contestations since the mid-sixteenth century, contributed immensely to the great erudite historiography of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries in particular, and to the development of historiography in general.

Law and History: Historians during the French Renaissance

Another important development was taking place in France, which fused historiography with the field of law. The Renaissance historiography in France in the sixteenth century attempted to overcome some of the limitations of Italian humanist historiography by introducing new historical ideas. An appreciation of the past and the desire to narrate the past events more exactly was an important but not a sufficient condition for the growth of modern historiography. Renaissance thinkers had self-consciously tried to refer to the ancient past for inspiration. But by neglecting and denigrating the Middle Ages, they often thought in terms of reviving antiquity. The French legal humanists of the sixteenth century introduced nuances by questioning the undisputed authority, nobility, and superiority of the ancients.

The Italian humanist, Lorenzo Valla, was one of the founders of legal humanism and his work on Roman law provided the ground for it. The main aim of legal humanism was to restore the 'pristine splendor' of Roman law by purging it of medieval accretions.⁵⁶ Some French scholars—Guillaume Budé (1467–1540), Andrea Alciato (1492–1550), who was born in Italy but settled in France in the early sixteenth century, Louis Le Roy (c. 1510–77), Jacques Cujas (1520–90), François Baudouin (1520–73), François Hotman (1524–90), Jean Bodin (1530–96), and Etienne Pasquier (1529–1615)—worked hard to uncover the original language and substance of ancient Greek and Roman laws as well as their differences from laws in modern states. Some of them also wrote excellent histories. Baudouin was the period's greatest historian of Roman law, and Pasquier's *Researches on France* (1560) was highly regarded as a remarkable book. It discussed a variety of subjects including church, religion, law, language, and politics. These scholars emphasized on the different roles that law played in ancient times and in their contemporary period. Patriotic arguments were given to assert that France was not under Roman tutelage and that modern French monarchy was not created or based on Roman laws, which were now considered irrelevant for the

modern states. It was also argued that the laws varied not only in terms of geography but also historically. They were created 'according to the seasons and mutations of manners and conditions of a people',⁵⁷ and 'all law is the product of history'.⁵⁸ The idea of individuality, already a part of Italian humanism, was asserted sharply to make a claim for the distinctness of law and culture in time and space.

Another thing that was emphasized, which Valla had done earlier, was the mutability of language.⁵⁹ Moreover, in the eyes of some of the French historians of the sixteenth century, the venerated ancient historians such as Herodotus, Livy, and Polybius became suspect because of their narrow and partisan perspectives. So, instead of accepting them as models, there was a growing tendency to reduce them to the status of primary sources. In fact, *another contribution made by some French historians of this period was the tentative distinction between the primary and secondary sources, made fully operative by Ranke in the nineteenth century*.⁶⁰ History's engagement with law in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries equipped it with enduring terminology such as 'evidence', 'proof', 'testimony', 'witness', and the historian as 'judge'. The French 'historical school of law' made significant contributions to modern historical thinking. Here we will discuss two important historical thinkers of sixteenth-century France to understand these ideas more clearly.

Jean Bodin (1530–96)

Bodin was a jurist, a renowned political philosopher, and a major writer on the historical method. His *Methodus ad Facilem Historiarum Cognitionem (Method for the Easy Knowledge of History)* (1566) is regarded as a major work of historical thought. Even in his own times, he was famous across Europe not only as the writer of the *Republic* (1576) but also as a thinker of *ars historica* (the art of history). In Bodin's work, there is an attempt to synthesize contradictory streams of thought—Platonist idealism and Aristotelian empiricism, universalist principles and individual particularism, philosophy and theology, deductive and inductive methods, and humanism and law. In this sense, Bodin is comparable to the later great synthesizers such as Bacon and Vico.⁶¹ Among all the streams of knowledge, he accorded the highest place to history (see Box 6.2). His important ideas are as follows:

1. Bodin rejected the cyclical conception of history combined with the degeneration of humankind that derived from the prophecy of Daniel contained in the Hebrew Bible. He contested this idea of decline,

and stated that in the most ancient period, the so-called Age of Gold, 'men lived dispersed in the fields and forests like beasts and had no private property', except what 'they could keep by brute force and crime'. It was after a long time that they came out of 'this savage and barbarous way of life', and got used to 'civilized behaviour and to a well-regulated society such as we have at present'.⁶² Bodin broadly advocated the idea of a gradual progress through time. He argued that the idea of decline from a golden age in the remote past was absurd. The ancient past was not all enlightened but ignorant and brutish. How could an age that had no knowledge of print and clock be said to be more advanced than the one that possessed them? He also introduced the idea of climate and geography as determining factors in human existence. Although the notion of decline was not completely forsaken and his notion of human progress may not be as bold as that of later thinkers, he made a beginning in this direction by rejecting the theory of degeneration and by claiming that his own age was not inferior to antiquity.

2. Bodin criticized the rhetorical tradition so praised by the early humanists by arguing that 'it is practically an impossibility for the man who writes to give pleasure, to impart the truth of the matter also'.⁶³ He further stated that in order to be objective, a historian should not write about his own country. The reliability of historical source material should also be checked by various methods already developed by early Renaissance historians.⁶⁴
3. He differentiated between three realms of reality, 'human, natural, and divine', which give rise to three kinds of history, 'probable, inevitable, and holy' respectively. This distinction was important in view of the fact that, later, a similar distinction was more comprehensively made by Vico, who integrated it with his transformative ideas about history.⁶⁵
4. Bodin urged historians to consider the histories of the countries away from the Graeco-Roman axis. For him, the histories of the Americas, Asia, and Africa were also important. The expansion of knowledge gathered by conquerors, traders, and travellers had brought the non-European territories to European attention.
5. He advocated an early form of historicism when he argued that the works of the writers of the ancient period should be read by considering the constraints prevailing in those times; they should not be condemned from a modern viewpoint. In this respect, he preached a 'tolerant historicism' that asked for a context-specific explanation.

Box 6.2 Some of Bodin's Ideas about History and Historians

Although history has many eulogists, who have adorned her with honest and fitting praises, yet among them no one has commended her more truthfully and appropriately than the man who called her the 'master of life'. This designation, which implies all the adornments of all virtues and disciplines, means that the whole life of man ought to be shaped according to the sacred laws of history.

This, then, is the greatest benefit of historical books, that some men, at least, can be incited to virtue and others can be frightened away from vice ...

Of History, that is, the true narration of things, there are three kinds: human, natural, and divine. The first concerns man; the second, nature; the third, the Father of nature. One depicts the acts of man while leading his life in the midst of society. The second reveals causes hidden in nature and explains their development from earliest beginnings. The last records the strength and power of Almighty God and of the immortal souls, set apart from all else. In accordance with these divisions arise history's three accepted manifestations—it is probable, inevitable, and holy—and the same number of virtues are associated with it, that is to say, prudence, knowledge, and faith. The first virtue distinguishes base.

There are, then, three kinds of historians, I think: first, those very able by nature, and even more richly endowed by training, who have advanced to the control of affairs; the second group, those who lack education, but not practice or natural gifts; the last is composed of those who, endowed to some extent by nature, lack the experience of practical affairs, yet with incredible enthusiasm and labor in collecting the materials of history have almost brought themselves level with men who have spent all their lives in public affairs.... The best writers are fully equipped on all three counts, if only they could rid themselves of all emotion in writing history. (Kelley 1991: 382, 383, 385, 388)

Thus, the 'art of history', as conceived by Bodin, 'offered nothing less than a re-evaluation and reconfiguration of time itself—one that rejected predictions ... in favor of interpretation; that effaced the traditional "time maps" ... and that opened up the possibility that human enterprise was changing and improving the world'.⁶⁶ Despite his novel ideas, however, Bodin could not break the mould of Renaissance historiography with respect to its didacticism. For him, the role of history lay in its usefulness in providing proper guidance to society and in instilling virtue in individuals.

La Popelinière (1541–1608)

La Popelinière was a French Protestant writer whose works on history represented a significant achievement of the new historical thinking in sixteenth-century France. His *History of France* (1571) invited the wrath of the Protestant sect, Huguenot, of which he was a member. This book

underlined the impartiality and objectivity of his approach to history. Despite the threat by the concerned parties, he further emphasized his belief in objectivity in his trilogy published in 1599—*History of Histories*, *Idea of Perfect History*, and *Outline for a New History of France*. He believed that the 'historian ought to be obligated to no man, fearless, impervious to despair or hope, to gain or loss, a citizen of all countries, an equitable judge of all persons, and content to await the verdict of a dispassionate posterity'.⁶⁷ His objectivity was displayed when in his account of the religious wars, he coolly described inhuman atrocities committed by both the sides—the burning of villages, plunder, killings, and rape were all portrayed without any heed to his own religious persuasion. He insisted that 'historical writing ought to be non-partisan and that history ought to be as free as possible of theological restrictions'. This was a forceful statement against the use of history for religious polemic.⁶⁸

In opposition to the Renaissance mode of thinking, La Popelinière showed no respect for the authority of the ancient historians. He condemned Greek historians for writing 'local history' on the basis of their 'superficial researches' and he criticized Roman historians for their intense focus on rulers, which reduced much of their writing into official propaganda. He was clearly of the view that the ideal of the historian should be 'to tell what actually happened'. But this was not possible due to the subjectivity of the writer who tended to narrate the past 'not according to former times and customs, but according to the age in which the writer lives'. Thus what a historian should strive for was to reach as close to the reality as possible. It could be done by relying upon witnesses. But even then a 'perfect history' was not possible and a historian's achievements should be judged by how often he/she hit the target.⁶⁹

The Renaissance was an intellectual movement that praised the thoughts, institutions, and culture of the antiquity, particularly the Roman antiquity, as against medieval ways of thinking. It arose in the political and institutional setting of Italy in the fourteenth century, gained momentum in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and lasted until the beginning of the seventeenth century. Besides new and spectacular achievements in the fields of painting, sculpture, architecture, and literature, it also stimulated novel ideas in historiography. It was during this period that modern historical scholarship began and developed. The form of historiography that emerged during the Renaissance has been termed as 'humanist historiography'. Initially, humanist historiography was based on ancient models and in most cases, historians chose a single text of a Roman historian

as their source. Soon, however, the source base of historians widened to include several texts and sometimes, as in the case of antiquarians, even the physical remains of the past. Such historical scholarship may be found in Flavio Biondo, but more significantly in Guicciardini, who developed it into his method. Another major achievement of humanist historiography was the development of text criticism, particularly in relation to historical sources, to determine whether a particular source belonged to a specified age. The pioneer of this methodology was Lorenzo Valla whose contribution to the development of later historical method is immense. One of his followers, Angelo Poliziano (1454–94), refined and generalized this approach by arguing that the earliest version of a text was the most authoritative one. This incipient idea of the 'original source' became well known by the mid-sixteenth century.⁷⁰ The humanist movement spread to other regions of Europe and, in conjunction with region-specific ideological predilections, spawned newer ways of thinking. It was ably supported by chroniclers, antiquarians, and jurists who emphasized the specific over the general, and who foregrounded the sense of historicity, the importance of impartiality and objectivity, the need to find the 'truth' of history, and the significance of distinguishing between different regions, cultures, and periods. The medieval conception of cyclicity was challenged and the notion of linear, phased change was tentatively introduced. The idea of progress was also gradually put forward. The idea of centrality of 'man' began to replace centrality of God in human affairs. Humanism, secularism, individualism, and realism were the new ideas that made their appearance and gradual progress during this period. Renaissance historiography cannot be said to have anticipated all the ideas of modern historiography, but impressive beginnings were made. However, there were certain crucial things that had continued in terms of theory and method. The idea of a cyclical history with degenerative tendencies was not fully abandoned, nor was the separation between human and divine taken to its logical conclusion. The objectivity of historical practice was asserted but its methodological foundations were still incipient.

NOTES

- Burke 2002: 15–28. The following outline is mostly based on Peter Burke's '10 Theses' with certain modifications. Burke calls these features as characteristics of Western historiography in general since the time of the ancient Greeks. However, as Georg Iggers points out, these features developed in the modern period rather than being always present in Western historiography. See Iggers 2002: 99–109 and Iggers and Wang 2010: 22.
- Burke 1976: 137.

3. Iggers 1965.
4. Carr 2008: 87.
5. Findlen 2002: 100.
6. In late antiquity in Europe, the realm of higher learning consisted of seven liberal arts—grammar, rhetoric, logic, arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy.
7. Findlen 2002: 101–2; Kelley 1991: 218–19.
8. Garner 1990: 51–2.
9. Kristeller 1947: 93.
10. Kristeller 1962: 2.
11. Burke 1986: 23.
12. Burke 1986: 25.
13. Burke 1986: 19–21.
14. Campana 1946.
15. Breisach 1994: 153–9.
16. Noth 1987: 29.
17. J.W. Johnson 1962.
18. Cochrane 1981a: 9.
19. Breisach 1994: 145.
20. Cochrane 1981a: 14; Grafton 1994: 57.
21. Avis 1986: 12–13.
22. Avis 1986: 10.
23. Cochrane 1980: 26.
24. Breisach 1994: 160.
25. Quint 1985: 423.
26. Woolf 2011: 183–4.
27. Findlen 2002: 111.
28. See Nadel 1964.
29. Cochrane 1981b: 52, 54.
30. Cited in Woolf 2011: 186.
31. Ianziti 1998: 367.
32. Quint 1985: 445.
33. Ianziti 1998: 379.
34. Cochrane 1981a: 38.
35. Ianziti 1998: 385–8.
36. Cochrane 1981a: 38.
37. Valla 1922: 21–23.
38. Valla 1922: 177.
39. Levine 2004: xi.
40. Cited in Avis 1986: 14–15.
41. Avis 1986: 15.
42. Cochrane 1981a: 172–7.
43. Cochrane 1981a: 304–5.
44. Guicciardini cited in Avis 1986: 47.
45. Cited in Avis 1986: 48.
46. Avis 1986: 48–51.
47. Cochrane 1980: 28.
48. Given in Kelley 1991: 255.
49. Grafton 1999: 129–30.
50. Kelley 1991: 257.
51. Kelley 1970: 11.
52. Luther given in Kelley 1991: 315–16.
53. Avis 1986: 20.
54. Hay 1977: 123; Grafton 2007: 107–8.
55. Levine 2004: xvii.
56. Kelley 1966; 1970.
57. Kelley 1966: 196.
58. Huppert 1966: 51.
59. Kelley 1966: 196.
60. Huppert 1966: 53.
61. Avis 1986: 52.
62. Huppert 1966: 57.
63. Cited in Soll 2003: 300.
64. Soll 2003: 301–2.
65. Bodin 1972: 71–2; and Bodin given in Kelley 1991: 380–95.
66. Grafton 2007: 179.
67. Sypher 1963: 45.
68. Sypher 1963: 54.
69. Huppert 1966: 49–50.
70. Findlen 2002: 104.

FURTHER READING

- Burke, Peter. 1969. *The Renaissance Sense of the Past*. New York: St. Martin Press.
- Cochrane, Eric. 1981a. *Historians and Historiography in the Italian Renaissance*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press.

7

DECLINE AND RISE OF HISTORY SEVENTEENTH AND EARLY EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

MODERN WESTERN HISTORIOGRAPHY did not develop in a linearly progressive manner. There were innumerable region-specific variations and several ups and downs. Even a broadly uniform pattern is not always visible. Moreover, the changing intellectual tastes affected mostly the elite and not even all of them. The attempt here is to trace the most important of those trends which contributed to the making of modern historiography in the long run, even though many of them might not have influenced the historical thinking of their contemporaries. Vico is the most glaring example of this but there were others as well.

In the seventeenth century two great intellectual movements gathered momentum and almost completely unsettled the previous modes of thinking. These were the rise of modern science and the rise of modern philosophy. Both profoundly affected historical thought and practice. Another, though less important, development was scepticism or Pyrrhonism, which questioned the reliability of historical knowledge. Faced with these challenges, the writing of history, which realized such tremendous flowering in the Renaissance period, witnessed a decline in the seventeenth century. In this chapter we will briefly discuss these developments before discussing how historical scholarship coped with the enormous challenges posed by them.

RISE AND GROWTH OF MODERN SCIENCE

The spectacular developments in the area of science that took place from the mid-sixteenth century until the end of the seventeenth century

have been designated as the 'Scientific Revolution' by philosophers and historians of science. This view may be traced to Immanuel Kant in the late eighteenth century and Auguste Comte in the early nineteenth. But it was Ernst Mach (1838–1916) who forcefully outlined a thesis of radical discontinuity occurring in the seventeenth century, particularly when Galileo shifted from the theory of impetus as the cause of motion to the law of inertial motion. In this dominant account of modern science, 'four great men' changed the entire course of science and, through its wide-ranging influence, swept away all traces of medievalism from the mental landscape of the educated Europe. The first breakthrough came in the form of an astronomical treatise, *On the Revolutions of the Celestial Spheres* (1543) by Nicolaus Copernicus (1473–1543), a Polish Catholic priest of quite orthodox views. He put forward the hypothesis that the sun was at the centre of the universe and the earth rotated around the sun. This view was diametrically opposed to the Aristotelian and Ptolemaic view of astronomy adopted by the medieval church, which professed that the earth was stationary and the sun and the planets revolved around it. Copernicus' views were further developed by Johannes Kepler (1571–1630), a German mathematician and astronomer, who discovered the three laws of planetary motion in his publications from 1609 to 1619. Next was Galileo Galilei (1564–1642), who is considered among the greatest figures of the modern science. His great original achievements lay both in the fields of astronomy and physics. He was the first to formulate the laws of dynamics. His contribution was a mechanical view of nature, which displaced Aristotelian cosmology. The final triumph of science was achieved by Isaac Newton (1642–1727), who finalized the famous laws of motion and laws of gravitation besides contributing greatly as an astronomer, mathematician, and natural philosopher. Through the Newtonian grand synthesis in the *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* (Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy, 1687), modern science had arrived and the 'triumph was so complete that Newton was in danger of becoming another Aristotle'.¹ Because of modern science, Bertrand Russell asserts, the 'modern world, so far as mental outlook is concerned, begins in the seventeenth century'. By the end of the seventeenth century 'the outlook of the educated men was completely transformed'. Witchcraft, magic, sorcery, and animism all vanished. In 1600, the Western world was still medieval; in 1700, it was completely modern.²

This narrative of a sudden break has been questioned by many historians of science. Even among some proponents of the 'revolution' thesis, there is a realization that it occurred over a much longer period. Moreover, the new science did not develop in a social, political, and

ideological vacuum, but was influenced by cognate developments. Alexandre Koyre, who is credited with coining the term 'Scientific Revolution' and who had earlier believed in an abrupt break, argued later that the scientific and philosophical revolutions cannot be separated as they were part of the same process that resulted in the 'destruction of the Cosmos', which meant that the concept of the world as a 'finite, closed and hierarchically whole' was replaced by the concept of an infinite universe operative through certain laws and in which there was no hierarchy. This had revolutionary implications for society, where it now became possible to distinguish between facts and values, and to envisage a 'scientific' basis of equality.³ But this did not happen in a sudden burst, 'the heavenly spheres that encompassed the world and held it together did not disappear at once in a mighty explosion; the world bubble grew and swelled before bursting and merging with the space that surrounded it'.⁴ There were three major elements in this process—(a) the rise and growth of new astronomy that shifted from the Ptolemaic geocentric and geostatic system to the heliocentric system proposed by Copernicus and developed by Kepler and Galileo (that is, the shift from the theory that all the planets revolve around a stationary earth to the theory that the sun was in the centre); (b) the development of astronomy and physics from Copernicus to Newton; and (c) the growing trend towards the mathematization of nature and emphasis on experiment and theory. Another revolutionary development was the slow disappearance of God from the universe. Although Newton still needed God to run this vast machine, Laplace, about a century later, 'did not need this hypothesis' to describe his conception of the universe.⁵ Herbert Butterfield also takes a long-term view and traces the origins of modern science to the late medieval era when a certain change in mental attitude was taking place. He, however, affirms the emergence of 'what contemporaries clearly recognized as a scientific revolution'.⁶ Writers, such as Butterfield, Koyre, and A.R. Hall accept the existence of a core revolution occurring in the seventeenth century within a much larger span of revolutionary developments in astronomy and mechanics from the fourteenth to the eighteenth centuries.

Now there has been a very significant challenge to this view also. According to Steven Shapin, 'there was no such thing as the Scientific Revolution' and 'there was no such thing as a necessary seventeenth-century conflict between science and religion'.⁷ Most of the radical shifts occurred in the name of purifying religion. Scientists and natural philosophers did not pose science and religion in opposition to each other. They tried their best to remain religious in their personal lives and to explain their new discoveries in terms of past theories. They also wished to

use their discoveries to purge pure religion of superstitious attachments. Moreover, there were generally attempts to bring in God 'at the most fundamental levels' to explain the workings of the universe. The 'final cause' of a phenomenon was generally supposed to be some supernatural power.⁸ Thus, non-secular and non-mechanical elements were inherent in the causal structure of seventeenth-century mechanical philosophy.⁹ The 'great paradox' that was put at the heart of modern science in the seventeenth-century was that 'the more a body of knowledge is understood to be objective and disinterested, the more valuable it is as a tool in moral and political action'.¹⁰ Thus, the celebrated separation between objectivity and value did not take place. In fact, the association between objectivity and value was reinforced and restructured. So, the term 'revolution' did not fit at all to these developments as it took far too long, anything from 150 to 500 years, for various processes to be complete in many areas of sciences. The break with traditional views, even among scientists, did not occur until quite late. And even the heroes of the 'revolution', most notably Newton, were preoccupied with alchemy and theology. Among the historians of science, such revisionist views have now become quite common.¹¹

It is imperative to mention that a historical view characterized by either a radical break or complete continuity is not a plausible idea. And it is important to see how contemporaries and immediate successors received the innovations in the sciences. The idea that something momentous and unprecedented was happening in the field of knowledge has been there since the seventeenth century. In fact, the intelligentsia of the period was more optimistic and exuberant about the potentiality and actuality of the developments in sciences. Even the term 'revolution' was not unknown in the seventeenth century with regard to the changes in intellectual life. The view that science was transforming society was held even by poets like John Dryden who exulted about its achievements in 1668 and claimed that 'nothing spreads more fast than Science, when rightly and generally cultivated'.¹² Despite their profession of faith, the general tendency among natural philosophers (as scientists were known) in the seventeenth century 'was to reject the legitimacy within natural philosophy of explicitly theological, moral and political considerations'.¹³ Most practitioners believed that a factually grounded and experimental approach would lead to certainty and to an understanding of nature's underlying causal structure. Particularly during the eighteenth century, there was all-round enthusiasm among the educated elite in many Western countries to proclaim that their thinking was 'scientific'. There were important scientific societies in England and France since the late seventeenth century. By the

1780s, it became quite fashionable to talk about a 'revolution in science'. The Enlightenment philosophers eagerly adopted the secular and progressive views of science that fitted well with their own ideas. It may well be argued that a scientific revolution was constructed in the eighteenth century. It was not the emergence of new science that unilaterally changed the way people thought; it was rather the way in which new developments in sciences were appropriated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to construct a radically different view of world.¹⁴ What is, therefore, important for us is that among contemporary intellectuals, many believed that they were witnessing, and sometimes participating in, revolutionary changes in knowledge and method, and that they also should align their intellectual practices to those in sciences.

FOUNDATIONS OF MODERN PHILOSOPHY

The seventeenth century is also credited with the development of modern philosophy. It was during this period that the two great philosophical systems—rationalism and empiricism—were established. Both had enormous, though opposing impacts on the development of historical scholarship. The basic differences between them were as follows: (a) rationalists believed that our most significant ideas are innate in the human mind that may serve as the basis of creating a system of knowledge, while empiricists believe that our sense experiences are the ultimate source of all knowledge; and (b) rationalists argued for the deductive method, which means that our conclusions are derived from some general proposition or hypotheses. If these hypotheses or premises are true then the conclusions that follow must also be true. On the other hand, the inductive method, which the empiricists followed, formulated a general law or principle from observation and experience. It puts stress on the probability of truth. In this, even if the premise is true the conclusion may be false. The two modes of reasoning may not necessarily be opposed to each other. However, in seventeenth-century thinking, these were conceived as opposites. Another development was the resurgence of scepticism, which questioned the possibility of knowing truth in general and historical truth in particular.

Rationalism¹⁵

Rationalism is the view that reason, and not experience, is the source of knowledge. It gives precedence to reason and intuition over sensory experiences as a better, sometimes the only, way of knowing the truth.

According to it, the ideas are innate in the minds of human beings and one must strive towards certain, and not probable knowledge. The greatest proponents of rationalism in the seventeenth and early eighteenth-century philosophy were René Descartes (1596–1650), Baruch Spinoza (1632–77), and Gottfried Leibniz (1646–1716). Descartes is generally considered as the founder of modern philosophy. He made a radical departure from earlier philosophical tradition by emphasizing on epistemology (theory of knowledge) rather than on ontology (theory of being). In other words, while ontology is concerned with studying and conceptualizing the essential nature of God, the world, and humans, epistemology is concerned with a critical analysis of the conditions of knowing. And here Descartes introduced the method of critical doubt by asking the question: how do I know that a particular thing is true? This made epistemology and methodology the centre of attention. But doubting was not the end in itself. The method of doubting was for Descartes the way to reach uncontrollable truth that might prove to be an axiom. And this was to provide the foundation of the system of knowledge that he wished to create.

Descartes started by doubting everything systematically. One by one, he demolished the traditional notions about the world and nature. This enabled him to unload the inherited cultural and intellectual baggage. After this radical rejection, he wished to make a fresh start. From radical doubt he wished to reach complete certainty. This new beginning was predicated upon the discovery of an idea that could not be doubted. He narrowed down to one idea which he thought was beyond doubt—the fact of his existence. 'I think therefore I am' (*cogito ergo sum*) is the famous Cartesian declaration of truth. But he had to find other similarly clear and distinct ideas so that he could proceed to construct his own system. These he found in mathematics, particularly in geometry, which contained the ideal of certainty reachable through the application of reason. These unassailable axioms would then create the *foundation* of a rational system of thought. Thus, Descartes' *Discourse on Method* (1637) effected a break from earlier philosophy by emphasizing on epistemology, by pursuing a methodology of critical doubt, and finally by providing a foundationalist theory of truth.

Descartes had a very lowly view of history as a form of knowledge. His disparaging remark that Cicero's maid knew more about her contemporary world than all the modern historians writing on that period may be extreme, but even his relatively restrained analysis dubbed historians as travellers who were more concerned about the past (the foreign land) than about issues in the present (their own country). Historians, therefore, were escapists. Second, he asserted that historical writings could never present a truthful picture of the past and, therefore, they would be useless in the

present. Finally, due to the confused and fantastic representation of the past and its truth, history was only capable of amusing readers. Among his followers Nicholas Malebranche (1638–1715) takes this critique even further. For him, historical knowledge could not be demonstrated nor be subjected to experiment. He severely criticized the antiquarian researches for their moral neutrality and considered that the study of genealogy, chronology, the languages, and the lives of the ancients are lost labour because their truth is questionable and their use in the present is unclear.

Despite its strongly anti-historical views, however, Cartesian philosophy stimulated new historical thinking in basically two ways:

1. The method of critical and systematic doubt put all the earlier authorities in question and created the condition whereby independence of ideas from traditional views might be achieved. Moreover, this thorough critique was followed by a thorough reconstruction from a subjective centre. This brought the human consciousness and the idea of an autonomous subject to the centre.
2. Cartesian scepticism towards the possibility of historical knowledge stimulated historians and historical thinkers to look for a solid 'foundation' for historical knowledge and to devise methods to make historical scholarship reliable. Two great thinkers—Pierre Bayle and Giambattista Vico—and a host of practitioners, particularly the antiquarians, laboured to make historical knowledge credible during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

Empiricism

In philosophy, empiricism is generally opposed to rationalism. The word 'empiricism' is derived from the Greek word 'empeiria' which means experience. It argues that all knowledge is based on experience and experience alone is the justification of all knowledge in the world. Experience is produced through sensory perception, which then results in the formation of ideas. Thus, the stimulation for ideas comes from outside and are not innate as rationalists argue. Empiricists believe that the only legitimate form of knowledge is the one whose truth can be verified either through observation or experiment. It is only the perceptible world that can provide the source of genuine knowledge. Empiricists reject the metaphysical, unobservable, and unverifiable modes of knowledge. In the modern period, empiricist philosophy may be said to begin with Francis Bacon (1561–1626), even though he was not a full-fledged empiricist. His greatest contribution is the emphasis on the inductive method, which he believed was the only

scientific method. The major philosophers of this school of thought were John Locke (1632–1704), George Berkeley (1685–1753), and David Hume (1711–76). Empiricism was relatively more supportive of the historical form of knowledge, and Bacon and Hume actually wrote significant histories.¹⁶

Scepticism and Pyrrhonism¹⁶

Both these movements may be traced to ancient Greece, from Socrates to the Pyrrho of Ellis. It refers to a sense of doubt, disbelief, uncertainty, suspension of judgement, and rejection of the certainty of knowledge. It kept recurring throughout the history of thought. However, it was in the seventeenth century that it witnessed a resurgence, particularly in the context of historical knowledge. The religious wars and related partisan historiography, and the radical rejection of history by Descartes and his followers, gave rise in the late seventeenth century to historical Pyrrhonism. La Mothe Le Vayer asserted in a provocative text, *On the Lack of Certainty in History* (1668), that historical knowledge was not reliable. Similarly, Pierre Bayle's *A General Critique of the Maimbourg's History of Calvinism* (1682) emphasized the bias in historical writings by contrasting the views of the Catholics and Protestants. Moreover, his *Historical and Critical Dictionary* (1697–1702) showed a very large number of errors in historical works. Pierre-Daniel Huet, a bishop, was another thoroughgoing sceptic whose posthumous work in 1722 created an intellectual scandal. Even before that the Jesuit scholar, Jean Hardouin, asserted that most of the writings of the fathers of the church, and almost all classical literature, had been forged in the fourteenth century by a group of people known as 'the faction'. In this way, both religious and secular histories came under the scanner. Apart from problems of bias and reliance on hearsay, legends, and mythical accounts, there was the terrible problem of forgery. Besides the famous document of the Donation of Constantine, several other valuable documents were found to be forgeries. The trend of deep scepticism threatened to produce a severe crisis of historical knowledge by the end of the seventeenth century.

HISTORIOGRAPHY DURING THIS PERIOD

The early seventeenth century was in several ways a continuation of the late sixteenth century. In France, the intellectual impetus generated by the combination of law and history continued. In England also the humanist imperative was quite marked even though some new directions

were being explored. Another important consideration was the political and religious censorship practised almost everywhere in Europe that constrained historians from expressing their frank thoughts and doing objective research, particularly in matters concerning the ruling powers and the respective churches. In many instances, it forced historians to delay the publication, and sometimes not to publish their works in their lifetime.

The form of historical scholarship that dominated and captured the title for itself was mainly a form of rhetorical history. It was concerned with big things—interrelationship between humans, between humans and nature, between societies and cultures, and between nations. It also emphasized historical explanation, particularly in terms of causes. It is this form of history which was called proper history. Right since the Renaissance, a distinction was made between *narrative* or *rhetorical history* concerned with political events presented mostly in a linear manner and *antiquarianism*, which took into consideration topography, literature, philosophy, and physical remains like monuments. Increasingly, the differences between the historians and antiquarians grew wider. This division downgraded a very large amount of work (known variously as chronicles, chronologies, and antiquarian scholarship) that supported and sustained historical scholarship by collecting empirical data. The fact that these scholars also did not consider themselves as historians reinforced the tendency to push their works outside the domain of history. However, their contribution to the development of modern historical scholarship was extremely crucial because they provided it with readymade time sequences, and techniques of collection, comparison, and correlation of historical sources.

The period, as we discussed earlier, did not start on a sanguine note. Descartes' dismissal of the historical form of knowledge and resurgence of Pyrrhonism put historians on the defensive and led to a decline in history-writing. However, there were many significant developments in historical theory and method. In fact, during this period there were more books on historiography and method than on giving a historical account of the past.¹⁷ The challenge faced by historians to prove that the historical form of knowledge was as reliable as any other gave rise to some significant work in this area. Three developments took place: (a) mainstream historiography, although still under humanist influence, began to change; (b) even more important was the intensification of antiquarian scholarship, particularly in France and England; and (c) there was far-reaching advance in historical thought that attempted to effectively answer the doubts raised with regard to history.

Histoire Raisonnée

The waning of Renaissance humanist historiography led to the development of 'baroque' historiography in Italy. In England, some universal histories were written. But it was in France that more serious developments took place. A new type of historiography developed in France which was known as '*histoire raisonnée*' (reasoned history). It was a 'transitional genre' created during 1660–1720 by historians who occupied the middle space between the Renaissance idea of history as art and the Enlightenment idea of history as science. Among these historians were Pierre Le Moyné (1602–71), Francois Faure (1612–87), Abbe de Saint-Real (1639–92), Pere Gabriel Daniel (1649–1728), and Isaac de Larrey (1638–1729). Although they, in many cases, followed Renaissance historiography concerned with eloquence, moral teaching, didacticism, and stylistic ornateness, they also valued practical wisdom and impartiality with an emphasis on facts. And although the purpose of history was still to instruct, many of these historians believed that the best way to do this was by presenting straight facts. There was also a growing interest in discussing the nature of truth and reliability of evidence. At least in principle, these historians showed their commitment to historical accuracy. Another important development was an increasing conviction that history was not part of literature or rhetoric, but an autonomous discipline with its own justification. However, the works of these historians differed very much from their precepts. They hardly did any original research on their own, but relied on secondary sources. Even a critical treatment of the sources was rare and they quite often twisted their material to serve the purpose of moral instruction.

Antiquarians and Erudites

In the context of historical scholarship, an antiquarian is a person who studied the past in terms of its non-literary physical remains. Unlike historians, who were primarily concerned about written sources, antiquarians devoted attention to monuments, natural remains, and ancient works of art. Arnaldo Momigliano characterizes antiquarianism as an antidote to Pyrrhonism (or scepticism) and argues that it 'meant not only a revolution in taste', but also 'a revolution in historical method'.¹⁸ Antiquarians effectively answered the general scepticism prevalent in the age both in terms of method and collection of sources. Moreover, antiquarianism also inspired an interest in the study of culture,¹⁹ and it was their work that proved to be of lasting value to posterity.

The Renaissance adulation of the classical past greatly stimulated interest in physical remains. Right since the days of Petrarch, innumerable scholars became actively concerned with monuments, inscriptions, and archaeological evidences. In the sixteenth century, antiquarian activities intensified in various areas of Europe. The Reformation also greatly added to these activities. The Catholic scholars in particular paid increasing attention to these things. Rome developed as a centre of antiquarian research on early Christianity. A. Bosio wrote a classic study of Christian Rome in 1632, and Raffaello Fabretti established the modern epigraphical methods while working in Rome. Later the antiquarians evolved into erudites or polymaths whose achievements in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries were enormous. In England, the Society of Antiquaries was founded in 1584–6 but could not survive for long owing to the disapproval of the king. A new Society was established in 1707.²⁰ In France, the Benedictine monks of St Maur almost monopolized antiquarian research. The late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries witnessed a remarkable growth in Catholic scholarship around the figures of Mabillon, Montfaucon, Tillemont, and Muratori. Their knowledge of the sources and the critical sense they displayed in interpreting them was phenomenal. They also used footnotes, the hallmark of developed modern historical scholarship. Both ecclesiastical and secular antiquarians provided invaluable factual material for historians, and devised methods of research and presentation that became indispensable for history-writing from the late eighteenth century onwards.²¹

Antiquarians and erudites attempted to answer the doubts expressed by Pyrrhonists by making a distinction between literary and other types of evidence. They argued that the charters and other public statements, coins, inscriptions, and statues were better evidence than literary sources. Ezechiel Spanheim, the founder of modern numismatics, emphasized in 1671 that the use of non-literary evidence provides better understanding of the past. Jacques Spon in 1679 and Francesco Bianchini in 1697 argued that archaeological evidences provide firmer basis for history than literary evidences because they are at the same time 'symbol and proof of what happened'. The role of archaeology had long been recognized; what was new in the seventeenth century was modern numismatics.²² Other specialized non-literary fields developed by the antiquarians were paleography (by Mabillon), iconography (by Montfaucon), and epigraphy (by Maffei). In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the systematic comparison of literary and non-literary evidences was accepted by many scholars as the standard method. Similarly, a broad consensus was emerging for determining safe rules for the authenticity and interpretation of charters, inscriptions, and coins.²³ Antiquarian researches in

non-literary fields and methods to determine the veracity of sources were the greatest contributions to the historiography of this period.

SOME IMPORTANT HISTORIANS

We will now briefly discuss some of the important historians of this period.

Francis Bacon (1561–1626)²⁴

Widely regarded as the initiator of empiricist philosophy in modern times, Bacon fervently believed in the efficacy of the inductive method in scientific research. According to him, the realms of both nature and humanity should be investigated on the basis of similar empirical-inductive method. He claimed to have discovered in this method a wonder instrument with whose help 'all things will be discovered with ease'. As to the style of writing, Bacon advocated the use of precise language, cutting out rhetoric and verbosity. He may be said to be 'the founder of the analytical view of language' that urges writers to eliminate the use of metaphors and maintain a univocity where 'each word can be treated as an atomic unit, a counter of meaning, and clarity itself is supposed to give us the simple "truth".²⁵ However, both his model of empirical-inductive method and his idea of non-rhetorical language suffer in practice. His historical work, *History of the Reign of King Henry VII* (1622), uncritically relies on other works for information, and embellishes even this borrowed material with literary flourish. In doing this, he basically conforms to the prevalent view of the rhetorical historians who did not do their own research but relied on others for facts, imposing their own interpretation on them. On the positive side, it has been argued that he was actually re-writing the received history of this king's reign 'in order to illustrate the quasi-biographical ideal of "Civil History" which he hoped to employ as an empirical source for the new science of mind and characters'.²⁶ So far as the structure of this work is concerned, it provided a thematic account of the subject by eliminating the irrelevant details of the earlier works. The material was organized according to general themes that were then treated chronologically to show various stages of development. In this sense, 'the work may be said to be the first modern classic of English history'.²⁷

De Thou (1553–1617)²⁸

Jacques-Auguste de Thou was one of France's most notable scholars and historians. He was also regarded by later historians as the 'best historian of his age' and 'the father of modern history'. He composed 'the longest

historical narrative ever undertaken' until the 1930s.²⁹ His book, *History of His Own Time* (written in Latin and published between 1604 and 1609), was a masterpiece that portrayed the intolerance of the religious wars with courage and impartiality. For this, he was discriminated against both by the state and the clergy. In this book, he comprehensively and accurately depicted the events of his contemporary period from 1544 to 1607, including his own role as a magistrate. It was a form of critical history in which he attempted to avoid errors in chronology, and he was not prepared to suppress unpalatable facts, even about religious orders, including his own.

William Camden (1551–1623)³⁰

Regarded as the most important British antiquarian of his time, Camden contributed significantly to the theory and practice of history. His major work was *Britannia* (1586), first published in Latin for a European readership and later in English in 1610. It was the first full-scale county-wise description of the British Isles, spanning history, geography, monuments, and genealogy. It significantly conceived of the account of the past in a holistic manner, not restricting itself to politics only. Camden believed that historians should be objective and truthful to their sources, and should inculcate 'an even and undistempered mind' to be able to impartially write about contemporary events. For this purpose he rejected the rhetorical device of presenting speeches and orations of great men in a historian's language. Speeches, if given, were produced verbatim. He also refused to offer elaborate commentaries on events. His attempt was to let the facts speak for themselves, by giving large quotations from documents and by describing events at length. His other contribution was to generally provide secular and empirical explanations for the events. These explanations he sought not in divine will or providence but in written evidence or otherwise empirically available data. His other important work was the *Annales* (1615–27), a chronological account of Queen Elizabeth's reign. It was not written in a narrative style but in the style of the previous annals, giving the year-wise description of events.

John Selden (1584–1654)³¹

Selden was regarded as one of the most learned people of his times in England. He was an antiquarian, jurist, and politician, and had great command on languages, philology, diplomatics (scientific study of documents), and paleography. This enabled him to carry out intensive historical research and produce several learned books, including some on West Asia, which established his reputation as an Orientalist. But his

greatest work was *The History of Tithes* (1618), which was suppressed due to the antagonism it faced from the church. It was a history of tithing practices from biblical times to his own period and it questioned the supposed perpetual right of the clergy to receive tithes (tithe is a part, usually a tenth, of the produce of the land). His contribution to the development of historiography in the seventeenth century were as follows: (a) to emphasize that particular practices and opinions appeared in specific contexts determined by the circumstances of the times; (b) to provide the basis for a comparative history by looking for precise analogies; (c) to stress that historians should look for truth uninfluenced by their own biases; (d) to establish that the internal coherence of the narrative was the main criterion of truth; and (e) to take historical scholarship beyond wars and kings.

François Eudes de Mézeray (1610–83)³²

Mézeray was a French historian appointed as the 'Royal historiographer' to write the history of the reigns of Louis XIII and Louis XIV. He did this in his three-volume *History of France* (1643–51) in which he provided an accurate and detailed summary of the French and Latin chronicles. He was highly praised and honoured for this work. In 1668, he published the *Short Chronological History of France* in which he criticized the various notables, including the king, for the wrong usage of their powers. This invited the wrath of the king's famous minister, Colbert, who then abrogated his pension and terminated him. Besides being a bold political document, this book also revealed some measures of historiographical changes by broadening its enquiry into the origins of the French nation, clerical institutions and religious practices, and customs and manners. In a revised edition published in 1685, Mézeray changed his focus from political and chronological details to cultural, social, and institutional developments. His source base also expanded and the explanation of events became more historical by paying less attention to providential factors and more to human motivations. He became more critical of the church going into cultural details, accusing the clergy of not sticking to their vows and for keeping concubines. He also included common people in his narrative, became relatively more objective in assessment and analytical in approach, and began to use marginal notations to list his sources.

Jean Mabillon (1632–1707)

Mabillon was a French Benedictine monk of great scholarship. He was deeply concerned about the attempts 'to diminish the authority and

trustworthiness of ancient documents and records', and felt that without these our knowledge about legal matters and history would be 'uncertain and incomplete'. Although he agreed that some of the church documents were 'false or interpolated', he sincerely felt that to 'strive to diminish either in whole or in large part the trustworthiness and authority of ancient documents of that kind on very slight grounds ... do great harm and damage'.³³ Thus, he developed certain standard procedures and rules that would distinguish genuine documents from the fake ones. His contribution to historiography consists in the innovation in method. In his treatise *De re Diplomatica* (On Diplomatics, 1681), he laid the foundations of paleography (study of ancient handwriting and manuscripts) and diplomatics (scientific study of documents) by investigating various categories of medieval manuscripts.

A REVOLUTIONARY INNOVATION IN THE HISTORICAL METHOD: FOOTNOTES³⁴

Footnotes are taken for granted in modern historical scholarship; they are one of the defining characteristics of modern historiography. They are the historians' 'equivalent of the scientist's report on data'. Although in some cases they are pushed from the end of the page to the end of the chapter or the book in the form of endnotes, their presence is ubiquitous. Without them, a scholarly history book looks incomplete. Even in textbooks they find their place, although their number may be relatively limited. They appear in various forms: a detailed listing of archival sources, a short reference to an individual work, sharp commentary on a view one disagrees with, an extensive statement on the position the writer agrees or disagrees with, a dismissive stance directed towards a view or work, assertion of an alternative view on a relevant subject, and so on. Their presence in any historical text is so much expected that their absence brings out intense disappointment. As Anthony Grafton, the foremost historian on this topic, says, 'Like a sewer, the footnote is essential to civilized historical life; like sewer, it seems a poor subject for civil conversation, and attracts attention, for the most part, when it malfunctions'.³⁵

Historians since antiquity to the Renaissance practised a form of history that claimed universal validity. They were usually more interested in presenting moral values to distinguish good from evil than in sources and dates. Modern historians, on the contrary, were better aware of the limitations of their writings and the unreliable nature of historical material. Therefore, they intended to show the credibility of their research by citing important available sources. Footnotes show that theirs is 'a historically

contingent product, dependent on the forms of research, opportunities, and states of particular questions that existed when the historian went to work'.³⁶ Thus, footnotes serve various purposes, which include indicating the exact reference for the statement made in the text, explaining certain matter not mentioned or elaborated in the text, and empowering the reader to question the validity of the assertion made on the basis of a particular source.

Annotations and commentaries on the works of famous persons have been common since the ancient days in all cultures with an advanced practice of writing. Systematic documentation revealing the authenticity of sources was to be found as far back as in the early Jewish history of Josephus and early Christian history of Eusebius. Occasionally, some ancient writers also provided commentaries on their own works. However, the formal practice of commentaries on one's own work started much later. Modern historians do not cite authorities to justify their commentaries; they, instead, cite sources to corroborate their arguments. Similarly, even the best of the antiquarian and erudite scholarship from the late sixteenth to the early eighteenth centuries, despite the occasional presence of footnotes, did not quite create the double narrative structure of modern historical texts. As Grafton comments, 'One can read through most of the classics of seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century erudition ... without encountering a double narrative in the Gibbonian style'.³⁷ Even historians of great eminence such as de Thou, who otherwise wrote a critical history based on a variety of sources, refused to provide notes to enlighten their readers. This was mostly because they wanted to remain within the tradition of Renaissance classicism. Both the greatly animated ecclesiastical history since the mid-sixteenth century and the long tradition of great antiquarian scholarship, despite their critical scholarship often adorned in various ways to point out their sources, failed to invent the footnote as it exists today.

Thus, although the self-consciously critical approach to sources had existed since the Renaissance, the self-consciously 'documentary approach to writing' was first witnessed on a comprehensive scale in the work of Edward Gibbon. But it was not Gibbon who invented footnotes. Almost a century before him, Pierre Bayle, the French historian and philosopher, inserted enormous numbers of footnotes in two influential historical dictionaries published in 1690 and 1696. This was to show that there existed a possibility of having at least some amount of definite knowledge about the past. The first book consisted 'not just of footnotes, but of footnotes on footnotes, covering the vast folio pages with a sea of small print, on the very top of which float a few foamy lines of legible text'.³⁸ In these works,

he exposed the errors and contradictions present in earlier historical works. By using the footnotes on this vast scale, Bayle formally outlined the rules of historical scholarship in the seventeenth century, which Gibbon's generation in the eighteenth century took for granted. Bayle was aware that his method of citation was a radical departure from the earlier forms of history-writing. He eloquently praised the researcher who tried 'to verify everything' by going 'to the sources', by examining 'the author's intent', and by making it their 'religion, when points of fact are concerned, to make no assertion that has no proof'.³⁹ He claimed to have consciously maintained in his works 'a dual personality, that of historian and that of commentator'. He stated that he had tried to 'compare the arguments for and against something, with all the impartiality of a faithful reporter'.⁴⁰ Thus, the idea of historians being impartial and ever ready to provide access to their sources through the medium of footnotes had already taken shape by the late seventeenth century. Bayle was not alone in this venture. J.F. Buddeus in 1702, Christian Thomasius in 1712, and some others were also using footnotes to disarm the philosophical scepticism about the possibility of historical knowledge. Another contemporary, Jean LeClerc (1657–1736), recognized the modernity and rationality of this practice and attempted to refine it by making it more reader friendly. He suggested that longer commentaries should be divided into several parts, each to be more accessible to the readers 'and where one asserts nothing without proving it, or without at least citing some good author where one can see the assertion verified'.⁴¹

Through the late seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries, writers and printers gradually worked out the detailed system of citations, particularly notes, to provide the readers guidance on the sources and authorities used in the texts. This collaboration between authors and publishers during this period established precision in this form of critical reviews of sources. In the nineteenth century, under the influence of the German school, footnotes almost became a norm. When the practice of footnoting came into general vogue, it was commonly thought that the footnote provides the proof of the statement made in the text. Now, however, many historians use both the text and footnotes for making statements as well as for providing proofs. Thus, the presence of footnotes in a book is more akin to a double-storey structure, a dual narrative in which one part—the text—is continuous and connected, whereas the second part—the footnotes—is disjointed. Footnotes serve the purpose of persuading readers that the historian has written on the basis of 'verifiable fact' and that he/she is aware of other writings in the field with which his/her work establishes a critical connection. In this

way, footnotes 'form a secondary story, which moves with but differs sharply from the primary one'.⁴²

HISTORICAL THINKING IN THIS PERIOD

The historical thought of this period was centrally concerned with the legitimacy of historical scholarship and the reliability of historical knowledge. The two great historical thinkers of this period were Bayle and Vico.

Pierre Bayle (1647–1706)⁴³

Bayle, a French philosopher, was regarded as a great sceptic by his contemporaries. However, he also believed that critical approach could establish factual conclusions not only in the field of history but in other spheres as well. His great work, *Historical and Critical Dictionary*, had a very wide readership in the eighteenth century. It set out to indicate the errors in other scholarly works. Its content was all-encompassing, covering history, religion, literary criticism, epistemology, and philosophy. It was believed that what one read in the writings of other writers and which was not contradicted in Bayle's *Dictionary* must be true.⁴⁴ Bayle's contribution to the development of historiography may be summarized as follows: (a) He raised the problem of the reliability of historical knowledge in view of the numerous errors found not only in most historical works, but also in the so-called original sources. But he did not use Cartesian methodological doubt to demolish history. Instead, he tried to provide a firm foundation for the growth of historical knowledge by pointing out and removing errors from historical works. He stated that 'errors are the only thing that can be of any service to me, provided I am able to correct them ... with regard to facts'.⁴⁵ (b) His basic approach was to pay close attention to all phenomena and to examine them critically so as to make a distinction between facts and errors, between the certain and the uncertain. He was interested in facts for their own sake and for him all facts were equally interesting. Facts for him were not the beginning but the end. But he had no general principles to organize facts and, much like the antiquarians, historical knowledge for him was an aggregation of unrelated facts. (c) To find the 'truth' of history, Bayle emphasized thorough critical research. He made elaborately excessive use of footnotes as an exercise in the search and presentation of truth. (d) In opposition to Descartes, to whom he was responding, Bayle believed in the possibility of establishing historical truth. He argued that mathematics existed only in mind whereas historical truth existed both in mind and in reality. The certitude of historical knowledge was more concrete and

better applicable to human life than that of mathematics. (e) The belief in objectivity and critical method that Bayle maintained led to his intrepid questioning of the authority of the Bible and the ecclesiastical tradition. By doing so, he emphasized the independence of historical practice free from any authority. It is for this contribution that Ernst Cassirer regarded him as having 'accomplished scarcely less for history than Galileo did for natural science.... It is he who carries out the "Copernican revolution" in the realm of historical science'.⁴⁶

Giambattista Vico (1668–1744)⁴⁷

Vico is one of the greatest historical thinkers of all ages. He is also regarded as the first philosopher of history. Born and brought up in Naples in Italy, he lived and worked in relative deprivation as a teacher of rhetoric, supplementing his income by writing official eulogies and commissioned hagiographies of the rich and notable. One of the most original thinkers, his ideas were misunderstood and neglected during his lifetime, and he was almost forgotten after his death. He was only discovered and popularized in the nineteenth century through the German translation of his most important work, *The New Science*, by W.E. Weber in 1822, but most significantly by a French version of his work by Jules Michelet in 1824. Michelet was also responsible for bringing him to the front rank of thinkers by claiming Vico as his guru. He is now regarded as an iconic thinker sharing the stage with the greatest. The first work containing Vico's original ideas was published in 1709 as *On the Method of the Studies of Our Times*. His greatest work, *The New Science*, appeared in 1725 after a lot of efforts on Vico's part to secure its publication. He revised it in 1730 and kept making additions to it until the final version appeared in 1744, the year of his death. In this work, he systematically and elaborately responds to the Cartesian debunking of historical knowledge.

In many ways, Vico did not belong to his age; several of his ideas were understood only in the nineteenth century and some of his ideas and opinions were the product of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Considering that he lived in an age when momentous intellectual revolution in the form of the Enlightenment was underway, he did not display much awareness of it. He also did not take much into cognizance the innovations in method which the antiquarian scholarship of his times had made in response to the challenges posed by scepticism. Nevertheless, he was also reacting against the radical dismissal of history by Cartesian philosophy and, in this process, he formulated

ideas that were path-breaking. His main ideas on history may be stated as follows:

1. As a theorist of change, Vico argues against the view that human nature is unalterable. According to him, there is nothing as the essence of a human being that remains static. Human efforts to understand and adapt to the respective surroundings generate changes not only in the physical world but also in human nature.
2. Vico distinguishes between two worlds—one made by God and the other by the humans. Nature, including human beings, was created by God; on the other hand, culture, society, politics, ideology, and various other forms of humanities were created by humans. From this distinction, he formulates the revolutionary idea: *creation and knowledge are convertible*. In other words, the true and the made are convertible (*verum et factum convertuntur*). It means that only those who create or make something can understand it most thoroughly. Since God has created nature and the world, He knows it better. Humans cannot fully understand this world merely as observers. This means that contemporary emphasis on science as the only true form of knowledge was misplaced because physicists and astronomers study the external world not created by humans. One cannot understand a phenomenon merely by studying it because phenomena could be known only through their origins. Thus, an outside view is inferior and an inside view is superior.
3. It follows from this that *only the things that humans have made can be truthfully and comprehensively understood by them*. Here he partly agrees with Descartes that mathematics represents a field quite amenable to human knowledge. It is not because there are 'clear and distinct ideas' contained in it, but because it is a human creation. However, it holds no superior position because all human creations, including history, can be known in this superior, 'inside' manner. Thus, Vico makes a sharp distinction between the human and natural sciences and subverts the Cartesian emphasis on the latter.
4. Every society, both past and present, is distinct from another. Within each society, however, there is a certain commonness in thought, arts, institutions, language, lifestyle, and activities. This idea is close to a differential concept of culture according to each society. These cultures are not static but changing through the succession of stages. Each stage grows out of its predecessor through human activities, and not through predetermined causes. This idea of distinctness of each society, of anachronism combined with the notion of certain common

characteristics at each stage and in each society is genuinely historical. Vico strongly asserts this idea of anachronism to underline the equality and autonomy of all societies.

5. Contrary to the prevailing notion of his day that primitive people were savages whose myths and fables were absurd fantasies, Vico forcefully argued that the cultural creations of humans such as laws, religions, rituals, languages, arts and crafts, songs, rules of conduct, and so on were designed for self-expression and communication. They were ways of presenting a coherent view of the world as it was perceived by primitive people. Thus, the proper way to understand these people was to get into their minds and their times, and not pass value judgements on them. He perceived the real significance of the rituals, myths, and languages of primitive peoples well in advance of modern anthropology. His emphasis on the importance of the intuitive, poetic and mythopoeic, compared to the singular emphasis on reason by the prevailing scientific discourse of his period, questioned the dominant structure of thought in the Western world.
6. Following from this is the argument of historical relativism that works of art and culture should be appreciated and interpreted not by some uniform, timeless principles applicable to all societies and cultures, but in terms of their meaning and value in respective societies. Primitive art, songs, paintings, and artefacts must not be dismissed as barbarous or exotic, but should be studied as the relevant product of that particular age. This proposition opens the widest vista for the growth of comparative cultural history.
7. This requires a new methodology. Besides deductive and inductive methods, what is needed even more is 'reconstructive imagination', that is, the way to enter the mental life and culture of peoples in different times and places in order to grasp their symbolic structures, means of expression, and visions of reality. Thus, while affirming the 'pastness of the past' and the differences in and equality among cultures, he also proposes 'imaginative empathy', which underlines the fundamental unity of humanity. In this sense, his historical relativism does not entail an impossibility of writing about other societies.

The seventeenth century witnessed a relative decline in history-writing compared to the earlier period when Renaissance humanist historiography held sway. From the late sixteenth century onwards there was a rethinking on the basic principles of humanist historiography. Although the overall humanist influence in the purpose and form of history-writing

continued, there were both subtle and marked shifts in all aspects, particularly in method, during this period. The radical scepticism towards history preached by the Cartesian school forced historians to defend themselves and this was done in several ways. At the level of thinking, Bayle and Vico formulated ideas to provide a firm footing to historical knowledge; the antiquarians developed various methods of verifying facts and to make sure the possibility of historical 'truth'; even historians, though to a lesser extent, attempted to answer the queries of the sceptics by paying more attention to facts and evidences and by cutting down rhetorical forms of expression. By the end of this period, historical scholarship was able to tide over this crisis both at the levels of thinking and method. It became more self-assured and confident, and did not face another major crisis until the late twentieth century.

NOTES

1. B. Russell 1984: 521.
2. B. Russell 1984: 512–23.
3. Koyre 2008: 4–5.
4. Koyre 2008: 2.
5. Koyre 2008: 200.
6. Butterfield 1957: 80.
7. Shapin 1996: 136.
8. Shapin 1996: 148.
9. Shapin 1996: 154.
10. Shapin 1996: 164.
11. See Osler 2000.
12. Cited in H.F. Cohen 1994: 1.
13. Shapin 1996: 104–5.
14. Jacob 2000.
15. This section is based on Wood 2005: 57–70 and Gellner 1979: 148–63.
16. The following account is based on Momigliano 1950.
17. Nadel 1964: 304–5.
18. Momigliano 1950: 286.
19. Miller 2007: 28–34.
20. Avis 1986: 24–6.
21. Momigliano 1990: 74–5.
22. Momigliano 1950: 299.
23. Momigliano 1950: 303–4.
24. Based on Avis 1986: 61–80, Fussner 1962: 253–74, S. Clark 1974, and *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* entry on 'Francis Bacon', available at <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/francis-bacon/>.
25. Avis 1986: 67.
26. S. Clark 1974: 118.

27. Fussner 1962: 273–4.
28. Based on de Smet 2006 and Grafton 1999: 133–42.
29. Grafton 1999: 133.
30. Based on Fussner 1962: 230–52, Boyd 1999, vol. 1: 170, and Woolf 1998, vol. 1: 274–5.
31. Based on Fussner 1962: 275–98, Woolf 1998, vol. 2: 824–5, and Barbour 2003.
32. Based on Leffler 1978, and Hay 1977: 142–3.
33. Mabillon, given in Kelley 1991: 413–15.
34. Based on Grafton 1994, 1997, and 1999.
35. Grafton 1994: 55.
36. Grafton 1999: 23.
37. Grafton 1999: 188.
38. Grafton 1994: 72.
39. Cited in Grafton 1999: 199.
40. Cited in Grafton 1994: 74.
41. Cited in Grafton 1999: 217–18.
42. Grafton 1994: 57.
43. This section is based on Soll 2003: 297–316, Avis 1986: 126–31, Grafton 1999, Wood 2005: 62–3, and *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* entry on 'Pierre Bayle', available at <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/bayle/>.
44. Grafton 1999: 193–4.
45. Cited in Wood 2005: 62.
46. Cited in Wood 2005: 63.
47. This section is based mostly on Berlin 1976, with help from Avis 1986; Lemon 2003; Stanford 1998: 156–7; *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* entry on 'Giambattista Vico', available at <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/vico/>.

FURTHER READING

- Avis, Paul. 1986. *Foundations of Modern Historical Thought: From Machiavelli to Vico*. London: Croom Helm.
- Grafton, Anthony. 1999. *The Footnote: A Curious History*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Momigliano, Arnaldo D. 1950. 'Ancient History and the Antiquarian'. *Journal of Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 13, nos. 3/4: 285–315.
- Nadel, George H. 1964. 'Philosophy of History before Historicism'. *History and Theory* 3, no. 3: 291–315.

ENLIGHTENMENT HISTORIOGRAPHY

ENLIGHTENMENT WAS ONE of the most crucial components of Western intellectual history. It provided Western thought a definitive push towards modernity. The Enlightenment thinkers subjected almost all aspects of tradition to intense questioning. They also tried to provide their own answers to these questions. Their answers were different from each other, but they also had quite a lot in common. The reach of Enlightenment was remarkable, covering grounds in almost the whole of Europe, North America, and even beyond. Almost the entirety of subsequent Western thought was, in one way or the other, influenced by it. For about three centuries, even in a rapidly changing world of revolutions, industrialization–deindustrialization, and colonization–decolonization, the Enlightenment reigned supreme. And even now, it has not completely lost its ground, despite significant challenge from postmodernist thinking.

The term 'Enlightenment' has been used in a variety of meanings to refer to different periods covering different, though related, phenomena from the late seventeenth to the end of the eighteenth century. Some go as far back as Bacon or Descartes, in terms of thought. Some associate it with the three great revolutions of this period starting with the English Revolution (1688) through the American Revolution (1776) to the French Revolution (1789). Most writers, however, identify it with the eighteenth century, with Locke, Newton, and Bayle as precursors.

Enlightenment historiography may be defined in two ways—the historiography on Enlightenment and the historiography during the Enlightenment. It is the latter sense—historical thinking and history-writing during the Enlightenment—that we are concerned with in this chapter. But the historiography on Enlightenment will also be briefly outlined in order to understand the phenomenon.

WHAT IS ENLIGHTENMENT?

In 1783 there was an essay competition by a German paper *Berlinische Monatschrift* on the topic 'What Is Enlightenment?' By that time the German term *Aufklärung* meaning Enlightenment was already in circulation. Many famous German philosophers, including Immanuel Kant and Moses Mendelssohn (1729–86), also participated in this. Mendelssohn interpreted the Enlightenment as an ongoing process in which education, particularly popular education, in the use of reason was important. It was Kant's essay, however, which became the most famous description of the phenomenon. In this, Kant defined Enlightenment as 'man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity'. Two centuries later Michel Foucault faced the same question and confessed that the clarity displayed by Kant in answering this question was lacking at his time. It has been 'a question that modern philosophy has not been capable of answering, but that it has never managed to get rid of, either'. Foucault goes so far as to state that 'modern philosophy is the philosophy that is attempting to answer the question raised so imprudently two centuries ago: *Was ist Aufklärung?* [What Is Enlightenment?]'¹ There have been continuous and intense efforts to grapple with the phenomenon of Enlightenment. In this section, we will deal with six important trends involved in such an interpretation.

1. Let us start with Enlightenment's self-definition from the Encyclopedists (Diderot and d'Alembert) to Condorcet and Kant. There was a self-conscious realization that something momentous and unsettling was happening in the sphere of ideas. Jean d'Alembert termed this period as 'the century of philosophy par excellence'. What he meant by this was the tremendous progress in natural sciences because of which the 'true system of the world has been recognized, developed, and perfected'.² In a rather radical way, the Marquis de Condorcet understood the Enlightenment as the beginning of the process that would bring about a time 'when the sun shines only on free human beings who recognize no other master but their reason; when tyrants and slaves, priests and their benighted or hypocritical minions exist only in the history books and the theater'.³ Kant, whose essay contained the most cited definition of Enlightenment, declared that the Enlightenment should be considered as the freedom of human beings from their 'self-imposed immaturity'. This immaturity consisted in letting others act as one's guide. The Enlightenment released human beings from this attitude: 'The motto of Enlightenment is

therefore: *Sapere Aude!* [dare to know] Have courage to use your own understanding!' Kant further identified the spirit of Enlightenment with 'the freedom to use reason publicly in all matters'.⁴ But, for Kant, this use of reason should not be unrestricted and uninhibited.

2. While the enlightened and the enlighteners revelled in the capacity of science and reason to bring about revolutionary changes in society, their eighteenth- and nineteenth-century critics questioned the basis of such beliefs. What has been famously termed as the 'Counter-Enlightenment' criticized and attacked Enlightenment. The term 'Counter-Enlightenment' was made popular by Isaiah Berlin in the 1970s particularly with reference to the ideas of Giambattista Vico, Johann Georg Hamann (1730–88), Johann Gottfried Herder, and Joseph de Maistre (1753–1821).⁵ Although it has been pointed out that these were more complex thinkers than they were made out to be, there is no doubt that there existed strong currents of thought that were firmly opposed to the ideas and values professed by the Enlightenment.⁶ Two strands of ideas may be differentiated within the overall Counter-Enlightenment tradition: (a) a reactionary trend belonging to church and aristocracy that defined the Enlightenment as 'an abomination, a plague, an infectious virus that spread in epidemic proportion, eating away at everything in its path';⁷ and (b) a more balanced trend influenced by Enlightenment ideas but opposed to its sometimes aggressively mechanistic, rationalistic, and universalistic views. This view criticized the Enlightenment for paying no attention to multidimensionality and for imposing an uniformitarian ideology.
3. Ernst Cassirer, in his landmark study *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* (1932), attributed to the Enlightenment 'an essentially homogeneous formative power'. This power was 'reason', which became 'the unifying and central point of this [eighteenth] century'.⁸ He perceived a fundamental unity in the Enlightenment which 'passionately defended the autonomy of reason, and which firmly established this concept in all fields of knowledge'.⁹ The purpose of the Enlightenment was 'not to observe life and to portray it in terms of reflective thought', but it was 'the task of shaping life itself'.¹⁰

Peter Gay, in his monumental two-volume study of the Enlightenment, *The Rise of Modern Paganism* (1966) and *The Science of Freedom* (1969), argued that the Enlightenment was the 'first truly modern century' because it was more successful in substituting critical thinking for myth-making and other forms of irrational thinking. He presented a dialectical analysis in which the Christian tradition represents the anti-thesis, the appeal to the critical spirit of antiquity during

the Renaissance provides the thesis, and the pursuit of modernity—or what he calls ‘modern paganism’—during the Enlightenment constitutes the synthesis. Like Cassirer, Gay also presents a unified view of the Enlightenment that was supposedly dominated by some great thinkers who were against religion and tradition and who argued for the use of reason and science to improve the human condition.¹¹

4. The twentieth-century critic of the Enlightenment had a wide range. Carl Becker published a seminal study of the Enlightenment that was completely at variance with Cassirer’s interpretation. In his *Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers* (1932), Becker argued that the Enlightenment was not much different from the system of religious faith it replaced:

In spite of their rationalism and their humane sympathies, in spite of their aversion to hocus-pocus and enthusiasm and dim perspectives, in spite of their eager skepticism, their engaging cynicism, their brave youthful blasphemies and talk of hanging the last king in the entrails of the last priest—in spite of all of it, there is more of Christian philosophy in the writings of the *Philosophes* than has yet been dreamt of in our histories.... The *Philosophes* demolished the Heavenly City of St. Augustine only to rebuild it with more up-to-date material.¹²

Such a startling statement about the severe critiques of institutional religion is predicated not exactly on their belief in religion but their religion-like belief in science and reason. Thus, their religiosity consisted in substituting man for God. Although they ‘ridiculed the idea that the universe had been created in six days’, they ‘still believed it to be a beautifully articulated machine designed by the Supreme Being according to a rational plan as an abiding place for mankind’.¹³

Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno’s path-breaking study, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947), acts as a radical internal critique. Writing in the aftermath of the devastating Second World War and Nazi brutalities, it points to the duality of the Enlightenment: ‘Enlightenment, understood in the widest sense as the advance of thought, has always aimed at liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters. Yet the wholly enlightened earth is radiant with triumphant calamity.’¹⁴ Contrary to the Enlightenment’s belief that it was totally against myth, the fact is that when Enlightenment poses itself as the absolute other of the myth it actually becomes another form of myth: ‘The more completely the machinery of thought subjugates existence, the more blindly it is satisfied with reproducing it. Enlightenment thereby regresses to the mythology it has never been able to escape.’¹⁵ What is even worse is that the triumph of instrumental and classificatory reason, and the denial

of other forms of reasoning, did not work against immorality and homicide because ‘reason is the organ of calculation, of planning; it is neutral with regard to ends; its element is coordination’. The endeavour to conquer nature metamorphosed into a bid to gain mastery over humans.¹⁶ The Enlightenment’s discourse of liberation and the language of reason produced the dialectic between enlightenment and myth, between reason and tyranny, and between civilization and savagery. This ultimately resulted in Nazism and the Holocaust, which was a lethal blend of a mythical construction (anti-Semitism) and a rationally and bureaucratically organized genocide. This irrationalism was not an isolated phenomenon but emerged from the ‘nature of the dominant *ratio* itself, and the world which corresponds to its image’.¹⁷ In this sense, the Enlightenment was a failed project.¹⁸ However, Horkheimer and Adorno believed that the Enlightenment ‘having mastered itself and assumed its own power, could break through the limits of enlightenment’.¹⁹

5. The idea of ‘a fractured Enlightenment’ has recently been contrasted to the earlier notion of a unified Enlightenment held both by its supporters and critics. A. Owen Aldridge’s *The Ibero-American Enlightenment* (1971) and H.F. May’s *The Enlightenment in America* (1976) were the two important contributions which showed that the standard ideas of Enlightenment did not quite apply to situations where societies living on European models were regularly interacting with societies whose ideas and values were very different. Franco Venturi’s multi-volume study of the Enlightenment in several ‘peripheral’ European countries such as Italy, Russia, Poland, Greece, the Balkans, and Hungary further highlighted the stresses and strains that the Enlightenment faced in these regions. Roy Porter and Mikulas Teich’s *The Enlightenment in National Context* (1981) identified thirteen distinct national expressions of the Enlightenment. J.G.A. Pocock’s multi-volume study around Edward Gibbon, *Barbarism and Religion* (1999–2011), emphasized the regional (not national) aspects of the Enlightenment, viewing them as plural phenomena.
6. The ‘fractures’ in the Enlightenment have also been revealed in terms of its social history. Robert Darnton and Roger Chartier in particular have pointed to the stratified nature of this movement. Robert Darnton stresses that ‘the literary culture of the Old Regime cannot be conceived exclusively in terms of its great books’.²⁰ His own works establish a vigorous and radical sub-culture of the late Enlightenment among the starving scribes, lower clerks, minor lawyers, and a host of lower classes who crowded the Parisian underworld. Here he

discovers the spark that lit the flame of revolution and supplied it with energy and passion that resulted in Jacobinism. According to him, high Enlightenment might have created the ground for this radical growth but the radical momentum generated by Voltaire and his fellow travellers had exhausted by the 1770s, and the great figures of high Enlightenment got absorbed by the 'Old Regime', leading a life of comfort and fame. The impetus for revolution came from the under-class propagandists full of hatred for the 'Old Regime'.²¹

Jonathan Israel, in *Enlightenment Contested* (2006a), has drawn attention to the existence of an 'essential duality' within the Enlightenment, an 'internal struggle between opposing tendencies which from beginning to end fundamentally divided it into irreconcilably opposed intellectual blocs'.²² He distinguishes between 'two Enlightenments'—radical and conservative (or moderate). He traces radical Enlightenment back to the philosophy of Benedict Spinoza and his radical followers during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. This continued in the ideas of the materialist and atheistic thinkers such as Diderot, Helvetius, Holbach, Raynal, and Condorcet in the late eighteenth century. The moderate wing, which was more influential, included Montesquieu, even Voltaire, and post-1754 Rousseau, besides many others all over Europe. The radical trend, professing 'egalitarian, secularist, Spinozist, and anti-colonial, thought', remained relatively isolated for a long time. However, in the late eighteenth century, 'the radical faction, despite the opposing efforts of Voltaire, had largely captured the main bloc of the French intellectual avant-garde which it continued to dominate down to the time of Napoleon'.²³ The basic tenet of this radical Enlightenment philosophy was that 'all forms of authoritarianism, orthodoxy, intolerance, xenophobia, and group chauvinism' should be condemned.²⁴

This disintegration of the Enlightenment at conceptual, national, and even regional levels may be seen in a very revealing instance. In the *Dictionary of the History of Ideas* published in 1973, we have the Enlightenment properly defined, outlined, and presented as a coherent set of doctrines both in the entry on 'Enlightenment' by H.O. Pappe and on 'Counter-Enlightenment' by Isaiah Berlin. According to Pappe, the Enlightenment started with the Glorious Revolution in England in 1688 and ended with either the French Revolution (1789) or the defeat of France in 1815. It has always been a European movement centred on England and France, while the German and Italian versions were derivative.²⁵ Similarly, the article by Isaiah Berlin on 'Counter-Enlightenment'

also represented the Enlightenment as a clear, definitive, and monolithic phenomenon espousing 'universality, objectivity, rationality, and the capacity to provide permanent solutions to all genuine problems of life or thought'.²⁶ About thirty years later, in the *New Dictionary of the History of Ideas* (2005), the Enlightenment as a conceptual category disappeared. All we have is a historiographical account in the entry on 'Enlightenment' by Michael C. Carhart, who expresses his apprehension that faced with a 'series of regional Enlightenments', the Enlightenment had become increasingly fractured, which threatened to render 'the rubric altogether useless'.²⁷ After a thorough literature survey, Carhart comments, 'If the 1780s had answers, the 1990s had only questions'.²⁸

UNDERSTANDING THE ENLIGHTENMENT

In the wake of such intense scholarly controversies and the apprehension about the dissolution of the Enlightenment, it appears rather adventurous to attempt to provide any sort of coherence to the phenomenon. Yet, I start by assuming that the Enlightenment was a historical phenomenon and there were certain thinkers who self-consciously associated with it. But what I am attempting in this chapter is not a precise definition or the explication of the 'nature' or 'essence' of Enlightenment, but a simple attempt to understand it by figuring out its broad features.

1. *The Enlightenment was an intellectual movement in eighteenth-century Europe.* Although attempts have been made to link it with the three revolutions in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it would be more apposite to view it as belonging to the realm of ideas. It is true that some ideas identified with the Enlightenment had an influence on revolutions or that some of these ideas were adopted post facto by the revolutionaries to provide an ideological justification to their actions. But these revolutions had a different dynamic.
2. *The Enlightenment was basically a Franco-centric European movement of ideas.* It has been forcefully and quite convincingly argued that the Enlightenment should be seen in plural and in national contexts. It is true that the national as well as the regional contexts were important, because to become and to be enlightened in the Netherlands and England was different from being so in Russia or Poland. However, at the level of elite transaction, the Enlightenment was a transnational movement of ideas with comrades and opponents dispersed all over Europe and even America.
3. *Probably the most important unifying factor was the Enlightenment's appeal to reason to criticize the dogmas and authorities of various*

kinds, and the demand for freedom to pursue one's reason. It was, however, not an abstract reason, but practical reason. Reason was almost natural, almost God-given, and present in all human beings everywhere. However, this reason was not clearly defined and the appeal to it was also not uniform.

4. Mostly deriving from the natural law theories, *the Enlightenment thinkers believed that the basic human nature was unchanging*. The changes that occurred either in nature or in humans were due to external causes. Thus, by positing the similarity of human nature everywhere, they envisaged an equality of inherent status. Although human beings are much different from each other, these differences were not intrinsic but were rooted in circumstances and could be eliminated through education, interaction, reform, and commerce.
5. *The Enlightenment left a contradictory legacy in its wake*. Seeking freedom from tradition and theology in Europe, the Enlightenment thinkers tried to devise an alternative system based on reason and modern science. However, this model of Eurocentric universal reason contained the explicit or implicit ideas that those outside the perimeter of this ideal were either undeveloped or inadequately developed. Since 'reason' was supposed to be used to liberate people from their own 'backward', 'savage', and 'barbaric' culture and tradition, the means employed to do so became less important, and the end was also ultimately forgotten. The Enlightenment's belief in the universality of a particular form of reason provided the opportunity to various forces to divide and categorize people and societies on various grounds (such as race, nationality, class, and community), to initiate, sustain, buttress, and validate the drive for power and resources, and to subjugate or eliminate the supposedly non-rational people within Europe and elsewhere. The Enlightenment's profession of fundamental human equality was turned on its head by the assertion that the absence or insufficient presence of 'scientific reason' proved the inferiority of specific societies and peoples that constituted most of the world's population.

ENLIGHTENMENT HISTORIOGRAPHY

History was one of the core concerns of the Enlightenment and most of the Enlightenment thinkers were centrally concerned with history in one form or the other. The Enlightenment historians mostly belonged to the genre known as 'philosopher-historian' due to their predilection to moralize and preach, at least in parts. It was their belief that philosophy

and history were interlinked. Voltaire asserted, 'History must be written by philosophers whatever our pedants say.' Similarly, Gibbon stated that 'if philosophers are not always historians, it were at least to be wished that all historians were philosophers'.²⁹ The Enlightenment historians vastly expanded the scope of history by taking into account an increasing amount of material on non-European countries, particularly Asia and America. There were large differences between them on the use of sources and narrative possibilities of history. But they all shared the belief in cosmopolitan history as they thought that 'individual states or nations are not, in themselves, intelligible units of historical study'.³⁰ Although their cosmopolitanism was primarily centred around Europe, many of them opposed the exploitation and oppression of the non-European peoples, and believed that increased commerce would promote freedom and well-being all over.³¹ In this section we will discuss some of the historians and historical thinkers whose ideas influenced the course of history-writing.

Montesquieu (1689–1755)

Montesquieu, a French political and historical thinker, recognized the differences between various countries and cultures and attempted to describe their distinct political and social situation. There is a strong deterministic conception of history found in many of his works. His belief was that environment and institutions, and not individuals, shape the course of history. He did not completely discount the role of chance and individuals. But he believed that such chance occurrences were not of much consequence and did not affect the general course of history. His philosophy of history consisted in eschewing the explanations based on providence and individuals in favour of reliance on secular and general causes.

In *The Politics* (1725), after analysing the course of events in England during the Civil War in the seventeenth century, Montesquieu concluded that individuals do not matter, the 'prudence of man actually amounts to practically nothing', circumstances are the sole determinants, and actions taken even by men in power could make only minor difference to the overall course of history. In his *Considerations on the Causes of the Grandeur and Decadence of the Romans* (1734), he firmly foregrounded his deterministic views. Here he attempted to discover the laws of human behaviour and a general theory of causation that focused on the fundamental importance of social, economic and institutional factors. He asserted that 'at the birth of societies, the leaders of republics create the institutions; thereafter it is the institutions that form the leaders of republics'. He wrote that even

if Caesar had not seized power and abolished the republic, somebody else would have done it, given the nature of the circumstances: 'It is not chance that rules the world.... There are general causes, moral and physical, which act in every monarchy, elevating it, maintaining it, or hurling it to the ground. All accidents are controlled by these causes.'³²

The Spirit of the Laws (1748) is Montesquieu's most ambitious work. His purpose was to discover and show the rational laws that govern human society, as the famous scientists had done about the natural world. He considered all laws as the product of human reason. But he envisaged a tension between the human as a physical being, who is well-governed by unalterable laws, and the human as an intelligent being, who resorts to breaking these laws.³³ According to him, historically there have been basically three forms of governments in the world—despotic, republic, and monarchic. The 'spring' of despotism is 'fear', that of the republic is 'virtue', and that of monarchy is 'honour'. He then moved on to argue that all these forms are territorially determined. A republic can survive only within a small territory, a monarchy forms in a medium-sized territory, and a large territory can necessarily be governed only by a despotic regime. Another major determinant in Montesquieu's repertory is climate. Jean Bodin had already appropriated the medieval views of climatic determinism and had given it a pseudo-scientific form. Montesquieu provided a relatively more refined explanation. He argued that people who live in cold climates are strong, vigorous, courageous, confident, frank, relatively peaceful, and generally honest. On the contrary, those living in hot climates are weak, sensuous, volatile, inconsistent, and fearful. Human agency is also greatly restricted in hot regions. He was so enamoured by this climatic determinism that he even justified slavery in such areas, although he was generally otherwise quite opposed to slavery. In his opinion, both the form of government (despotism) and civil condition (slavery) are determined by the hot climate.³⁴ Similarly, domestic slavery of women in the form of polygamy and concubinage are explained in terms of hot climate. Although Montesquieu was opposed to polygamy on moral grounds, he stressed the primacy of the laws of nature over the rights of individuals.³⁵ The only other determining factor reaching anywhere near the importance of climate is terrain. According to Montesquieu, fertile lands give rise to despotism and slavery, 'monarchy is more frequently found in fruitful countries', and barren lands spawn democracies.³⁶

After reaching the height of his determinism in climate and terrain, Montesquieu sought ways of gaining freedom for humans. Although these two major determinants still remained as the constituting factors,

he suggested that the 'general spirit of laws' were formed by many things, including religion, customs and manners, examples of past things, and so on. This might give opportunity to the legislators to counteract the influence of the climate. One of the most important forces that might work against the stranglehold of climate would be commerce.³⁷

Voltaire (1694–1778)

Francois-Marie Arouet, better known as Voltaire, was a French philosopher and historian. He was generally considered as the most representative figure of the Enlightenment. He coined the term 'philosophy of history' by which he implied some sort of 'critical cultural history' that would extract morally useful lessons from the vast mass of historical material and which would mean developing a rational outlook about the past shorn of the superstition and religious dogma. It would be a modern view of history as opposed to the theological interpretations. He also attempted to provide a narrative of 'the evolution and existence of a unique, common European civilisation', based on the growing strength and wealth of the middle orders, and distinct from the older Renaissance's notion of an ancient classical heritage.³⁸ A substantial part of his enormous output was concerned with history. *History of Charles XII* (1731), *The Age of Louis XIV* (1751–3), *Essays on the Manners and Spirit of Nations* (1756), *History of the Russian Empire under Peter the Great* (1759–63), and *Philosophy of History* (1765) were his important historical works. It is from these works and from relevant entries in his popular *Philosophical Dictionary* (1764) that we can derive his historical ideas and method (see Box 8.1).

Box 8.1 Voltaire's Views on History

History is the recital of facts represented as true. Fable, on the contrary, is the recital of facts represented as fiction. There is the history of human opinions, which is scarcely anything more than the history of human errors.

The foundations of all history are the recitals of events, made by fathers to their children, and afterwards transmitted from one generation to another. They are, at most, only probable in their origin when they do not shock common sense, and they lose a degree of probability at every successive transmission. With time the fabulous increases and the true disappears; hence it arises that the original traditions and records of all nations are absurd.

... the method which would be proper in writing a history of our own country is not suitable in describing the discoveries of the new world; that we should not write on a small city as on a great empire; and that the private history of a prince should be composed in a very different manner from the history of France and England. (Voltaire 1764, vol. 5: 217, 231)

Voltaire was quite critical of Montesquieu's climatic determinism and his intangible sociology of law. He doubted the validity of Montesquieu's distinction between various forms of governments as he thought that it cast the Asian regimes in negative light. Voltaire's own method was pretty eclectic in explaining a phenomenon. His 'philosophical history' possessed the following characteristics:

1. It is primarily a cultural history, a history of customs and manners, and not political or dynastic history. It would jettison useless chronologies and boring details in favour of learning useful lessons from the past. Voltaire was also of the opinion that historians should also not glorify the cruelties, injustices, murders, and useless wars of past rulers.³⁹ Historians must concern themselves with 'the rights of the nation, the rights of the chief corporate establishments in it; its laws, usages, manners, with the alterations by which they have been affected in the progress of time'.⁴⁰
2. Such history would focus on the present. It would be a history of the modern period, based on the sources generated in the modern period because they are the only reliable evidences. Voltaire was basically an unabashed presentist.⁴¹ History, for him, was a means to spread the Enlightenment's principles of rationality, freedom, peace, and humanism. He distinguished between two epochs in relation to the human past—the fabulous and the historical. During the fabulous period, when the art of writing was not known, the memory of the past was preserved in the form of fables, which lost some of its certainty at every transmission. The original traditions of all nations are, therefore, unreliable. The historical period was no more than four thousand years old. But even in this, the initial histories were based on pure imagination. Real history, according to him, emerged only by the mid-sixteenth century with the invention of the printing press when trustworthy documents could be produced.
3. History is a probabilistic science: 'All certainty which does not consist in mathematical demonstration is nothing more than the highest probability; there is no other historical certainty.' However, if a particular event is attested by many eyewitnesses, it may be held as near certain. But this event has also to fall within the boundaries of reason. Thus, even if many people attest to having witnessed the resuscitation of the dead, it is difficult to believe it because what 'is in opposition to the ordinary course of nature ought not to be believed'.⁴²
4. Voltaire gave due recognition to the non-European, particularly Asian, countries and peoples. He opposed Montesquieu's notion that the Asian governments were despotic, rejected the idea of 'oriental despotism', and praised ancient religions as containing truth that the elaborate structure of official Christianity had masked. He praised ancient Persians for having founded 'a useful religion based on a belief in the immortality of the soul and in a supreme creator', the ancient Chinese for developing a religion that 'was wise, simple, and free from all barbarities and superstitions', the ancient Indians for preaching peace and for professing a religion based on moral precepts and the principles of universal reason, and the ancient Arabs for believing in the simplest and most natural religion.⁴³
5. Voltaire's history is anti-theological, particularly against the Judeo-Christian tradition, which, according to him, had given rise to barbarism and superstition in the medieval period and violent conflicts in the modern. He attacked both the medieval crusades and modern religious wars in Europe as fanatic and barbaric. He also criticized the colonial undertakings in the Americas as remnants of European barbarism. By giving the example of China as a great and self-contained civilization, he condemned the greedy Europeans for their colonial plunder and cultural arrogance.
6. In contrast to Montesquieu, Voltaire believed in the role of great men to change the course of history. Their genius and activities provided inspiring examples for emulation. But he judged the greatness of individuals in the light of his Enlightenment principles.
7. Voltaire's profound admiration for the early Asian societies notwithstanding, his orientation was Eurocentric, in the sense of positing European history as the universal history. Thus, despite its universal sweep, his *Essay* was essentially 'an Enlightenment narrative of the rise of Europe'.⁴⁴ In his *Age of Louis XIV*, he endeavoured to write about 'the spirit of mankind in general' by dividing it in four epochs, all belonging to the European narrative. The ancient Asian civilizations, howsoever admirable, remained frozen in time in his history. Since no other culture experienced Enlightenment as Europe did, the superiority of modern Europe was unquestionable: 'In short, of any civilised people of Asia whom we consider, we may say: It preceded us, and we have surpassed it'.⁴⁵
8. Voltaire did not visualize equality on the basis of difference. Instead, he imbued the ancient Asian societies with the Enlightenment attributes of deism, monotheism, and rationality. Moreover, his praise of the ancient Chinese, Arabs, and Indians, and his condemnation of the Jews are based on certain achievements such as big empire, commerce, fine arts, power, and civility. Thus, the non-European histories were

lauded not for their own sake, but as instruments in his battle against the Judeo-Christian religious establishment. His antipathy to the biblical tradition is so acute that he regularly refers to the Christian era as 'the vulgar era'.⁴⁶

9. The core of Voltaire's philosophy was constituted by his universalism. He believed that all 'civilized nations everywhere, beginning with India and ending with Europe', possessed the same truth. Moreover, human nature has always been the same. He, however, makes a distinction between 'civilized' and 'non-civilized' societies. The 'civilized' societies were the Oriental and European countries, the latter deriving from the former several aspects of their learning.⁴⁷ Yet, it left the rest of humanity, such as most of Africa, and Americas, and even some periods of the European past, vegetating in an abyss of non-rationality.

Hume (1711–76)

David Hume, the great British philosopher, was also an accomplished historian. In fact, during his lifetime, he was known more for his historical writings than for his path-breaking work in philosophy. His six-volume *History of England*, published between 1754 and 1762, covered the period from Julius Caesar's invasion of the British Isles to the revolution of 1688. Hume wrote his history backwards, beginning with the Stuarts in the seventeenth century, then going back to the Tudors, and then finally from Roman times to the Renaissance. Despite being concerned with Britain, Hume's *History* was placed within a cosmopolitan European structure of causation. He, moreover, attempted to present a non-partisan view of British history by critiquing both the Whig (liberal) and Tory (conservative) views of the past.⁴⁸ His *History* was criticized by almost all parties at home. But he was admired both by the Enlightenment philosophers and counter-Enlightenment ideologues and Restoration politicians in France.

Hume, unlike Voltaire, was more interested in political history. But, like Voltaire, he was interested in his own times, and the premodern period was not of much value to him, except for learning some lessons for the present. According to him, the three main advantages of history are that 'it amuses the fancy ... it improves the understanding, and ... it strengthens virtue'.⁴⁹ History also 'affords materials to most of the science'.⁵⁰ He largely relied on secondary material for his history. He thoroughly distanced himself from the antiquarian scholarship of placing emphasis on accurate facts, and dubbed antiquarianism as the 'dark industry'.⁵¹

Although there is a trace of historical relativism in Hume's thoughts on the lines of Bayle and Montesquieu, he was more inclined towards uniformitarianism. His famous (or notorious) statement on a uniform human nature was that 'there is a great uniformity among the actions of men, in all nations and ages, and the human nature remains still the same, in its principles and operations'. The sameness of mankind across places and times does not leave much scope for the historian to tell us anything new in this regard, and the main purpose of history 'is only to discover the constant and universal principles of human nature, by showing men in all varieties of circumstances and situations, and furnishing us with materials from which we may form our observations and become acquainted with the regular springs of human action and behaviour'.⁵² This search for laws brings history in line with the natural sciences. He does acknowledge that there is 'diversity of characters, prejudices, and opinions'. But, 'however singular these events may appear, there is really nothing altogether new in any period of modern history'.⁵³

Hume practised secular history like other Enlightenment historians. He completely rejected the 'miraculous' and subjected the 'marvellous' to a close scrutiny 'consistent with known facts and circumstances'.⁵⁴ His quest was to introduce understanding and coherence to the vast mass of distressing details, and 'to conquer the unknown with reason'.⁵⁵ He did not support the idea of either progress or decline, as both are part of human history. He rather believed in a cyclical movement, with progress and decline alternating each other. His views on this matter are different from many Enlightenment thinkers like Voltaire, Turgot, Kant, and Condorcet who thought that a certain age was the pinnacle of historical growth.

Hume's historical works give the impression, as Pocock says, 'that there are always two histories to be written'—one about the 'general change of human conditions' and another of 'the mysteries of human psyche and the human condition'.⁵⁶ However, this tension between the general and the particular, between 'the master narrative and the anecdotal anomalies', remains in Hume's *History* in a 'relatively stable dichotomy'.⁵⁷ Such 'systematic ambivalence' found in Hume's historical thought is necessary 'not only [to] achieve an interpretative understanding of symbolic, human action, but [also] to frame causal explanations'.⁵⁸

Diderot (1713–84) and Raynal (1713–96)⁵⁹

Denis Diderot, a French philosopher, was a confirmed materialist with a great faith in science. He believed that the distinction between mind

and matter was false; that all the world—inert or active—consists of ‘matter that thinks’ or ‘matter endowed with a sensitivity’.⁶⁰ A thorough-going determinism was crucial to Diderot’s understanding of history. Everything, according to him, was determined by physical causes and all human actions were underlined by non-human natural factors. He also emphasized that despotism in general and slavery in particular were abhorrent, and sometimes there may be a change through bloodshed. His contribution to historiography was highlighted in the parts he wrote in Raynal’s volume during the 1770s. It is in these writings that his interest in historical change and a greater radicalism were visible.

Guillaume Thomas Francois Raynal was a French philosopher and historian. His book, *A Philosophical and Political History of the Commerce and Settlements of the Europeans in the Two Indies* (1771), aroused a lot of public interest with its passionate condemnation of the excesses and brutalities of the imperialist powers in the colonies. It was revised and expanded in 1774 and 1780, particularly with contributions from Diderot who is credited with writing almost one-third of the book. Voltaire described it as ‘charged with declamation’. Indeed, its passionate rhetorical style was the basis of its attraction for the readers as well as for democratic propaganda. It was considered as the most important anti-imperialist work in the eighteenth century. Its creation of a general oppressed subject through the depiction of oppression in the colonies gave a massive boost to republican sentiment against the authorities in France. It went into many editions and was translated into many European languages (see Box 8.2).

Box 8.2 Opposition to Imperialism

The anti-imperialist sentiments of the book may be gauged from the following quotes:

Since the bold expeditions of Columbus and da Gama, Europe has witnessed the rise of a previously unknown obsession, the desire for discoveries. People have explored, and continue to explore every part of the world, from one Pole to the other, in search of continents to invade, islands to ravage, peoples to rob, to subjugate and to massacre. If someone could succeed in putting a stop to this mania, he would indeed deserve to be counted among the benefactors of the human race.

This insatiable lust for gold has given birth to the most appalling of all forms of commerce, the slave trade. People talk of crimes against nature, yet they fail to include this as the most detestable. The majority of European nations have defiled themselves with it, and all proper feelings for their fellow men have been stifled in their hearts by base self-interest. (Raynal and Jimack 2006: 277, 278)

The book is concerned with colonial history in the Americas and Asia. Its strident anti-imperialist parts were written by Diderot who unequivocally condemns the colonizers for their brutalities. It begins with the fifteenth century, outlining the history of European geographical expansion and colonization. It emphasizes that the imperialistic ideas and policies of Europeans led to the thoughtless division of the globe and misery in colonial territories. Taxes imposed on the colonies are viewed as ‘the mask of tyranny’ and consequently, the rebellion against oppression is considered as the ‘inalienable right’.⁶¹ It condemns slavery in unequivocal terms.

It denounces the religious fervour evinced by many colonizers in ‘establishing their religion by fire and sword in lands which they have laid waste and depopulated’.⁶² In Americas, ‘ruins have been heaped on ruins; countries that were well peopled have become deserted; ports that were full of buildings have been abandoned.... It seems as if from one region to another prosperity has been pursued by an evil genius that speaks our [European] several languages, and which diffuses the same disasters in all parts’.⁶³ Despite his general appreciation of British democracy, Diderot blamed them for causing famine in Bengal leading to the death of millions.

The expeditions of discoveries and conquests had harmed Europe also. It had resulted in corruption in public life and in the strengthening of despotism.⁶⁴ The book warned the Europeans that their oppressive policies would lead to terrible bloodbath in the colonies: ‘Your slaves don’t need either your generosity or your advice to break the sacrilegious yoke that oppresses them.’ There had already been some revolts among the slaves and ‘the blacks only need a leader courageous enough to lead them towards vengeance and carnage’. Such leaders would definitely emerge to ‘raise the sacred flag of liberty’ and ‘Spaniards, Portuguese, Englishmen, Frenchmen, and Hollanders, indeed all their tyrannical masters will fall prey to fire and brimstone. The American fields will get ecstatically drunk with the bloodshed they have awaited for ages, and the bones of so many unfortunates, piled up for three centuries, will quiver with joy’.⁶⁵ The revolt in Saint Domingue in the 1790s, which led to the formation of the independent state of Haiti, was partly inspired by this book, and busts and portraits of Raynal were put up in the island as an emancipationist hero.

However, Raynal’s position with regard to an all-out revolt of the slaves and other oppressed in the colonies was quite ambivalent. To a significant extent, the book may also be treated as offering suggestions for an enlightened European government policy. It suggests that the colonial

contact, if shorn of its aggressive, and oppressive policies, was not bad and could help in developing the colonies through commerce and cultivation of land. It viewed commerce in the most favourable light, as the 'art of growing rich by augmenting the general prosperity of mankind'. It condemned monopolies because it 'has produced devastation'. Free trade was its solution for re-uniting the world unnaturally split by the avarice and aggression of the European powers. This would lead to prosperity all over.⁶⁶

d'Alembert (1717–83)⁶⁷

Jean-Baptiste le Rond d'Alembert was a French philosopher, mathematician, physicist, and music theorist. He was one of the prominent intellectuals of the French Enlightenment. Along with Denis Diderot, he edited the great tome of Enlightenment, the *Encyclopedia*. D'Alembert distinguished between three faculties of mind—memory, reason, and imagination. From these three faculties are derived 'the three general divisions of our system of human knowledge: History, which is related to memory; Philosophy, which is the fruit of reason; and the Fine Arts, which are born of imagination'.⁶⁸ According to him, memory is the lowest of all these faculties. He, therefore, relegates historical scholarship to the lowest form of knowledge among the three. History could never compete with the sciences because most historical facts are not reliable and historical scholarship could never make discoveries. He was not against history as such, but he thought that it was necessary only to the extent that it supplied material for the philosophers, whose purpose was to know humanity and not just to collect facts for their own sake. He also suggested that after some time, say a hundred years, an assembly of philosophers should meet and destroy the 'irrelevant' facts. Despite his negative assessment of historical scholarship, however, d'Alembert's scheme contained some insightful observations: (a) His differentiation between history, science, and art was substantially correct, although in a spirit prejudicial to history and wrongly related exclusively to memory, reason, and imagination, respectively. Historical scholarship, as it was emerging since the Renaissance, was neither science nor art, but was developing distinct characteristics of its own. (b) Even though he assigned secondary importance to history and was quite critical of erudition, he brought antiquarian and erudite scholarship within the ambit of historical scholarship, which was very significant in view of the prevailing tendency to draw a sharp line between them. (c) Separating the realms of certainty and probability, he assigned history to the second. For him, like Descartes, geometry was the only model of certainty. What

other forms of knowledge could do was to try to imitate and approximate the geometrical model. But even the highest degree of probability could not become certainty. Thus, what historians should realize their limits, practice moderation, and avoid pseudo-certainty.

Turgot (1727–81)⁶⁹

Anne Robert Jacques Turgot was a French economist with physiocratic leanings. His contribution to historical thinking consists of the definitive statement about linear secular historical progress. The idea of progress, present in Western thought since long, was given a very systematic formulation by Turgot. According to him, progress is inevitable in every society, though it may happen at different times. The motors of progress are the cumulative knowledge and the quantity of geniuses a particular society produces and preserves. For him, progress was no longer a subject for study by 1750, but had 'manifestly become a fixed, invariable, natural law, godlike in its universality and power'.⁷⁰ The intellectual roots of all the later developmental 'grand narratives' such as those by Comte, Marx, and Spencer may be traced to Turgot. Ever since him, philosophers and thinkers have been searching for the laws of progress of humankind.

Turgot traced the development of all human societies through three stages—hunting, pastoral, and agricultural. The hunting, grazing, and cultivating societies had been identified earlier by Montesquieu, but Turgot put them in successive developmental order, in the form of stadal development. Thus: (a) in the first stage of human development, the primary sensations were supreme, and the reflective capacity of human beings was very limited. Passions, not thoughtful actions, ruled the world. Hunger, lust, pain, pleasure, and thirst for power were the driving forces of human actions. In this period, before the invention of writing, knowledge of human beings could not extend beyond three or four generations, and even that knowledge was mostly uncertain. He calls this period as the 'silence of reason and history' during which hunting-gathering societies moved incessantly in search of food without any stability of social life. This period was thus unsuitable for the creation of culture. This was the age of savagery. (b) The next stage was pastoralism in which people 'began to grow richer, and to understand better the idea of property'. Battles, loot, pillage, and false ideas of glory accompanied the movements of the people from one territory to another. Much activity was taking place. But due to the mobile nature of these societies no common bonds could develop, and due to lack of writing no records could be kept.⁷¹ (c) Then came agriculture, sedentary life, creation of surplus, towns, invention

of writing, general advancement of the mind, greater skill in war, the division of labour, and the inequality among human beings, including subjection of women. But this phase also brought keen enquiry about the forms of government. Moreover, the leisure afforded by the city gave rise to that singular phenomenon in Turgot's imagination—'the genius'.

Turgot emphasized 'Progress' as a unique principle applicable to human society through the spirit of innovation, the search for novelty, and the retention of cumulative knowledge. Distinct from the system of nature, he posited a separate human world. In the realm of nature, there is a cyclical movement: 'All things perish, and all things spring up again.' On the other hand, the mankind presents 'an ever-changing spectacle'. The cumulative experiences, through repeated and increasingly expanding transmission, lead to innovations and creation of enduring newness. He believed that the progress of modern science had reached such a level that the stopping or turning of the wheels of progress is quite improbable, and in the midst of all the upheavals 'the whole human race, through alternate periods of rest and unrest, of weal and woe, goes on advancing, although at a slow pace, toward greater perfection'.⁷² The human capacity to store the knowledge created through the experiences of earlier generations has helped humankind to escape from the cyclical pattern of development, and to set the conditions for linear and collective progress.

The individual human element in the dynamics of progress came in the form of 'the genius'. As millions of sensations and events take place in human history, much of it was bound to be lost if some great mind does not capture them, derive meaning, and then present it in the form of a new truth. Progress takes place through the mediatory agency of the genius. The genius is also uniformly distributed in all lands.⁷³ But wherever the genius was unable to function due to adverse circumstance, progress is temporarily arrested. Society's responsibility, therefore, was to preserve its geniuses and provide them the opportunity to operate freely. Thus, the genius was the cause that explained the variable levels of progress attained in various countries. But he was sure that 'the human mind everywhere contains the potential for the same progress', and change was constant and was bound to lead to progress.⁷⁴

Robertson (1721–93)

William Robertson was part of the famous Scottish Enlightenment that included eminent figures like Adam Smith and Adam Ferguson. He was one of the greatest and 'the most insistently cosmopolitan of all eighteenth-century British historians'.⁷⁵ He started with national histories and then

proceeded to compose international histories. He wrote several books relating to the history of Scotland, America, and India. Robertson put his faith in the stadial or stage-wise theory of historical development, which had a long pedigree beginning with the German jurist Samuel Pufendorf (1632–94) who propounded an influential seventeenth-century account of the transition from the 'state of nature' to the 'state of civilization'. A more systematic stadial scheme was developed by Turgot in France and by Kames (1696–1782) in Scotland. The famous four-stage periodization based on economic subsistence was finally evolved by the thinkers of the Scottish enlightenment such as Adam Ferguson, John Millar, and Adam Smith.⁷⁶ Robertson gave it an even greater finality and was regarded as the best practitioner of stadial history. In this version of 'stadial history', each stage related to particular 'modes of subsistence' and had its own representative types: the first stage was identified with the 'savage' hunter-gatherer, the second with the nomad, the third with the farmer, and the fourth with commercial society. In this schema, there is a strong emphasis on material circumstances in shaping civilization.

In his *History of Scotland* (1759), Robertson divided the entire past of the country into four stages, writing briefly on the first three periods while concentrating on the modern one. He was centrally interested in the history of the sixteenth century as it fitted with the Enlightenment narrative of the development of the modern state system, civil society, and worldwide commercial interaction. The preceding 'Christian millennium' was considered barbaric and superstitious, a world of unreason, a period 'most calamitous and afflicted'. The sixteenth century, according to him, was a crucial period when the 'ambition' for individual aggression and control was transformed into rational interest and national policy. In this history, an almost linear path of progress is depicted. Thus, Scotland progressed through the earlier barbarity and darkness to the era of light, of commerce and civilization after its union with England when 'commerce advanced in its progress, and the government attained nearer to perfection'.⁷⁷ His most important historical work, *The History of the Reign of Charles V* (1769), in some ways covers whole of Europe. It surveys the rise and decline of feudal society in Europe, from the end of the Roman Empire to the establishment the Habsburg Empire.

His view of progress was also expressed in his application of the four-stage model of development to the American Indians. In his *History of America* (1777–96), Robertson outlined the early stages of existence of Native Americans and the consequences of their catastrophic encounter with the civilized Europeans. Most of the American tribes were in a 'savage' state, while some of the more organized formations like the Inca were 'still

in the first stages of transition from barbarism to civilization'. In imitation of the French naturalist Buffon (1707–88), Robertson described the indigenous people as biologically immature and degenerate. He also dubs them as morally primitive lacking in the sense of 'sympathy' and involved basically in self-gratification. He wrote that although the Incas and Aztecs were somewhat less primitive, they also 'can hardly be considered as having advanced beyond the infancy of civil life'.⁷⁸ Robertson's stadal history is static and suffused with European moralizing sentiments. But he does not approve of the cruelties wrought upon the indigenous people, which he explains as the fatal consequences of stadal disjunction between the Europeans and the Native Americans. But he holds only the private adventurers responsible for it, exonerating the state and the church. An assumption of ladder-like gradation and intrinsic European superiority is inbuilt in this conception which places the 'civilized' European societies on top. However, in harmony with the Enlightenment view, Robertson asserts that these differences could not be explained on the basis of any inherent incapability or racial characteristics because human nature and capability are the same everywhere.⁷⁹

In his last work, *An Historical Disquisition Concerning the Knowledge which the Ancients Had of India* (1791), Robertson displays a liberalism and generosity of spirit lacking in his work on America. He is full of praise for the antiquity and cultural achievements of the Indians, particularly the Hindus. In the sixteenth century, at the time of modern encounter with Europe, India was already 'highly civilized' and was quite capable of participating in world commerce on its own without coercion. He thus disapproves of East India Company's rapacious ways. In this work, Robertson, despite his Eurocentrism, evinces a 'thoroughly self-critical form of cosmopolitanism'.⁸⁰

Catharine Macaulay (1731–91)

Catharine Macaulay is considered the first female historian in Britain. She took a radical position against David Hume whose *History* she considered as conservative. Her successful eight-volume *History of England* was published between 1763 and 1783. She took a radical position in favour of liberty and supported the American struggle for freedom. She later criticized Edmund Burke for his masculinist position and argued that the moral perfection and strength that Burke considered as inherently masculine were within the capability of women. Their weakness was not intrinsic but conditioned. Her feminist stand was clearly expressed in her last major work, *Letters on Education* (1790). She argued that 'all those

VICES AND IMPERFECTIONS WHICH HAVE BEEN GENERALLY REGARDED AS INSEPARABLE FROM THE FEMALE CHARACTER, DO NOT IN ANY MANNER PROCEED FROM SEXUAL CAUSES, BUT ARE ENTIRELY THE EFFECTS OF SITUATION AND EDUCATION'.⁸¹ A proper education would make both women and men patriots and lovers of liberty. In her view, the struggle of the English people to remove feudalism and monarchy and bring about liberty and justice was the real history of England. Her *History* was basically political. The history of manners, customs, and behaviour, which was a major achievement of Enlightenment historiography, was not her domain. But she took a stronger position on human liberty and rights than some of other Enlightenment thinkers. She wanted women to be strong and daring like men, in other words 'manly'. For this purpose, she depicted a number of political women as 'heroines' possessing 'manly' virtues along classical Roman lines.

Gibbon (1737–94)⁸²

Edward Gibbon was the greatest historian that the Enlightenment produced. Although he did not postulate general theories of history, his command over individual facts, elegant style of writing, and provision of exact but ironic footnotes were unparalleled. His magnum opus, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–88), stands among the best ever achievements in history-writing. Covering thirteen centuries and a large geographical space from Europe to Asia, the range and span of this work is enormous. It focuses on the Romans, the Byzantines, and the northern tribes. It also, like most Enlightenment histories, narrates the story of the origins and growth of modern Europe, which it holds to be superior to the rest of the world. Gibbon considered 'Europe as one great republic, whose inhabitants have attained almost the same level of politeness and cultivation' and which was distinguished by its 'general state of happiness, the system of arts, and laws, and manners ... above the rest of mankind'.⁸³

Gibbon's greatest contribution to the historical method was his blending of 'philosophical history' with antiquarianism. This transformed the course of history-writing. As discussed earlier, both 'exemplary' history and antiquarianism arose in the wake of the Renaissance's engagement with the antique past. But their paths diverged almost from the beginning. Whereas historians prided themselves for writing history for emulation, particularly by the princes, nobles, and persons of authority, the antiquarians were involved, almost with a religious spirit, in unearthing the 'facts' from the past. Moreover, while the mainstream of history until the Enlightenment was concerned with political and diplomatic matters,

the interest of the antiquarians lay more in the social and cultural areas. Although Enlightenment historiography changed the earlier historical emphasis on politics, it also widened the cleavage between historians and antiquarians by asserting that history should be dealt with philosophically and the accumulation of facts was a mindless exercise. On the other hand, the 'antiquarians looked with horror at the invasion of the holy precincts of history by a fanatic gang of philosophers who travelled very light'.⁸⁴ Gibbon reconciled these contrary positions in his own writings and thus bequeathed to posterity a more composite way of writing history.

Gibbon started exploring these ideas quite early. His *Essay on the Study of Literature* (1761) was a reaction to d'Alembert's attempts at consigning history to a low place in the system of knowledge. Gibbon spiritedly objected to the relegation of history to the domain of memory where it would lie passively before being rescued by the philosophers. He stated that although 'Natural Philosophy and Mathematics are now in possession of the throne', probably 'their reign too is short, and their fall approaching'. He commented that to understand the ancients we should be 'able to place ourselves in the same point of view with the Greeks and Romans'.⁸⁵ He then elaborated the rules of engagement with history. The first thing is that there are too many facts and one needs to be selective. But this selection requires the judgement 'that causes ought always to be proportioned to their effects'. It would be 'wrong to trace the character of an age, from the conduct of an individual'. A thorough comparative effort would be required to match various events and then to relate them to cause and effect. Gibbon finds unacceptable another idea of d'Alembert that unnecessary facts should be destroyed after each century. He instead argues that 'let us carefully preserve every historical fact. A Montesquieu may discover, in the most trivial, connections unknown to the vulgar'.⁸⁶ Gibbon himself succeeded in bringing the whole battery of erudition to the service of his philosophical history.

In *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Gibbon divides his subject matter into three periods: (a) from the second century to the beginning of the sixth century; (b) from the reign of Justinian (483–565), the emperor of the Eastern Roman Empire with its capital at Constantinople, to the coronation of Charlemagne as the emperor of Romans in 800; and (c) from the ninth century to the extinction of the Eastern Roman Empire as a result of the Turkish invasion in the fifteenth century. What began as a history of the 'decline and fall' of the ancient Western world assumed a much vaster scope covering the history of the nomadic and pastoral peoples on Europe's frontiers and as far as China, and a history of the rise of the church in Europe. It encompassed the

'decline and fall' of the empire as well as the history of 'the triumph of barbarism and religion'. Thus, as Pocock comments, 'What has set out to be a history of the fall of the empire became a history of the rise of the church, and alone among the great Enlightened historians Gibbon became an ecclesiastical historian ... a historian of theology, and a historian of philosophy that underlay it.... Though an unbeliever, he wrote like a great clerical historian'.⁸⁷

The causes of the fall of the Roman empire have been earlier debated by Montesquieu and Voltaire. Montesquieu attributed it to the decline in morals of the citizenry due to the transformation of the republic into an empire, and to the overextension of the imperial boundaries, leading to intense pressures on its human resources. Voltaire's narration highlighted the combination of the Christians and barbarians in bringing about the fall of the empire. Gibbon seems to agree with both, although in the ultimate analysis, his explanation is nearer to Voltaire's. He considered the external factor of barbarian invasions and the internal factor of Christianity as responsible for the fall of the empire.⁸⁸

Although much appreciated, Gibbon's *History* has also been criticized on some points as follows: his disparaging comments on Christianity and Judaism, particularly in the first volume; unsympathetic attitude towards the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) Empire; apathy for the large slave population in the ancient Greek and Roman societies; and his Eurocentric and socially and politically conservative attitude.⁸⁹

Condorcet (1743–94)⁹⁰

Condorcet, a French mathematician, was among the last of the Enlightenment thinkers. In his writings, many implicit and explicit ideas of eighteenth-century philosophy may be found in a synthesized form. He was the only *philosophe* who actively participated in the French Revolution of 1789. He possessed a strong democratic and republican belief in the 'the absolute equality of all citizens' and natural rights of human beings.⁹¹ After the French Revolution, he became a firm supporter of the Girondins. When he was hiding from the Jacobins, he wrote his most famous historical piece, *Sketch for a Historical Picture of the Progress of the Human Mind*, during 1793–4. The work was still incomplete when he was arrested and died under mysterious circumstances. In this work, he outlined a grand picture of human progress occurring in ten stages, starting with the primitive society and ending in the scientific, rational, and fully enlightened society of the future. He believed that despite various obstacles in its path, humanity has continuously advanced

and that infinite progress was possible in human history. This perpetual progress was an outcome of human action and God had no role to play in this.

Beginning with the first stage of hunter-gatherers, Condorcet argued that one problem that proved to be the biggest obstacle in human progress was 'the separation of the human race into two parts.... The one wishing to place itself above reason, the other humbly renouncing its own reason'. The deceitful priestly class made people believe in slavery and blind submission. The dawn of civilization in ancient Greece and the emergence of philosophy marked the beginning of 'the war between philosophy and superstition'. The following period witnessed significant progress, but 'the triumph of Christianity' led to relapse into the worst form of superstition, and 'the entire decline both of the sciences and of philosophy'.⁹² However, the invention of printing in the early modern period relieved the situation by freeing knowledge from the clutches of the clergy, and by widening the reach and accessibility of books. This created the condition for the successful dissemination of rational thought, leading to the ninth stage beginning with Galileo, Bacon, and Descartes, and ending with the Enlightenment and the French Revolution.

The tenth and the final epoch of his teleological scheme, beginning with the French Revolution and its constitution, would witness 'the destruction of inequality among nations; the progress of equality within each people; and the real betterment of humankind'. He condemned the violent European intervention in colonial territories, which had been catastrophic for the natives: 'Review the history of our enterprises and settlements in Africa and Asia and you will see our commercial monopolies, our betrayals, our bloodthirsty contempt for people of another color or creed, the insolence of our usurpations, and the extravagant proselytizing or the intrigues of our priests destroying the sentiment of respect and goodwill initially inspired by the superiority of our knowledge'.⁹³ But soon the time would come when 'these outposts for bandits will become colonies of citizens spreading to Africa and Asia the principles and practices of European liberty, knowledge, and reason'. When the Europeans would treat the non-European people as their 'brothers', the latter 'would instantly become their friends and disciples'. And these 'nations crouching under the yoke of sacred despots or stupid conquerors' would now have the enlightened voice of reason and the friendly hands 'to deliver them'.⁹⁴

Such a view of linear progress, as it has been pointed out by many scholars, is the secular counterpart of the Christian view in which the world was created by God on a particular day and would advance to its

consummation on the day of Last Judgement, when the good would finally and irrevocably triumph over the evil. Moreover, the ten-stage scheme of human development appears arbitrary with no causal links between various stages. There is also a certain naivety in the belief in the rationality of people who would be benefited by the printing medium in a positive manner only. Condorcet simply assumes that a secular and scientific common opinion would result in the dissemination of education through mass media, and fails to see its differential impact on various groups of people. Similarly, despite his anti-colonial beliefs, Condorcet remains bound within a Eurocentric discourse. Yet, on the whole, he represents one of the purest, most strident and radical voices of the Enlightenment.

IMPORTANT FEATURES OF ENLIGHTENMENT HISTORIOGRAPHY

Enlightenment historiography transcended the earlier modes of history-writing prevalent since the Renaissance—political-administrative history and the antiquarian or erudite scholarship. It abandoned the history concerned with great kings and notables, and even where the name of the king was mentioned it was only to denote a particular age in which the king may have played a role. The Enlightenment historians also rejected what they termed as the unnecessary accumulation of facts; instead they focused on interpretation. They proposed to seek common principles and general causes of the events to reduce the apparent chaos that formed the picture of the past. Among the Enlightenment historians, Gibbon most notably fused the earlier two historical traditions in a synthesis that became the greatest achievement of Enlightenment historiography. The Enlightenment thinkers inaugurated a new tradition of historiography concerned with socio-cultural issues and broad structures of particular societies. They were interested in 'civilizations' and the 'progress of mankind' associated with political and commercial institutions. They were predominantly concerned with the present, from where they viewed the developments in the past. Enlightenment historiography was firmly secular and discarded the role of providence in human affairs.

Many sets of opposing ideas had jostled with each other for supremacy since the Renaissance. These were cyclical versus linear history, the idea of decline versus The idea of progress, the superiority of the ancients versus the moderns, and universal versus specific history. During the course of the Enlightenment, all these controversies were more or less resolved, particularly in the thinking of the educated elite, either by elimination of one or by its absorption into another. The idea of a progressive, linear,

statal, and universalistic or cosmopolitan history gained precedence, and moderns were almost uniformly declared as superior in comparison with the ancients. We will now briefly discuss some of these issues.

1. One of the biggest intellectual contests of the modern times was termed as the *battle between the ancients and the moderns*. There was a keen intellectual debate among the post-Renaissance thinkers, particularly since the seventeenth century, to decide whether the ancient age and its thinkers or the modern age was superior. This controversy, which was most intense between 1680s and 1720s, resulted in transforming the intellectual firmament of Europe, particularly in France. As the debate ranged through the press, the first recognizable 'public sphere' emerged, a conception of culture as opposed to that of civilization began to take shape, and a reconceptualization of human psychology happened.⁹⁵ Jean Bodin had already questioned the notion of the superiority of the ancients on the grounds of both morality and scholarship. Later, Fontenelle's *Digression on the Ancients and Moderns* (1688) is considered one of the most definitive statements about the superiority of the moderns. He started with the assumption of the invariability of nature's laws, and argued that if the human mind and reason had not declined since antiquity, it follows that the accumulation of knowledge in arts and sciences has led to an absolute advance. In the eighteenth century, the moderns asserted their superiority by claiming that, great though the antiquities were, the modern age was superior due to its use of reason, growth in knowledge, and developed skill in separating truth from error. They rejected the Renaissance idea that their job was limited to reworking the Graeco-Roman models in every field. At the level of historical writings also, those who favoured the moderns argued that (a) the ancients had inserted fables in their narratives and their history was full of fiction; (b) historical writings by the ancient scholars were of no relevance in modern times; (c) the tools and method of research in the ancient period was backward, while the modern methods were more advanced and capable of bringing out the truth; and (d) in the historical writings by the ancients, the rhetorical element was dominant while the modern writers presented their material in a straight and scientific manner.⁹⁶ By the middle of the eighteenth century, this debate was more or less settled in favour of the moderns.
2. Another development was a decisive shift from *cyclical* to *linear* or *stadial* history, particularly in the late eighteenth century. The deliberate snapping of the cord between the antiquities and the modern

age resulted in the rejection of the cyclical notions of history and brought about the idea of progress through time. It is true that some Enlightenment historians, most famously David Hume, still professed cyclicity of change. But most others conceptualized a long-term linear development based on changing social structures. In keeping with the idea of 'general causes' and their role in determining human character, a theory of stadial progress evolved, leading to the formulation of stage-wise socio-economic change towards increasingly higher forms. The stages of progress may vary with each proponent. For example, Turgot proposed three stages, Condorcet ten stages, and the thinkers of Scottish Enlightenment suggested a four-stage progression. The latter proved to be the most famous stadial concept—a four-stage developmental scheme according to which most societies in the world were said to have passed from hunting-gathering to pastoral to agricultural to commercial stages, which, in other words, denoted the passage from the 'savagery' to 'barbarism' to 'civilization'. This had another consequence: the character of the individual became a product rather than a cause of historical change. Individual agency was generally accorded lower weight in Enlightenment historiography.

3. One of the most powerful concepts of modern times, *the idea of progress*, may be defined as the belief that humanity had advanced in the past, is advancing in the present, and will advance in the future. It also connotes a change for the better. The basic ingredients of this idea are: the notion of advancement in knowledge in a progressive, cumulative manner; efforts by individual human beings to improve their lot; and the general advancement of freedom.⁹⁷ The famous early twentieth-century historian J.B. Bury, in his *The Idea of Progress* (1920), argues persuasively that the idea of progress is a modern idea and most premodern thought did not contain any concept of durable progress. On the other hand, Robert Nisbet argues that the idea of progress has ancient roots going back to the ancient Greeks and Romans, but more particularly stated by St Augustine and his followers. It was based on the Greek philosophy of natural growth and the Judaic ideas of history based on necessity. Augustine fused the two.⁹⁸ He also, however, agrees with the general view that 'the first secular statement of the idea of progress in modern Europe occurred during the so-called Quarrel of the Ancients and Moderns in France in the last part of the seventeenth century'.⁹⁹ Thus, most scholars agree that the modern idea of secular progress may be traced to the seventeenth century. In the eighteenth century, Turgot and Condorcet in France, Lessing, Kant, and Herder in Germany, and the Scottish

Enlightenment thinkers in Britain gave most clear expression to this idea. However, in substantial parts of Enlightenment thought, the idea of progress was still tempered with the notion of decline. It was only during the nineteenth century, in the wake of the industrialization in many European countries leading to remarkable rise in wealth, that the idea of progress acquired its present form. Nevertheless, the trend was quite clear in the later years of the Enlightenment itself.

The Enlightenment played a crucial role in bringing history to the centre of human knowledge. By secularizing knowledge and freeing history from theology, it created conditions for viewing historical reality empirically. The contribution of Enlightenment historiography to the development of ideas and methods of history-writing has been considerable. Montesquieu's emphasis on long-term causes, particularly on the determining role of climate and geography, had a big impact on subsequent historiography for a long time to come. Voltaire's stress on cultural history rather than on the deeds of kings, his uncompromisingly secular approach, belief in reason, and praise of Eastern cultures and civilizations introduced new elements in history-writing. Hume's criticism of Montesquieu's determinism and the support of the idea of 'unintended consequences', Turgot's and Condorcet's emphatic ideas of the continuous progress of humanity, Smith's, Ferguson's, and Robertson's concept of economy-oriented stages in the development of human societies were important innovations. Finally, Gibbon's synthesis of philosophical history and erudite tradition added greatly to the development of modern historiography.

NOTES

1. Foucault 1984: 32.
2. Cited in Cassirer 1968: 4.
3. Condorcet 2004: 69.
4. Kant 1991: 54, 55.
5. Berlin 1973.
6. See Norton 2007; Mali and Wokler 2003: vii.
7. McMahon 2003: 98.
8. Cassirer 1968: 5.
9. Cassirer 1968: xi.
10. Cassirer 1968: viii.
11. The above passage on Peter Gay is based on Darnton 1971b, Leith 1971, Wilson 1968 and Outram 2005: 3–4.
12. Cited in Gay 1957: 183–4.
13. Becker, cited in Gay 1957: 188.

14. Horkheimer and Adorno 2002: 1.
15. Horkheimer and Adorno 2002: 20.
16. Horkheimer and Adorno 2002: 65; 69.
17. Cited in Rocco 1994: 79.
18. Schmidt 2000: 745.
19. Horkheimer and Adorno 2002: 172.
20. Darnton 1971a: 132.
21. Darnton 1971b: 115.
22. Israel 2006a: xi.
23. Israel 2006a: 11–12.
24. Israel 2006b: 525.
25. Pappe 1973.
26. Berlin 1973: 109.
27. Carhart 2005: 674.
28. Carhart 2005: 676.
29. Cited in Carrithers 1986: 61.
30. O'Brien 1997: 1–2.
31. See Muthu 2003.
32. Cited in Carrithers 1986: 65.
33. Montesquieu 1777, vol. 1: 33.
34. Montesquieu 1777, vol. 1: 322.
35. Montesquieu 1777, vol. 1: 337.
36. Montesquieu 1777, vol. 1.
37. A.J. Samuel 2009: 306.
38. O'Brien 1997: 22.
39. Voltaire 1764, vol. 5: 234.
40. Voltaire 1764, vol. 5: 230.
41. Force 2009: 460.
42. Voltaire 1764, vol. 5: 224, 225.
43. Voltaire 1764, vol. 5: 159.
44. O'Brien 1997: 48.
45. Cited in Pocock 1999b: 119.
46. See, for example, Voltaire 1764, vol. 5: 218: 'This series of observations, which goes back two thousand two hundred and thirty-four years beyond our vulgar era'; or 'The second monument is the central eclipse of the sun, calculated in China two thousand one hundred and fifty-five years before our vulgar era.'
47. Rosenthal 1955: 157–8.
48. O'Brien 1997: 62.
49. Cited in Berry 1982: 236.
50. Given in Kelley 1991: 459.
51. Mossner 1941: 662.
52. Given in Burns and Rayment-Pickard 2000: 40.
53. Cited in Wertz 1975: 482.
54. Mossner 1941: 662.
55. Noggle 2004: 620.
56. Pocock 1999b: 183–4.

57. Noggle 2004: 623.
58. Farr 1978: 305.
59. Based on Jimack 2006, Muthu 2003, Jimack and Mander 2008, Aravamudan 1993, Ansart 2009, Cannon et al. 1988: 352, and Boyd 1999: 983–4.
60. Barzun 1986: 18.
61. Jimack 2006: xvii.
62. Jimack 2006: 269.
63. Cited in Muthu 2003: 87.
64. Muthu 2003: 104–05.
65. Cited in Aravamudan 1993: 54.
66. Jimack 2006: 271–5.
67. Based on Pocock 1999a, Shklar 1981, Cassirer 1968, and Hankins 1970.
68. Cited in Pocock 1999a: 178.
69. Based on Turgot 2011, Nisbet 1975, Manuel and Manuel 1979.
70. Nisbet 1975: 221.
71. Turgot 2011: 352, 355.
72. Turgot 2011: 321, 322.
73. Turgot 2011: 325.
74. Cited in Manuel and Manuel 1979: 474.
75. O'Brien 1997: 3.
76. Wright 2004: 208–10.
77. Cited in O'Brien 1997: 122.
78. Cited in O'Brien 1997: 160.
79. Hoebel 1960: 650.
80. O'Brien 1997: 166.
81. Cited in Hicks 2002: 183.
82. Based on Gibbon 1761, Momigliano 1954, Pocock 1976, Pocock 1977, Pocock 1999a, O'Brien 1997, B.W. Young 1998, Aylmer 1997, Trevor-Roper 1976/77, Shackleton 1976, Manuel 1976, Furet 1976, and Wright 2004.
83. Cited in O'Brien 1997: 173.
84. Momigliano 1954: 452.
85. Gibbon 1761: 4–5, 25–6.
86. Gibbon 1761: 99–101, 110.
87. Pocock 1999b: 5.
88. Aylmer 1997: 275.
89. Aylmer 1997: 273.
90. Based on Condorcet 1795, Condorcet 2004, Burns and Rayment-Pickard 2000: 35–9 and 46–51, Koyre 1948, Woolf 1998: 199–200, and Breisach 2003.
91. Condorcet in an open letter, cited in Koyre 1948: 143.
92. Condorcet 1795: 18, 37, 54.
93. Condorcet 2004: 67.
94. Condorcet 2004: 67–8; Condorcet 1795: 121.
95. DeJean 1997: ix–x.
96. Witschi-Bernz 1972: 59–62.
97. See Bury 1920; Krieger 1951; Nisbet 1979, 2009; Fay 1947; Mazlish 2000; Rotenstreich 1971; Iggers 1965; and Wagar 1967.

98. Nisbet 2009: xi–xiii; also Nisbet 1979.
99. Nisbet 1979.

FURTHER READING

- Muthu, Sankar. 2003. *Enlightenment against Empire*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- O'Brien, Karen. 1997. *Narratives of Enlightenment: Cosmopolitan History from Voltaire to Gibbon*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Pocock, J.G.A. 1999. *Barbarism and Religion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press [It is a massive projected six-volume study (of which five volumes have been published between 1999 and 2011) of Edward Gibbon and Enlightenment historiography]

HISTORICISM AND POSITIVISM

VARIOUS STREAMS CONTRIBUTED to the crystallization of modern historiography. Humanist historians, historical philosophers, legal historians, advocates of exemplary history, antiquarians, and Enlightenment historians—all helped in shaping the contours of historical scholarship whose importance became all too visible in the nineteenth century. However, one development in thought that proved the most crucial for the development of modern historiography is known as ‘historicism’ or ‘historicism’. Some elements of historicism had been in existence since the Renaissance’s emphasis on the ‘pastness of the past’. But it was during the eighteenth century that this doctrine received its full expression, particularly in the writings of Vico and Herder. Although the writings of some Enlightenment historical thinkers, particularly Montesquieu, also contained historicist features, Enlightenment thought, on the whole, posited a fundamentally unified human nature across ages and regions. Historicism was pitted against such universalist and uniformitarian thinking. It emphasized the particularity of the historical context rather than interpreting human behaviour on the basis of some general principles.

Yet another philosophical system—positivism—emerged in the early nineteenth century and was a continuation of the Enlightenment ideas of progress and universalism. It was not of much help to practicing historians, and the term widely used in the twentieth century known as ‘positivist historiography’ is quite misleading and inappropriate in describing most forms of actual historical practice. It lumps together widely divergent, even opposing, forms of history-writing from the idealist and individual-centric Rankean tradition to the histories seeking to formulate laws.

This chapter is organized as follows: first we will discuss the history of the term ‘historicism’ and the various meanings attached to it; next, we will pay attention to the ideas of two important thinkers—Herder

and Hegel—associated with this trend, and who differed quite a lot from each other; and finally, we will focus on ‘positivism’ as formulated in the thought of Auguste Comte.

HISTORICISM

The term ‘historicism’ has been used in a variety of meanings since the late eighteenth century, some even opposed to each other. In Germany, where it seems to have originated, the term used was ‘*historismus*’ or ‘historism’. Later, in Italian, it was used as ‘*istorismo*’ and ‘*storicismo*’, and from there it was translated into English as ‘historicism’. Novalis (1772–1801), a German Romantic philosopher, seems to have first used the term negatively to denote a ‘system of confusion’. However, it was Friedrich Schlegel (1772–1829), a German poet, critic, and scholar, who gave it a definite positive meaning by emphasizing ‘the totally unique nature of antiquity’ and its ‘immeasurable distinctness’.¹ The term was used in Germany in the first half of the nineteenth century with meanings resembling that of Schlegel. It was contrasted to the generalizing, system-building approaches to history and society in the wake of the Enlightenment. Christlieb Braniss (1792–1873), a professor of philosophy in Breslau, argued in 1848 that ‘historicism’ tried to comprehend reality historically, which was in contrast to ‘naturalism’ that sought to analyse reality in terms of nature. In 1852, Carl Prantl (1820–88), a German philosopher and philologist, distinguished ‘true historicism’ that respects individuality in the concrete contexts of time and place, from shallow empiricism and idealism. In his book on Vico in 1879, Karl Werner (1821–88), an Austrian theologian, traced Vico’s ideas about the centrality of history to the human mind. In the later nineteenth century, ‘historicism’ was imbued with a negative meaning by its critics. The three great traditions in the West—theology, philosophy, and economics—have always assumed an extra-historical status. Historicism’s emphasis on historicity of any phenomenon aroused their wrath. At the turn of the twentieth century, there was also talk about the ‘crisis of historicism’. This crisis may be defined as ‘the concern ... with the allegedly damaging effects of an excessive preoccupation with the methods and objects of historical research’. These two effects were ‘a relativism destructive of absolute (or at least of prevailing) values, and a focus on the past destructive of commitment to the tasks of the present’.²

The term ‘historicism’ became widely known in the 1920s through the writings of Ernst Troeltsch (1865–1923), a German Protestant theologian and a historian of religion. In 1922, he wrote on the ‘Crisis of Historicism’,

tracing the origins of the battle between naturalism and historicism to the seventeenth century. Troeltsch defined it as 'the historicizing of our entire knowing and experiencing of the spiritual world, as it has taken place in the course of the XIXth century'.³ Although he hailed historicism's notion that all human ideas and institutions are subject to change, he also feared that this would result in destroying all points of reference. Karl Heussi (1877–1961), a German Protestant church historian, in his book *The Crisis of Historicism* (1932), related the term 'historicism' with 'history for the sake of history', relativism, radical evolutionism, and speculative philosophy of history.

It was Friedrich Meinecke (1862–1954), a famous German historian, who gave a detailed and optimistic account of the phenomenon. In his famous book, *Historism: The Rise of a New Historical Outlook* (1936), he considered it 'the greatest spiritual revolution which Occidental thought has undergone', on par with the Reformation so far as Germany was concerned. He locates it mostly within the German intellectual tradition stating that 'historicism is nothing else but the application to the historical world of the new life-governing principles achieved by the great German movement extending from Leibniz to the death of Goethe'. Its 'essence' lay in 'the substitution of a process of *individualising* observation for a *generalising* view of human forces in history'. What was needed was to blend the generalizing approach with 'a feeling for the individual; and this sense of individuality was something new that it [historicism] created'.⁴ According to Meinecke, historicism represented the process of 'breaking down the rigid ways of thought attached to the concepts of Natural Law and its belief in the invariability of the highest human ideals and an unchanging human nature that was held to be constant for all ages'.⁵ While Meinecke traced the core content of historicism to the triad of Herder–Goethe–Ranke, Benedetto Croce (1866–1952), the renowned Italian philosopher and critic, thought that historicism was more ingrained in the thoughts of Vico and Hegel. He asserted that all reality is historical and that historicism 'is the affirmation that life and reality are history and history alone'.⁶ R.G. Collingwood (1889–1943), a British philosopher of history, made a sharp distinction between science and history, and believed that historicism was the affirmation of this.

Karl Popper, in an influential book *The Poverty of Historicism* (1957), made a distinction between historicism and 'historism'. He defined historicism as 'an approach to the social sciences that assumes that *historical prediction* is their principal aim, and which assumes that this aim is attainable by discovering the "rhythms" or the "patterns", the "laws" or the "trends" that underlie the evolution of history'.⁷ The thinkers he

identified with this trend were Hegel and Marx, who tried to formulate laws of historical development. He associated 'historism' with the search for particulars 'characterized by its interest in actual, singular, or specific events, rather than laws or generalizations'.⁸

Frederic Jameson identifies two types of historicism: genetic or teleological, and existential. Genetic historicism is evolutionary, believes in the idea of progress, and could be identified with certain Enlightenment thinkers as well as with Herder. Existential historicism repudiates unilinear progression, considers that every age or society has its own justified existence, and is generally associated with Ranke in historical thinking, finding its fullest expression in Dilthey, Croce, and Collingwood. Jameson thinks that this latter variety of historicism is subject to 'complete relativization' and may result in 'an infinity of possible histories'.⁹

It is the variety of usages associated with historicism that has prompted John Cannon to comment that historicism is a 'confused and confusing word, which should be abandoned, since it obscures more than it illuminates'.¹⁰ However, on the basis of the above discussion, we would try to reach a more precise understanding of historicism as follows.

1. It was since Meinecke's famous work that historicism has been identified with the German Historical School in the nineteenth century. Before Meinecke, no historian had characterized his/her practice as 'historicism'. But since the late 1930s, there has been a general agreement that historicist thought in its present form can be traced to the writings of Vico and Herder in the eighteenth century. During the nineteenth century, these ideas were most representatively reflected in the historical thinking and writing of the 'German Historical School' from Wilhelm Humboldt and Leopold Ranke to Gustav Droysen and Mommsen. Although it was discussed extensively all over Europe and America, particularly in Italy and Britain, it may be said that Germany was the epicentre of historicist intellectual movement, as France and Britain were that of the Enlightenment and Italy was that of the Renaissance.
2. Historicism was the culmination of the process of historical thinking that originated in the Renaissance discovery of anachronism. Ever since the Renaissance, it was recognized that the past was different from the present. However, with historicism, it became possible to view 'the past in its uniqueness'.¹¹ Thus, the 'sense of history' that the modern West had had since the Renaissance was superseded by historicism. However, the differences between the Enlightenment and early historicism was not very sharp. Despite their radical pronouncements

to judge the past on its own terms, Humboldt and Ranke were as prone to viewing the past with the eyes of the present as Voltaire or Gibbon, who quite deliberately decided to be presentist. Moreover, the early historicists realized that it was not possible to abjure universal history because it was only within a larger canvas that the particulars could be suitably understood.¹²

3. Historicism, in its most basic form, is associated with individuality, development, and relatedness. It proclaims that history is the repository of all meanings, truths, and values. It rejects Enlightenment ideas about the unchangeable human nature. Instead it presents 'the unique, genetic, and incommensurable character of societies in history', and considers the ideas and values in relation to particular societies. Thus, human experiences and cultural expressions should not be judged on the basis of eternal and universal principles, but in relation to the thought and values of particular cultures in their own times and environment.¹³
4. One of the most relevant and widely accepted definitions of historicism is provided by Maurice Mandelbaum as follows: 'Historicism is the belief that an adequate understanding of the nature of any phenomenon and an adequate assessment of its value are to be gained through considering it in terms of the place which it occupied and the role which it played within a process of development'.¹⁴

HERDER (1744–1803)

Johann Gottfried Herder is considered as the most influential proponent of historicism. Although half a century earlier Vico had most originally laid out the ideas now associated with historicism, his works were much less known and remained of mostly esoteric interest restricted to some top-ranking European intellectuals. Herder's works, on the other hand, were instantly noticed and circulated widely. Their situation was also different. While Vico's ideas were overshadowed by the quick and wide spread of Enlightenment historical ideas, Herder wrote in an era when Enlightenment had already reached its peak and was now being questioned from nationalist angles, particularly by some Germans who considered it Franco-centric and belittling to German pride. One important influence on Herder was J.G. Hamann, a German philosopher associated with the German Counter-Enlightenment, who was bitterly critical of the Enlightenment's emphasis on reason and universalism. Hamann believed that truth is particular and not general, the use of reason cannot reveal reality to us, and rationalism and scientism were used to distort

reality. Another immediate influence on Herder might have been Justus Moser (1720–94), whose multi-volume *History of Osnabrück* (1762–71) emphasized on the particular and on the role of the irrational in history. This history of a single city, depicting loss and recovery of liberty, was to prove influential as a counterpoint to the Enlightenment's universal histories. In this, Moser argued that the city gained in peace and prosperity because it successfully resisted the centralizing tendency of the Holy Roman Empire. He emphasized that the city's customs, institutions, and laws should be understood only in terms of their own particularities, and not in the light of some general principles.

Isaiah Berlin, in a famous account of Herder, described him as 'the father of the related notions of nationalism, historicism, and the *Volksgeist* [people's spirit]', and as 'the most formidable of the adversaries of the French *philosophes* and their German disciples'.¹⁵ However, Ernst Cassirer, about half a century earlier, had taken a somewhat different approach by considering Herder's views as a continuation of the Enlightenment. Although he affirms the originality of Herder's thought, he also asserts that this could not have been possible without the groundwork done by the Enlightenment. In fact, Herder's 'conquest of the Enlightenment' was 'a genuine self-conquest'.¹⁶ It is true that the impact of Enlightenment ideas on Herder cannot be ignored even though his thought challenged certain crucial notions associated with it.

In 1774, Herder wrote an important tract titled *Another Philosophy of History for the Education of Mankind*. He began his essay by emphasizing on monogenesis, that is, 'the single origin of the whole species'. This was the most natural time when 'one human couple began spinning the thread'.¹⁷ It was a blissful time. It was in this climate in the 'Orient' that 'the human spirit received the first forms of wisdom and virtue with a simplicity, strength and majesty that—to put it bluntly—has no equal, no equal at all in our philosophical, cold, European world'.¹⁸ He contended that 'the human nature is not a vessel of an absolute, unchanging and independent happiness, as defined by the [Enlightenment] philosopher; everywhere it attracts that measure of happiness of which it is capable: it is a pliant clay which assumes a different shape under different needs and circumstances. Even the image of happiness changes with each condition and climate'.¹⁹ He opposed the 'general, philosophical, philanthropical time of our century [which] wishes to extend "our own ideal" of virtue and happiness to each distant nation, to even the remotest age in history'.²⁰

In contrast to Enlightenment thinking, he insisted that the past should not be viewed with the eyes of the present or be judged on the basis of

some timeless, universal standards. Each age, country, or event must be seen, analysed, and evaluated in its own right: 'You must enter into the spirit of the nation before you can share even one of its thoughts and deeds'.²¹ Thus, he criticized the Renaissance's and Enlightenment's abrupt dismissal of the medieval period as dark ages because he felt that each age has its own merits and demerits,²² and each age 'has the centre of its happiness within itself'.²³ Thus, for him, human history 'is an unending drama with many scenes, God's epic through all the centuries, continents and generations, a fable with a thousand variations full of immense meaning'.²⁴ He believed in diversity and stressed that 'not a man, not a country, not a people, not a natural history, not a state, are like one another'.²⁵

Herder argues that it is due to individual 'genetic force' that different cultures and nations emerge. But his idea of the 'genetic' has nothing to do with modern 'biogenetics'. What he means by this term is human creative energy that works in each individual, group, or culture to create happiness in every individual instance. It cannot be compared with others, neither can it be judged on the basis of a different culture or individual. The cultures are transmitted from one generation to the next by means of language. But the language is also historical, and there cannot be any universal scientific language suitable for everyone in the world. Each language develops as an intimate cultural expression of particular communities. It is the unique manifestation as well as maker of the national spirit. His emphasis on particularity, uniqueness, and concreteness coexisted with the typology of human relationships inherited from Enlightenment thought. Both the individual and the type were real, as they were placed in a harmonious relationship within a larger, cosmic totality under the providential umbrella.²⁶

Despite his insistence on difference, he envisages the unity of humankind: 'Do you see this river flowing on, how it springs from a tiny source, swells, divides, joins up again, winds in and out and cuts farther and deeper but, whatever the intricacies of its course, still remains water'.²⁷ For Herder, the 'nation' was not the nation-state but *volk*, people. In fact, for him, 'the state is the coldest of all cold monsters'.²⁸ Moreover, Herder, in consonance with many Enlightenment thinkers, maintained that history should not be mainly concerned with chronicling the deeds of the kings and nobles but focus on the people at large. He is uncompromisingly against hero-worship in history, and depicts the Roman conquerors as a bundle of 'blood, lust, sinister vices—a trail of blood'. And he asks, 'Why should hundreds suffer hunger and cold to satisfy the whim of a crowned madman'?²⁹

He was against the imperialism and Eurocentrism of his times and firmly believed in equality among nations:

There is no such thing as a specially favoured nation on earth.... Least of all must we think of European culture as a universal standard of human values.... Only a real misanthrope could regard European culture as the universal condition of our species. The culture of *man* is not the culture of the *European*; it manifests itself according to place and time in *every* people.³⁰

He castigated European drives for trade and conquests all over the world. Thus, although in 'our Europe slavery has been abolished ... this did not prevent our raiding three other continents for slaves, trading in them, banishing them to silvermines and sugar plantations'.³¹ He stated that 'our part of the earth [Europe] should not be called the wisest, but the most arrogant, aggressive, money-minded: what it has given these peoples is not civilization but the destruction of the rudiments of their own cultures'.³² He related the story of a black slave who was dying: "Why are you pouring water over my head?" asked a dying slave of a Christian missionary. "So that you can go to Heaven." "I do not want to go to a heaven where there are white men," he replied, and turned on his side and died.³³

Later Herder moderated some of his radically historicist ideas in favour of universalist notions. In his *Ideas for a Philosophy of History* (1784–91), he outlined a universal history going as far back as the creation of the solar system.³⁴ He also does not seem to maintain a distinction between natural history and human history, or between science and history, a distinction emphatically asserted by later historicists. He believed that 'in history also natural laws are valid which lie in the essence of things'.³⁵ While the ideas about unity of humankind and progress were also present in his earlier work, now they became more prominent. In this work, each society and culture in time and space evolve in their own way but they are linked because they all develop *Humanitat* or humanity, comprising the 'creative powers and potentialities of human beings'.³⁶ He also talked of an almost teleological development in history, but without abandoning his earlier belief that each society should be judged not by the standards of another society but on its own terms. He combined universal history with particular history, which influenced German historians of the subsequent period. Herder's ideas about history may be briefly outlined as follows.

1. Every event, historical age, culture, or society possesses a unique character of its own that is incomparable and irreducible to any other event, age, or culture. There are no universally valid standards applicable to all societies, and there is no uniform human nature. Any

attempt to impose the standards of a later period or different country over others is unjustified and tends to eliminate the crucial differences which a historian should study. All cultures and societies are equal and respectable in their own times and places. This idea of individuality applies to all values. All values and cognitions are historical and inhere in particular peoples.³⁷

2. Development or constant change was another important idea. But, according to Herder, each individual or society develops according to its own laws and not in accordance with some universal principles. The seeds of this development are inherent in individuals and societies, which set them on a particular course. It is like the differential growth of plants, which in their variety make the garden beautiful. Human individuals and societies also follow the same organicist principle of growth and development and are interesting only in their variety. Herder's attitude was non-judgemental and he valued everything. For him, the greatest and the smallest were equal and valuable in their own existence. Everything served a divine purpose and was part of the greater whole without, however, being dependent on anything else. For him, the past and the present held important values of their own and should not be judged in terms of one or the other.
3. Despite their differences, however, various civilizations or societies are related by the universal ideal of *Humanitat*, which each of them try to attain. Herder believed that the seed of a common humanity, nobility, and dignity is present in all human beings. Diverse societies and cultures can coexist peacefully and help each other in achieving happiness.
4. Herder's contribution to historical consciousness consisted in his 'feeling for the diversity of life forms, his sense of unity in diversity, and his substitution of process for structure as the mode of comprehending history in its totality'.³⁸ He insisted on the intrinsic value of each event and did not take it as a means to a further or broader end.
5. However, Herder's overall work reveals a tension between the particular and the universal. While the historicist theme is dominant in the *Yet Another Philosophy*, the universal predominates in *Ideas*. Thus, there is a 'juxtaposition of two systems of thought in mutual conflict: the historicist and the enlightened'.³⁹

HEGEL (1770–1831)

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel was one of the greatest and most influential philosophers in the Western world. He was a German who taught

philosophy at the University of Jena from 1801 to 1806 and later at the University of Berlin from 1818 until his death in 1831. He published several books, the most famous being *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (1821), and *The Philosophy of History* (1837, 1840). It was in the last work that he elaborated his views on history. Hegel considered history as the true foundation of knowledge. He was an idealist who believed that ideas came prior to material evidences. He rejected the Kantian distinction between subject and object, between form and content, and between a priori and a posteriori. In his system, the idea attains its realization through historical experience. He emphasized the role of the historian as crucial to the writing of history. He argued that despite the notion of reconstructing the past on the basis of evidence, historians could not avoid infusing their historical accounts with their own creativity so that the past could be presented coherently. Language provides the medium through which the gap between consciousness and reality is filled up. According to him, history is primarily interpretative with four varieties of interpretation—universal, pragmatic, critical, and conceptual. Since history is based on the critical self-consciousness of the historian, Hegel considered it closer to literature than to science.⁴⁰

Hegel was not a historicist in the usual sense of the term. He differed from Herder and other Romantics on several counts as follows: (a) He was critical of the Romantic doctrine of feeling and insisted that 'Reason' was the only way of understanding the nature of the world. (b) He did not believe that each nation and culture should be regarded as an equally legitimate embodiment of God. Rather, he placed various cultures on a scale of progression of the 'Spirit' epitomizing different levels of worth; and quite a few cultures and nations possessed no worth at all. This conception was in fundamental opposition to Herder's idea of equality among all cultures. (c) Hegel's notion of a rational dialectical progression made it difficult for him to consider an individual society or period in isolation. He insisted that in order to comprehend any society, we must know the entire process of development of world history.

Nevertheless, his philosophy of history contained several elements of historicism, particularly his sharp distinction between the natural and historical phenomena. He also had a notion of differences in human nature and cultural achievements in time and space, although in his system differences were hierarchically arranged. In the following account, the main elements of Hegel's ideas on history are briefly presented.

1. Hegel makes a clear distinction between the natural and human realms: only humans have history, which means a linear and progressive

- movement. Nature is cyclical: things are born, they grow, and then decay in a cyclical pattern.
2. He distinguishes between three types of history: (a) 'Original History', written by historians such as Herodotus, Thucydides, and Guicciardini based on the 'deeds, events, and states of society, which they had before their eyes, and whose spirit they shared'. In such histories, there is an identity between the historian and the happenings because they share a similar spirit. (b) 'Reflective History' in which the historian is away from the event in time and space, and belongs to a different 'spirit' from that of the persons and events he/she is covering.⁴¹ (c) 'Philosophical History' which is the most important. It is with this history that Hegel is concerned. Although he agrees with other historicists that various societies can be distinguished on the basis of their different cultures and moral standards, he does not think that individuals, societies, or nations are the real agents of history. According to him, they are all ultimately driven by the 'Spirit' (*Geist*). This Spirit is unevenly distributed and is manifested in a variety of institutions and thoughts. The telos of its development is from less rational to more rational forms until it attains the height of rationality in a set of institutions where its contradictions and alienation are rationally overcome. It is in this history that the subjective and the objective are united.⁴²
 3. In Hegel's system, 'Reason' is situated outside humanity and works its way through the seemingly irrational actions of the human beings, particularly those whom he calls 'world-historical individuals'. This transcendental characteristic of 'Reason' puts it in the same category as God in medieval historiography and Nature in Enlightenment historiography. It all begins with a concept Hegel terms as 'Absolute Idea', which is an abstraction of the totality of human actions. This Idea exists outside of history. The rational core of this Idea is 'Spirit', and 'the very essence of Spirit is activity'.⁴³ It is unconscious of itself. To become conscious of and to realize itself, it has to descend into history, into time: 'History in general is therefore the development of Spirit in *Time*, as Nature is the development of the Idea in *Space*'.⁴⁴ This temporalization, however, is related only to the *development* of the Spirit and not the Spirit itself, which comes from a realm that is timeless and that resists temporalization.
 4. For Hegel, all history is the history of the state. Only those peoples who have constituted themselves into states, defined both by cultural and political relationships, can be considered as 'World-Historical' peoples: 'In the history of the World, only those peoples can come

under our notice which form a state'.⁴⁵ It is only through them that the Spirit moves towards the realization of freedom. It is in the state that rationality and freedom combine. It is in the state, therefore, that the 'successive phases of the Idea manifest themselves'.⁴⁶

5. Hegel was aware that, despite all his talk about the rationality of the real, much of world history is filled with what even he views as irrational. People act on impulse, or to realize their personal ambitions, interests, or passions which are, in fact, the 'most effective springs of action'. They are indispensable because '*nothing great in the World* has been accomplished without *passion*'. However, such selfish and violent actions make history appear 'as the slaughter-bench at which the happiness of peoples, the wisdom of States, and the virtue of individuals have been victimized'. It is here that 'Reason' operates with all its intelligence to achieve its aims, hiding in the crevices without letting any harm befall on it. It does not expose itself to danger, does not become explicit in the midst of battle or struggle. But it controls the process by remaining 'in the background, untouched and uninjured'. Hegel famously called it the 'cunning of reason' because 'it sets the passions to work for itself'. Although death and destruction follow in its wake as a necessary consequence, they do not injure the 'Idea'. The general Idea survives while the 'individuals are sacrificed and abandoned'. The quest for power and glory by such 'World-Historical Men' as Alexander, Caesar, and Napoleon caused destruction but also resulted in creating superior and more rational forms of political organizations. It is all because 'Reason' operates 'cunningly' through unreason to produce higher forms of institutions. This Hegelian idea of 'cunning of reason', in a way, justifies extortion, war, invasion, violence, and oppression. If 'Reason' in all cases achieves its rational aims, and in most cases through irrational means like violence and wars, does it not mean that paying attention to innumerable deaths and destruction is irrelevant? Hegel thought that ordinary morality is useless because 'the History of the World occupies a higher ground than that on which morality has properly its position ... moral claims that are irrelevant, must not be brought into collision with world-historical deeds and their accomplishment. The Litany of private virtues—modesty, humility, philanthropy and forbearance—must not be raised against them'.⁴⁷ He argued that in the march of the Spirit, many individuals and 'races' were expendable and one should not mourn over them because the Spirit 'is rich enough for expenditure on that scale ... it has nations and individuals enough to spend'.⁴⁸ It means that the elimination of a considerable number of indigenous Americans and

Australians, Africans, and Asians, who supposedly did not possess the state and who resisted attempts by Europeans to colonize them, would be no loss to humanity.

6. After much elaboration on the nature of the Spirit, its development through history, and its realization through the successive state forms, Hegel tried to fit his formulations into concrete history based on, as Bertrand Russell remarks, 'some distortion of facts and considerable ignorance'.⁴⁹ One may add that significant amount of prejudice was also injected in delineating the march of Spirit into actual history. Hegel began by considering the 'geographical basis of history', and declared, 'In the Frigid and in the Torrid zone the locality of World-Historical peoples cannot be found', because 'cold and heat are here too powerful to allow Spirit to build a world for *itself*'. This logic rules out quite a bit of the globe, but still leaves quite a large area for the Spirit to develop. However, Hegel goes on to assert that the 'the true theatre of History ... is the temperate zone; or rather, its northern half'. Narrow though the focus has now become, this logic still covers non-European lands. But, Hegel now looks for other determinants. In case of America, Hegel concentrates on the supposedly innate character, leaving aside his earlier climatic determination: 'America has always shown itself physically and psychically powerless, and still shows itself so.... The inferiority of these individuals in all respects, even in regard to size, is very manifest'. The logic here gives way to monumental prejudices. The unspeakable brutalities wrought upon the indigenous Americans are simply ignored. In fact, Europeans are depicted as trying to introduce human character among the natives. North America fares better because 'all the citizens are of European descent'; so it could also become 'the land of the future'.⁵⁰
7. After dismissing America, he directed his attention to Africa. 'Africa proper,' he asserted, 'has remained ... enveloped in the dark mantle of Night'. He went on to portray the Africans in the most negative colours: they have no regard for humanity, support tyranny, are cannibals, are devoid of all morality and fellow-feeling, and are by nature slaves. According to Hegel, 'The Negro ... exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state ... there is nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in this type of character.' He even considers '*slavery* to have been the occasion of the increase of human feeling among the Negroes'. For Hegel, slavery—both ancient and modern—was 'a phase of advance from the merely isolated sensual existence'. Even 'the great courage' and 'enormous bodily strength,
8. Having thus eliminated a very large part of the world (almost three whole continents!) from the 'pale of history', Hegel then focused his attention on Asia. Here he straightaway eliminated 'Siberia' and 'Upper Asia'. The first dawn of Hegel's 'History' was witnessed by China, India, Persia, and Egypt. They represented the 'childhood' of history. History as such had a westward movement, starting with China, then moving to India, Persia, and Egypt. In this realm, history began with the early examples of state formation, formulation of laws, and 'subjugation of the mere arbitrary will'... unlike in the West where the people obey laws because of 'an *internal sanction*'... while the rest had 'to eat the bitter bread of slavery'.... Like China, India has also 'remained stationary and fixed'. The 'Indian culture is prehistorical' and it did not constitute 'an essential epoch in the development of Spirit'. India has only been 'a *Land of Desire*'.... Hegel justifies it by asserting that 'it is the necessary fate of Asiatic Empires to be subjected to Europeans; and China will, some day or the other, be obliged to submit to this fate'.... Persians fare better because they belong to 'the Caucasian, i.e. the European Stock'. Thus, 'With the Persian Empire we first enter on continuous History. The Persians are the first Historical People.... This therefore constitutes strictly the beginning of World-History'.... Egyptian Spirit could never rise 'to the Universal and Higher', and it was left to the 'free, joyful Spirit of Greece that accomplishes this'.⁵²
9. With the Greek world, Hegel felt 'immediately at home, for we are in the region of Spirit', in 'the Kingdom of *Beautiful Freedom*'. Here the ideal of 'free individuality' is recognized, and the 'Spirit became introspective, triumphed over particularity, and thereby emancipated itself'. But, although the Greek society was free, the Greeks had no consciousness of it. 'Subjectivity' was not advanced. They were only concerned with 'their country in its living and real aspect'. The Spirit was 'still involved with the Natural element' and the Abstract universal Personality had not yet appeared'.⁵³ Some of these deficiencies were overcome by the Romans.

exhibited by Negroes', who were shot down in large numbers by the Europeans, are condemned as their 'contempt of humanity' and 'want of regard for life'. And not a word against those 'Europeans' who massacred people. The victims are held responsible and condemned for their own death. 'At this point', Hegel declared, 'we leave Africa, not to mention it again. For it is no historical part of the world'.⁵¹ He similarly ruled out the participation of Australia in his 'world history'.

8. Having thus eliminated a very large part of the world (almost three whole continents!) from the 'pale of history', Hegel then focused his attention on Asia. Here he straightaway eliminated 'Siberia' and 'Upper Asia'. The first dawn of Hegel's 'History' was witnessed by China, India, Persia, and Egypt. They represented the 'childhood' of history. History as such had a westward movement, starting with China, then moving to India, Persia, and Egypt. In this realm, history began with the early examples of state formation, formulation of laws, and 'subjugation of the mere arbitrary will'... unlike in the West where the people obey laws because of 'an *internal sanction*'... while the rest had 'to eat the bitter bread of slavery'.... Like China, India has also 'remained stationary and fixed'. The 'Indian culture is prehistorical' and it did not constitute 'an essential epoch in the development of Spirit'. India has only been 'a *Land of Desire*'.... Hegel justifies it by asserting that 'it is the necessary fate of Asiatic Empires to be subjected to Europeans; and China will, some day or the other, be obliged to submit to this fate'.... Persians fare better because they belong to 'the Caucasian, i.e. the European Stock'. Thus, 'With the Persian Empire we first enter on continuous History. The Persians are the first Historical People.... This therefore constitutes strictly the beginning of World-History'.... Egyptian Spirit could never rise 'to the Universal and Higher', and it was left to the 'free, joyful Spirit of Greece that accomplishes this'.⁵²
9. With the Greek world, Hegel felt 'immediately at home, for we are in the region of Spirit', in 'the Kingdom of *Beautiful Freedom*'. Here the ideal of 'free individuality' is recognized, and the 'Spirit became introspective, triumphed over particularity, and thereby emancipated itself'. But, although the Greek society was free, the Greeks had no consciousness of it. 'Subjectivity' was not advanced. They were only concerned with 'their country in its living and real aspect'. The Spirit was 'still involved with the Natural element' and the Abstract universal Personality had not yet appeared'.⁵³ Some of these deficiencies were overcome by the Romans.

10. While Greece represented the youth of history, Rome was its 'Manhood'. Here neither the will of the individual nor that of the despot is supreme. The 'general aim' asserts its supremacy, and the 'individual perishes and realizes his own private object only in that general aim'. The individual personality also becomes conscious of its responsibility. 'These two elements, which constitute Rome—political Universality on the one hand, and the abstract freedom of the individual on the other—[become] the ground on which a new side of the World's History arises.' But this also had its deficiencies as the emperor accumulated all powers while the common citizens had little political rights. The sovereign and the subjects were not united on the basis of a constitution. The principle of universality remained abstract and was 'pursued with soulless and heartless severity' resulting in conquests but no assimilation.⁵⁴
11. The last phase of the march of the Spirit takes place in the Germanic world. It begins with the reconciliation of the church and the state in medieval Europe, with the unity of the religious and secular. But there is no commensurate national and political development. The real 'modern age' begins with the Reformation. It is in this period that the Spirit realizes the condition of rationality and self-consciousness. Besides Germany, it only influenced Scandinavia and England. During the Reformation, people realized spiritual and individual freedom, the unity between God and man without any intermediaries. There was also a perfect harmony between state and church. The southern Romanic nations did not adopt Protestantism because of their disharmonious nature. However, 'it was by Romanic nations that the abstract idea ... was first comprehended'. During the Enlightenment and then in the French Revolution, Reason came into its own to claim sovereignty and make the world in its own image. However, the French Revolution did not fully accomplish in reality the principles it enshrined. As the Revolution degenerated into 'Terror', it brought with it 'the most fearful tyranny'. Nevertheless, the French Revolution was a truly 'World-Historical' event that introduced its political principles of liberty in many countries. But it was only in German states—many of whom had adopted the French code of Rights but with a monarch at the head—that we find the rational principle coming to its fruition. Here, the secular and the religious have been united, and the 'freedom of property and of person have been recognized as fundamental principles'. It is here that the 'Idea of Freedom' which is 'the History of the World' achieved its 'consummation'.⁵⁵

The main contribution of Hegel to historiography is his stress on the historical nature of 'Reason', in contrast to the Enlightenment's emphasis on the universal and timeless character of Reason. Another contribution is dialectics, in which all concrete political forms, except the last, are shown to consist of both positive and negative features, which Hegel called thesis and antithesis. Both make their contribution in the progress of history by engendering a struggle that leads to synthesis and attainment of a higher political form in which the features of the earlier system are absorbed. The resulting system develops its own thesis and antithesis, which are again superseded in a still higher political form. And so on. The first historical political form was despotism, the second was aristocracy, and the last was monarchy. For Hegel, history ended in *his* present time as the Spirit realized itself in fully rational freedom. In the Hegelian view, individuals are not important; they only serve as the means to realize the larger designs of history. The Europeanization of history, which started during the Enlightenment, reached its high point in Hegel. But, unlike the Enlightenment (which was largely critical of European colonization and the slave trade), Hegel justified the European invasions as it helped to bring unhistorical peoples within the web of history. Even slavery was considered as heralding a higher form of social and political organization compared to the earlier supposed individualized existence. Moreover, Hegel justified wars as a motor of change and a catalyst of the process that would result in higher forms of political organization (see Box 9.1).

POSITIVISM

The term 'positivism' is originally derived from the 'positivist philosophy' enunciated by the French thinker Auguste Comte (1798–1857), who coined it in an essay in 1848. It became quite influential in both the natural and social sciences as Comte attempted to formulate principles for the development of both. The two main books he published were known as *The Course of Positive Philosophy* (1830–42), which contained his theoretical model about history, and *The System of Positive Polity* (1851–4), where there is an attempt to turn his philosophy into a dogma akin to religion. The main ideas of positivist philosophy were the three-stage law and the sequential classification of sciences.

Positivism was the philosophical expression and systematization of the scientific spirit that had been strengthened in the West since the seventeenth century. It was primarily devised as a philosophy of science, which included social sciences such as sociology, a term which Comte coined.

It was an organized philosophical justification of the notion that empirical sciences were the core component of Western cultural modernity and the only source of objective, unambiguous, and trustworthy knowledge about nature and society. It argued emphatically that the search for causes should be replaced by the search for laws, and observation and facts should take the place of imagination. In this sense, unlike historicism, positivism may be seen as a continuation of Enlightenment intellectual tradition in its quest of founding a science of social development. In the nineteenth century, the initiator of this trend of combining science, philosophy, and history into a system was Saint-Simon (1760–1825) in France. Comte, as a disciple of Saint-Simon, derived many of his ideas from him. Comte also displayed elements of historicism when he differed from the Enlightenment view of historical progress on the ground that the Enlightenment imposed its own values on the past ages, rather than on the basis of the contributions made by earlier eras to the progress of science and civilization. He argued, ‘We should regard institutions and doctrines as having reached, at every period, the greatest perfection compatible with the corresponding civilization.’ Moreover, ‘instead of regarding the past as a tissue of monstrosities, we should ... consider society as having been, on the whole, guided with all the wisdom the situation allowed’.⁵⁶

So far as the method of gaining knowledge was concerned, Comte argued that all knowledge could be generated through observation and inductive reasoning. The general comes from the particular, and ‘the abstract determination of the general laws of individual life rests on facts derived from the history of various living beings.’ In this, ‘the commonest facts are the most important’.⁵⁷ He considered that the inductive method supposedly used by the natural sciences (in which the data is gathered first and then conclusions are derived from them) was the most suitable method for history and other social studies. Thus, in the positivist programme, first the data were collected, then conclusions were derived, and finally laws were formulated, which would become the ground for later conceptualization. At its most fundamental level, however, Comtean thought was not concerned with individual facts and concrete historical writings. For Comte, it was possible to formulate universal laws for society as the physical sciences were doing for nature. Individual histories were of no concern to him. He used history ‘without the names of men, or even nations’, and was not interested in the richness of past human experiences.⁵⁸ He criticized contemporary historians for producing ‘the shapeless heap of facts improperly called history’. He believed that history should concern itself with ‘the development of the most advanced

peoples’ and should avoid the ‘other centres of civilization, whose evolution has so far been, for some cause or other, arrested at a more imperfect stage’.⁵⁹ Thus, individuals, events, and backward countries were not the proper material for history, which should be concerned primarily with the progressive development of the collective human mind. Comte’s views may be summarized as follows:

1. The ‘law of the three stages’ is considered as the foundation block of positivist philosophy. In this, Comte formulated a three-stage progression of all human cognitive faculties. He asserted, ‘A great fundamental law ... is this: that each of our leading conceptions—each branch of our knowledge—passes successively through three different theoretical conditions: the Theological, or fictitious; the Metaphysical, or abstract; and the Scientific, or positive.’⁶⁰ He also equated the first stage with military, the second with jurists and lawyers, and the third with scientists and industrialists. Similarly, at the mental level of a human being, these stages corresponded to childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Although Comte was basically concerned with progressive changes in the modes of thought, he also seemed to think that there was an overall development of humanity from one stage to the next, covering all facets of human existence. In European societies, he believed, the first two stages had been crossed and it was on the threshold of the positive or industrial age. In this age, theologians, priests, and warriors had been replaced by industrialists, scientists, traders, managers, and financiers. Moreover, the human mind no longer searched for causes of events but looked for the general laws.
2. The theological phase is the first one. In this stage, ‘the human mind ... supposes all phenomena to be produced by the immediate action of supernatural beings’. It was a breakthrough in the early stage of development of the human mind as it visualized that everything in nature possessed an analogous life to human life. It provided the stimulus to early scientific investigations like those of astrologers and alchemists, without whose ‘long series of observation and experiments’ the positive sciences of the modern period would not have been possible. The theological stage may be further divided into three: fetishistic, polytheistic, and monotheistic ways of thinking. The theological stage reached its climax when in monotheism ‘it substituted the providential action of a single Being for the varied operations of the numerous divinities’.⁶¹

3. The next is the metaphysical stage, 'which is only a modification of the first'. In this phase, 'the mind supposes, instead of supernatural beings, abstract forces, veritable entities ... inherent in all beings, and capable of producing all phenomena'. The multiplicity of explanatory points is reduced to one when this stage reaches its climax. Thus, 'in the last stage of the Metaphysical system, men substitute one great entity (Nature) as the cause of all phenomena, instead of the multitude of entities at first supposed'.⁶²
4. The last is the positive stage in which the human mind attains its highest development. Now it abandons the search for causes and relates all phenomena to certain general and invariable laws. Even the laws are reduced to the 'smallest possible number'.⁶³ The climax of the theological stage was when multiple gods were reduced to one God (monotheism); the climax of metaphysical stage was when the determinants were reduced to one factor (nature). Similarly, 'the ultimate perfection of the Positive [stage] ... would be ... to represent all phenomena as particular aspects of a single general fact—such as, Gravitation'.⁶⁴ Now, this would result in the possibility of predicting events because of their invariable connection with the known general laws, and the further possibility of intervening in the nature and society to determine the course of events.
5. The law of the classification of sciences is another most important formulation by Comte. In this scheme, the six fundamental 'sciences'—mathematics, astronomy, physics, chemistry, biology, and social physics or sociology—are arranged in a scale moving from general to particular, and from simple to the complex. This does not, however, mean that the succeeding science is produced by the preceding one. Each science is autonomous and Comte visualizes diversity. Moreover, all sciences pass through the usual three stages.⁶⁵
6. Like so many others in his age, Comte firmly believed that Europe was superior to all other countries in the world. The theological and metaphysical phases had been achieved everywhere but the positive stage was the achievement entirely of the 'white race, or the European nations'.⁶⁶ The peoples in 'remoter past' only represent the 'political ancestors of these peoples'. The aim of the investigation should also be to ascertain 'all the political relations arising from the action of the more advanced on the progress of inferior nations', such as 'India and China and others that have not aided the process of development'. Thus, 'the elite of humanity', or 'the superior portion should intervene for the advantage of the inferior'.⁶⁷

Box 9.1 The Different Views of Historicist Thinkers

The differences between the three thinkers may be elucidated as follows:

- Herder's unrelentingly anti-imperialist stance is evident from the following:
Thus ... the entire history of mankind was destroyed [when] the most insolent arrogance and the crudest usurpation were granted privileges in the name of the greater glory of god. So let no people on earth be handed the scepter over another on account of its '*inborn superiority*', let alone the sword or the slave-master's whip. (Herder 2004: xxxvfn81)

The nature-investigator presupposes no *order of rank* among the creatures that he observes; all are equally dear and valuable to him. Likewise the nature-investigator of humanity. The negro has as much right to consider the white man a degenerate, a born albino freak, as when the white man considers him a beast, a black animal. Likewise the [native] American, likewise the Mongol.... The negro, the [native] American, the Mongol has gifts, talents, preformed dispositions that the European does not have. (Herder 2002: 394–95)

- In contrast, consider Hegel on the Africans:

The Negroes indulge, therefore, that perfect *contempt* for humanity, which in its bearing on Justice and Morality is the fundamental characteristic of the race.... The undervaluing of humanity among them reaches an incredible degree of intensity. Tyranny is regarded as no wrong, and cannibalism is looked upon as quite customary and proper ... and the devouring of human flesh is altogether consonant with the general principles of the African race.... Another characteristic fact in reference to the Negroes is Slavery. Among the Negroes moral sentiments are quite weak, or more strictly speaking, non-existent. Parents sell their children, and conversely children their parents ... The polygamy of the Negroes has frequently for its object the having [of] many children, to be sold, every one of them, into slavery ...

From these various traits it is manifest that want of self-control distinguishes the character of the Negroes. This condition is capable of no development or culture, and as we see them at this day, such have they always been. The only essential connection that has existed and continued between the Negroes and the Europeans is that of slavery ... and viewed in the light of such facts, we may conclude *slavery* to have been the occasion of the increase of human feeling among the Negroes. (Hegel 2001: 113–14, 116)

- For Comte, slavery is associated strictly with the condition of various stages. Thus, while it was justified in the ancient societies, it is condemnable in the modern one.

Among the many differences which distinguish the ancient from our dreadful modern slavery, the conspicuous fact that the one was in harmony with the spirit of the age, while the other is opposed to it, is enough to condemn the latter ... The difference is that the ancient slavery was a normal state, originated by war ... whereas modern slavery is simply factitious anomaly. (Comte 2000, vol. 3: 47)

Three great philosophies of history emerged during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Historicism, Hegelianism, and Positivism enunciated by Herder, Hegel, and Comte, respectively proved quite influential in providing new directions to the study of history. All three regarded development as cumulative and progressive. In all of them, the European medieval period is not viewed as 'dark ages' but seen as different and helping in the realization of the modern age. However, their views of development were not the same. Whereas Herder thought of development as individual and organic, Hegel viewed it in metaphysical terms as the onward march of an extra-historical Spirit, and Comte conceptualized it in close association with late Enlightenment's idea of self-contained stages.

Although Vico was the earlier proponent of the ensemble of ideas that became known as historicism, it was Herder's works that popularized these views. Herder differed from later historicism and from Hegel as he did not visualize a difference between nature and human society. However, his 'nature' is not about laws. It was about variety, about thousands of different species of plants and animals. His 'natural world' is like a garden populated by different trees, each strange and beautiful in its individuality. Hegel, on the other hand, differentiated between natural and historical processes, the former being cyclical while the latter was thought to be linear. For Comte, there was a similarity between nature and society both being operated by certain laws. Thus, for him, the natural and human sciences are propelled by the same quest of finding laws that can make predictions possible.

Herder visualized a radical equality between all societies and cultures almost leading to an idea of radical relativism of truth, values, and beauty. Even when he later sought a common ground, it was based on diversity, with God's will as the uniting factor. European societies and cultures possessed no superiority for him. Comte and Hegel, on the other hand, believed in the superiority of Europe, which would serve as a model for other countries. Thus, while Herder viewed historical movement as various diverging and converging streams originating from the same river and leading to an ocean, Hegel and Comte conceptualized a single history for the entire humankind which, in the last analysis, was European history.

NOTES

1. Iggers 1995: 130.
2. Megill 1997: 416.
3. Cited in Rand 1964: 505.

4. Meinecke 1972: lv.
5. Meinecke 1972: 3.
6. Cited in Lee and Beck 1954: 572.
7. Popper 2002: 3.
8. Cited in Burns and Rayment-Pickard 2000: 58.
9. See Jameson 1979: 46–53.
10. J. Cannon 1988: 192.
11. Iggers 1973: 458.
12. Iggers 1995: 162–7 and Force 2009: 482–4.
13. Mah 2002: 147; Femia 1981: 116.
14. Mandelbaum 1971: 42. Emphasis in original.
15. Berlin 1976: 145.
16. Cassirer 1968: 230–3.
17. Herder 2004: 3.
18. Herder 2004: 9.
19. Herder 1969: 185.
20. Herder 1969: 187.
21. Herder 1969: 181.
22. Herder 1969: 193.
23. Herder 1969: 188.
24. Herder 1969: 216.
25. Cited in Berlin 1976: 210.
26. White 1973: 70.
27. Herder 1969: 188.
28. Berlin 1976: 162.
29. Cited in Berlin 1976: 158–60.
30. Cited in Burns and Rayment-Pickard 2000: 60.
31. Herder 1969: 209.
32. Cited in Berlin 1976: 160–1.
33. Cited in Berlin 1976: 161.
34. Zusi 2006: 511.
35. Cited in Spitz 1955: 473.
36. Mah 2002: 150.
37. Iggers 1968: 34–7.
38. White 1973: 75.
39. Palti 1999: 325.
40. White 1978: 52–4; Munslow 2006b: 127–9.
41. Hegel 2001: 14–15, 17.
42. Hegel 2001: 76.
43. Hegel 2001: 90.
44. Hegel 2001: 88.
45. Hegel 2001: 54.
46. Hegel 2001: 62.
47. Hegel 2001: 34, 37, 35, 47, 83.
48. Cited in Burns and Rayment-Pickard 2000: 68.
49. B. Russell 1984: 705.

50. Hegel 2001: 97, 98–9, 104.
51. Hegel 2001: 109–17.
52. Hegel 2001: 28, 129, 156, 159–60, 191–92, 240.
53. Hegel 2001: 124, 243, 271, 297.
54. Hegel 2001: 125, 297, 336, 298.
55. Hegel 2001: 438, 443, 439, 459, 465, 470, 476–7.
56. Cited in Mandelbaum 1971: 65.
57. Comte 2000, 3: 6–7.
58. Comte 2000, 3: 7.
59. Comte cited in Breisach 1994: 274.
60. Comte 2000, 1: 27–8.
61. Comte 2000, 1: 28–9.
62. Comte 2000, 1: 28.
63. Comte 2000, 1: 31.
64. Comte 2000, 1: 28.
65. Comte 2000, 1: 28–9.
66. Comte 2000, 3: 5.
67. Comte 2000, 3: 6.

FURTHER READING

- Berlin, Isaiah. 1976. *Vico and Herder: Two Studies in History of Ideas*. London: Chatto & Windus.
- Iggers, Georg G. 1973. 'Historicism', In *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, vol. 2, edited by Philip P. Wiener, 457–65. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.
- . 1995. 'Historicism: The History and Meaning of the Term'. *Journal of the History of Ideas* 56, no. 1: 129–52.

10

GERMAN HISTORICAL TRADITION IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY was a century of history. It was during this period that history was almost universally adopted as an academic discipline. Even more importantly, it reached the pinnacle of glory never achieved either earlier or subsequently. It was considered a source of authority, a position which 'reason' had occupied in the previous century. There was a tendency to historicize almost everything, including religion and science, and to refer to history for understanding and justifying other phenomena. History, historical consciousness, and historical knowledge became oft-repeated terms referring to putatively autonomous domains of existence, thought, and knowledge respectively. The German historical tradition in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries played an extremely crucial role in this process. Two institutions—the University of Göttingen established in 1737 and the new University of Berlin established in 1810—were central in shaping modern historical discourse in Germany.

This tradition was a complex phenomenon. Even within the dominant 'historicist' current of mainstream German historical scholarship, one may discern varying streams and quite different attitudes to Enlightenment ideas. However, as Georg Iggers argues, there were three significant points on which German historical thinking during the nineteenth century diverged from the Enlightenment: (a) there are no abstract rationality and universally valid attributes or values, and everything is historically and nationally specific; (b) the nation is an exclusive entity based on a particular language and community; and (c) the state is a rational and moral institution, with its own justification that secures the national boundary and maintains harmony within it.¹