
Perspective and Temporality: A Contribution to the Historiographical Exposure of the Historical World

The historian's pledge to seek and recount only that which is true is an old one. This pledge is still valid today and meets in general with undivided agreement. On the other hand, the claim that it is only possible to discover the truth by adopting a definite position or even through partisanship is a product of modernity.

If it was said today that every historical statement is bound to a particular standpoint, this would hardly provoke any objection. Who would wish to deny that history is viewed from different perspectives, and that change in history is accompanied by alterations in historical statements about this history? The ancient trinity of place, time, and person clearly enters the work of a historical author. If place, time, and person should alter, then new works would emerge, even if they dealt with the same object, or appeared to do so.

Whoever tries to clarify epistemologically this current historiographical position—more exactly, this shift of position—gets into difficulties soon enough, being confronted with accusations of subjectivism, relativism, or even historicism. Whatever else the worn-out catchword “historicism” might mean, it certainly is concerned with this change of perspective forced upon anyone involved with the course of history. New experiences are gained, old ones are superseded, and new expectations are formed; in addition, new questions are posed to our past, questions which demand that history be reconsidered, reviewed, and reinvestigated.

Contemporary historical science is thus subject to two mutually exclusive demands: to make true statements, while at the same time

to admit and take account of the relativity of these statements. In this dilemma, various arguments are deployed for defense. In the first place, the historian can point to the enormous success achieved by this science in its slow growth from early modernity, success that is owed to the methods used. In approximately two hundred years, we have come to know more about the past of mankind in general than mankind had in this past known about itself. There is much that we can no longer recover because of the state of the sources, but nevertheless we have learned much that escaped the knowledge of past contemporaries. In many respects, then, we know more than we once did, and such knowledge frequently is more soundly based than was earlier possible. A defense conducted by the historian in this way, invoking the empirical body of research presently existing, is in itself conclusive and is difficult to refute.

A second line of argument seeks to disarm accusations of subjectivism and relativism in a theoretical and methodological fashion. Historical science has also developed a methodology specific to itself which enables it to make objective statements. Source criticism is at any time communicable, verifiable, and subject to rational criteria. Here we have the doctrine of *Verstehen*, which gained entry into historical science through Schleiermacher and Dilthey. In the words of Dilthey:

Das Verstehen and interpretation is the method which realizes *Geisteswissenschaft*. All functions are united in this method. All truths characteristic of *Geisteswissenschaft* are contained within it. At every point, *Verstehen* opens up a world.¹

Thus, if the essence of the historical world is its transformation, so the medium of *Verstehen* allows every unique situation to be understood. Even the alien and distant past is susceptible to understanding, transmission, and hence recognition through self-involvement and empathy.

Such a theory of the *Geisteswissenschaften* is ultimately founded on an implicit and stable human nature which comprehends an infinite possibility for the human being. Through *Verstehen*, texts that are fundamentally susceptible to transmission are disclosed; the failure or success of actions and plans of the past can be assessed and past sufferings made comprehensible. Admittedly, the historian, like every person, must have a particular standpoint: the whole of the historical world is opened up to the historian by virtue of his source criticism conducted in the medium of *Verstehen*. Through participation in the

past or continuing objectification of historical persons, a historical individual of today can likewise objectify this form of history.

Thus we have an empirical and a theoretical argument which should disarm accusations that historicism constantly supersedes itself. In both research and *Verstehen*, history is closed down, even if the historian experiences himself as and knows himself to be a changing part of this history.

We are, therefore, in a stalemate. All historical knowledge is locationally determined and hence relative. Aware of this, history allows itself to be assimilated critically-*verstehend*, leading in turn to true historical statements. To exaggerate somewhat, partisanship and objectivity are mutually exclusive, but in the course of historical work they relate to one another.

We will roll out this epistemological dilemma once more in hopes of showing, in the form of a historical exposition, how the emergence of historical relativism is identical with the discovery of the historical world. In concluding this essay, some theoretical remarks, which are perhaps capable of making this dilemma more bearable, if not altogether dispensable, will be attempted.

The Premodern Imagery of Suprapartisanship

Since Antiquity, it has been a part of the topology of history as art and as science that accounts of human acts and omissions, deeds and sorrows should be truthfully recounted by the historian. The pledge to proceed in this way continually appears in works of historical writing. Since Lucian, or Cicero, two rules have belonged to the methodological self-assurance of all historians who do not wish to wander into the realm of the fabulist: one may not lie, and one should tell the complete truth.²

What is striking about this position is not the appeal to truth as such, but rather the related demand that the truth be permitted to appear, pure and unmediated. Only by disregarding one's own person, without passion and ardor (*sine ira et studio*);³ that is, nonpartisan or suprapartisan, is it possible to bring truth to speak.

Notwithstanding the polemical thrust that such ideas might have against adversaries or professional colleagues, there lurks behind them a form of naive realism, if one is looking for epistemological names within epochs when such labels were foreign.

An unflinching index of this naive realism, which aims to render the truth of histories in their entirety, is provided by the metaphor of the mirror. The image provided by the historian should be like a mirror, providing reflections “in no way displaced, dimmed, or distorted.”⁴ This metaphor was passed down from Lucian until at least the eighteenth century; it can be found in Voss’s 1623 definition of *Historie* as the *speculum vitae humanae*,⁵ as in the emphasis by the Enlighteners on the older, moralistic application demanding of historical representation that it give to men an “impartial mirror” of their duties and obligations.⁶

A variant of epistemological nonchalance, just as frequently encountered, can be found in the form of the “naked truth”⁷ that a historian is supposed to depict. One must not underestimate the persisting impulse expressed in this metaphor, namely, that one should permit the truth of a history to speak for itself if it is to be experienced and have any effect. Taken at its word, however, this demand forces the author to withhold any judgment, and in this way the metaphor of the mirror is only strengthened.

Historie, wrote Fénelon in 1714, has a *nudité si noble et si majestueuse*,⁸ requiring no poetic adornment. “Saying the naked truth; that is, recounting events that have occurred without varnish”—this was the task of the writer of history, according to Gottsched.⁹ Even the young Ranke, in 1824, invoked “naked truth without adornment,” betraying “Guiccardini’s false stories” by use of this “concept of history.”¹⁰ Blumenberg rightly argues here that this almost involves an Enlightenment anachronism,¹¹ even if it was the Enlightenment itself that had undermined the stability of this metaphor of the naked truth. The older Ranke still maintained this idea, though with reservation, as he formulated, in 1860, his oft-cited confession: “I would like to efface myself entirely and allow only things to talk, simply allow the mighty forces to appear. . . .”¹²

A third topos, stemming like the others from antiquity, leads us to the heart of our problematic. It was Lucian who introduced into the conceptual apparatus of history the term “apolis.” A writer of history must be “in his work a stranger, having no country, autonomous, the subject of no ruler.” One could only hold to the truth in a space free of domination; one could here “report what had occurred” unreservedly.¹³ The step to Ranke does not seem very far, given the way the latter defined his historical approach: he sought neither to judge

nor to teach; “he merely wishes to show how it really was” (*er will bloss zeigen, wie es eigentlich gewesen*).¹⁴

The scientific postulate of nonpartisanship, in the sense of non-adherence to party, abstinence, or neutrality, continues unbroken into the eighteenth century. Bayle, Gottfried Arnold, Voltaire, and Wieland committed themselves to this just as much as Niebuhr, who “sought the truth, without party and polemic.”¹⁵ Even a historian as politically involved as Gervinus assumed that belief, loyalty, and fatherland should not confuse the issue, if one was to be able to write in an “unrestrained and impartial” manner.¹⁶ “Everything is related,” wrote his distanced opponent Ranke, “critical study of the genuine sources, impartial outlook, objective presentation—the objective is the realization [*Vergegenwärtigung*] of the entire truth,” even if it is not fully attainable.¹⁷ According to Ranke, “The truth can only be one.”¹⁸

So much for the topology, which could be illuminated further with countless examples. Notwithstanding the alterations of context, it remains an imperative for the course of research that suprapartisanship be aspired to, so that the contrary positions or views might be articulated. Whether it is to give them their due, or whether—and this is more modern—it is to relate all parties or forces in a historical process in such a way that the process itself is foregrounded. To the extent that this is done, the call to tolerate the dominance of no partisanship is today repeated with justice.

The historical world, however, was not constituted by a methodological research precept according to which suprapartisanship must be promoted. This was effected, rather, by the connection of history to its own conditions of action and knowledge, opening the way for modern history in the domains of the scientific and prescientific, the political and social. A new concept of “history” emerged.¹⁹ Modern history is initially distinguished from earlier forms by its revelation of an objectless “history in and for itself” through the reflections of the Enlighteners. The conditions of historical processes and the conditions of action in this process (and knowledge of this process) have, since the Enlightenment, been related. But this relation is not to be had without a defined location vis-à-vis historical movement.

Naturally, earlier doctrines of historical artifice considered the influence of the narrating or writing subject on the form of presentation. The association of *Historie* with grammar, rhetoric, and ethics, in-

creasingly followed by poetics and aesthetics, dictated that the productive performance of the author be discussed.

The historian as artist or as moral judge played a productive role which had to be continually measured against the demands of an effective delivery. Lucian himself had relativized his metaphor of the mirror by his direct comparison of the historiographer with the sculptor whose material lies ready, but who must, as with Phidias, work it up in a manner as true to reality as possible. As the saying goes, the listener must be able to clearly “see,” with his own ears, the events reported to him. The comparison with the productive sculptor in this way remained within the domains of sight, display, and reflection.

All metaphors that ultimately refer to a naked, unadorned, unequivocally reproducible truth refer us to a state of reality which constituted historical representation until well into the eighteenth century. Such metaphors involving a naive realism draw primarily on eyewitnesses (less on “earwitnesses”) whose presence guarantees the truth of a history.²⁰ The methodological point of departure was the historical writing of the present or recent past. Everywhere they were capable, as in Herodotus, of reaching back three generations so that, with the aid of surviving earwitnesses, past events could be recovered and made plausible. The precedence of contemporary historical writing, reinforced by the growing body of memoir-literature in the early modern period, remained unbroken. It was likewise to be found preserved wherever recourse in the past was made. The signs of authenticity were centered on the eyewitness; whenever possible, the acting or participating agent, be it for the history of revelation, or for the continuing history of church or worldly events.

Historical experience therefore related itself to the present, a present which in its forward movement collected the past without, however, being able to significantly change itself. *Nil novum sub sole*: this was true both for classical antiquity and for Christians awaiting the Last Judgment. Related as it was to a given contemporary view, the metaphor of the mirror, of reflection or of the naked truth, was founded on a present state of experience whose historiographic apprehension corresponded to the recourse to an eyewitness. To establish the true nature of circumstances or of states of affairs, the historian must first question living eyewitnesses, and second, surviving earwitnesses. There is no great leap from this manner of disclosing reality to the demand for impartiality in the reproduction of an event in all its aspects, or

to the idea that judgment is to do justice to all participants. History as a continuing present exists through its eyewitnesses; the interrogation of such eyewitnesses requires distance and impartiality.

There is no doubt that this canon, whose metaphors imply a continuous and unbroken present space of experience, can still today lay claim to methodological validity. It has not, however, called a halt here.

The Discovery of Positional Commitment as a Precondition of Historical Knowledge

It seems to be a linguistic irony that, in the domain of sight and eyewitness, mirror-based metaphors and the undistorted truth, it is precisely the question of position or location which can assume the role of furthering understanding without straining these metaphors and the experience which they embody. If the historian is supposed to question all witnesses for the purpose of selecting the best and demoting the rest, why should the position adopted by the historian not have an influence on his presentation? This question arises quite naturally, not least under the influence of the doctrine of perspective, which originated during the Renaissance. Thus, Comenius, in 1623, compared the activity of historians with the view provided by telescopes which, like trombones, reached back over their shoulders. This prospect of the past was used to gain instruction for one's own present and for the future. Surprising, however, were the warped perspectives which cast everything in a varying light. Thus one could in no way "depend on it, that a thing really behaved in the way that it appeared to the observer."²¹ Everyone trusted only in his own view, and from this there followed nothing but argument and bickering.

Cartesian doubt and Pyrrhonic skepticism contributed to the formation of a guilty conscience among historians, who doubted that they could offer any representation adequate to reality. Thus, Zedler, still oriented to the realistic ideal for knowledge and transmitting the metaphors of Lucian, stated, full of reservation, that it would be very difficult, in fact practically impossible, "to be a complete writer of history. Whoever aspired to such, if possible, should have no allegiance to order, party, country, or religion."²² The demonstration that precisely this is an impossibility is owed to Chladenius.²³

Chladenius (1710–1759), at that time completely under the influence of the idea that authenticity resides in the testimony of the eyewitness, developed the domain of objects of *Historie* in terms of the contemporary *Geschichten* of living generations and hence made a distinction between future *Geschichten* and “ancient *Geschichten*.”²⁴ This division did not, however, arrange itself according to substantive or chronological givens, and it no longer involves epochs; it is, in fact, conceived epistemologically. “Author, originator, or spectator” are more reliable than “reporters [*Nachsager*]”; verbal tradition is superior to written. Ancient history thus begins at the point where no eyewitnesses exist and directly mediating earwitnesses can no longer be questioned. With the demise of generations, then, the boundary of ancient history is displaced, and it advances at the same rate that witnesses disappear. It is no longer a given temporal order—for instance, a God-given order—of all of history that arranges the material of history, but instead the history of the future and the history of the past (“ancient history”) are determined by desires and plans, as well as the questions, which arise in the present. The experiential space of contemporaries is the epistemological kernel of all histories.

To this extent, the epistemology of premodern *Historie* was supplied by Chladenius and established in a fashion that is today still unsurpassed. At the same time, however, Chladenius is thereby rendered the harbinger of modernity. Since that time, the temporal arrangement of history depends on the position one occupies within history.

Chladenius assumed that history and conceptions about it usually coincide. The exposition and evaluation of a history required, however, a methodological separation: “History is one, but conceptions of it are various and many.” A history as such is, in his view, conceivable without contradiction, but any account of such a conception involves a break in perspective. It quite simply is decisive whether a history is judged by an “interested” or an “alien party,” by “friend” or “foe,” “scholar” or “lay person,” “courtier” or “*Bürger*” or “peasant,” or, finally, “insurrectionary” or “loyal subject.”²⁵

Chladenius deduced two things from this: first, the relativity of all intuitive judgments and of all experience. Two contradictory accounts can exist, both of which have a claim to truth. For there is

a reason why we see the thing in this way and no other: this is the viewpoint of the same thing. . . . It follows from the concept of points

of view that persons regarding one thing from different points of view must have different conceptions of the thing . . . ; *quot capita, tot sensus*.²⁶

Second, Chladenius deduces from his analysis of the eyewitness and of political and social attitudes the perspective of later investigation and representation. Certainly, through proper questioning of opposing witnesses and the preservation of evidence, one has to endeavor to recognize past history oneself—to this extent, even Chladenius renders homage to a moderately realistic epistemological ideal—but the coherence of past events is not reproducible in its entirety by any form of representation. The “archetype of history” is itself transformed during the creation of a narrative.²⁷ Restriction to a particular position not only limits the witnesses, it also affects the historian. A history, once it has passed, remains irrevocably the same; but the prospects enjoyed by historians are kaleidoscopic in their variety of standpoints. A good historian, in particular, wishing to recount “meaningful history,” can do no more than reproduce it in “rejuvenated images.”²⁸ He must select and condense, employ metaphors, and use general concepts; in this way, he inevitably gives rise to new ambiguities which require exposition in turn. For “a writer of history composing rejuvenated images always (has) something in mind,”²⁹ and readers must be able to deal with this if they are to evaluate the history at stake.

“History,” from that which is experienced to that which is scientifically consumed and digested, is always realized within social and personal perspectives which both contain and create meaning. “Those who require that a writer of history assume the position of a person without religion, fatherland, or family are greatly in error; they have not considered the impossibility of that which they demand.”³⁰ From the time of Chladenius on, historians have been more secure in their consideration of the probability of an individual, historical form of truth. Positional commitment since then has not been an objection, but rather a presupposition of historical knowledge.

To be sure, Chladenius draws a clear line against deliberate invention or falsification that does not adhere to the rationally verifiable canon of interrogation of witnesses and source exegesis. The inevitability of perspective does not lead to a “partisan account” in which events

against knowledge and conscience are intentionally contorted or obscured. . . . An impartial account cannot, therefore, mean relating a thing without any point of view, for this is not at all possible; and

relating in a partisan fashion cannot amount to relating a thing and history according to its points of view, for then all accounts would be partisan.³¹

In this appreciation of the lack of identity between a perspectivist mode of forming judgments, on the one hand, and partisanship, on the other, Chladenius established a theoretical framework which today has still to be superseded. For the sources of past events display a resistance and retain a weight that is not susceptible to displacement *ex post* through a partisan evaluation, whether positive or negative. Differing prospects can certainly result in differing results being drawn from the same sources. This point will be returned to in the conclusion.

Chladenius's epistemology was like an act of liberation. The extension of the witness's perspective (previously an object of historical interrogation) to that of the historian won for the historian a freedom previously unimagined. In terms of the poetic criteria which could at that time be adopted, the historian could henceforth be in a position to "produce" history by weighing causes, examining long-term relations, reorganizing the beginning and end of a history. He was able to design systems which appeared more appropriate to the complexity of histories than the simple addition of knowledge. In Klopstock's words, out of polyhistory arose polytheory.³² Mindful of the discipline provided by the sources, the historian could ultimately construct hypothetical histories which drew more attention to the prerequisites of all histories than to these histories themselves. In short, the historian could become a philosopher of history, which had not before been possible.

Fénélon had forecast this breakthrough when he proposed, in 1714, that the true completeness of history rested in its ordering. To arrive at a good order, the historian must encompass the whole of his history with one glance and must turn it from side to side until he has found the true point of view (*son vrai point de vue*). He could then outline history as a unity and trace the most important events to their causes.³³

Chladenius had provided this approach with a theoretical foundation, but in so doing he had relativized the question of what is the appropriate, true point of view for the historian, or, if you like, historicized it. He stumbled upon a plurality of points of view which necessarily belonged to historical knowledge without at the same time surrendering what they shared in common, historical truth. He had simply shifted the emphasis from truth itself to the epistemological conditions of truth.

From then on, the historian, inspired by the example of Chladenius, gained the courage to openly and consciously assume a “position” if he wished to reflect a point of view. This breakthrough was effected in the second half of the eighteenth century.

Temporalization of Historical Perspective

Chladenius’s work had a dual impact. His epistemology drew on the precedence of the optical, evident in all his imagery and comparisons. The eyewitness as guarantor of the realization of an occurrence remained the primary witness of all history. The historical space of experience corresponding to this approach was a space of acting and suffering persons, a space of events whose verifiability increased with their adjacency to a given present, and decreased with their removal. Accordingly, his *Allgemeine Geschichtswissenschaft* dealt first with the conditions of historical knowledge of the present, and then, on the basis of this, with the sources of past histories and their exposition. Past histories external to the living community of memory were merely a supplement to contemporary historical experience. But future history also belonged to the organon of historical exposition, since, for Chladenius, plans, hopes, and wishes were just as constitutive of the coming histories as those of one’s own recent past. The three temporal dimensions remained anthropologically founded and likewise related to each other in a static fashion. After Chladenius, this rapidly altered, not least under the influence of the other part of his theory, his modern doctrine of historical perspective.

Whereas, in terms of its metaphorical employment, it was related initially to the space of a given present, this perspective extended itself more and more into the temporal depths. It gained, in addition, a temporal significance which articulated an increasing difference between past histories, one’s own history, and the history of the future. Indeed, modes of perception were themselves endowed with temporal coefficients of change corresponding to the rapidly spreading contemporary conception that history was accelerating. This can be briefly outlined through the medium of historiography.

The expressions “point of view,” “position,” and “standpoint” (*Sehepunkt*, *Standort*, and *Standpunkt*, respectively) rapidly gained acceptance. Schlözer, Wegelin, and Semler also made use of them, and to the degree that the perspectival approach was taken seriously, the

status of a once-and-for-all past history also altered. It lost its character of necessarily remaining identical with itself in order for it to possess verity.

Thus, Thomas Abbt wrote his *Geschichte des menschlichen Geschlechts*, “soweit selbige in Europa bekannt worden,” and deduced from his “position” that “the history of a people in Asia is different from that of one in Europe.”³⁴ There certainly was here the impact of a growing experience of overseas conquest, in which countless histories awaited integration into the world of European Christianity. But the idea that perspective should be spatially determined (i.e., must remain bound to one position) and that this would result in diverse but equally valid texts on the same substantial matter was before this point not accepted.

Temporal relativity now joined the spatial relativity of historical statement. It had not occurred to Chladenius that the course of time could also alter the quality of a history *ex post*. He had distinguished quite rigorously between an established and thenceforth consistent past, and the variety of accounts to which it gave rise. Gatterer had doubts here: “The truth of history remains fundamentally the same: I at least assume this here, although I know well that one may not assume even this everywhere.” And he sought in an *Abhandlung vom Standort und Gesichtspunct des Geschichtschreibers* to demonstrate that it was ultimately selection that constituted a history. Selection, however, did not depend only on social or political circumstances, or on the supposed addressee, but also on temporal distance. Thus, Gatterer developed criteria which a German Livy (for example, a Protestant professor living under a mixed constitution) would today need in order to rewrite and write anew the Roman history of the authentic Livy, and accordingly improve this history by means of viewpoints newly attained.³⁵

Historical time acquired a quality of generating experience, which, retrospectively applied, permitted the past to be seen anew. Büsch said in 1775: “Hereby can newly arising occurrences render important to us a history which had previously interested us little or not at all,”³⁶ referring to the history of Hindustan, which had first been introduced into a world-historical context by the English twenty years earlier. The factual effects of a history and its historical reflections thus mutually constituted each other. Opined Schlözer nine years later: “A fact can

today appear extremely insignificant, but in the long term or the short term become decisively important for history itself or for criticism.”³⁷

But it was not simply the alteration of contemporary experience that displaced the valency of past events and hence the historical quality of those events. The mutual relation of temporal dimensions was also shifted by methodological focus and proficiency. Slowly the practice of writing a continuous “current history” (*Zeitgeschichte*) lost its methodological dignity. Planck was one of the first to establish that the increase of temporal distance raised rather than reduced the prospects for knowledge. This led to the exclusion of the eyewitness from his privileged position, which had already been relativized by Chladenius. The past was henceforth no longer to be preserved in memory by an oral or a written tradition, but rather was to be reconstructed through the process of criticism. “Every great occurrence is, for the contemporaries upon which it directly acts, wrapped in a fog, and this fog clears away very gradually, often taking more than a few human generations.” Once sufficient time has elapsed, the past can appear “in a completely different form,” thanks to a “historical criticism” capable of making allowances for the polemical partiality of earlier contemporaries.³⁸

The old space of experience which had covered at any one time three generations was methodologically opened up. It was no longer a former present which constituted the thematic of *Historie*, extrapolating and handing down *Geschichten*. Now the past was itself made an object of study and, in terms of a specificity which is only today apparent, “in a completely different form.” From a narrative of former presents there develops a reflective re-presentation (*Vergegenwärtigung*) of the past. Historical science, mindful of its temporal location, becomes the study of the past. This temporalization of perspective was certainly advanced by the swift change of experience embodied in the French Revolution. The break in continuity appeared to uncouple a past whose growing foreignness could only be illuminated and recovered by means of historical investigation. But this in no way means that historical research would be *eo ipso* nostalgic or restorative. The statement that the later a past is expounded, the better, is rather a product of the prerevolutionary philosophy of progress.

This philosophy discovered in history that temporal quality distinguishing the Former from Today, and that Today needs to be regarded as basically distinct from Tomorrow. The thesis of the possible repetition

of events is discarded. If the whole of history is now unique, then to be consistent, the past must be distinct from the present and the present from the future. In brief, the historicizing of history and its progressive exposition were at first two sides of the same coin. History and Progress shared a common factor in the experience of a genuinely historical temporality. To recognize this, a particular viewpoint was needed which, in turn, had to perceive itself as historically conditioned.

In Germany, this is particularly apparent in the writing of the history of the Protestant Church which, as enlightened *Historie*, covertly became historical theology and sustained the new historical philosophy.

The anticipation of a genuinely historical temporality was outlined especially early by Bengel,³⁹ whose exposition of the Apocalypse of St. John implied the irreversible singularity of historical events. In doing so, Bengel proceeded in both empirical and reflective modes. Former interpretations of the Apocalypse were viewed not only as a collection of errors but as a progressive history of revelation. Each earlier exegesis was conceived as an act of obscurity foreseen by God, whose successive illumination was the task of later interpreters. From the collective misinterpretations and their correction, there finally emerged the ultimate, true insight. So much for the reflective aspect which was based upon belief.

According to Bengel, the events which had been biblically forecast occurred to the degree that the interpretation of such events increasingly proved accurate. The clearing away of past errors was at the same time made possible by the course of history. And in this way, the phenomenology of spirit is outlined. The interpretation of historical experience becomes the inherent moment of a history which leads to true knowledge.

Bengel proposed a model of progress, as was later demonstrated. Revelation disclosed itself in the forward movement of history or, more precisely, in the progressive coincidence of empirical events and salvational interpretation. Event and interpretation progressively converged, but only in the medium of a genuine historical temporality. The mode of interpretation remained the same, while its content altered.

This is apparent, for instance, in Semler, in the context of his rational historiography. The accent shifted from the divine economy of salvation to a historical economy of time, which permitted a progressive inter-

pretation not only of what was foretold biblically, but of all historical events.

From the epistemological point of view, Semler based himself entirely on Chladenius's doctrine, except that he consistently temporalized historical perspective. He did further separate "real history" from its reproduction, but the history of historical reproduction became for him a moment of real history. Historians did not merely report, they "created" histories.

The influence of the will, intention, or objective, if it has just emerged and is not present in ancient times, gives the narrative a real direction which was not formerly present in the occurrence itself.

This retrospective structuration of the past was not traced by Semler to "evil or partisan intention," which occurred often enough. Instead, he said, "this distinction is quite unavoidable."⁴⁰ In the course of time, the conditions and circumstances according to which history is practiced are continually changing: "It is precisely this distinction of successive periods which brings about the fact that repeatedly new histories can and must arise."⁴¹

Semler concluded from this temporalized perspective that historical writing was only possible through the critical review of previous historiography. Stated more generally, historical knowledge always is simultaneously the history of historical science. The presuppositions according to which reports are made and processed must themselves be considered and critically reviewed. "I believe that one has previously paid too little attention to this former history composed by all previous historians." Here, Semler formulated a methodological principle which has since then been indispensable.

The doctrine of the temporal change of perspective was now preserved in a theology of progress which lent meaning to this change. God had intended it "for the further and ever new moral education of men." Because of his temporal approach, Semler was already forced into the position of a historical relativist for whom all histories were more or less partisan. He was only able to contain this dilemma by sketching in his own location in the course of a progressing knowledge and a rising morality. "The real stages of an ever unequal culture"⁴² became for him the stages of growing knowledge which enabled those born later to see through and disclose the partisan interests of earlier generations and their historians. Semler intended to do exactly this

with the three early Christian centuries. It was, he wrote, a blessing of Providence that “our life and epoch is placed so far beyond those Christian centuries.” For it was only now possible to undertake a “free revision” which disclosed “for us, with regard to us, the really true history of [the Church] of that time.”⁴³ Truth and temporal perspective are no longer separable. Whoever today claimed in his account the “unchangeability of the church system” was the slave of prejudice and served hierarchical ruling interests. He obstructed the moral development of Christian religion, “and no greater sin against all historical truth can exist.”⁴⁴

After being plunged into the temporal perspective of its historical development, a superior truth emerged out of historically relative truth. The theoretical condition of this superior position was the perspectival and (following from this) actual otherness of the past when compared with one’s experience of today and expectation of the morrow. Goethe, soon afterwards, wrote:

There remains no doubt these days that world history has from time to time to be rewritten. This requirement does not arise, however, because many occurrences are rediscovered, but because new views emerge; because the contemporary of a progressive age is led to standpoints which provide new prospects of the past and permit it to be evaluated in a new manner.⁴⁵

Goethe here articulates a historical experience which had slowly formed and whose theoretical construction in Germany has been followed in the above from Chladenius on: that relation to a particular location is constitutive for historical knowledge. This corresponded to a state of reality which increasingly allowed the dimensions of past, present, and future to break away from one another in the progress of time. The temporalization of this history endowed with an interrupted perspective made it necessary to consider one’s position, for this altered with and in the historical movement. This modern experience, formerly more a revelation of theory, was now substantiated by the unrolling events of the French Revolution. This in particular provided a concrete constraint forcing the adoption of a partisan standpoint.

The Partisan Constraint and Its Historiographic Constitution

Whereas the concept of party within German historiography to the eighteenth century was based upon confessional division and the fronts

constituted around this, the concept assumed new force through the socially motivated constitutional conflict that broke out after the collapse of the system of estates in France and which soon afterward involved the whole of Europe. As Gentz noted in 1793, since the collapse,

every democratic and antidemocratic party, in Germany as everywhere else, has split up into a great number of smaller parties [*Unterparteien*]. . . . Thus there exist today democrats until 5 October 1789, democrats until the formation of the Second Legislature, democrats until 10 August 1792, democrats until the murder of Louis XVI, and democrats until the expulsion of the Brissot faction in the month of June this year.⁴⁶

Within this temporal perspective, still before the fall of Robespierre, Gentz quite concisely described the process of radicalization, hidden until then by the Revolution, which had generated the division of parties. The formation of political parties, while it may be a structural element of all history, in any case belongs since that time to the everyday experience of European modernity.

A sign of their modernity was that these parties did not simply mutually distinguish themselves socially or politically through substantial programs; these distinguishing features themselves involved a temporal factor of change. One placed oneself within the sequence of a continually changing history: toward the front (progressive), in the middle or toward the back (conserving). All titles to legitimacy are bound to a temporal scale if they seek any effect. As Rivarol noted, making metaphorical use of the parliamentary seating arrangements: "The Revolution limps. Rights move continually to the Left, but the Left never to the Right." Progress into an open future involved party perspectives, plans, and programs which dissolved in the absence of temporal criteria of movement or direction.

How, then, did *Historie* react to this new substantial reality? A few answers can be given. Gentz himself considered the temporal self-identification of the parties an error of perspective. "A writer who teaches the consideration of the Revolution as a whole" would come across the internal principles of movement compared with which the formation of parties is a superficial matter. Here he had discovered a response which ultimately implied a theory of revolution. Such theories, which seek to consider at once the plurality of all parties, developed in the succeeding period in great number and entered, for example, into the systems of German Idealism.

This led certainly only to a shift of the current demand to assume a party standpoint. This was openly expressed by Friedrich Schlegel, who had himself, in the course of time, decidedly changed camps. It was an illusion if one hoped “to find pure historical truth solely and alone in the so-called nonpartisan or neutral writers.”⁴⁷ The formation of parties is a factor in history itself, and if parties, as, for example, in England, continuously reach into the present, one cannot avoid adopting a particular position. He thus demanded as a methodological principle that the historian openly state “views and opinions, without which no history can be written, at least no descriptive history.” One could no longer complain of the “partisanship” of such a historian, even when one did not share his opinions.⁴⁸

For Schlegel, the methodological condition for relief from partisanship lay in the separation of facts established independently of party positions from the formation of judgments on such facts. In this fashion, “factual exactness is itself not seldom promoted by dispute, since every party has the criticism of all others to fear, and thus they watch over each other and themselves.”⁴⁹ Here, Schlegel has described—empirically, quite accurately—the reaction of political positions upon the practice of investigation, a practice which primarily seeks to preserve the separation of knowledge of the facts from the formation of judgment. This is the attempt to save objectivity without having to dispense with a partisan standpoint.

But even Schlegel found this approach inadequate. For it is impossible to answer in this way “which the right party” might be. As an investigator of empirical history, he found himself referred back to a theory of history in that he endeavored to raise himself to the “great standpoint of history,” to use his words. Without “the general development of human fates and of human nature in view,” the historian found himself caught up in mere political scribbling (*Schriftstellerei*).⁵⁰ Or, as he later stated in a more subdued fashion in the *Signatur des Zeitalters*: one could not “permit the party to count just as a party. . . . We should indeed be partisans of the food and the Divine . . . but we should never be partisan or even create a partisan position.”⁵¹

Notwithstanding the religious position which Schlegel seeks to mediate through the historical movement, there is behind his ambivalent thoughts a historicotheoretical claim: history does not exhaust itself in the process of parties, for there plainly are long-term trends which, while promoted by disputes between parties, nevertheless do extend

through their positions. Such long-term “tendencies,” “ideas,” or “forces,” as one then said, became central to the interpretive apparatus of the Historical School, making it possible to arrange the entire course of history into epochs. The validity or plausibility of such factors cannot be assessed by means of empirical statements bound to specific sources; here, the field of theory alone is decisive. For this reason, the Historical School remained, part consciously, part unconsciously, under the influence of idealist philosophy.

Hegel, in separating his philosophical world history from the subjectivity of the know-all, defined its “spiritual [*geistiges*] principle as the “sum total of all possible perspectives.”⁵² Therefore, the demand for impartiality was justifiable. It alone saw to it that “that which existed [facticity] prevail” against an interested one-sidedness. In this way, Hegel gave due recognition to the inherited canon of historical investigation. Theoretically, however, he demanded partisanship. To stretch impartiality so far that it forced the historian into the role of “spectator,” recounting everything without purpose, would rob impartiality of purpose:

Without judgment, history loses interest. Proper historical writing must, however, know the essential; it is a partisan of that which is essential and holds fast to that which has relation to it.⁵³

It was plain to Hegel what the criterion of “the essential” (*das Wesentliche*) was: historical reason. But Hegel might here, without coincidence, have coined an empty formula, for it needs to be ever occupied anew within the temporal passage of history. Impartiality, indispensable in the methodical course of investigation, cannot, however, relieve the historian of the necessity of identifying the criteria for the essential. Since the French Revolution, however, this is no longer possible without possessing, consciously or not, a theory of historical time.

In conclusion, this will be demonstrated by two examples.

It was generally accepted around 1800 that an epochal turning point had arrived. After the fall of Napoleon, Perthes wrote:

All comparisons of our time with turning points in the histories of individual peoples and individual centuries are far too petty; one will only be able to sense the immeasurable significance of these years if one recognizes that the whole of our part of the world is in a period

of transition, a transition in which the conflicts of a passing and of an approaching half-millennium collide.”⁵⁴

Earlier developments could have produced a change of direction only for several centuries, but today the relations of old and new were shifting with “unbelievable speed.” By way of compensation, interest in history was increasing. Perthes, therefore, sought to launch his *Europäische Staatengeschichte* in what was clearly a favorable state of the market. But he had difficulties, stemming from the new historical experience of acceleration. This caused professional historians to hesitate to write modern histories, especially those which, as had previously been customary, led as far as “contemporary history.”

The three dimensions of time seemed to have fallen apart. The present was too fast and provisional. Rist wrote Perthes that

We have no kind of secure, established viewpoint from which we can observe, judge, and trace phenomena in their course toward us; [one lives] in a time of decline that has just begun.

This was confirmed by Poel:

Is not the condition everywhere—in bourgeois, political, religious, and financial life—a provisional one? But the aim of history is not that which is emerging, but that which has emerged. [Thus the planned *Staatengeschichte* has] a twin defect in seeking to relate to the transitory and to that which is imperfectly understood.

The future is likewise not knowable: where is the man who can see it even dawning? If he sought to write a history, he would have to

anticipate the birth of a functioning time together with its hopes and conjectures. His history would, as would everything which emerges with spirit from stirring times, increase the ferment, arouse passions, create conflict, and be an eloquent monument to the present, but not a history of the past. Such a history must not be written, and a different history cannot be written.

The past might now still be recognized, for “it should outline earlier history in relation to its present condition”; but this was impossible in the current “process of transformation.” In a sentence, “From a history that is to be written now, nothing lasting, no real history, can be expected.”⁵⁵

Both of the academics who were approached thus based their refusal on a historicotheoretical argument. In other words, the acceleration of history obstructed the historian in his profession. Confronted with this, Perthes asked, "When will the time come when history comes to a halt?" As a result of this, there emerged that tendency dedicated to the reconstruction of a lost past in a methodologically rigorous investigation. This is the historical tendency about which Hegel had already made some ironical remarks; of which Dahlmann sarcastically said it was "a history far too respectable to approach the present day";⁵⁶ and which Nietzsche finally described as "antiquarian."

Pure investigation of the past was not, however, the sole response that was found for the acceleration of history. In this second camp, which, like the first, permits of no clear-cut political classification, Lorenz von Stein can be found. In 1843, Stein had clearly formulated the idea that temporal perspective was involved in a continually changing and accelerating movement and was itself driven by this movement. For fifty years, life had been accelerating in pace.⁵⁷ "It is as if the writing of history is no longer capable of keeping up with history." Thus was established the importance of the position from which one could apprehend the singularity of the modern movement in a single glance and which permitted one to form a judgment.

Perhaps without knowing it, Stein seized on arguments of Enlightenment theory. These gained ground steadily for those wishing to become involved with "contemporary history," for, if the periodic rhythm of history was undergoing change, an appropriate perspective was needed. Therefore, Stein searched for the laws of motion of modern history so that he could deduce from them a future that he wished at the same time to influence. The more he had before his eyes the advancing course of the French and English examples, out of which he endeavored to derive directions for political conduct in Germany, the more he was able to risk a prognosis on the basis of his diagnosis. A prerequisite of this was a history whose long-term effective factors remained susceptible to influence, but which initially were constant conditions of continual change. In this fashion, the historical perspective shifted completely from a pure condition of knowledge into a temporal determinant of all experience and expectation that derived from "history itself." In Feuerbach's words, "History has only that which is itself the principle of its changes."⁵⁸

Both responses outlined here repeatedly appear in various guises. They react to a history which, in its change, demands that the relation of past and future be defined anew. Neither position is radically reducible to an alternative: here partisanship, there objectivity. The scale is a sliding one, as can be seen from what separates and what is shared by Ranke and Gervinus. Thus, Gervinus, as the propagator of a liberal politics, also entered a plea for a methodologically required impartiality: [The historian] must be a partisan of fate, a natural proponent of progress," for the representation of the cause of freedom is indispensable.⁵⁹ Opposing this move toward partisanship, Ranke deliberately assumed the contrary position, that of the timeless nature of historical research produced through the proper method. Writing an obituary, Ranke noted:

Gervinus frequently repeated the view that science must intervene in life. Very true, but to be effective it must above all be science; for it is not possible for one to adopt a position in life and transfer this into science: then life affects science, and not science life. . . . We can then only exercise a real influence on the present if we first disregard it, and fix our thoughts on a free objective science.

He strictly rejected any view "which considers all that has occurred from the standpoint of the present day, especially since the latter changes itself continually."⁶⁰ For Ranke, historical specificity remained an objection against historical knowledge. Not that Ranke could have done without the effectivity (even party-political) of historical knowledge. Rather, he wished to mediate it through a science distanced from the everyday so that past history might itself be initially recognized. He scented behind questions guided by interest the danger that they would obstruct precisely the historical knowledge that might today be needed.

Thus we stand in the middle of the previous century before the same dilemma that still dominates our discussion today. The historical doctrine of perspective has indeed helped us disclose the historicity of the modern world, but in the dispute between objectivists and representatives of partisanship the camps are divided. They have separated, notwithstanding the great historiographical attainments that have issued from both camps.

Theoretical Prospect

The foregoing historical outline lays no claim to establish in a hard-and-fast way the chronological succession of the positions presented. Rather, these were ordered with respect to a systematic viewpoint which may need to be altered or supplemented in the light of material from different countries and periods. Nevertheless, the problem of a modern historical relativism and its scientific assimilation will not substantially alter. It is, therefore, possible to draw some conclusions here from the arguments which, in Germany, first posed the questions of locational determination and formulated the various responses to these questions.

Since the ancient doctrines of historical artifice, there has been a dispute about the degree to which an interpreter can himself present a history, or whether history can be brought to life only in a rhetorical performance. Chladenius drew a distinction between true histories that were in themselves unchanging and exposition that was determined by a particular position. The temporalization of perspective made the issue more complex, since henceforth the history of influence and of reception of past events became part of the experiential substance of "history in general," entering into the individual histories. Likewise, the new positions gave past "facts" a continuing validity independent of the judgments made upon them later. The separation of fact and judgment was even accepted by Hegel, to the extent that he associated the methodological establishment of facts with impartiality, demanding partisanship only for the formation of historical judgment—partisanship of reason, hence partisanship for the suprapartisan.

Past facts and contemporary judgment are, within the practice of investigation, the terminological poles which correspond to objectivity and partiality in epistemology. From the viewpoint of investigative practice, however, the problem becomes less critical. There is probably only an apparent problem concealed behind the epistemological antithesis. In the historiographic context, facts are also conditioned by judgment. In Gentz's words, whether Louis XVI was murdered, executed, or even punished is a historical question; but the "fact" that a guillotine of a given weight separated his head from his body is not.

Methodologically, so-called pure establishment of the facts is indispensable, but it involves the principles of general verifiability. Historical method has its own rationality. Questions regarding original

source authenticity, document dating, statistical figures, reading methods, and text variations and derivations can all be answered with an exactitude similar to that of the natural sciences, such that results are universally communicable and verifiable independent of the position of a historian. This canon of methodical accuracy, developed through the centuries, offers a solid barrier against arbitrary claims made by those convinced by their own certainty. But the real dispute over the “objectivity” of the “facts” to be established from remnants does not primarily take place within the domain of scientific technique. There are degrees of correctness for historical observations that can be definitively determined. The dispute over “objectivity” becomes explosive when a “fact” moves into the context of the formation of historical judgment. Thus the suggestion being made here is to shift the problematic.

The real tension, indeed a productive tension, which a historian should see himself confronting, is that between a theory of history and the given sources. Here, we are falling back on experience and results assembled before the establishment of historicism, drawing on knowledge developed by Enlightenment and Idealism thinkers that has been outlined here.

There is always more at stake in historical knowledge than what is contained in the sources. A source can exist or be discovered, but it can also be missing. This, then, makes it necessary here to take the risk of making statements which are perhaps not completely founded. But it is not only the patchiness of all sources—or their excess, in the case of recent history—which hinders the historian in establishing, on the basis of sources alone, either past or contemporary history. Every source—more exactly, every remnant that we transform into a source through our questions—refers us to a history which is either more, less, or in any case something other than the remnant itself. History is never identical with the source that provides evidence for this history. If this were so, then every clearly flowing source would be the history we sought.

This might be true for the history of art, whose sources are, at the same time, its objects. This might be true for biblical exegesis, in which the statements of the Bible are the object. It might also work for the analysis of laws, to the extent that they claim a normative validity. Historical science is, however, required from the first to interrogate sources in order to encounter patterns of events that lie

beyond these sources. This requirement also contains the boundary of any doctrine of *Verstehen*, which remains primarily oriented to persons, and their testimony or works, and which forms the objects for interpretation. Even explanatory models employed, for instance, in the interpretation of long-term economic change, escape the method of *Verstehen*, which functions only at the level of the source. As historians, then, we have to go a step further when we consciously make history or wish to recall a past.

The step beyond immanent exegesis of the sources is made all the more necessary when a historian turns away from the so-called history of events and directs his gaze at long-term processes and structures. In written records, events might still lie directly to hand; but processes, enduring structures, do not. And if a historian has to assume that the conditions of possible events are just as interesting as the events themselves, then it becomes necessary to transcend the unique testimony of the past. Every testimonial, whether in writing or as an image, is bound to a particular situation, and the surplus information that it can contain is never sufficient to grasp the historical reality that flows through and across all testimony of the past.

Thus we need a theory: a theory of possible history. Such a theory is implicit in all the works of historiography; it is only a matter of making it explicit. There is a wide variety of statements on history in its entirety or individual histories which cannot be directly related to the sources, at least in the second phase of study.

On the basis of everyday experience, it cannot be denied that an economic crisis or the outbreak of war is perceived by those affected as divine punishment. Theological science can essay an interpretation, in the form, for instance, of a theodicy that lends meaning to affliction. Whether this kind of explanation will be accepted by historians, or whether they would rather find other reasons (for instance, the catastrophe as the outcome of erroneous calculations of power) or look for psychological, economic, or other kinds of explanations, cannot be decided at the level of the sources. The sources certainly might provide an impulse toward a religious interpretation. The decision of which factors count and which do not rests primarily at the level of theory, and this establishes the conditions of possible history. The question of whether a history should be read economically or theologically is initially one that has nothing to do with the state of the sources, but is a theoretical decision that has to be settled in advance. Once this

decision is made, the sources begin to speak for themselves. On the other hand, they can remain silent because, for instance, there is no evidence suited to a question formulated economically, and the question is not thereby a false one. Therefore, the primacy of theory brings with it the compulsion of having the courage to form hypotheses. Historical work cannot do without this. This does not mean that research is given a free hand. Source criticism retains its irreplaceable function. The function of the sources, their criticism, and their exposition must be defined more closely than was previously customary under the doctrine of *Verstehen*.

In principle, a source can never tell us what we ought to say. It does prevent us from making statements that we should not make. The sources have the power of veto. They forbid us to venture or admit interpretations that can be shown on the basis of a source to be false or unreliable. False data, false statistics, false explanation of motives, false analyses of consciousness: all this and much more can be revealed by source criticism. Sources protect us from error, but they never tell us what we should say.

That which makes a history into the historical cannot be derived from the sources alone: a theory of possible history is required so that the sources might be brought to speak at all.

Partisanship and objectivity cross one another in a new fashion within the force field between theory formation and source exegesis. One without the other is worthless for research.⁶¹

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III

Semantic Remarks on the Mutation of Historical Experience