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NARRATION AND KNOWLEDGE

(including the integral text of
ANALYTICAL PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY)

With a new introduction by Lydia Goehr and
a new conclusion by Frank Ankersmit

ARTHUR C. DANTO

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS
NEW YORK

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS
Publishers Since 1893
New York Chichester, West Sussex

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Danto, Arthur Coleman, 1924–
Narration and knowledge / Arthur C. Danto ; with a new introduction by Lydia Goehr and a new conclusion by Frank Ankersmit.
p. cm. — (Columbia classics in philosophy)
Includes Analytical philosophy of history.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-231-13822-2 (cloth : alk. paper)
ISBN 978-0-231-13823-9 (pbk. : alk. paper)
ISBN 978-0-231-53783-4 (e-book)
1. History—Philosophy. I. Danto, Arthur Coleman, 1924– Analytical philosophy of history. II. Title. III. Series.
D16.8.D23 2007
901–dc22 2006032888

Columbia University Press books are printed on permanent and durable acid-free paper.
Printed in the United States of America

To Shirley
in memoriam

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INTRODUCTION TO THE MORNINGSIDE EDITION

The *Analytical Philosophy of History* was conceived and written on the cusp, as it were, of a profound revolution in the philosophical conception of science. The animating question in the philosophy of history had been whether explanations in history are logically of a piece with those in the natural sciences, and hence whether there is finally an essential unity in all the sciences, natural as well as human, at least with respect to the structure of explanation. Such a unity had, of course, been denied by a large number of Continental theorists clustered near the turn of the century—Dilthey, Windelband, Weber and many others—according to whom it had been even questionable whether explanation has any role at all in rendering comprehensible the actions of human beings, presumed to be the substance of history. Human actions, it was insisted, are matters more for interpretation than explanation, largely because they were to be understood with reference to the ways in which individuals read the worlds they live in. Since each culture is defined with reference to a different way of reading the world, with variations to be expected from individual to individual, the possibility seemed remote of regimenting any significant number of actions under the sort of general law it was widely conceded that explanation consisted in. Since a quite diferent mode of cognitive address seemed called for, these thinkers drew a sharp line between the natural sciences and the human sciences—between *Die Natur-* and *die Geisteswissenschaften*.

This division between the sciences as well as between modes of cognitive address—between *Erklären* and *Verstehen*—drew its philosophical impulses from Kant and ultimately from the deep defining views of western civilization, but in the atmosphere in which I began thinking about the philosophy of history it had come under severe challenge. It was supposed that the doctrine of the unity of science had been advanced by a crucial essay by C. G.

Hempel, "The Function of General Laws in History," which argued that explanations as such, whether in history or in physics, presuppose general laws, even if the laws are rather more vaguely indicated in the one than in the other, and even if historians more typically produce *sketches* for the kinds of explanations to be found fully realized in the mature sciences: there is only a spectrum of explanatory schemes measured by the degree of explicitness in the formulation of laws. It was just when it seemed as though, by claiming history for its own, the unity-of-science position had triumphed over those who insisted upon a duality of scientific methods, that the entire philosophical scaffolding which supported Hempel's enterprise began to collapse. This is the revolution in the philosophy of science to which I refer.

It is certainly plain that Hempel's reconstruction defined the problematic of the philosophy of history, narrowly construed, in the period before I wrote my book. Philosophy of history consisted largely in a kind of bickering over the adequacy of the Covering Law Model, as it came to be called, for the explanations historians in fact offer. But it was more or less assumed by Hempel's opponents, as it had been assumed by the earlier dualists, that the model was quite adequate for explanation in the natural sciences. It was the systematic questioning of this entire conception of natural science, hence of the adequacy of the model even for the most advanced sciences there are, which finally made the post-Hempelian quibbles in the philosophy of history of marginal relevance at best.

Hempel's elegant analysis took for granted a certain conception of the tasks of the philosophy of science, and presupposed a theory of the structure of science itself. The philosophical task was to provide a formal reconstruction of the *language* of science, conceived of as a logical edifice, resting upon observational reports, overarched by sentences of increasing generality and scope—a fretwork of laws and theories: one mansion, so to speak, commodious enough to house the whole of knowledge under a single vault. This shimmering architecture was one of the great visionary ideals of modern philosophical thought, but it was destined soon to be

dismantled, if not brutally demolished, through a quite different philosophical task and a wholly different conception of science itself. The logical architects of Neo-Positivism had only supposed themselves to be bringing to consciousness a structure which belonged to science as such, already articulated by the delicate relationships they had but to make explicit. The new views held that science is a far messier, less austere, considerably more human enterprise than Positivism would dare to have supposed.

The two works I regard as most decisive in this revolution were written by philosophers who came from the same analytical precincts as the Positivists themselves, but who had come under the influence of the later philosophy of Wittgenstein, which only began to be widely discussed after the appearance of *Philosophical Investigations* in 1953 (Hempel's paper had been published in 1945). These were N. R. Hanson's *Patterns of Discovery* (1958) and Thomas Kuhn's legendarily transformative *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1960). Hanson's attack centered on what was almost instantly recognized as having been a naive view, that observation and theory can be neatly enough separated, that the latter can rest upon the former as its base, as the architectonic metaphor required. His point was that observation is (if I may borrow a locution from Derrida) "always already" permeated by theory to the point that observors with different theories will interpret even retinally indiscriminable observations differently. This put one of the basic dogmas of empiricism on the defensive, and with the subsequent historicization of theory by Kuhn, the revolution was in all essentials complete. Instead of history being connected to the wider body of science by a logical *Anschluss*, the natural sciences themselves became matters for the kinds of interpretation the earlier theorists had identified as the methodological prerogative of the human sciences: ways of reading the world. To be sure, there now really was a unity of science, in the sense that all of science was brought under history rather than, as before, history having been brought under science construed on the model of physics. I have always found it ironical that Kuhn's book was a volume in the projected *Encyclopedia of Unified Science*, a thirty-volume mon-

ument to Neo-Positivist thought. His theory of scientific revolution subverted the enterprise that sponsored it, and opened the way to discussing science as a human and historical matter instead of a logical *Aufbau* of some immaculate formal language.

My book is colored by this drama of philosophical transformation. The structures it works with and against were inherited from the philosophy of science as practiced by Hempel, but the spirit of its revisionism and innovation is that of Hanson and of Kuhn, whose book appeared in the same year in which I published "Narrative Sentences," which stands as the pivotal chapter in the book I drafted the following winter in Roquebrune-Cap Martin. Narrative sentences, as I characterize them, give descriptions of events under which the events could not have been witnessed, since they make essential reference to events later in time than the events they are about, and hence cognitively inaccessible to observors. "The Thirty Year War began in 1618" could not have been known true in 1618, and in the main the descriptions of central historical importance are those which contemporaries and eyewitnesses could not have had. My general point throughout the book was that narrative structures penetrate our consciousness of events in ways parallel to those in which, in Hanson's view, theories penetrate observations in science.

This leaves the question to be faced of the relationship between narrative and theoretical redescriptions of events—between history and science, in an earlier formulation—in a somewhat more tractable form than before. There are countless descriptions of any event, only under some of which is the event available for scientific explanation, which then connects description and explanation very closely. It is almost certain that the descriptions relevant to science will differ from those of importance to history, hence it is unlikely that an event can be covered by a law under the same description in which it is covered by an historical narrative. A certain autonomy then attaches to history, indeed to narrative history, which cannot become more "scientific" without losing its defining human importance since it is human interests, after all, which determine which events are important and under what sorts of descriptions.

It was this defense of the autonomy of history which gave my book its celebrity in Europe, since it came at a time when historians, especially in Germany, felt themselves embattled by quite inappropriate demands for scientization. These demands, incidentally, were derived from just the inappropriate conceptions of science that the American theorists had begun to disassemble. But by then narrative had become focal to the philosophy of science itself, construed in the post-Kuhnian period as a thoroughly historical undertaking.

Narration exemplifies one of the basic ways in which we represent the world, and the language of beginnings and endings, of turning points and crises and climaxes, is coimplicated with this mode of representation to so great a degree that our image of our own lives must be deeply narrational. My main philosophical work since *Analytical Philosophy of History* has addressed the larger concept of representation—in knowledge, in action, in art and, most recently, in the structure of the mind itself—but I have continued to be absorbed by narrative as a representational form, and in the philosophy of history conceived of as the theory of narrative representation. I am very grateful to have the opportunity to append to my book three subsequent writings which extend the insights of the original book. "The Problem of Other Periods," delivered before the American Philosophical Association in 1966, advanced an analogy between persons and periods which seemed so much to belong to the book that I had it incorporated as the penultimate chapter in the German and Italian translations. "Historical Language and Historical Reality" was presented to the American Historical Association, at the invitation of Richard Vann in 1967, and then expanded to almost novella length and published in *The Review of Metaphysics*, whose editor, Jude Dougherty, has always been hospitable to my work. "Narration and Knowledge" was written at the invitation of Martha Woodmansee for presentation to the International Society for Philosophy and Literature, and published in the lively periodical *Philosophy and Literature* at the urging of its editor, Dennis Dutton. I take the title of this new volume from that essay, which moves beyond analytical philosophy to a kind of

rapprochement with phenomenology, seeking to show that the structures that had concerned me as an analyst are indeed the structures of philosophical consciousness as such. What finally emerges from this effort is the instructive suggestion that narration yields certain categories of thought that might be said to compose the metaphysics of everyday life—a spontaneous and perhaps unrevisable philosophy that incorporates the philosophies of knowledge, action, psychology, and art that I have sought to elaborate in the twenty years since *Analytical Philosophy of History* was published. I am particularly grateful, then, to William Germano for giving the book a second life in the company of part of its progeny.

It is always a fair question to put, whether a theoretical work on history can apply its theories to itself, construed now as an historical entity in its own right, as a writing with a specific location in time and as part of the conversations and disputes that compose the history of theory. I have often felt that it would be a useful, chastening exercise for Hempel to give an historical explanation of his own work on historical explanation, a challenge that scarcely can be declined on principle since, if a theory cannot account for itself when it is part of its own subject-matter, as the writing of a theory must be covered by a theory of writing, there is scant reason to suppose it can count for very much at all. The philosophy of history is after all part of history. One of the deep confirmations of my own theory is the natural way its structures apply to itself, as I have tried among other things to show in this brief preface.

A. C. D.

NEW YORK, 1984

PREFACE

It sometimes is said that the task of philosophy is not to think or talk about the world, but rather to analyse the ways in which the world is thought and talked of. But since we plainly have no access to the world apart from our ways of thinking and talking about it, we scarcely, even in restricting ourselves to thought and talk, can avoid saying things about the world. The philosophical analysis of our ways of thinking and talking about the world becomes, in the end, a general description of the world as we are obliged to conceive of it, given that we think and talk as we do. Analysis, in short, yields a descriptive metaphysic when systematically executed.

It is impossible to overestimate the extent to which our common ways of thinking about the world are historical. This is exhibited, if by nothing else, by the immense number of terms in our language, the correct application of which, even to contemporary objects, presupposes the historical mode of thought. Should there be a people somewhere in time who truly thought unhistorically, we would know this by the fact that communication with them would be marginal, vast regions of our language being untranslatable into theirs. To endeavour, ourselves, to think unhistorically would require at least a linguistic restraint, for we would be committed to get on with a fragment of our vocabulary and grammar. We should, indeed, have to restrict descriptions to just those predicates which pass muster under empiricist criteria of meaningfulness. Empiricists, who have found this limited vocabulary uniquely meaningful, have encountered problems in connection with history, which is only natural, given the criteria they impose. It is the glory of empiricism to be austere, and it is by meeting and solving the problems which it raises that one begins to get a dim sense for the contours of historical thought, and hence for the structure of history itself. This book is an analysis of historical thought and language, presented as a systematic network of arguments and clarifications, the conclusions of which compose a descriptive metaphysic of historical existence.

More than this it would not be advisable to say by way of prefatory

remark, and I say this much only to explain somewhat the title of the book and the spirit in which it was written. And to suggest, finally, the odd view I have that philosophy has things to say in its own right, that 'analysis'—which I employ eclectically (in the sense given that term by the Bolognese painters)—is the way in which to say them, and that the distance from Cambridge to Saint-Germaine-des-Près is not so astronomically vast as it appears.

The bulk of this book was written during a sabbatical leave from Columbia University, 1961–62, and supported by a fellowship award from the American Council of Learned Societies. To both of these institutions I am grateful for their tangible encouragement and aid. Earlier studies were abetted by two summer grants from the Columbia Council for Research in the Social Sciences. Two sections of the book—chapters VIII and XII—first appeared as articles in *History and Theory* and *Filosofia* (Turin; 4th International Fascicle, November 1962) respectively, and I thank the editors of these journals for permission to use this material again.

There are three persons to whom I should like to acknowledge an intellectual debt. The first of these is Professor William Bossenbrook, whose courses in history at Wayne University awakened me, and a whole generation of students, to the world of intellect. His lectures were the most stimulating I ever audited, and I should have devoted my life to the study of history as a result of them were it not for the discovery that they were unique. The second is Professor Ernest Nagel, whose work in philosophy of science, and especially in the topic of reduction, has been paradigmatic of high philosophical achievement. I have profited from his example and his encouragement. The third is my close friend and colleague, Professor Sidney Morgenbesser, a man of warmth, wit, and extraordinary philosophical acuity. His own submission to the highest standards of philosophical integrity stands as a kind of conscience upon all who know him. My book bears the mark of all these three men.

Many others have stimulated my thought, sometimes in ways they might not recognize, and should they read this book they may find some phrase or thought of theirs cut out of a conversation and mounted like a fragment in a collage: I have not borrowed, but stolen, making

their matter mine. I have, in addition, some special obligations to Justus Buchler, Robert Cumming, James Gutmann, Judith Jarvis Thomson, and John Herman Randall, to each of whom I shall always be grateful. My daughters, Elizabeth and Jane, furnished me with example after example of historical explanation, some of which are preserved in my discussion of that tormented subject.

To the extent to which this essay has any clarity or literary surface, I owe it to my wife, Shirley Danto, whose unerring eye and ear for literary rectitude and taste have been my guide. Where the writing is dark, this will be due to my having failed to consult or heed her. But of course my debt to her is, in every way, immense.

A.C.D.

NEW YORK
1964

AFTERWORDS

An Introduction to Arthur Danto's *Narration and Knowledge* (including his *Analytical Philosophy of History*)

LYDIA GOEHR

A good introduction must at once be the square root and the square of its book.
—Friedrich Schlegel

THE INTRODUCTION AS AFTERWORD

It is always a fair question to ask whether a theoretical work on history can apply its theories to itself, construed now as an historical entity in its own right. . . . The philosophy of history is after all part of history. One of the deep confirmations of my own theory is the natural way its structures apply to itself.
—Arthur Danto, Preface to *Narration and Knowledge*, 1984

It is also fair to ask whether an introduction to a book on the philosophy of history can apply the book's theories to itself. I think it can, even if doing so makes the very act of writing an introduction contradictory. What a writer of an introduction writes for readers who do not yet know what the book says is written only after the writer has read the book. This is, an introduction that is supposed to lead readers forward is written actually as an afterword.

Danto's philosophy of history tells us that not to acknowledge the asymmetries of temporal claims is a potentially dangerous conceit. The conceit is to think that historical words uttered after events can also, by some sort of extension, be uttered before them. His book is written in opposition to an arrogant philosophy of the future, although it is not opposed to a philosophy of change. It offers what I call *a philosophy of afterwords*, in which the words coming after offer new perspectives on the past. Written in the revolutionary 1960s and despite its rather pure philosophical appearance, Danto's book was not written without political motivation. Nor is it without historical consequence.

To this day, Arthur Danto's *Analytical Philosophy of History* contributes to understanding the temporal constraints on what we can claim to know when. As a logical exploration of the three modalities of time—the past, the present, and the future—it focuses more on the *tensed language* of historical sentences than on an ontology or metaphysics of time. As such, the book reflects its philosophical times, the heyday of analytical philosophy, but is no less captivating because of this historicizing fact. Danto is most interested in *when* historians can write *what* about the past. His interest in the past is more philosophical than historical. Establishing the terms of an analytical philosophy of history establishes the conditions for producing true sentences about the past just when these sentences are uttered at a *later* time and perspective. Even understanding the character of a full historical narrative, which presumably both philosophers and historians want to do, presupposes understanding the logic of its constitutive sentences. Danto calls these individual sentences *narrative sentences* but sometimes also *historical* or *tensed sentences*. I prefer "historical sentences," because to call these sentences narrative sentences runs the risk of their being confused with fictional sentences; and to call them tensed sentences runs the risk of their being confused with those tensed sentences that aren't historical sentences. The potential confusions are philosophically illuminating. Nevertheless, to understand the logic of historical sentences is to know the *unique* conditions under which these particular sorts of sentences are true.

THE OPENNESS OF FAME

At public meetings we often hear the person introducing a speaker assert that no introduction is necessary. Such a statement, however, threatens a double conceit if it presumes that what the introducer knows about the speaker (the first conceit) is already known to the audience (the second). However, in the spirit of the rhetoric with which the statement is uttered, all the introducer is really saying is that a person who needs no introduction is a person already known, which is a nice way of acknowledging his or her fame. Thus, the rhetorical gesture prevents the conceit by taking attention away from the introducer and giving it back to the person being introduced. Danto's fame is widespread and deservedly so. Nevertheless,

given the rhetorical gesture, the assertion that "he needs no introduction" leaves it *open* both *for what* and *to whom* he is known, thereby necessitating an introduction after all. Danto has long been known as a philosopher of art but even longer, for some, as a philosopher of history. The writer of an introduction should thus tell what he or she knows without assuming that readers already know the same thing. Although this gap between writers and readers makes the task contradictory, the *openness* implied by the gap makes the task necessary. In Danto's view, *openness* regarding what is known and when what is known is known is the *primary* condition making historical discourse possible. Writing an introduction, I suggest, is a similarly discursive task.

With comparable modesty, I do not believe that reading an introduction is entirely for its own sake. An introduction is supposed to help readers understand what is to come: it is essentially preparatory. Here, I think, the afterword gains the upper hand. In an afterword what is to come has already come. If readers choose to read an afterword after they have read the book, they are looking for additional edification. An afterword is also an interpretation.

Just as my remarks refer to the epistemological gap between writers and readers, Danto appeals to the gap between the participants and interpreters of historical events, giving priority to the latter. His book about history is far less about witnessing or remembering, as are many such books currently, and much more about the progress of knowledge gained from interpreting past events. In history, interpretation entails the production of narratives that describe, explain, and assess historical events. Danto's philosophy of history is a philosophy only of the interpretive afterword, a philosophy of productively organized sentences written after the fact.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE CHRONICLE

Historians don't just record past happenings; they produce patterns of description into which these happenings fall. They seek the significance of events, significant because they juxtapose one event in relation to another. Danto has much to say about the idea of significance. In his terms, historians do not want to be just chroniclers of events or the ones

who produce cumulative lists. They do not want to be mere hunters and gatherers of material. Instead they want to be the narrators, even storytellers, of the entire spectrum of human and social affairs. They are concerned with changes of significance brought about both by and to persons and peoples, their societies, cities, laws, and artifacts. To describe these changes is to describe the before and after of events as well as the temporal stages between them. Historians' descriptions are transformed into explanations as well as into theory-, interest-, and value-laden assessments. History as transformational narrative is what prevents history as a discipline from being focused entirely on the past.

Transformation, not lists, leads Danto to argue against the *ideal chronicle* theory, a "pellet" view that leads historians only to record or accumulate all the events located in historical time. It also leads Danto to reject the idea of the narrative as a perfect reproduction of the past and instead to stress its essential incompleteness. The narrative is incomplete because no one ever has either all the evidence at hand or all knowledge at hand at any particular time, and one is always in time.

I was tempted to entitle my introduction "The Transformation of the Chronicle" after one of Danto's best-known titles in the philosophy of art, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*. I wanted to capture the sense in which historical sentences are *more* than chronological statements of fact or *do something more* to those statements, where what they *do* is give them historical significance. This play on titles might, however, have seemed that I was assuming that *transformation* and *transfiguration* were identical. For Danto they seem to be different, for whereas transformation brings *history* to its correct *philosophical* account, transfiguration brings *art* to its *historical* end. But how great is this difference? My answer will eventually show that, despite appearance, the difference might not be so great.

ASYMMETRIES OF TIME

History is formed from three asymmetric modalities of time. One way to understand these asymmetries is by looking at our language (here, English). Danto rightly notes how much of our talk centers on the past. We might thus think that English would have more "past-referring" terms

(Danto's language) than "future-referring" terms. Nevertheless, the contrary seems to be the case. For the future we may choose among the languages of envisaging, foretelling, forecasting, previewing, prophesying, and presaging. For the past, however, we are limited to terms of retrospection, reflection, and hindsight. What seems to be missing for the past is a rich vocabulary of "after-seeing" or "post-visioning," to which the nonexistence of these words testifies. To be sure, we have many words to describe looking back, such as *review*, *recall*, *remember*, *reflect*, and *revise*, yet these words seem to signify acts less of looking back than of repetition belonging, like echoes, to the present. We could of course say the same about future-referring terms, for example, when we speak of wanting to preview the future from the perspective of the present. Nonetheless, a subtle asymmetry still exists, because although we are led through the act of repetition from the present to the past, we are not led by this act into the future. Indeed, only if we read Kierkegaard are we likely to think about the present as a repetition of things to come.

A satisfactory philosophy of history is generally one that does not try to overcome the asymmetries among the three modalities of time. Trying to overcome these asymmetries often strips the active character from history and makes it seem as if it were only a passive reflection of a past that is already dead and gone. History is anything but.

Consider the almost banal or fatalistic truth that even though we spend much of our lives reflecting on our pasts, we cannot change our pasts even if we want to. A Freudian would say that the reflection begins not with choice but with traumatic necessity. Yet this traumatic necessity defies a logic telling us that trying to change our pasts is wasted effort. We are told that we would do better to redirect our reflection toward transforming our futures with the aim that the future not be a mere repetition of the past. But we cannot, strictly speaking, change the future either, since it does not yet exist. Therefore we can change only the present. This is what we tend to believe. To be told to "seize the day" is to be told to stop thinking about today as already formed and instead as ready to be made. There is no time, so the saying goes, like the present.

Experientially, this saying is literally true. To speak of the present as something that can be changed is not to think of it derivatively, as if it marked merely the momentary transition from past to future. Rather, it is

to think of it expansively, not only as fully extended across time, but also as the only expanse of time to which we have access, as if it were a spatial expanse saturated entirely with presence. At one extreme of this expanse, the present is experienced as becoming the no-longer present past and, at the other extreme, as the not-yet present future. In other words, the present is no longer defined in terms of the past and the future; the past and future are defined derivatively in relation to it, as *respectively* and *prospectively* projected out of its Janus-faced *perspective*. This description accords with how we speak about *seeing* the past or the future in terms of looking back or looking forward, in active acts performed in the expanded gaze of the present. History, conceived either as a narratival act of interpretation, as Danto conceives it, or as a mode of experience, as I am describing it, reveals the active interrelations among the three modalities of time. In other words, Danto's narratival transformation of the chronicle matches the dynamic experiential transformation of chronological time.

HISTORICAL SENTENCES

In his poem *Don Juan*, Lord Bryon wrote that "narrative is not meant for narration." Narrative, unlike narration, is connected to "fantastic" tales that build up "common things and commonplaces." Barring too much fantasy, the Byronic building up of common things lies behind Danto's own view of history as transformational narrative.

Danto distinguishes *historical* events from *mere* or *plain* occurrences: narrative is not meant for plain narration, "plain" also being one of Byron's terms. For Danto, historical events are events-under-a-description or interpreted-events-contextualized-by-a-narrative. An event known under one description at a given time might come to be known later under a different description, although speaking of events as falling under a description raises tricky questions about the individuation of the events themselves. Consider a Wittgenstein-inspired analogy to what Danto establishes elsewhere, for example, in his so-titled *Body/Body* book of essays on the philosophy of mind and action (which also includes several significant essays on the philosophy of history).

A bare movement of the arm that is first described as a greeting to a passerby is later described as a military salute. I can't help but recall the

many variously either apologetic or damning descriptions of Furtwängler's handshake with Goebbels at the end of a 1942 birthday performance for Hitler of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. In this example, we have no problem saying that the same physical movement has been interpreted differently. However, when redescribing historical events, what do include or exclude regarding the event itself? As part of "the handshake," should we include Furtwängler's wiping his hand with his handkerchief, an act of erasure that might be read as his wanting either to remove the sweat after conducting so vigorously or to erase the compromising action? But then we also see his little bow as he hurries off the stage and the arguably wincing smile as if to show discomfort (to whom?) at what he is doing. And so on and so on. What counts as part of this event? Temporally, an event under one description may suggest that it lasts for one period of time but, under another description, for a different period of time. How long did the Second World War last? It depends on whether the end is marked, say, by the end of hostilities in Europe or in the Pacific.

The difficulties of event ontology aside, the point is that even though this sort of redescription constitutes a major part of the historian's task, it does not strictly speaking fall into the class of what Danto calls *historical sentences*. Historians do *not* use historical sentences when seeking the correct event to fit a description they already have in mind. However, they *do* use historical sentences when emphasizing the differences among descriptions of the same event. Different descriptions give the event different (intensional and nonsubstitutable) meanings. Still, even this is not enough. Historical sentences are distinguished by the fact that in making claims about past events, historians refer to events that occur at later dates, ones to which the original events are *relevantly* related. The original events acquire new *significance* in relation to what occurs afterward, and the description accordingly changes. In my words: the afterwords of historical sentences depend also on after-events. Hence what it is possible to say at a later date is not possible to say at the original time of occurrence or even for a span of time thereafter: something must occur after the first event that alters the description and significance of the first event in the particular way that it does. A historical sentence clearly depends on when it is uttered, although it is not crudely relativized to such. Rather, its truth depends on its reference to the original event that

has been set in a relation of relevance to a later one. Danto's account here hinges on a subtle discussion of the *realism* and *relevance* of *reference* and of the *relativism* of *description*, during which he dismisses many traditional forms of realism and relativism as simply too crude.

To repeat Danto's favorite example, whereas it was possible in 1618 to state that a war had begun, it was not possible until at least 1648 to describe that beginning as the beginning of "the Thirty Years' War." Another example, derived from Danto's own example about Diderot, contrasts the sentence "Arthur Danto was born on January 1, 1924," with "On this day, the author of *Analytical Philosophy of History* was born." The first is not, strictly speaking, a historical sentence; it is merely or basically factual. However, the latter is: after January 1, 1924, anyone could say the former, but they had to wait until 1965 to say the latter, and even a bit longer if the latter sentence also implied an evaluation. "The author of this pathbreaking book was born on this day." (As I later show, it was a pathbreaking book.)

HISTORICAL SENTENCES AND FICTIONAL SENTENCES

> This, madam, is a faithful narrative of every event in which we have been concerned together; and if you do not absolutely reject it as false, you will, I hope, acquit me henceforth of cruelty towards Mr. Wickham. I know not in what manner, under what form of falsehood he has imposed on you; but his success is not perhaps to be wondered at. Ignorant as you previously were of every thing concerning either, detection could not be in your power, and suspicion certainly not in your inclination. You may possibly wonder why all this was not told you last night.

When first thinking about Danto's historical sentences, I was reminded of the letter written by Darcy to Elizabeth in the middle of *Pride and Prejudice*. At first I wanted it to fit Danto's account of the historical sentence perfectly, so that I could show how well it also illustrated his own worst fear for the philosophy of history, when a healthy pride gives way to an unhealthy prejudice in which the term *prejudice* etymologically suggests *prejudgment*. Danto is wary of producing sentences uttered before the fact. Unfortunately, this literary example did not fit perfectly, though it is helpful to see why not.

Darcy writes to Elizabeth to explain that he was not able to say last evening what he can now say this morning regarding his kindness to Mr. Wickham, a kindness that she has incorrectly been mistaking for cruelty. To fit Danto's account, some *external* event would have had to occur between the night before and the morning after, from which Darcy acquired a new piece of information about some earlier event. All that happens to Darcy, however, is a change or an improvement of mind; nothing eventual has happened in the world. "I was not," he wrote, "then master enough of myself to know what could or ought to be revealed." Simply to decide to say something later that one couldn't say before doesn't count as producing a historical sentence, although it is still a good example of both a tensed and a narrative sentence.

A fictional sentence should not be confused with a historical sentence. A historical sentence must refer to an event that occurs later, which is why historians should never feel satisfied that all has ever been said about an event. They always have new and more work to do. New events make possible the historians' continuing job. This is a central point for Danto as is another, inspired by Kant's famous sentence, "Concepts without intuitions are empty; intuitions without concepts are blind." Accordingly, whereas *realism without interpretation is plain*—it would be like historians producing mere chronicles of events without providing narratives—*interpretation without the tether of the real is fiction*. Or at least this is the sort of interpretation that is given of any sort of writing in which nothing external or eventual to the narrative is at stake from the movement of one sentence to the other. On the realist view of interpretation, nothing can happen after the fictional book ends to change the sentences within it. Historical narratives, conversely, are not so constrained just because the real world goes on.

THE ADVANCE OF KNOWLEDGE

Metahistorically, historians of historical narratives can determine what was known to other historians *when*. They know what it is possible to say in the present given what has occurred so far and what, at that moment, they know. However, they cannot assume that future historians will say the same things as they say in the present because what will happen may

well cause future historians to describe the same past events differently. In other words, although like present historians, future historians may elicit from a past event a significance of which past historians were not and could not have been aware, no claim by present historians should be made as if they were speaking on behalf of future historians as well.

Put differently, historical sentences bring past events under particular descriptions. A complete historical narrative of that event would contain all possible descriptions of it. To offer all possible descriptions of an event would be to assume access to the entire history of the world, including the world's future, and this is not possible. If not everything can be known, not everything can be said. Historians must acknowledge the epistemological limits determined by historical time.

Hence, that historical sentences are pronounced after the fact does not imply a strong qualitative advance in knowledge. It implies only a quantitative advance in what is known and what can be said about a past event. The word *qualitative* implies that the advance of historical knowledge points to a predetermined course for history toward a final or absolute end. However Hegelian Danto is in many aspects of his life's work, and most obviously in his philosophy of art, he is explicitly anti-Hegelian here. Even when he writes about contemporary philosophers knowing more than previous philosophers did and about their not therefore making the same mistakes their predecessors did, he imagines Minerva's owl fixing its gaze for the sake of logic but not for the sake of world-historical spirit. For Danto, the advantage gained from hindsight is sustained solely by the epistemological outcome of the logic of time. What is known later indicates only that it couldn't have been known earlier. What Danto argues for historical discourse can be compared to any act of writing that assumes a reflective perspective: to come to know more is not necessarily to come to know better in a strong "world-historical" sense. To think that we do know better implies a "grandioseness" (his term) that Danto explicitly wants to avoid.

MEANING AFTER THE ACT

Danto rejects the sort of progress in knowledge that assumes a world-historical course for humanity, although he doesn't deny the changes

of knowing that are also, in a more modest sense, advances. This point returns us to the apparent disadvantage of writing introductions in contrast to afterwords.

The writers of introductions risk preempting the authors of the books. To avoid this risk, they recognize the authors' right to the first word. Yet this right does not thereby guarantee authors the last word, which is exactly what afterwords make explicit. Afterwords articulate meanings of which authors may not be aware when writing their books. Insofar as books are like historical events, their significance is not complete when the books are finished being written. Just as historical events are more than plain events, given that they assume new significances in present and subsequent interpretations, significant books are not finished even, as the saying goes, after the fat lady has sung her last notes.

Compare works of music that are considered complete at the end of the compositional process but not fully comprehensible without the subsequent history of their performances. In extending Danto's view, musical works are more than their notes; like historical events, they are saturated with later-to-be-interpreted significance. Or consider that when listening to overtures to operas we are given hints of the themes to come, but we still do not know the real significance of these themes until after the last notes of the operas have been sung. Similarly, themes in music are often not fully understood without their variations. Temporal arts such as music often support the principles of a philosophy of history. For our purposes, musical examples may show readers that they need not worry that so many themes of this introduction will elude them at present, for they are promised a full understanding when they read Danto's book. Suppose, however, that readers decide to read this essay as an afterword rather than an introduction; what will be left of its promise? Imagine listening to the overture to an opera after listening to the opera. We might gain a greater appreciation of the overture's thematic suggestiveness, but we lose its sense of anticipation and excitement. Insofar as overtures are like introductions, they hold promise because their composers know what is to follow. Even inspiration conveys insights acquired in hindsight. Still, if the point of an introduction is to convey excitement, then even if written as an afterword it is better read up front.

THE LIMITS OF OMNIPOTENCE

Danto doesn't draw this particular analogy between interpreting events and interpreting books (or musical works), although he might have, given his liking of theories that are self-reflectively able to confirm themselves. However, this analogy matches a story Danto does discuss, a biblical story showing that even the eternal and omnipotent creator did not fully exhaust the significance of the world in that first, seven-day act of creation. In fact, the creator realized that for *human history* to exist at all (*natural history* being too complex to treat here too), the creator had to restrain any *appearance* of knowing everything, thereby leaving the historical course of human events *apparently* undetermined in advance. The creator might know the essential pattern or truths of the world but not those with which history is concerned, namely, the contingent complexities of human actions. Or if the creator did know, he had to hold this knowledge in abeyance. Whether or not human beings are *really* free, they cannot make sense of their earthly existence if they do not act as if they are. Human history tracks the world at least as it is given in appearance.

This view of human history mirrors the view of ancient Greek philosophers, at least that of Aristotle. When he defined "history," or its etymologically corresponding term(s), he did so partly to demarcate a domain of actions and events motivated by prior intention and deliberation. Aristotle linked the judgment of history, as did the writers of Genesis, to an ethics presupposing persons to have free will and thereby the ability to do wrong intentionally. However, this definition included a crucial complexity defining the tense relation between philosophy and history up to the present day. By linking history to the course of free human action, philosophers separated historical claims from knowledge claims. For knowledge to be knowledge, it had to be noncontingent, nonparticular, and, most important to our concerns, timeless. Such knowledge came from philosophy but not, so philosophers claimed, from history.

Danto argues that tensed sentences belong to history but not automatically to philosophy, which is why, perhaps but not incidentally, philosophers have always felt justified in writing in the timeless present tense. We may think that what Danto shows has always been known, yet this is

not so. Consider whether historical sentences produce knowledge claims. Danto says that historical sentences say true things about the world. Does this truth count as philosophical knowledge, or do we say that it is *merely* or *only* empirical? If empirical truth counts also as philosophical truth, this says something significant about what constitutes philosophy. A philosophy constituted at least partly by empirical sentences approaches the condition of science, although, traditionally, empirical science includes neither philosophical nor historical statements as constitutive. Danto wrote his book in the 1960s when philosophy, history, and science were all undergoing revolutionary reconception. With his introduction of historical sentences into the philosophy of history, he contributed to this reconception with unforeseen but momentous consequence.

EMBATTLED DISCIPLINES

To understand what was at stake in Danto's theory when it was first written we must start to read somewhat between his lines and certainly after the fact. My aim now until the end of this introduction is to connect Danto's concerns in the philosophy of history to both his broader and later concerns about philosophy in general.

The fact that philosophers rather than historians originally determined the boundaries of knowledge helps explain the adverse relations between the disciplines. Philosophy versus history; philosophy versus art: the warfare and the violent language associated with them are often a central topic of Danto's writings. However, more than Danto's treating the old Platonic battle among philosophy, politics, and the arts, he has always shown more interest in the post-1800, modern conflict among philosophy, history, science, and the arts, especially as it emerged in Hegel's writings.

The warfare between philosophy and history reveals much about our claims to knowledge and the nature of narrative. Regarding both, it is not only philosophy and history that appear on the battlefield, but theology too. Most philosophies of history, including Danto's, recognize that their claims about history and narrative cannot be easily separated from Judeo-Christian theories of such, theories that are most concerned with showing how human access is or is not possible to the word of God.

Thus it matters to Danto that the Old and New Testaments were written in tensed sentences, even though the truths they told were timeless, or so at least believers had to believe. Sometimes even the sentences became timeless as, for example, when it was proclaimed that "Unto us a Savior *is* born." As long as this was believed, writers, painters, and composers were licensed to present these truths in the tensed or contemporary styles of the age. Biblical paintings were painted to be *more* than historical, to transcend the tense of both their form and their content so that more would be shown than was literally seen. In turn, to achieve in painting what could be achieved in the Bible brought the highest regard to art: it could surpass the historical as it approached a timelessly philosophical or religious truth.

The battle between philosophy and history has ancient roots but came to the fore in the age of classicism, idealism, and romanticism, when, in German, *Geschichte* as opposed to *Historie* threatened to usurp the supremacy of both philosophy and theology. In ancient times there was no philosophy *of* history as such, even if there was much thinking about history, and in one sense there was no philosophy *of* history, from the philosopher's perspective, so long as history was deemed inadequate to produce genuine knowledge. Although philosophers covered all terrains, the aim of a "philosophy of" was to give its subject matter a value worthy of their respect.

Before 1800 the phrase "philosophy of" usually had a derogatory connotation referring to less worthy activities comparable to how the term *aesthetician* is sometimes used to refer to "a cosmetician" or how we still disparagingly describe someone as "having a philosophy." The eighteenth century brought philosophies of perfume, vanity, advertising, and industry. Hegel even mocked the phrase "philosophy of," although he did so to elevate its status to no less than titular pride. In fact, we may well conclude (and the conclusion is not lost on Danto) that Hegel was the first systematic philosopher of history, as he was also the first systematic philosopher of art.

Recall the familiar story about the history of art, according to which art's connection to appearance and emotion for a long time prevented its inclusion in the (philosophical) domain of the real and the rational. Like the philosophy of history, the philosophy of art emerged around

1800 when both history and art asserted their equality to, if not also their supremacy over, philosophy and, by doing so, challenged philosophy's right to be the sole proprietor of claims to knowledge. Since 1800 theorists have described the moment as the beginning of the equality, autonomy, or democratization of the disciplines. Others, more critical, have judged this "deceptive" moment of "brotherhood" and "joy" as the beginning of modernity's end: a revolutionary moment that quickly became a lost opportunity.

Hegel saw specifically in the disciplinary struggles of his age an opportunity to incorporate history into philosophy so as to transform both partners. He produced a *critical* and *dialectical* method based partly on the transcendental arguments of Kant and partly on the then-developing Idealist arguments for mediation. Hegel's argument for disciplinary transformation related contingent, concrete, and particular claims to necessary, abstract, and general claims, on the assumption that without the mediation of history there could be no genuine advance in philosophy's progressive passage of Reason. While revising the relation between philosophy and history, Hegel revised philosophy's relation to art.

In his own philosophy of art, Danto often employs the concept of *disenfranchisement* to describe philosophy's historical attempt to control the claims and production of the arts. This attempt has a double origin, first in ancient Greece and second in the Kantian and Hegelian years around 1800. For most of its history, philosophy dictated the progressive movement of art from one style to another, demanding that art subject itself, above all else, to philosophy's need to define art (arguably to give it philosophical respectability). At a certain moment in the 1960s, art released itself from philosophy's dominion with consequences so great that Danto proclaimed the release "the end of art." With this end came a new beginning, the age of art's stylistic freedom, a genuine pluralism for a mode of production now freed from a progressive and philosophically masterminded narrative.

Danto describes this end less as a philosophical end than as a historical end, seeming as he does to regard history as the primary conveyor of philosophy's progressive narrative. However, as I would suggest on his behalf, to be posthistorical is to be postphilosophical only if the philosophy is bound up with a falsifying concept of history. Danto finds

this falsifying concept in Hegel's radical revision of philosophy's relation to history. Danto deeply disapproves of this revision, according to his *Analytical Philosophy of History*. His disapproval motivates him to rethink the terms not only of the philosophy of history but also of the philosophy of art.

Danto sees with the beginning of Hegel's systematic philosophy of history that rather than becoming equal to philosophy or freed from its judgment, history is only further subjugated to it. The years around 1800 were dominated by the "philosophy of," the moment when—given Hegel's commitment to absolute spirit—history was made to perform philosophically in a way that contradicted its nature. What I described as Hegel's attempt to produce a dialectics of mediation that considered history as seriously as it did philosophy, Danto viewed as a false or failed attempt to make history too much like philosophy and philosophy too much like history. For Danto, the mediation between philosophy and history that Hegel proposed falsified itself with every step toward an absolute, consummating, or totalizing identity.

FALSE PROPHETS

Danto approves of what ancient philosophers did to history: it allowed them to focus on the contingent, particular, and temporal character of freely willed, human acts. However, he does not sympathize with the philosophers' often deprecating attitude toward the kinds of sentences historians produce. Philosophy produces one kind of sentence and history another. It is crucial to Danto to regard historians' tensed sentences as saying true things about the history of the human and social world. To write a philosophy of history that acknowledges that unique claims about the world are made by tensed sentences is to give a philosophical credibility to history it has long been denied.

Nonetheless, Danto doesn't allow historical claims to assume the status of philosophical claims if this means that tensed sentences may be translated into tenseless or absolute ones. Why is preserving the difference important? Returning to the biblical story, Danto offers both a logical and a deeply secular argument to reveal the limitations of God's knowledge regarding historical time. It is less the limitations

of God's knowledge that Danto wants to stress than the limitations of a human knowledge that would rather be a divine form of absolute knowledge. That God does not logically have knowledge of the future is one claim; that human beings, and particularly political dictators, do not have this knowledge is another. In fact, the latter claim seems to have been the more important one for Danto to bring home to philosophers of history in America returning from the war in Europe. In his book on history, he refers to the dictator who apparently declared such tenseless sentences as "the war is won" before his war—Hitler's war—was in fact lost. For comparison, the 2004 German film *Der Untergang* shows the lesser and greater significances of Hitler's final declaration that the "the war is lost." Only historically is the latter sentence preferable to the former; in their philosophical pretense to tenselessness, both are conceited.

Danto is worried by the use of the present tense to will the future or, even worse (since Danto takes one to imply the other), to will a timeless or absolute truth. Given this worry, I believe that Danto's *Analytical Philosophy of History* was written in part to claim an Anglo-American victory over those philosophers of history whose claims the world had already disproved. Philosophers of history who claim to know the future in an absolute way are constantly embarrassed by a reality that contradicts their claims. Many Marxist philosophers were deeply troubled, as Danto well knew in the 1960s, by the part of the world that had become Stalinist.

FATE AND TRAGEDY

Beyond the rhetorical gesture, it would be incorrect to say that given the historical pattern so far established, Danto's *Analytical Philosophy of History* is fated forevermore to be introduced, a pattern that seems to be repeated more or less every twenty years. Thus my introduction, written in 2006, appears in the third major publication of a book that was first published forty years ago (1965) and then again twenty years ago (1985) under the new title *Narration and Knowledge*. Danto wrote his own introductions to the first two editions and, in the second case, even increased the number of chapters from twelve to fifteen

to offer additional readings to, and retrospective readings of, what he had already written. If there is something contradictory about writing an introduction, there is also something redundant, especially when an introduction and a preface, plus the book itself, already tell readers most of what they need to know.

To overcome this feeling of redundancy, I decided not to repeat Danto's explicit argument in my own introduction and instead to discuss what often remains unsaid. However, it is also important to describe the mistake of declaring about any good book that it is fated to be introduced repeatedly if this declaration implies that we know in the present something substantive about the future. Danto's book tells us that the language of fate says much more about our hope for the future than about our knowledge. If fate has anything to do with knowledge, then it does so because the knowledge we want is absent. If Aeneas had known that he would found Rome, in which his knowing implied understanding the significance of his task, he would not have had to be guided by the forces of fate. "Arms, and the man I sing, who, forc'd by fate, / And haughty Juno's unrelenting hate, / Expell'd and exil'd, left the Trojan shore." To confuse such forces with claims about knowledge sustains many "causes and crimes" of war. This confusion is not irrelevant to Danto's own postwar concerns of the 1960s, nor unfortunately does it cease to be of concern to many of us forty years later.

Long before Arthur Danto wrote his *Analytical Philosophy of History*, the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer suggested that readers read his own momentous book twice, first not knowing in advance how the ending would turn out and then knowing how it would. Between the two readings there would be a significant change. With the first reading, the reader would be a historical reader; with the second, a philosophical reader. According to its nature, history demands that readers follow the temporal unfolding of the thoughts without assuming that the end is already known, whereas philosophy allows readers to start with the conclusion already known. Philosophical reading is then a matter of backtracking to see how the conclusion is reached.

First time, history; second time, philosophy: knowledge given by philosophy but not by history is a distinction Aristotle introduced into his theory of tragedy specifically to demonstrate that tragedy teaches on

philosophy's side. Tragedy can show the tragic nature of human life, the logic or possibility it contains, over and above the play's particular course of events. Danto discusses tragedy when he describes the cognitive dissonance implicit in Greek tragedy, the gaps between what the author, protagonist, and spectator each knows at any given moment. Here the protagonist is, and must be for the sake of the genre, a historical character. If he already had the knowledge he later acquires, this would prevent the course of action that unravels his life. Or at least it would change the description of that course, since what makes the action tragic is that although the acts are performed with good intentions, each is performed out of a lack of knowledge. *Unluckily* rather than *unfortunately* (since fortune is not the point), the acts contradict nature and bring about unintended negative consequences. The author, however, knows in advance what the outcome will be: he knows it because he decides it. The author achieves by decision what philosophers achieve by reason, namely, the tragic knowledge that human life is characterized by contingency associated with luck. Through artistic means, this knowledge is transmitted to the spectators, who first time around follow the action historically and identify with the tragic protagonist, and second time around follow it philosophically to grasp the philosophical point. To avoid repetition, the author often uses a reflective chorus to help the spectators shift between the historical and philosophical modes of spectatorship during one and the same experience or performance of the work.

First time, history; second time, philosophy: one can't help but envision Marx appearing on the stage to remind us that when history repeats itself in the movement from ancient Greece to modern Germany, it appears the first time as tragedy and the second time as farce. Indeed, one might suggest that the relation between history and philosophy in Greek tragedy was transformed around 1800 into a relation between tragedy and farce itself. For the heroic protagonist of modern (German) drama is made philosophical just at that moment when he, and it usually is a he, is constructed as a "great man" with the sort of cunning or advanced knowledge that places him historically ahead of, and philosophically above, the lesser humans around him. Sensing that he knows something more, he is given license, so Hegel argues, to perform heroic and even violent acts, which are justified by the ends they quickly bring about. The

impatient (but usually unhappy) man of action is the anticipator of better things to come. Acting ahead of his time, he is the world-historical man who need not use the future tense to speak of what will come, but only the present tense insofar as this tense is reserved for the man who has timeless knowledge. With Aristotle, the difference between philosophical and historical forms of knowledge is maintained. However, by the nineteenth century the difference is in danger of being blurred at least in the acts performed, as Danto knows when he writes his *Analytical Philosophy of History*.

CLOSED AND OPEN BOOKS

It is tempting to say that a particular book that "needs no introduction" is one that sustains itself by living a historical life. This is a book that does not languish on the dusty shelves of a library but remains in the hands of live publishers and interpreters. To speak of the life of a book is like speaking of a person whom we read as an open book. To read a person as a closed book is like meeting the historian who is born old, already, as Nietzsche described him, with gray hair. Nietzsche's reflections on history were closely connected to the spirit of openness, to the spirit of *life* (*Leben*) or a human history (*Historie*) that depended on persons exhibiting their free will and acknowledging the limits of their knowledge. Danto was inspired by Nietzsche and wrote a book about him at the same time he wrote his *Analytical Philosophy of History*, though in the latter book, Nietzsche hardly makes an appearance. Had he appeared more often, he might have given different terms to Danto's argument against the will to arrogance—as a will to power demonstrated by the historical man who, falsely wanting somehow to return to youth, finds he can demonstrate only a transhistorical love of the people (*das Volk überhaupt*).

As a philosopher like Nietzsche, Danto knows that the arrogance of the historical man who speaks transhistorically is reminiscent of the sophists from whom the ancient philosophers also kept their distance. Sophists are rhetoricians of the present tense. For Danto, the philosopher's task is to put or find history in its right place, as opposed to philosophers who, by inserting history into an incorrect philosophical method, end up assigning it a role it should not rightly assume. I use the term

rightly here because giving history both its rights and its right philosophical account is Danto's aim.

THE WRONG PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

The impatient modern man of action is comparable to the "impatient philosopher of history." Rather than admitting the dependence of his historical sentences on time, the latter seeks, through either *substantiation* or *speculation*, to make transhistorical claims about the future. Danto thinks this error was first made in the writings of Hegel and Marx, but the real enemies are those "world-historical" ideologists of action who led the world into war. I think this because Danto's argument derives less from his criticizing the detailed claims of the speculative philosophers of history and more from his articulating the tendencies of a speculative philosophy of history that has fallen into the worst version of itself, into something overly "substantive."

I stress this point to motivate my introducing one of the books I believe most inspired Danto. Its primary claim was that "a future known in advance is an absurdity." To claim that one could know the future in advance was for this author, the Swiss art historian Jakob Burckhardt, both a logical and a dangerous absurdity that hastened society's political, moral, and cultural decline into barbarism. The book first appeared in German in 1905 in Stuttgart under the title *Weltgeschichtliche Betrachtungen*. It was put together by his nephew from lectures Burckhardt had delivered between 1868 and 1871, which inspired not only Nietzsche's *Untimely Meditations*, including the essay on the advantages and drawbacks of history for life, but also Danto's work. However, between Burckhardt and Nietzsche, on the one hand, and Danto, on the other, is both a temporal and a continental divide.

That is, it is quite likely that the version of Burckhardt's book Danto read was the first translation, which appeared in 1943 in New York entitled *Force and Freedom*. With a translated title evoking America's wartime goal to let force and freedom triumph over the enemy, the book was generally read as a warning against the dangers of a dictator who claimed to know in advance (or at all) what was best for humanity. *Force and Freedom* was also read (for example, in *The Nation* in

1943) as having prophesied a half century before its time the totalitarian age, which was rather paradoxical, for the conceit of prophecy was what Burckhardt most opposed and it was not something on which America's free and democratic society should have wanted to rely. Even more, Burckhardt argued against democracy for the cultural boredom and new form of political tyranny it suggested. However, democracy was at least partly what America was fighting for and certainly for what Danto (in his own writing for *The Nation*) has always argued.

Burckhardt's discussion of force and freedom implied something grander and more conservative than what the American title was meant to suggest. Yet it did not entail the commitment to a fully substantive philosophy of history. Even though the writer who wrote the introduction to the 1943 translation understood this, he still chose to entitle his three introductory chapters with these inappropriately "substantive" titles: "The Man and His Mission," "Burckhardt as Prophet," and "The Meaning of History." Burckhardt argued against the danger implicit in all three: missions, prophecies, and Meaning (with a capital M), and so did Danto in his own book in 1965. Although Danto drew on Burckhardt's thought to support his own more democratic philosophy of history, he did not accept the interpretation of Burckhardt as prophet. Instead, Danto saw him as an anticipator, where anticipation as opposed to prophecy, so Danto argues, is a perfectly reasonable or logical notion that historians may employ.

To introduce political themes pertaining to a secular postwar American democracy gives additional sense to Danto's concerns even if he rarely chooses to make such themes explicit. The American composer John Cage (about whom Danto has written) once alluded to Gertrude Stein by suggesting that America should not be burdened by tradition and therefore should not be burdened by Europe which was burdened by tradition. America should be the country of the forever new. In the 1980s, Francis Fukuyama argued that the end of history marked the end of a certain preoccupation with a master narrative of political theory in the West that was no longer pertinent to a liberal democracy that had achieved its "final form." Even if this were not one of Danto's arguments, it could have been, since he has always been concerned with showing that philosophy should no longer be burdened by a European tradition of master narratives. His analytical philosophy of history is a

sustained democratic argument against the lack of openness and tolerance that follows from a substantive philosophy of history, an approach to history and knowledge that closes down a society as it once closed down a significant part of European society.

To speak of a closed society is to invoke Karl Popper, who appears briefly in the last chapter of Danto's book. Although this chapter is the most political, Danto's argument for an open society is premised almost exclusively on the logic of claims made about the future. In other words, Danto does not explicitly engage in ideological rhetoric or political argument. He argues only that there is no significant "philosophical difference" between the claims made by what he calls methodological *individualists* and methodological *socialists*. To take either position is equally compatible or incompatible with the logic of the open future.

What is always at stake for Danto is the presence of openness. To leave the future open is to make no substantive claim upon it; to leave the future open is to leave the present open, as also the past, for only if a past is open does the historian's task make sense when generating historical narratives. History is not possible if interpretation is not possible, and historical interpretation is dependent on both time and the relations among the different modalities of time. To see the past both as open and as incomplete is to see it neither as a closed book nor as an ever-expanding container. History is anything but the mere accumulation of facts about the past; however, it is also anything but the imposition of absolute knowledge on humanity and the world.

Burckhardt's presence is felt in Danto's book, although he is mentioned only occasionally. Still I believe that he gave Danto the model for reading the substantive philosophy of history, a philosophy interpreted as claiming that advanced and substantive knowledge is possible. I also believe that Burckhardt's book came to Danto's attention through another that inspired him, Karl Löwith's *Meaning in History*, published in 1949. This book reveals the remains of eschatology in a secularized and modern philosophy of history. Again, Danto is aware of these remains even if they usually stay in the background of his book. With Löwith's argument in mind, we might identify Danto's greatest worry as that arising when speculative philosophers of history allow history less to become philosophical than substantively theological. Danto does not differentiate between

speculation and *substantiation*, but he could have, I suggest, especially given his own interest in transformation and transfiguration.

In Danto's view, a substantive philosophy of history oversteps the bounds of temporal knowledge. It makes a substantive leap to assert in historical terms what can be asserted only through a certain view of philosophy, namely, a timeless truth about the future. I am deliberately showing the contradiction between timelessness and futurity to explain why Burckhardt once described the philosophy of history as "a contradiction in terms." Danto criticizes the substantive philosophers of history because by believing they know the present, they believe they know the future. In other words, they make timelessly present claims about "the whole." When Danto refers to "the whole," he is certainly referring to Hegel's concept of *das Ganze* and interprets this notion as implying a path of absolute reason that suppresses more than it mediates any genuinely historical unfolding of thought. For Danto, the error turns on making not local claims about the future but absolute claims about history as a tenseless totality. Here absolutist philosophy meets absolutist theology.

Danto often refers to the substantive philosophy of history as simply the philosophy of history, as if the very idea of history's being subject to philosophy risks (theological) transformation. I wrote earlier that Danto might have described this act as just another demand for philosophy to subjugate history, when philosophy's pressure on history around 1800 turned history into a philosophical monster. This cannot be true, however, of every sort of philosophy of history unless Danto wants to argue against the entire field. A philosophy of history is impossible or a contradiction, as Burckhardt said it was, if it fails to separate the tensed character of historical sentences from the untensed character of philosophical sentences. In his own philosophy of history, Danto maintains the separation precisely to show that the philosophy of history is possible.

THE RIGHT PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

Showing the contradiction implicit in the philosophy of history might be a way of bringing the discipline it calls "history" to an end. Indeed, one unwitting outcome of Danto's own analytical philosophy of history

was that it created a revolution in the field, with the result that the narrative theorists of the literary arts assumed what was formerly the philosophers' task. The analytical philosophy of history had its heyday in the 1960s and 1970s; by the 1980s it had been replaced by narrative theory. The leader of the narrativists, or "metahistoricists," Hayden White, acknowledged the role of Danto's work, and specifically his introduction of the idea of narrative sentences, in the revolution of the disciplines. Even though Danto did not intend a full transformation, he was not unhappy to have had a large part in the change. Nonetheless, to argue against the philosophy of history per se was Danto's way of arguing against only the substantive philosophy of history. In place of a wrong philosophy of history, he intended to produce a right one, which he labeled *analytical*. I am not referring to Danto's *intentions*: his lifework has consisted in producing right *analytical philosophies* of history, action, art, science, and of everything else.

Beyond offering one philosophy of history as an alternative to another, Danto makes a takeover bid. He has never been a relativist when it comes to philosophical method. Thus one of his most sustained arguments against the substantive philosophy of history is that it is not really a philosophy of history at all, only a philosophically motivated way of doing history. A substantive philosophy of history is arguably even theologically motivated, in which rather than doing what historians can do—make temporal claims—it assumes a timelessness for itself and hence the conceit that it can surpass the limits of temporally constrained knowledge. A substantive philosophy subjugates history when it gives history a license to make claims that contradict history's own nature. Conversely, a philosophy of history that gets history right, or allows history to follow its nature, is one worth having and this, for Danto, is an analytical one. Danto writes the philosophy of history as philosophy "writ small." The problem with the substantive philosophy of history is that it allows history to be writ (too) large.

THOUGHTS IN AND OUT OF TIME

Danto's *Analytical Philosophy of History* is not completely devoted to these large questions. Most of the book is a detailed analysis of historical

sentences and the "systematic" problems associated with them. Nonetheless, as his first chapter shows, Danto is aware of these questions. Certainly these questions assume more prominence as his thought turns to art. However, whenever in his work on philosophy of history he is tempted to move in this broader (or continental) direction, he stops because, as he says, he does not want to become too distracted. It is this lack of distraction that gives this book its rather pure, analytical appearance even if more is going on behind the scenes.

Although avoiding a digression into continental or "grandiose" thinking was common to the positivist or analytical theorizing of the 1960s, Danto never feared looking further afield, as his various books on Nietzsche, Sartre, and Eastern philosophy demonstrate. Still, we do not need to go this far with him, since there is already enough to say about looking near and far just in relation to his philosophy of history.

In thinking about what makes history possible, Danto repeatedly says that he wants to accommodate what historians actually do. Accommodating practitioners might mean that philosophers need to go to no lengths at all, whereas contradicting them would lead them far afield. Wittgenstein once made this point by maintaining that if we want to understand our home, we need travel no farther than our backyard. The point was marvelously disingenuous, as many of Wittgenstein's points were, since philosophers who want to understand their home or tend to their gardens often have to go to great lengths to get rid of all the journeys to faraway places that philosophers have taken before them. It is not for no reason that another philosopher once spoke of having to clear away something like a garden full of weeds. If access to the backyard were easy, perhaps Danto's book would have been shorter. It isn't short, however; it is long and well labored because it attempts to correct all the errors of thinking it needs to correct before it can reach its own, more homespun, truths.

Still, homespun truths that are reached in this arduous way are usually ones whose obviousness needs to be dispelled. One such truth Danto offers is that historians try simultaneously to be within and outside their own historical time, so that they may refer to a time past from a present perspective or to beliefs once held from the perspective of beliefs now held. Historical sentences are spoken in and out of time. Assuming this

double gaze is not easy; it requires approaching beliefs naively and reflectively at the same time. To hold a belief naively, Danto contends, is not to be aware of it as a belief. It is to hold it transparently in order to see the world directly through it: the world just is as the belief says it is. To view a belief at a distance, as we do when we look back at the past, is to be conscious of the belief as a belief, a belief *about* (and therefore held at a reflective distance from) the world.

Danto compares the transformational activity of shifting between past and present perspectives with shifting between the beliefs "I" hold as opposed to those "others" hold. The problem of other periods converges with the problem of other minds. Still, it is not only other minds but also other places that come into play. From Danto's account of temporal displacement, we are also given the terms for an account of the sort of spatial displacement, refraction, and estrangement we find in anthropology or even in the book of Genesis, which records that in the first act of sin, human beings became "other" to their nature. They became displaced; their "eyes were thrown open" so that humans could no longer naively live according to natural knowledge. What Danto refers to as a "temporal provincialism" is often also a spatial or cultural provincialism, and from all sorts of *provincialism* comes a *provisionalism* regarding the sentences produced.

MATERIAL MEDIATION

Danto maintains that I am not conscious of my own (present) beliefs as beliefs: I live and act with them naively as if they give me unimpeded access to the world. They do, but it is only my world to which I am given such access, not *the* world or a world that exists independently of me. This argument unmasks those who, as historians, attempt to derive their accounts soley on the basis of witnessing. What cannot be trusted is what ordinary people recall, since by analogy, they speak with a certain naiveté. Witnessing, rather than being all that history is, must still be interpreted by historians. Witness accounts are material for historians, not substitutions for their interpretive acts, according to a conception of history as a discipline that is both reflective and dependent on material mediation. Historians are concerned with what happens and with what

happens as a result of these happenings. The actions themselves are temporal entities and, like all events, do not survive the passing of time. What survives are the material changes that can be represented or made, say, visible to the eye: a proud people ravaged by war, architectural edifices once standing tall turned to rubble, or a royal wedding in which at least one of the persons turns from being a commonplace citizen into a picture-postcard princess. When events occur in the present before "our very eyes," we say we are witnessing those events; in the right place at the right time we say we see more than just the material evidence, we see history in the making. But we cannot say we can witness events of the past unless that past was once our own immediate present. Conceived under the condition of pure witnessing, history is concerned with only the present or immediate past. Conversely, a history of the absent past necessitates the material remainder. However, the difference between the two quickly collapses, as Danto also suggests in his own discussion of "history-as-actuality" and "history-as-record." Is pure witnessing ever really pure? To become the subject for history, it must become both estranged from itself and subjected to the impurities of a memory that is also mediated by the incomplete material remainder: the monuments, the documents, and the descendants.

That history is materially mediated or "embodied," to use one of Danto's preferred terms, is partially what motivates him to argue against a *Verstehen* theory of direct access, or any theory of perfect replication or reproduction. He argues for a view in which, without the mediation, historical narrative would not, like painting, be possible. If we could access the past or the real world through unmediated forms of history or art, we would not need to refer to these forms as modes of re-presentation.

When historians think about accessing their subject matter, they speak as often of looking or seeing as they do of reading. Danto is certainly taken with the language of seeing. When his examples are not from literature, they are almost always from the visual arts. The reason is not mere taste or expertise. Danto has always been concerned with the history of philosophy as a history of the problems of representation. His attentiveness to representation originated first in a Platonic and then in a Cartesian anxiety about how mind, image, and language connect to reality or to the world given that human consciousness exists at a *remove*,

which Danto also refers to as a *gap*. The gap necessitates the forms of representation, producing a feeling of connection as well as an awareness of inaccessibility. Yet it must not be collapsed in such a way that either immediate access or absolute inaccessibility is assumed. Instead, the gap must be treated as something to be both explained and justified as enabling any claim of knowledge to be a form of representation.

To focus on the logic of historical sentences is to think about how the world is represented to the historical eye. Conscious beings do not only participate naively in the world; they also regard it reflectively and with anticipation. No conscious beings, following Nietzsche, can live (as animals) in the pure immediacy (or timeless paradise) of the present. Representation turns out to be the core concept of Danto's overall philosophy. It allows him to generate strong analogies among historical sentences, works of art, scientific theories, and persons (with minds). Indeed, on the basis of these analogies, Danto likes to say that all parts of his analytical philosophy are "of a piece."

HISTORY UNDER THE MODEL OF SCIENCE

The sentence from *Pride and Prejudice* I quoted earlier to illustrate the difference between historical and fictional sentences serves another purpose now. *Pride and Prejudice* is one of the books currently taught at Columbia University in its core curriculum (though it was not in the 1960s). Danto wrote his *Analytical Philosophy of History* at the beginning of the student unrest at this university and amid vigorous debates over the curriculum's arguably outmoded rationale. The critics, including Danto, rejected the idea that to know something is to understand its genealogy, that is, the history that led up to an event, as if everything that occurs has a predetermined rationale. Danto was suspicious of the historicist conceit, or the pride behind the assumption of historical understanding, and contrasted it with other, less prejudicial appeals to historical explanation. Between understanding and explanation was another continental divide, separating the then new Anglo-American approaches to the philosophy of history from the old and, not irrelevantly, German ones. When Danto criticized the old theory and offered a new one in its place, he tended to use the German terms *Verstehen* and

Erklären with a significance surpassing his merely having borrowed the use of these terms from the once German, later American, philosopher of science Carl Hempel.

Danto began his professional life in the 1950s as a philosopher of science. He quickly became interested in the influence of the positivist philosophy of science of his day on the philosophy of history. His analytical philosophy of history was written "out of the spirit" of science and particularly out of the *nomological* or *covering-law model* of science that Hempel had begun developing in the 1940s. If Hempel's argument of extension had been fully extended, it would have admitted into the class of historical sentences predictive sentences about the future based on laws derived from true statements made about past and present events. In fact, what would have been surpassed in the model would have been precisely what Danto wanted to preserve, namely, the dependence of such sentences on the time of their utterance. Covering laws threatened to make historical sentences scientifically—even if not substantively—"timelessly true." However, Hempel did not think that the extension of the scientific model went far enough and offered a theory of explanatory sketches and lawlike behavior for history and more broadly for the social sciences. His argument for this limitation was nonetheless based on a progressivist assumption inherent in much positivist theory of the time, that if the social sciences had "developed" as fast as the natural sciences had, their lawlike descriptions would have been far more exact or far less sketchy than they were. However, that Hempel didn't question the historical model he was employing to make this progressivist claim is partly what Danto questioned in recognizing the essential difference between historical and scientific statements. History is less like science than Hempel wanted to believe. Certainly, human behavior submits to lawlike or patterned structures and, certainly, much in the philosophy of science can be adopted by the philosophy of history. Yet this does not mean, so Danto contends, that the world must be pictured as nomological through and through.

Moving a step away from Hempel, Danto argues that whereas the past can be described in terms of concrete facts that are then used for producing historical sentences, the kinds of sentences we can use for the future are at most nonsubstantial, predictive sentences based on abstract

principles or inductive patterns of generalization or inference. However, strictly speaking, these necessarily abstract sentences are not historical sentences even if they are used within historical narratives. A qualification is needed. Danto speaks of entire narratives as made up of narrative sentences and sometimes describes the "construction" of language in terms of relations between part and whole. Taken literally, his account of historical sentences suggests that entire narratives are probably not entirely constituted by such sentences, but also by many other kinds of tensed and untensed sentences, including lawlike ones about the future. On the other hand, Danto's account allows that just by entering a historical narrative, all sentences are more or less or nontechnically "historical sentences" and contribute to the overall historical interpretation. His account, though rigorous, is not rigid.

Danto uses the philosophy of science to oppose one of the oldest claims in the philosophy of history. This claim was most famously articulated by the nineteenth-century thinker Leopold von Ranke. Historians, he claimed, should try to describe the past as it actually happened (*wie es eigentlich gewesen*). Although Danto admires the realism and respect implicit in Ranke's ideal of history, he recognizes the necessity also of writing historical sentences for temporal and interpretive mediation. This idea has two parts. Historical sentences logically require temporal mediation, but the more richly they represent the world, the more interesting they are. Danto says he borrowed this doubly inflected idea first from philosophers of science developing accounts of theory-based observation. The mediation of observation contradicts any *Verstehen* theorist who assumes that unmediated access to the past or to anything else is either possible or enough.

THE REVOLUTION OF THE DISCIPLINES

Danto respectfully departs from Hempel, who wanted the social sciences to become too much like the sciences. Instead, Danto was more tempted to argue for the reverse, as Thomas Kuhn and N. R. Hanson were doing at the time, although his temptation, like theirs, was limited. Nonetheless, the general argument of reversal started the revolution of the disciplines in England and the United States. At this time, the social

sciences were continuing to shift their allegiance away from the model of the natural sciences and closer to the humanities and the arts, with the—either devastating or liberating—result that the natural sciences were asked to follow suit.

I locate the revolutionary debate in an Anglo-American context because a similar discussion had already taken place in Europe. In the 1960s Danto was aware of some of the European discussion. He knew about the disciplinary struggles between the so-called *Geisteswissenschaften* and the *Naturwissenschaften*. He knew that the struggles turned significantly on the translation of the term *Geist*, which was used to refer to either the *human* spirit or the *social* spirit or both. A debate followed on whether study of the social belonged to the humanities or to the natural sciences. Hans Georg Gadamer tells the familiar story that the term *Geisteswissenschaften* was introduced in 1863 by the German translator of John Stuart Mill's 1843 *A System of Logic* as a rendering of Mill's "moral sciences" (with "moral" also meaning "social"). This story is only partially correct (as Rudolf Makkreel has recently argued), given J. G. Droysen's earlier but vaguer use of the term to refer to the "science of history." In 1883, Wilhelm Dilthey gave the term its "classical definition." I mention this only because although Dilthey concentrated on the synthesizing aesthetic in his definition, he still stressed the plurality of the disciplines overall in order to reject the "Hegelian" tendency to synthesize all subjects under a single philosophy of spirit. Danto would have been sympathetic to Dilthey's reasoning in this regard.

Although Danto was aware of this discussion, he was less aware of how long the European debate continued throughout the twentieth century. While he was writing his book, the so-called *Positivismusstreit* was being fought out in Germany among the preeminent philosophers or, as they were also described, sociologists: Theodor W. Adorno, Karl Popper, Jürgen Habermas, and their colleagues. Like Danto, they attempted, although more explicitly, to determine the postwar conditions of "openness" for a modern and would-be democratic society. When Habermas wrote his *Zur Logik der Sozialwissenschaften*, evidently he found something sympathetic in Danto's project. Just as Habermas's thought on history and social science was allied to his work on what he called the structural *transformation* (*Strukturwandel*) of the *public sphere*, so Danto's view

of history and society was worked out vicariously in his work on what he called the *transfiguration* of the *commonplace*. Transformation and transfiguration differed in emphasis, for whereas Habermas referred to the arts as part of his account of the rise of bourgeois culture, Danto gave them center stage. By no means, however, did this attention imply a reduction of history to art or, indeed, of the social sciences to the humanities.

In other words, Danto was not entirely satisfied with the results of the revolution that shifted science and social science into the domain of the humanities, in which truth, as he sometimes sadly comments, does not always seem to matter. Certainly, there is little point in being concerned with history if you are not concerned with truth. Danto has always wanted to preserve the differences between those disciplines whose differences should be preserved: thus his philosophy of history is designed to place history between science and art without either side's encouraging a reductionism or any other sort of eliminativism. Unwittingly, however, with his idea of the narrative sentence, he seems at first to have encouraged the confusion he wanted to avoid—that historical sentences would be thought to work just as fictional sentences work—with the result that the philosophy of history, like the philosophy of narrative sentences, would be subsumed under the philosophy of literature or, even worse in his view, literary studies.

Historically speaking, Danto had no right to complain about the unintended consequences of his own theory, but philosophically, he did have such a right. He could simply have claimed that his theory had been misunderstood, although even this claim is complicated. Danto began as an analytical philosopher of science and over time became an analytical philosopher of art. Combining the two, he produced an analytical philosophy of history that, though "of a piece," was distinguished by its tensed subject matter. Being "of a piece" philosophically but not "of a piece" regarding the subject matter then typified the production of any "philosophy of *X*." Certainly by the 1960s, this phrase had assumed a dominating, though now positivistic, conceit to suggest that philosophy was the invariant method used to make logical sense and bring coherence to any claim in any of its subject matters. However, to assume this posture was to avoid the question that the revolution had itself encouraged, concerning the role of *X* in altering the view of philosophy itself.

One of the hardest questions for any philosopher of history is whether the tensed nature of historical sentences can be made compatible with the untensed nature of philosophical statements, and, if so, whether the compatibility should then be stated in either history's or philosophy's terms. Friedrich Schlegel once wrote that "one of two things is usually lacking in what one calls the philosophy of art, either philosophy or art." The same could be said of the philosophy of history. Danto wants to show that the analytical philosophical method treating history as its subject matter can avoid philosophy's becoming a mere extension of history and history's being subsumed by philosophy. To avoid both, the philosopher should attend to what historians actually do, but only as a guide to saying something right about the logic rather than the substance of their sentences. Danto describes his project as "a metaphysics of everyday life" without this implying a reduction of the historical sentences of everyday life to the philosophical sentences that make their logic explicit. Burckhardt said that the philosophy of history is "a contradiction in terms"; Danto contends that this is not the case, but if it were, then the contradiction should not be resolved on one side at the expense of the other. In fact, one might even suggest that all analytical philosophies of X show the unresolved contradiction between logic and subject matter and thereby the irresolvable tension between the disciplines. Danto reaches nearly the same conclusion himself in his *Body/Body* essays when he mentions the error of some of his positivist predecessors who claimed that philosophy alone was free of methodological self-assessment.

When Danto writes that an analytical philosophy of history is philosophy writ small, he means that the former can answer many general philosophical problems pertaining to free will and determinism; relativism, realism, skepticism, and instrumentalism; truth and reference; description, explanation, and interpretation; and causality, prediction, and verification. His book discusses in more detail problems with language than problems of event or action ontology. He is more interested in the logic of sentences than in the literary devices of narratives. Yet a principal focus is on the arguments of analogy intended to demonstrate a whole philosophy of which all parts are "of a piece." I have discussed history's relation to philosophy and science; I have mentioned Danto's

philosophy of action. I shall turn finally to history's relation to philosophy and art, for there, arguably, the consistency among the pieces is most threatened.

FROM HISTORY TO ART AND BACK AGAIN

Around 1800, the idea of equalizing the disciplines was connected to the project of unifying them. In the 1950s and 1960s the project of unification was still evident in the work of Hempel and even in the work of some of the revolutionary philosophers who succeeded him. The question for the unifiers was under what principle or model the unification should take place: philosophy, science, history, politics, or art. Danto also proposes a principle of unity, but only if it does not imply a merger under a single totality. Although he supports the principle of coherence in the production of scientific theories, historical narratives, and works of art, he argues for coherence under the condition of freedom, equality, plurality, and tolerance and not under the totalitarian or substantive ideal of "wholeness." For example, he contends in his philosophy of art that when art is liberated from the master narrative of philosophy it enters a pluralist arena in which no single style takes precedence over another. Any remaining coherence is seen (if at all) only in individual works, but it no longer signifies any progressivist movement or style for the class of artworks as a whole.

Danto argues that historical sentences refer to events under a description. He speaks similarly about works of art. In his *Analytical Philosophy of History* he often refers to what became the central theme of his philosophy of art: visual indiscernibility, which is always actually an argument for interpretive discernibility. Regarding the difference between historical and fictional sentences, Danto writes that "we cannot tell just by the surface" or "one can't tell by reading alone" what the difference is; that is, the former sentences are tethered to the real and the latter are not. Likewise, we cannot tell only by looking to see whether a stone is the foundation piece for a building or evidence of the earlier presence of a statue. Actually, in this particular case, the discovery that the latter was true entirely changed the later description given. In his philosophy of art, Danto asks of two objects with the same physical properties that *look* the

same, what makes one an artwork and the other an everyday, commonplace object. This is really a philosophical question about how we define art, which Danto answers by contending that only the artwork admits the transfigurational attribution of art-historical properties generated by the work's placement in a historical art world. Likewise, a historical sentence brings objects under different descriptions according to the time and situation of their utterance, where the different descriptions reflect changing interests and values. Not incidentally, the fact that discernibility or difference is prominent in historical narratives works against Hempel's covering-law model, which tries to "cover" its examples on the basis of the most surface or least significant similarities.

Despite the argument of analogy, Danto reaches different conclusions about art and history. Art ended when the essential difference between artworks and visually identical ordinary objects came to be known. The difference was shown in an act performed by an artist and came to be known in the reflective act of a philosopher. The artist was Andy Warhol and the work was his Brillo Box installation; the philosopher was Arthur Danto. Warhol brought into the gallery a work of art that looked no different from an ordinary commodity. That the work was accepted as art prompted the philosopher to ask not for the ahistorical conditions of acceptance (such as would be stipulated by the so-called Institutional theory of art). Instead the philosopher asked why in this historical moment this act was possible, whereas a century earlier it would not have been. His question followed the act, a point that suggests that time and timing are as important to reflecting on art as they are on the past. Nevertheless, the analogy doesn't hold up completely.

Danto argues that when the essence of art was known, art was liberated from the burden of the philosopher's reflective question and entered a posthistorical condition. Yet why doesn't he claim the same about history, that it too was liberated in 1965 when he explained to historians the difference between *historical* sentences and other sentences that were *plain*, *philosophical*, or *fictional*? Like the artist, didn't the great dictator achieve something when his historical statements were accepted (by far too many) as identical to (substantively) philosophical ones? And didn't the same philosopher similarly respond by showing the difference between them?

Had Danto gone this far, he could have gone further. Indeed, he might have concluded that art reached the end of its modern disenfranchisement when it stopped being burdened by a substantive philosophy of history. Art in a pluralist, posthistorical condition is art that submits to analytical philosophy but not to a philosophy that demands that it submit to a substantiation foreign to its nature. The fact that art continues after it has released itself from this demand means only that it continues in a history that no longer presumes to be grandiose in philosophical or theological terms, just as a history that makes no such pretense is probably possible only in an open society. If Danto had said this, however, he could have said the same about history, that it, too, was liberated when it stopped being burdened by a substantive philosophy, and therefore just as art continues to be a subject for analytical philosophy, so history continues too.

Danto did not say this but maintained a difference between his accounts. Whereas his analytical philosophy of art led him to a *posthistorical pluralism*, his analytical philosophy of history led him only to a *historical openness*. What accounts for the difference? Why does art reach a posthistorical condition and history not? The answer takes us back, for the last time, to Hegel.

For Hegel, history is the dialectical underbelly required for the temporal unfolding of reason. It ends with reason's self-realization or when philosophy reaches its goal through the actualization of history. All this happens (to make a long story short) when the *ideal* condition of freedom, reconciliation, and recognition is finally *actualized* in the (Prussian) state. Insofar as art contributes to the passage of overall Geist, it does so with its sensuous or lesser means of "intuition" and "imagery." Not being up to pure Reason, art realizes itself or comes to an end earlier. Apparently, when lesser knowledge is to be grasped, the self-realization comes sooner. However, the fact that art does play a role, next to that of religion and philosophy, is Hegel's way also of acknowledging its importance. When art ends, it does so by giving way to reflection, that is, to a (higher) philosophy of art. But here now is the twist in the familiar story. When Hegel thought about the end of art, he also thought about the contemporary condition of the state and saw in it evidence of cultural and spiritual decline. Wouldn't it then follow that when the state achieved its goal, it

would overcome the decline and thus encourage a rebirth—to anticipate Nietzsche—of art? The fact that Hegel suggested as much means that his end-of-art thesis is not nearly as final as many critics have thought. Indeed, under the condition of rebirth, art (like religion) would no longer be a "thing of the past" or saturated by the sort of ironic reflection that is foreign to its nature. Rather, it would find a form of representation (new or old?) allied to the state's achieved freedom.

In his book on history, Danto is not immediately concerned with the life and death of culture. Still, he is careful not to close off history through essential or self-conscious definition. Regarding this alone we might say that when he later describes the end of art, he uses arguments that make no substantive assumption about the end of philosophy or history. In other words, he makes the assumption only about art (as I would argue in the same spirit as Hegel) to determine the terms of art's continuation. Just as Hegel thought that philosophy, history, society, and the arts could achieve a final harmony, Danto does as well, with the crucial difference that such harmony is found in an open-ended and democratic state of "total tolerance" and in a philosophy without ends. The end of art is its continuation, a continuation that depends on history's not ending. In other words, history's *openness* is the social condition that, sustained by an analytical philosophy, makes art's *pluralism* possible.

However, had Danto said this, would he have circumvented the complaint that he had made a substantive claim about art but not about history? Only if we remove from his end-of-art thesis the reference to posthistory, for art's end as a continuation is a thesis that embraces history as ongoing, and a history that is ongoing is enabled only by a more modest philosophy. The transition from art's disenfranchisement by philosophy to its pluralism is consistent with Danto's proposal for a more modest analytical philosophy of history. The fact that art continues even after the philosopher knows the essence of art is a way of giving less weight to philosophical knowledge per se. Just as Danto raises the status of history, so he raises the status of art, by announcing ends that are really new beginnings for subjects released from the overly tight grip of philosophy. This is certainly a good argument for the democratization of the disciplines. Whether, however, it is a good argument or enough of an argument for how democracy functions in a society is a quite different question.

LAST WORDS

Charles Sanders Peirce once wrote: "I think that great errors of metaphysics are due to looking at the future as something that will have been past." Peirce often appears in Danto's book, especially when Danto wants to show the past as something that is, in Peirce's terms, "living, plastic, and determinable" rather than "determinate, fixed, fait accompli, and dead." Danto also notes that Peirce developed the logical notion of retroduction—that is, a form of reasoning that shows how a commonly accepted proposition is asserted and warranted until reasons are found to revise its acceptance or alter its understanding.

In the late eighteenth century, the term *retroduction* meant only a bringing, a leading, or a drawing back. It might have been an excellent description of my introduction. Yet my introduction has not been merely a looking back; it has also been a contemporary reading of a book produced forty years ago in the light of what Danto wrote later. As it is used in the term *afterword*, the word *after* has a connotation different from that of *retro*. My introduction is a retroduction according to only Peirce's revised and revisionist meaning.

A last comment: some critics have recently said that too many philosophies of history focus on the successes rather than the failures of history, on the positive rather than the destructive deeds of humanity, or on what materials historians do have rather than all they do not have. Danto's book cuts across these oppositions. His philosophy of history takes sides only at a metahistorical level, with openness as a principle or ideal. The fact that narratival openness also implies incompleteness means that rather than being content with the material at hand, historians must wait to see how future events in the world will change their contemporary narratives of the past. These historians anticipate with excitement what is to come. The question of their own neutrality is once more left open for them to confront on their own, without the substantive dictate of the philosopher.

NARRATION AND KNOWLEDGE

I

SUBSTANTIVE AND ANALYTICAL PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

Two distinct kinds of inquiry are covered by the expression 'philosophy of history'. I shall refer to these as *substantive* and *analytical* philosophy of history. The first of these is connected with ordinary historical inquiry, which is to say that substantive philosophers of history, like historians, are concerned to give accounts of what happened in the past, though they are concerned to do something *more* than just that. Analytical philosophy of history, on the other hand, is not merely connected with philosophy: it *is* philosophy, but philosophy applied to the special conceptual problems which arise out of the practice of history as well as out of substantive philosophy of history. Substantive philosophy of history is not really connected with philosophy at all, any more than history itself is. This book is an exercise in analytical philosophy of history.

The first thing I shall analyse is what substantive philosophy of history pretends to do in addition to giving an account of the past. One might say, roughly, that in contrast with even the most ambitious piece of ordinary historical writing, a philosophy of history seeks to give an account of the *whole* of history. There are, however, some initial difficulties in this characterization. Suppose we took together all the pieces of ordinary historical writing, and to these then added further pieces of historical writing which filled in all the gaps, so that we had, in the end, a complete and total description of everything that has ever happened. It might then be said that we had produced an account of the whole of history, and hence a philosophy of history. But in fact we would not have done this: we would at best have produced an account of the whole *past*. We must, accordingly, distinguish between the whole of history and the whole past. And one way of doing it might be as follows.

Typically, we think of historians as interested in studying, and in

writing accounts of, particular past events in very great detail. I use the word 'event' with some looseness here, but the French Revolution would clearly be an instance of the kind of event which historians are interested in studying and accounting for. Now there must be innumerable events for whose occurrence we have scant evidence, and a great many others which we believe must have happened, but about which we know little more than that they must have happened. There are, in short, many gaps in our account of the past. But just suppose that these gaps were all filled in, so that we knew as much about every event which ever happened as we know about the French Revolution. Let us, indeed, suppose that we know everything that ever happened; that we have some Ideal Chronicle of the whole past. This would still not be the whole of history with which I have said that substantive philosophers of history are concerned. Such an ideally complete account of the whole past would at best furnish *data* for a substantive philosophy of the whole of history. The concept of data is correlative with the concept of theory, and the plain suggestion here is that substantive philosophy of history is an attempt to discover a kind of theory concerned with the, as yet unclarified, notion of the whole of history. I shall follow this suggestion, and identify two distinct kinds of such theories, *descriptive* and *explanatory*.

A descriptive theory in this context is one which seeks to show a pattern amongst the events which make up the whole past, and to project this pattern into the future, and so to make the claim that events in the future will either repeat or complete the pattern exhibited amongst events in the past. An explanatory theory is an attempt to account for this pattern in causal terms. I am insisting that an explanatory theory qualifies as a philosophy of history only insofar as it is connected with a descriptive theory. There are any number of causal theories which seek to account for historical events in the most general terms—explainable by reference to racial or climatic or economic factors. But these theories are at best contributions to the social sciences, and are not, as such, philosophies of history. Marxism is a philosophy of history, and indeed exhibits both theories: the descriptive and the explanatory. Seen from the point of view of the descriptive theory, the pattern is one of class conflict, where any given class generates its own antagonist out of the conditions of its own existence, and is overthrown by it: 'all history is

the history of class struggles': and the shape of history is dialectical. This pattern will continue as long as certain causal forces are operative, and the attempt to identify these causal forces with various economic factors constitutes the explanatory theory of marxism. Marx predicted that the pattern would terminate at some future time because the causal factors responsible for its continuing will become inoperative. What would happen after that Marx hesitated, save in some cautious utopian hints,[1] to say. But then, he felt, the term 'history' would no longer apply. History, as he understood it, would come to an end when class-conflicts came to an end, as they would when society came to be classless.[2] And he, Marx, was only offering a theory of *history*.[3] At all events, it should be clear that the expression 'the whole of history' covers more than does 'the whole past'. It covers, as well, the whole future or, if it is important to make this qualification, the whole *historical* future. I shall revert to this in a moment.

If we see the connection between history and philosophy of history in the manner I have suggested, we might be tempted to understand this connection as analogous to the connection between observational astronomy and theoretical astronomy. Thus, Tycho Brahe is celebrated for having made, over a long period of time, a series of celestial observations of unprecedented accuracy concerning the positions (amongst other things) of the known planets. Yet he himself failed to find a projectable pattern amongst these various positions. It was Kepler who succeeded in this, discovering, after some arduous work, that a planet's positions could be located on an ellipse with the sun as one focus. This would be like having what I have called a descriptive theory. It remained for Newton to explain why this particular pattern held; that is, to offer an explanatory theory. On occasion, philosophers of history have seen their task in terms exactly analogous to these. Kant, for example, writes in this manner:

> Whatever metaphysical theory may be formed regarding the freedom of the will, it holds equally true that the manifestations of the will in human actions are determined, like all other external events, by universal natural laws. . . . In view of this natural principle of regulation, it may be hoped that when the play of freedom of the human will is examined on the great scale of universal history, a regular march may be discovered in its movements, and that, in this way, what appears to be tangled in the case of individuals, will be recognized

in the history of the whole species as a continually advancing, though slow, development of its original capacities and endowments. . . . We will accordingly see whether we can succeed in finding a clue to such a history; and in the event of doing so, we shall leave it to nature to bring forth the man who will compose it. Thus did she bring forth a Kepler who, in an unexpected way, reduced the eccentric paths of the planets to definite laws; and then she brought forth a Newton, who explained these laws by a universal natural cause.[1]

Were we to continue with this somewhat flattering comparison, substantive philosophy of history would stand in the same relationship to ordinary historical inquiry that theoretical science stands to scientific observation. There have been, and perhaps there still are, parts of science which have not passed beyond the mere making of observations, the collecting of specimens, and the like. Ordinary history might be just such a science. Substantive philosophy of history might then constitute a step towards bringing history to the next two levels (the keplerian and the newtonian levels respectively) of scientific understanding. Indeed, 'philosophy of history' would be the science of history, and its being known as 'philosophy' would be simply a quaint survival of the older use of the term in accordance with which physics was once called 'natural philosophy'. Kepler's laws, though based on the data gathered by Tycho, went beyond them, enabling astronomers not merely to organize into a coherent pattern all the positions of the planets observed by Tycho but to predict all their *future* positions and even those of planets unknown in Kepler's time. Newton's laws did not simply explain the facts known to Tycho and to Kepler, but (ideally) a great many facts unknown to them. Similarly, it might be urged, a truly successful *historical* theory would go beyond the data gathered by history, not only reducing them to a pattern, but predicting, and explaining, all the events of future history. It might be said, then, that this is the sense in which substantive philosophy of history is concerned with the *whole* of history: the whole past and the whole future: the whole of time. Historians, by contrast, are concerned only with the past, and with the future only when it becomes past. For all our *present* data come from the present and the past: we cannot *now* gather data from the future: and history is *just* a data-gathering enterprise.

Such an account is exceedingly generous to substantive philosophy of

history. But it is singularly ungenerous to history itself. Even supposing philosophies of history were attempts at something like scientific theories, one cannot but conclude, from any acquaintance with them, that they are quite crude attempts, so crude, indeed, that when contrasted with even so simple a descriptive theory as Kepler's, existing philosophies of history are unspeakably inept, with almost no power to predict. Explanatory philosophies of history, even those which have been most influential, are little better than programmes for theories which remain to be formulated, much less tested. On the other hand, if we think of ordinary historical accounts (and not even just the best of these), they seem to be highly developed instances in their own genre, satisfying criteria applicable to that genre, and throwing into relief the way in which philosophies of history fail miserably to satisfy the criteria for a scientific theory.

Moreover, the genre, whose criteria historical accounts appear to satisfy, does not, on the face of it, include such things as sequences of inscriptions reporting planetary positions on successive nights. It is very difficult to class such a work as, say, Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, with Tycho Brahe's observatory notes, or with any set of reports of scientific observation. Or rather, there exists within history itself something like the sort of activity with which history as a whole is compared in the account we are considering. I have in mind the sort of thing which is done when historians use special techniques to authenticate documents and artifacts, or to date an event, or to decide whether Sir Walter Raleigh really was an atheist, or to identify an individual. Such activities might indeed be usefully regarded as observational, yielding single sentences, hopefully true, such as 'Sir Walter Raleigh was not an atheist'. But this is by no means all that historical activity consists in. There are also, within history itself, attempts to organize the known facts into coherent patterns, and such organizations of facts have, in a way, very nearly as much in common with scientific theories as have philosophies of history. Of course they do not in quite the same way admit of projection into the future. But they nevertheless do have some predictive power. A certain account of what happened in the past, based on evidence, might allow us to predict some further fact about what took place which we were heretofore ignorant of: and independent

investigation might confirm this prediction. The fact that the predicted occurrence took place in the past must not blind us to the fact that it was a prediction, and, if you like, a prediction about what we, as historians, will subsequently find if we make an investigation. And this is very like predicting what we will see in the heavens if we make a certain observation. Thus, finding three elaborate roman-style tombs in different parts of Jugoslavia, and knowing the Roman habit of burying people by the sides of roads, might suggest that these tombs all lay on some main road: and subsequent investigation might bear this prediction out. The distinction between observation and theory has, then, at least an analogue within history. There may be vast differences between historical accounts and scientific theories. But no vaster, one feels, than the difference between philosophies of history and scientific theories.

Further, it is inaccurate and distorting to think of historical writing as consisting of nothing but data for future philosophies of history (Tycho wanted to find a descriptive theory to fit his observations, but it is certainly false to suppose that historians see their own 'observations' in that light). It does not follow that what historians do could *not* be seen in that light, but only that they do not see it in that way, any more than artists see themselves as providing data for art-historians, even if it happens to be true that what artists do is, in fact, the data with which art-historians work. However we might, in a different context, characterize historical work, the present account does not describe this work in accordance with the purposes and criteria of achievement which are those of practising historians. And to accept this account would involve a revolution in our concept of history as an intellectual discipline. If I happen to read an account of the Thirty Years War which stimulates me to think about historical explanation, it would be true that the historian who wrote it stimulated some philosophical reflection. But it was not his purpose in writing it to stimulate reflection of this sort. What we do have, of course, is some such situation as this. An individual historian works very hard to establish, say, a certain fact concerning the past. And then some other historian finds a use for this fact in writing an account of some part of the past. This may or may not be a satisfactory account in the eyes of his peers. But if it is unsatisfactory, another account may be written, and an account of just the same sort as the one it replaces, but

satisfying exactly the same criteria as those by which the other one was deemed unsatisfactory. Accounts of this kind (and I shall have more to say about the criteria historical accounts must satisfy) are somehow consummatory, in the sense that any improvement of them is still a production which remains within history. These accounts, in other words, do not seem to be preliminary to any other, different *kind* of activity, but only, perhaps, to further accounts of just the same kind, satisfying just the same criteria.

The difference, then, between history and a philosophy of history cannot be that the latter gives, as the former does not, accounts based upon detailed factual findings. For such accounts are given by history and philosophy of history alike. So the account given by a philosopher of history would have to be a quite different kind of account if it is to get outside the area of history, and do something other than what history itself does. And of course one would expect it to be quite a different kind of account if it were at all like a scientific theory, for scientific theories seem, on the face of it, to belong to a different genre and to satisfy different criteria from ordinary, paradigm historical accounts. But then the difficulty is that philosophies of history resemble paradigm scientific theories hardly at all. If they resemble anything, they resemble paradigm historical accounts, except for their making claims on the future of a kind not commonly made by the latter.

This latter resemblance does not merely lie in the fact that, like historical accounts, philosophies of history often exhibit a narrative structure. It lies also in the fact that, typically, philosophies of history tend to give interpretations of sequences of happenings which are very like what one finds in history, and very unlike what one typically finds in science. Philosophies of history make use of a concept of interpretation which it seems to me would be grossly inappropriate in science, namely a certain concept of 'meaning'. That is to say, they undertake to discover what, in a special and historically appropriate sense of the term, is the 'meaning' of this event or that. Professor Löwith offers the following as a general characterization of substantive philosophy of history. It is, he says, 'a systematic intepretation of universal history in accordance with a principle by which historical events and successions are unified and directed towards an ultimate meaning'.[1]

How are we to understand this special use of the word 'meaning', which is quite different from the way in which, for instance, we speak of the meaning of a term or of a sentence or an expression? Roughly, I think, as follows. We are to think of events as having a 'meaning' with reference to some larger temporal structure in which they are components. But this is not an altogether unfamiliar way of using this term. Think, for example, of the sort of critical point we score when we say, of a certain episode in a novel, or in a play, that it has no meaning, that it 'lacks significance'. We intend to say that it fails to further the action, that it is superfluous and hence aesthetically inappropriate. But this, of course, is a judgment we can make about a particular episode only once we have before us the entire novel, or only once the play is complete. Until then, we can say only that we do not know as yet what might be the meaning of the episode, though we assume it has some part to play in the progress of the plot. *Afterwards*, we might say that it had *this* meaning, or *that* (unless nothing, so to speak, turns with it,[1] that it was of no significance at all, a blemish in the well-made play). I emphasize that it is only retrospectively that we are entitled to say that an episode has a given specific meaning, and then only with respect to the total work. But information concerning the total work is just what we lack when we are going through it for the first time: then, if something strikes us as meaningless, we have to wait and see whether it is so; and if something seems to us to have a certain meaning, then again, we must wait and see if we are right. We are often obliged to revise our views concerning the meaning of an episode, in the light of what happens afterwards. This sense of meaning has application in history, too. Now that the French Revolution is over, we can say what was the significance of the Tennis Court Oath—something which even the participants in that event might have been wildly wrong about. So understood, we might think of philosophers of history as trying to see events as having meaning in the context of an historical whole which resembles an artistic whole, but, in this case, the whole in question is the whole of history, compassing past, present, and future. Unlike those of us who have the whole novel before us, and are able to say with some authority what is the significance of this event or that, the philosopher of history does not have before him the whole of history. He has at best a fragment—the whole past. But he

thinks in terms of the whole of history, and seeks to discover what the structure of this whole must be like, solely on the basis of the fragment he already has, and at the same time seeks to say what is the meaning of parts of this fragment in the light of the whole structure which he has projected.

I quite agree with Professor Löwith's claim that this way of viewing the whole of history is essentially theological,[1] or that it has, at all events, structural features in common with theological readings of history, which is seen *in toto*, as bearing out some divine plan. It is, I think, instructive to recognize that Marx and Engels, although they were materialists and explicit atheists, were nevertheless inclined to regard history through essentially theological spectacles, as though they could perceive a divine plan, but not a divine being whose plan it was. Whatever the case, the substantive philosophies of history, insofar as I have correctly characterized them, are clearly concerned with what I shall term *prophecy*.[2] A prophecy is not merely a statement about the future, for a prediction is a statement about the future. It is a certain *kind* of statement about the future, and I shall say, pending a further analysis, that it is an *historical* statement about the future. The prophet is one who speaks about the future in a manner which is appropriate only to the past, or who speaks of the present in the light of a future treated as a *fait accompli*. A prophet treats the present in a perspective ordinarily available only to future historians,[3] to whom present events are past, and for whom the meaning of present events is discernible.

It is just here that I want to take up again my earlier claim that substantive philosophy of history is connected with history. We can now see how a philosophy of history resembles an ordinary historical account, for one thing. And we can understand how it sometimes happens that philosophies of history are even ascribed to the wrong genre, and taken merely as *very* ambitious instances of ordinary historical writing, on a specially grand scale: 'The difficulty with the grandiose proposals of the Marxes, the Spenglers, the Toynbees ... can hardly be that they are history, but that they are grandiose.'[4] The resemblance is due to the fact that philosophies of history make an unjustified use of the same concept of 'meaning' which has a *justified* application in ordinary historical work. I shall discuss later some of the problems which arise in connection with

this notion of meaning, but for the moment it is enough to indicate how ordinary ascription of meaning to events is used in historical discussion. We might, for instance, know that what an individual *B* accomplished was due, in some considerable measure, to the influence upon him of *A*'s work. To demand, in an historical way, to know the significance of *A*'s work, is to expect some such answer as this: its significance is that it influenced the work of *B*. Obviously, this sense of 'significance' does not exhaust the whole meaning of the concept of significance: a corpus of poetry may be significant only because it is intrinsically great poetry. And it is perhaps arguable that unless we used the term 'significant' in some other, and non-historical sense, we would have no use at all for the historical sense. It may, that is, be true that we find *B*'s work intrinsically significant, a great achievement; and because of this, we are likely to regard the episode in *B*'s biography in which he first encountered *A*'s work as *fraught* with significance, indeed as laden with destiny. A contemporary would, of course, have been blind to this significance, for *B*'s great work had not been done. He would lack what we possess, namely the sort of information available only after this encounter. *Afterwards* a biographer might single this episode out as the most significant event in *B*'s life. A contemporary could not have seen it in this way: he might, indeed, regard it as beneath mention. *A*'s work, meanwhile, might have as its *sole* significance that it influenced the work of *B*.

Think, in this connection, of certain very common sorts of emotions which are connected with both memory and appraisal of our own actions and negligences, for instance, regret or remorse. Typically, conventionally, we express regret by saying 'If only I had known ...'. Now the ignorance we complain of here is often an ignorance of the future, an ignorance which has been removed by time, so that we now know, as we did not and perhaps could not then have known, what were the consequences of our actions or failures to act. Generally what we mean is that if we had known then what we know now, we would not have acted as we did. Such statements, of course, are puzzling. If, for instance, I know that *E* will happen, it follows that '*E* will happen' is true, so that *E* must happen. If *E must* happen, then nothing can be done to prevent its happening, or to make '*E* will happen' false. And so regret is gratuitous.

If, on the other hand, I can do something to forestall *E*, then it is not the case that *E must* happen. And if I do forestall *E*, '*E* will happen' is false, and so I cannot be said to know that *E* will happen. If I can do something about the future, the future cannot be known; and if it can be known, we can do nothing about it. This is an old puzzle, of Aristotle's, and one we shall be obliged to reckon with later. But I am suggesting that 'If only I had known ...' cannot be *strictly* taken: if I *had* known, I could have done nothing. To regret, however, presupposes that we do not see our own actions, at the time we perform them, as having the significance we will later attach to them, in the light of further events to which they are to be related. But this is a general insight into the historical organization of events: events are continually being re-described, and their significance re-evaluated in the light of later information. And because they have this information, historians can say things that witnesses and contemporaries could not justifiably have said.

To ask for the significance of an event, in the *historical* sense of the term, is to ask a question which can be answered only in the context of a *story*. The identical event will have a different significance in accordance with the story in which it is located or, in other words, in accordance with what different sets of *later* events it may be connected. Stories constitute the natural context in which events acquire historical significance, and there are a number of questions I cannot even touch upon at this point concerning the criteria belonging to a story, the criteria, that is, by appeal to which we say, with respect to a story *S*, that an event *E* is part of *S* and an event *E'* is not. But obviously, to tell a story is to exclude *some* happenings; is to appeal tacitly to some such criteria. Equally obviously, we can only tell the story in which *E* figures relevantly if we are aware of what later events *E* is related to, so there is a certain sense in which we can tell only *true* stories about the *past*. It is this sense which is somehow violated by substantive philosophies of history. Using just the same sense of significance as historians do, which presupposes that the events are set in a story, philosophers of history seek for the significance of events before the later events, in connection with which the former *acquire* significance, have happened. The pattern they project into the future is a narrative structure. They seek, in short, to tell the story before the story can properly be told. And the story

they are interested in is, of course, the whole story, the story of history as a whole. This does not mean, to be sure, that every event is going to be part of the story (stories, to be stories, must leave things out), and this means, amongst other things, that the philosopher of history will be seeking for the significant events, the events that belong to the whole story. His mode of organization, then, is indeed the historical mode of organization. But the difference is not merely a certain grandioseness, as we shall see. It also has to do in an important way with a certain sort of claim on the future.

There are ways of finding out what will happen, and even ways of giving historical descriptions of things that will happen. One sure way of doing this is to wait and see what happens, and then write the history of it. But the philosopher of history is impatient. He wants to do now what ordinary historians, as a matter of course, will be able to do later. He wants to view the present and the past in the perspective of the future (indeed of the ultimate future, for there must be an end to every story). And he wishes to be able to describe events in a manner not ordinarily accessible at the time when the events themselves take place. There are descriptions, and I shall be much occupied with them in this work, which we encounter in history books, and which are cast in a mode quite characteristic of historical utterance—descriptions we find intelligible enough, and consider true, but which, with a suitable shift in tense, we would find very nearly unintelligible and hardly credible if they had been uttered at the time when the event they describe took place. An historian might write: 'The author of *Rameau's Nephew* was born in 1715.' But think how odd it would be were someone to have said, at the right moment in 1715, 'The author of *Rameau's Nephew* is just born'. Or even more puzzlingly, if someone were, in the future tense, to say the same thing in, say, 1700. What could such a statement mean to anyone in 1715, much less in 1700? One might, of course, predict that Mme Diderot would give birth to an author, even an encyclopaedist ('Unto you an encyclopaedist is born'), for instance, on the grounds that males in the Diderot family had been literary men for generations. But to refer, by title, to the potential author's unwritten works goes beyond prediction: it involves speaking in a prophetic vein, i.e. describing the present in the light of things which have not as yet happened ('Unto you

a Saviour is born'). Yet it is just such descriptions of events, descriptions which make an essential reference to later events—events future to the time at which the description is given—that substantive philosophers of history undertake to give. In effect they are trying to write the history of what happens *before* it has happened, and to give accounts of the past based upon accounts of the future.

It is this about substantive philosophy of history that I find both philosophically interesting and philosophically odd. Critics sometimes draw upon an important distinction between the meaning *of* history, and meaning *in* history,[1] in order to cast doubt upon the legitimacy of the entire enterprise of philosophical history. To demand the meaning of an event is to be prepared to accept some context within which the event is considered significant. This is 'meaning in history', and it is legitimate to ask for such meanings. Usually, the context within which an event is significant is some limited set of events which may together constitute a whole in which the event in question is a part. Thus Petrarch's ascent of Mt Ventoux is significant within the set of events collectively making up the Renaissance (and perhaps not uniquely significant in that context). But we may also ask for the significance of the Renaissance itself. And this in turn requires specification of a larger context, etc. There are wider and narrower contexts, but history as a whole is plainly the widest possible such context, and to ask the meaning of the *whole* of history is to deprive oneself of the contextual frame within which such requests are intelligible. For there is no context wider than the whole of history in which the whole of history can be located. This is an important critical point, but not, I think, essentially damaging to the substantive philosopher of history. The philosopher might say that the whole of history gets its meaning from some quite non-historical context, for example, from some divine intention, and then go on to say that God at any rate is outside of history and indeed outside of time. Secondly, *he* might point out, as I already have done, that the ascription of historical significance is dependent upon the ascription of some other and non-historical kind of significance, For instance, *A* is significant historically for having influenced *B*, because we regard *B*'s work as (perhaps) significant in some quite different sense. The philosopher might continue, then, by suggesting that we cannot speak of the historical significance of history as a whole,

but that historical significance is by no means the only kind of significance. Finally, he might emphasize that by 'history as a whole' he does not necessarily mean every event that *has* happened and every event that *will* happen. Perhaps not everything is part of history as a whole, nor is history as a whole *the* widest possible context. A story, we have said, must leave things out. Nothing that happened in Siberia, for instance, was considered by Hegel to be part of history.[1] He was not denying that things happened in Siberia, but only that these happenings had any significance in the grand march of events, the story of which it was his aim to tell. Discussing the meaning of history as a whole, he supposed it to be this: the progressive coming to self-consciousness of the Absolute. Each thing that happened in history was significant with respect to this story, or insignificant, but Hegel never asked what was the significance of the Absolute's final self-awareness. Or, if he had, he would doubtless have moved to a quite different sense of 'significant' than that applied to the ordinary events of history. Whatever mistake it is the philosopher of history is making, it is not, I think, the mere confusion of two senses of meaning. And even ordinary historians, as I have contended, could not always use 'significant' in just one way. If nothing were of non-historical interest, it would be meaningless to say, of something (like the eighteenth-century Neapolitan paintings) that they were of *merely* historical interest.

I feel nevertheless that substantive philosophy of history is a misconceived activity, and rests upon a basic mistake. It is a mistake, I shall argue, to suppose that we can write the history of events before the events themselves have happened. The error might be represented like this: it is an attempt such philosophers are making to give temporally inappropriate descriptions to events, to describe events in a manner in which they cannot be described at the time the attempt is made. I am appealing here to the familiar fact that we write the history of events after those events have happened. But of course, no such appeal constitutes an argument, and the proper philosophical question is why this fact holds, if indeed it holds at all. Scientists make unexceptionable claims on the future, as do all of us in practical life. But it is the *kind* of claim on the future which philosophers of history make, or which their enterprise requires them to make, which I find suspect. Their claims concerning the past and the present are, I maintain, logically connected with their

claims on the future, so that if the latter are illegitimate, the former are not compelling. Historians describe some past events with reference to other events which are future to them, but past to the historian, while philosophers of history describe certain past events with reference to other events which are future both to these events and to the historian himself. And I wish to maintain that we cannot enjoy a cognitive standpoint which makes such an activity feasible. The mode of organizing events which is essential to history does not, I shall argue, admit of projection into the future, and in this sense the structures in accordance with which these organizations are effected are not like scientific theories. And this is, in part, due to the fact that historical significance is connected with non-historical significance, and this latter is something which varies with variations in the interests of human beings. The stories historians tell must not be relative merely to their temporal location, but also to the non-historical interests they have as human beings. There is, then, if I am right, an unexpungeable factor of convention and of arbitrariness in historical description, and this makes it exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to speak, as the substantive philosopher of history wishes to, of *the* story of the whole of history, or, for that matter, *the* story of any set of events. Philosophy of history is an intellectual monster, a 'centaur', as Jacob Burckhardt once called it,[1] which is neither history nor science, though it resembles the one and makes claims for itself which only the other can make.

History co-ordinates, Burckhardt writes, and philosophy subordinates, and the expression 'philosophy of history' is a contradiction in terms.[2] This is true in a general kind of way, but it tells us very little about the way in which history co-ordinates which makes it so different, as we feel intuitively that it is different, from science. And this brings us to analytical philosophy of history, one main purpose of which is to clarify this mode of co-ordination. The main fact to keep in mind, for this purpose, is that the events co-ordinated are temporally distant from one another, that they are respectively past and future to each other, though both past to the historian. Why and whether they *must* both be past to the historian is the main question this book will deal with. So in discussing our knowledge of the past, I cannot but be interested in discussing our knowledge of the future, if we may speak at all of knowledge here. So in a way I

shall be at least as much interested in substantive philosophy of history as I shall be in history itself. I shall maintain that our knowledge of the past is significantly limited by our ignorance of the future. The identification of limits is the general business of philosophy, and the identification of *this* limit is the special business of analytical philosophy of history as I understand it.

II

A MINIMAL CHARACTERIZATION OF HISTORY

My thesis, in the last chapter, was that substantive philosophy of history belongs to a different genre from history itself, and that it consists in making projections, which I regard as illegitimate, into the future, of the same sorts of structures which historians employ in organizing the events of the past. It is because of structural similarities between ordinary historical accounts and philosophies of history, and again, because the same concept of historical *meaning* determines the kind of account appropriate here, namely, a narrative account, that we might be inclined to suppose that these two kinds of activities are generically of a piece, differing only in scope. An ordinary historical account covers only a piece of what a philosophy of history tries to cover, namely, the whole of history. Now of course there are differences of scope within history itself. A history of the Terror of 1793 has a narrower scope than the history of the French Revolution, and a history of the latter a narrower scope than a history of France, and this in turn a narrower scope than a history of Europe, and so on. The widest possible historical account, I have suggested, is an account of the whole past, an account which is to be distinguished from an account of the whole of history, the latter being an instance of a *philosophy* of history. It is tempting to suppose that there is only a practical impossibility in giving an account of the whole past, even if there is, perhaps, a logical impossibility in giving an account of the whole of history. But in fact this is not quite the case, and to see the reason for this is to see, in what I regard as the deepest sense, the manner in which substantive philosophy of history is 'connected' with history. I shall seek to argue, in a later chapter, that any account of the past is *essentially* incomplete. It is essentially incomplete, that is, if its completion would require the fulfilment of a condition which simply cannot be fulfilled. And my thesis will be that a complete account of the past would presuppose a complete account of the future.

so that one could not achieve a complete historical account without also achieving a philosophy of history. So that if there cannot be a legitimate philosophy of history, there cannot be a legitimate and complete historical account. Paraphrasing a famous result in logic, we cannot, in brief, *consistently* have a *complete* historical account. Our knowledge of the past, in other words, is limited by our knowledge (or ignorance) of the future. And this is the deeper connection between substantive philosophy of history and ordinary history. It is the reason why one cannot bypass substantive philosophy of history if one is analytically interested in the concept of history, even history as practised by ordinary historians.

A brief illustration will perhaps show what I mean. A complete account of an event would have to include every true historical description of that event. Consider the birth of Diderot in 1715. One true historical description of what took place is that, on that date in 1715, the author of *Rameau's Nephew* was born. Prior to the writing of *Rameau's Nephew* one could not so describe the event unless one made a certain kind of claim on the future, that is, without speaking in the prophetic mode. Such an historical description during the required interval would logically presuppose a sentence which belongs in the *philosophy* of history. But without this description, we do not have a *complete* description of the event in 1715. Hence we could not have a complete historical description without presupposing the achievement of a philosophy of history. And this is perfectly general. There will always be descriptions of events in 1715 which will depend upon descriptions of events which have not as yet happened. Only when they have happened can we give these descriptions, and without these descriptions, we have not a complete account. But to give these descriptions before the required events have happened is to do philosophy of history. So if philosophy of history is impossible, complete historical accounts are impossible as well, and historical accounts are thus *essentially* incomplete.

Notice that if philosophy of history were legitimate, a philosophy of history would licence, would indeed entail, certain statements about the past which historians would not otherwise be able to give. Philosophers of history do not *only* make statements about the future, they make

statements also about the past. So 'making statements about the past' does not serve to distinguish historians from philosophers of history. This is the final connection I shall remark on between history and philosophy of history. The difference lies in what their respective statements about the past *presuppose*, and what marks the philosopher of history off is that his statements about the past presuppose certain statements about the future. By 'the future', of course, I mean 'his future'. The characterization of both history and philosophy of history essentially involves reference to the temporal location of the historian and the philosopher of history alike.

For the present, I shall be concerned only with ordinary history. Historians, *as* historians, are not concerned with events in *their* future, or at least not concerned with them in the way in which they are concerned with events in their past, or with, in certain cases, events in their present, events they are living through. They may be concerned with events they are living through in *this* sense, for example: they observe these events in the expectation that someday, when these events are past, they will write the history of them. This was the case with Thucydides, whose work is particularly instructive in our present context. He begins his celebrated book with the following sentence: 'Thucydides, an Athenian, wrote the history of the war between the Peloponnesians and the Athenians, beginning at the moment it broke out, and believing that it would be a great war, and more worthy of relation than any that had preceded it.'[1] It is plain that he felt that the set of events he was living through was 'significant', that there was to be an important story to tell, and he observed things as they happened, in order to be able afterwards to tell the story of them. Thucydides tries to be as accurate as it was possible for him to be in finding out what really had happened, an accuracy, he tells us, that cost him considerable labour.[2] For he was able to witness personally but a fraction of the events which belonged to his story, and was forced to depend, in the other cases, upon the reports of others. But these did not always agree, and in order to determine which (if either) of a pair of contrary accounts was correct, he was obliged to apply 'the most severe and detailed tests possible'. It is this care which earned for him the honour of being the father of scientific history. But the reason for his taking such pains was not *simply* to write a correct account, though

writing a correct account was a necessary condition for what he further wished to do. He wished his work to be a *useful*[1] work, and he was persuaded that it could not be useful unless it was true. Hence his pains to be correct. Now perhaps all historians wish their works to be useful. But often the utility of their work has to do with nothing but the writing of more history. Their works, that is, are useful to other historians, interested in the periods or events covered, or to non-historians interested in finding out what happened. The criteria of utility remain within the area of history itself; but Thucydides was concerned with usefulness in a non-historical sense. He had, if you wish, a non-historical purpose in writing a work of history, as well as the obvious historical purpose. It is this further kind of utility that I want briefly to discuss.

His book was aimed at an audience which, in his words, 'desires an exact knowledge of the past as an aid to the interpretation of the future.' For 'the future must resemble the past if it does not reflect it'.[2] His work, then, is to be 'a possession for all time'. From these few statements, it would plainly appear that Thucydides is writing for what, according to my conception of them, must be philosophers of history: he is writing about the past, but only, or mainly, to provide a guide to the events of the future which 'must resemble if not reflect' it. But his reference to the future is *not*, I think, the kind of reference to the future which characterizes philosophies of history, and the claim that the future must 'resemble if not reflect' the past is, really, only a crude formulation of what we all recognize as the Principle of Induction. I offer the following, then, as a reconstruction of what Thucydides had in mind. Here, he is saying, is a war, taking place under these and those conditions. Conditions similar to these will hold in the future as they have held in the past, and so wars similar to this one will take place in the future as they have taken place in the past. Hence, if one can but determine what these conditions were in the present instance, then, if, in any future instance, we can identify similar conditions we can expect similar events to happen. And so we will have provided a guide to future events which resemble the Peloponnesian War, or resemble it sufficiently.[3]

Now this statement admits of a thoroughly trivializing interpretation. Of course we would be able to predict the sequence of happenings in every war which *sufficiently* resembles the Peloponnesian War, providing

we had an accurate description of the Peloponnesian War itself: whoever understands x understands every copy of x, providing it is a good copy. The real question is whether in fact there *are* wars which sufficiently resemble the Peloponnesian War for us to do this, whether, indeed, the events of the future will really resemble 'if not reflect' the events of the past. And in a way we can say that they have not done this. We, for instance, have knowledge of a good many wars which are in our past but were in Thucydides' future, between which and the Peloponnesian War the dissimilarities are at least as striking as the similarities. To be sure, Thucydides could not have known about the wars in his future. But he must have had comparable information if we are to take him literally. For after all, the war he so brilliantly described was future to many wars in Thucydides' *past*, and presumably he knew about some of these. If his war *exactly* resembled those others, then we should have to reject many parts of his account. For instance, he makes a claim that his war was on a 'grand scale'. But he also tells us that 'the evidence which an inquiry carried back as far as was practicable leads me to trust, all point to the conclusion that there was nothing on a grand scale, either in war or other matters'.[1] Actually, we must suppose there was something altogether singular about his war if his statement that *his* war was 'more worthy of relation than any that had preceded it' is to be justified. If the future is to resemble the past, the past must resemble the future ('resembles' being a symmetrical relation), so it is plain that Thucydides cannot insist, as he does, on the unprecedentedness of his war, and also say that all future wars must resemble it. Obviously all wars in some sense resemble one another if they are to be so called. But then we need only consult dictionaries, or grammatical usage, to determine what are these common features in virtue of which an event is correctly to be called a war. We need not study history. In the cognitively important sense, however, what right had Thucydides to suppose that future wars would resemble his war, if past wars did not? Surely he could not have evidence for this, for the only evidence he had would have told strongly *against* the claim that future wars would sufficiently resemble this one. So how could he suppose other than that future wars would be as dissimilar to this war, as this war was dissimilar to all past wars? But if this was the only conclusion he was entitled to, given the evidence he possessed, his purpose in writing a

'useful' history was defeated from the start. Or, its utility would be just the reverse of what he thought it would be, namely, that the past is a wholly useless guide to the future, drawing the moral that if one really wants to cope with the future, one had better not waste one's time with history. Yet if the past is no guide to the future, what is? And surely in some sense, the sense enshrined in our inductive procedures, it is a guide. The question is whether Thucydides was entitled to an induction here.

There is something highly artificial in applying this sort of logical pressure to Thucydides' remarks.[1] Yet he is explicit about wanting to write a useful book, and explicit, as well, about what he thinks its use is to consist in. A more congenial reconstruction of his methodology might be this. As with Plato in a famous part of the *Republic*, Thucydides might have adopted the stratagem of taking something as another thing 'writ large'. The idea was that if *A* is a magnified projection of *B*, then the structural features common to *A* and *B* might be more readily studied in *A* than in *B*. It is, of course, presupposed that *A* and *B are* structurally alike, but some such presupposition lies behind our unquestioning acceptance of microscopy: even if we are unable with the 'naked eye' to compare an enlarged image of *x* with *x* itself. So Thucydides may have felt that the war which was taking place was on so grand a scale that one might regard it as a magnified instance of the whole class of wars, and so, by studying it, one could discern structural features not so readily made out in smaller instances. He says after all, or strongly suggests, that it was its *size* that made this war 'more worthy of relation' than any other. His selection of it then might be justified in the way in which selection of a particularly clear instance of anything is justified if other members of the population from which it is drawn exhibit the characteristic features of the class less lucidly than it does. His narration is meant to bring out the features of typical human responses to typical situations which he believed recur again and again. And it is in just such terms that his work has been appreciated since, and has been considered, as he wished it to be, a 'possession for all time', and as something more than *merely* an account of what happened between Athens and Sparta in the long dead past.

We might then say that his claim that the future must resemble the past, and that by describing clearly a splendid instance of the class of wars, he was furnishing a guide to future wars, was not an *essential* temporal

claim. He is making no explicit temporal reference in speaking of the future. He could, with equal justification have said that he was providing, in the appropriate sense, a guide to all *past* wars. But the latter he would not perhaps have regarded as a worthwhile contribution. A practical man, Thucydides must doubtless have felt that nothing could usefully be done about the past (as Richard Taylor has suggested, we are all fatalistic about the past).[1] It is only the future we can do anything about, and it is only with respect to the future that his work would be likely to have its intended use.[2] But this is in fact immaterial so far as the *logic* of his argument is concerned in our present interpretation. For what in effect he was doing was to argue from a sample (albeit a 'good' sample) to a population—from the current war, to *all* wars, past *and* future. But 'past *and* future' adds nothing to the expression 'all wars'. Thucydides was then making a claim on the future which is like the claim that any of us make in performing any standard induction. It is a claim, however, which it is misleading to think of as any more a claim on the future than it is a claim on the past. For it is, rather, a claim concerning a population, and is independant of any information concerning the temporal location of its members, either in relation to one another, or in relation to the person who makes the induction. It is true that we sometimes phrase our philosophical doubts about induction by asking 'Will the future be like the past?' But there is in fact no temporal direction in induction, which is symmetrical with regard to time. And we could as easily phrase the question thus: 'Will the *past* have been like the past?' That is, will the parts of the past that preceded the period of the past from which our samples have been drawn 'be like' the latter period? For all the same problems regarding future examples of the population from which my sample has been drawn are raised by examples of the same population which were temporally earlier than the drawn ones. For instance, we have no better grounds for supposing that there will even *be* later instances than we have for supposing that there ever *have been* earlier instances. And just as there is a possibility that the samples we have are the *last* ones, there is a matching possibility that those we have are the *first* ones. Hume once entertained the logical possibility that the whole complexion of the world might someday change, after which none of our general laws would hold.[3] But we can entertain the matching possibility

that this has already happened, that such a change may have taken place, and that the world was once as dissimilar to what it is as, on Hume's supposition, it will be. Clearly, I have no inductive grounds for ruling out either possibility. For it is precisely the limitations of such grounds that Hume's possibility was meant to illuminate. Or rather, I have only inductive grounds for ruling out either possibility, since each is logically coherent: and inductive grounds are inadequate here. To suppose them adequate is to beg the question.

Without protracting this schedule of symmetries, we may conclude that inductive processes are invariant as to the direction, pastwards or futurewards, of inferences to unexamined instances. The implicit conclusions, then, of Thucydides' work, that human motivations are everywhere and always the same, that humans respond in predictably standard ways to predictably standard situations, are time-independent. Hence he makes no different sort of claim about the future than he makes about the present or the past. I am not concerned, of course, to question whether his specific conclusions are right or wrong, but only to insist upon their time-independence. So Thucydides is not engaged in philosophy of history, as I have characterized it. Instead, he is writing social science, at least implicitly, for he intends that we should gather from his work some very general facts concerning the behaviour of individuals and groups in political contexts, facts which are particularly well illustrated in the events he is narrating. But of course his work would remain valuable even if these were not general facts, even if, indeed, the Greeks and Spartans were significantly different from those who came later or earlier. We in fact see ourselves mirrored in his book.

The success of Thucydides' illustration depended, apparently (at least from his own point of view), upon his giving as accurate an account as he could of what actually happened. So the very least we can say about Thucydides is that he endeavoured to give a true description of events in *his* past, some of which he had witnessed and some of which he had not, but which had been witnessed by contemporaries of his whose testimony he submitted to the most stringent probation. And this could be said of him even if he had not had the ulterior purpose I have been discussing. Allowing that this ulterior purpose may have dominated his selection of what features of the war to remark upon, we may nevertheless consider

the two activities as in some sense independent, and distinguish those features of the same work which satisfy the complementary descriptions 'is a work of history' and 'is a piece of social science'.

I shall employ Thucydides' stratagem of making a general point concerning a whole class through exhibiting a good instance of that class, by taking *him* as an especially good instance of the class of historians. I shall say that the very least that historians do is to try to make true statements, or to give true descriptions, of events in *their* past. I offer this as a minimal characterization of historical activity, as a necessary condition for applying the predicate 'is an historian' to an individual. I do not say that it is a sufficient condition, for, as we have seen, it is also part of our criterion for applying the predicate 'is a philosopher of history' to an individual. Perhaps we can amplify this criterion to make at least the distinction between historians and philosophers of history by saying that historians, in contrast with philosophers of history, try to make true statements, or to give true descriptions, of events in their past which do *not* logically presuppose true, and time-dependent, statements about, or descriptions of, events in *their* future.

I am not saying that this is all that historians do. But I will insist that *whatever else* it might be that historians are thought of as trying to do, their success in making such statements is a necessary pre-requisite for that other activity, whatever it might be. Thus it might be said that historians seek to *explain* events in their past. I cannot quarrel with this. I only say that it is first necessary to give a true description of the event to be explained. But what if an historian *A* has already given such a description of an event which an individual *B* wishes to explain? Would we then call *B* an historian? The answer is that any explanation of an event will require reference to another event, and unless we have a true description of it, we shall not have succeeded in explaining the given event. Nor ought we to overlook that '*E*-2 happened because of *E*-1'—supposing this to be offered as an explanation of *E*-2—is, at least, a true statement about some event in some historian's past. Similarly, if it is said that in order to explain some past event, an historian must perform a special act of empathic identification with persons involved in that event. I have no doubt that historians can and do perform such acts. But surely their ability to do this non-vacuously depends upon their first having

established that there was such an event, and that there was such a person with whom empathic identification can be attempted. And *this* cannot be achieved by empathic identification. This, however, suggests a gap in my characterization. For it might be argued that a person is not an event, and that my characterization only has to do with events in the historian's past. So I shall amend my characterization to compass making true statements about the past, whether these be about events, or persons, or things of any kind.

This is all, for the moment, that I wish to say about historians. I do not even want to insist that they ever succeed in what they are said to be trying to do, but *only* that they try to do this. And surely this is an innocuous enough thing to say about historians. It is perhaps not even very enlightening to say this, not, at least, until we give some further particulars of the kind of statement they try to make (a true statement is not, in this sense, a *kind* of statement). We might similarly say that a philosopher of history tries to make a statement of a certain kind about the future. But what I wish to say is that what the substantive philosopher of history attempts is to make the same kind of statement about the future that historians try to make about the past. So our picture of the substantive philosopher of history will acquire shape as we get a better picture of the historian himself. And we will, I hope, eventually be able to see why it is illegitimate to make, about the future, the kind of statements it is legitimate to make about the past.

Meanwhile, there is some reason for keeping our characterization of the historian's intention as general and unspecific as I have. The reason is this. It is sometimes argued that we cannot *in general* succeed in making true statements about the past. But if, in general, the historian's intentions are unfulfillable, there is little to be gained by any further descriptions of the intention. If there are no unicorns, it is idle to ask for details about unicorns, for example, whether they are savage or mild. I turn therefore to the objections there might be against our making true statements about our past.

III

THREE OBJECTIONS AGAINST THE POSSIBILITY OF HISTORICAL KNOWLEDGE

Few of us, I think, have any serious doubt that historians sometimes succeed in achieving that aim which I have minimally ascribed to them, that they sometimes, indeed frequently and typically, succeed in making true statements about things in their past. The question is whether we are justified in supposing this. To raise such a question, of course, is not to cast doubts on the competence or integrity of historians. We plainly have ways of discerning incompetence or mendacity, and are usually able enough to determine whether historiographical skills are being abused or misused. The question, rather, is whether these skills enable us to achieve the minimal purpose for the sake of which we take the trouble to master them, and allow us to make true statements about things in our past, or to decide whether any statement which purports to do this is true or false. The question is more general even than this. For suppose it could be shown that the skills, the mastery and honest employment of which qualify someone, by present criteria, as an historian, were somehow utterly insufficient for achieving our minimal purpose. It is hardly plausible to suppose this could be shown, but if it were, men might then undertake to find another set of skills better fitted for achieving this purpose than the present ones. Surely it has happened, in the history of thought, that a set of techniques, imagined to be sufficient for attaining a given end, for example, for solving a certain kind of problem, were shown not to be so, so that new and more powerful techniques had to be found. But I am not concerned here with objections against presently accepted historiographical skills. I am, rather, concerned with objections against our being able, with *any* set of techniques, to make true statements about the past, so that further improvements in existing techniques would be as idle, say, as further improvements upon existing compasses would be once it were demonstrated that one cannot, by means of ruler and compass alone, trisect an angle. To put the question

in this *general* form is to mount an attack upon the foundations of historical knowledge. And it is this attack which is to concern me now.

It does not commonly occur to one to adopt a position of wholesale scepticism with regard to statements purported to be about the past. One may doubt this statement or that, but usually for some fair reason, for instance, that one distrusts the person who makes it, or finds the evidence offered in support of it in some way defective, or rejects it because it conflicts with some other statement we are prepared to trust. Often, in fact, that other statement will *itself* be a statement about the past. Thus we might reject the statement that Sir Walter Raleigh was an atheist because we accept, as true, certain other statements about Sir Walter's behaviour which are incompatible with his having been an atheist. And in such a case, we are always at least prepared to accept the natural contradictory of a rejected statement, that is, that Sir Walter was *not* an atheist—itself a statement about the past. We can accept a wholesale scepticism here only if the acceptance of *any* statement purportedly about the past conflicts with some other statement which we are prepared to accept as true, and which rules out *any* statement about the past; that rules out *both* 'Sir Walter Raleigh was an atheist' and its natural contradictory. But any such proposition must be wholly general if it is to justify *wholesale* scepticism, that is, if it is to entail the unacceptability of both *p* and not-*p*, if *p* is a statement purportedly about the past. By the *natural contradictory* of a statement, I shall mean a contradictory which preserves the same subject, predicate, and tense, of the rejected proposition. So that '*S* was not *P*' is the natural contradictory of '*S* was *P*'.

I shall now state briefly three distinct arguments which, if cogent, entail the impossibility of making any true statement about the past, and which justify a wholesale scepticism towards both *p* and not-*p* if these are in the past tense. These arguments attack statements purportedly about the past at three different points: their meaning, their reference, and their truth-values. I do not believe any of these arguments in fact to be coercive. It is, moreover, easy to see what, in general, is wrong with each. But to work through each of them in detail is not merely philosophically instructive, since the arguments themselves are philosophically interesting. It will, in addition, bring out different aspects of the concept of history, and it is this which will justify, I hope, the rather extended

treatment I propose to give these arguments in later chapters. For the present I shall merely state, and briefly comment upon, each one.

(1) Every statement purportedly about the past is strictly speaking *meaningless*. But then, with meaningless statements, the question whether they are true or false cannot, in principle, arise. So, if we cannot make a meaningful statement about the past, we cannot make a true statement about the past.

Now this argument presupposes a certain theory of meaning. The sophisticated reader will recognize, in fact, that what is presupposed is the celebrated Verifiability Criterion of meaning, which, on one of its many formulations, holds that a non-analytical proposition is meaningful only where it is verifiable by experience. Sometimes this was taken to imply that we must be able to experience what such a proposition is about. But we cannot now experience what statements about the past are purportedly about, hence we cannot verify them, and hence, by application of the criterion, they are meaningless. Few are so puritanical or so heroic as to maintain this extreme view, least of all those framers of the Verifiability Criterion whose aim, after all, was not the extirpation, but the explication of empirical science. A moderated version, however, which holds that the meaning of an empirical sentence *is* just its mode of verification has consequences which are nearly as paradoxical. For amongst the modes of verifying historical statements we can hardly reckon experiencing what they are about. For we cannot now do that. What we do instead is to seek for evidence in support of them, and this then suggests that the meaning of an historical statement is the process of finding historical evidence, and that historical statements, accordingly, can be interpreted as predictions concerning the results of historiographical procedures. But all such procedures must take place after the pronouncement of the given historical statements whose meaning they are, that is, in the historian's *future*. And inasmuch as the meaning of a proposition is what a proposition is about, historical statements, when meaningful, are about the future. So we remain unable to make meaningful statements about the past. And so we have just the same heroic position as before. Notice that even from the more enlightened point of view of meaning, for instance, that the meaning of a sentence is its *use*, we would have roughly the same consequence. For it is the *use* of predictions

to make statements about the *future*, and so, once more, we fail to be able to use historical statements to make statements about the past. The thesis that historical statements are (covert) predictions has been subscribed to, in various ways, by Pragmatists such as Peirce, Dewey, and Lewis; and by Positivists, in particular A. J. Ayer.[1]

(2) Perhaps argument (1) confuses meaning with reference, a not uncommon philosophical lapse. But here a different difficulty arises. For perhaps there is, or rather was, nothing for statements, purportedly about the past, to be *about*. At least it is logically possible that the world was created just five minutes ago, intact with us and all our memories, and containing all those bits and pieces of things we take as evidence for a much older world than we in fact inhabit. The whole present complexion of the world might be just as it is, independently of when the world was created, and the world, as we now know it, is compatible with an astoundingly brief history of itself. But then, if it were created five minutes ago, there would have been nothing for statements purportedly about the past to refer to. Hence depending upon which of the more favoured current analyses of what are called 'referring expressions' all such statements would be *false* (Russell) or else the question of their truth or falsity could not arise (Strawson).[2] But then with neither of these analyses could the minimal historical aim of making *true* statements about the past be achieved. Most historical disagreements would be spurious. For strictly speaking, each of a pair of disputing historians would be either asserting a *false* proposition, or else asserting a proposition about which the question of truth and falsity could not arise. But this is precisely the same as being sceptical about *p* and its natural contradictory, when *p* is a statement purportedly about the past.[3]

This argument, it must be noticed, is not strictly general, and hence involves a less wholesale objection against my characterization than does (1). For even if we allow that the world did come into being, intact, and so on, just five minutes ago, we could nevertheless succeed in making *some* true statements about the past, namely that the world came into being five minutes ago, as well as further statements about happenings within the past (indeed within the *only*) five minutes. The argument could not rule out every statement about the past because it of course presupposes at least one statement about the past in its own formulation.

Nevertheless, it permits so few genuine statements about the past that its failure to be perfectly general bears but cold comfort to the historical industry. For how many historians, after all, are concerned with what has happened only within the last five minutes?

The argument does not require, of course, that the world in fact began five minutes ago, but only that it *might* have 'for all we know'. It might or might not have. So perhaps we can succeed in making true statements about the past, and perhaps we cannot. If we succeed, we cannot *know* we have done so. For all the evidence is compatible with the world having come into being five minutes ago, and we have, then, no way of knowing, on the basis of *evidence*, whether we have succeeded or not. We are, then, never in a position to know whether our historical disagreements are genuine or not. But this then, is the same as being sceptical about *p* and not-*p*, when *p* is purportedly about the past. For when we are not in a position, and cannot in principle be in a position, to say whether or not a given proposition is true or false (or neither), what is this but scepticism with regard to that proposition?

In comparison with (1), few people have taken this argument seriously, except Bertrand Russell, who formulated it, and *he* said that no one could seriously maintain it. Nevertheless, it raises in a dramatic way a variety of questions about time, reference, and knowledge, and merits a careful examination.

(3) Historical statements are made by historians, and historians have motives for making historical statements about one past thing rather than another. Not merely that, but historians have certain feelings about the past things they are concerned to describe. Some of these feelings may be personal, some may be shared by members of various groups the historian belongs to. Such attitudes induce historians to make emphases, to overlook certain things, indeed to distort. Because of the baggage of attitudes they bring with them, they themselves are not always able to detect the distortions they make. But those who pretend to detect distortions have themselves a special set of attitudes, and hence their own manner of emphasizing, overlooking and distorting. Not to have attitudes is not to be a human being, but historians are human beings, and cannot, accordingly, make perfectly objective statements about the past. Every historical statement, as a consequence of unexpungeable personal factors,

is a distortion, and hence not quite true. So we cannot succeed in making statements about the past which *are* quite true.

This argument would seem, on the face of it, open to an easy charge of meaninglessness. What, for instance, would it mean to say that every object in the world were crooked? We can only determine crooked things in comparison and contrast with straight things, and if there are no straight things, we cannot significantly apply the expression 'crooked'. It is a term which logically requires its polar opposite. But so with distortions. If we have no idea of what an undistorted statement about the past is like, what sense can we give to the expression 'distorted statement'? And if we *do* have such an idea, then we can in principle produce instances of undistorted statements, and the argument is wrong. So, this objection concludes, either the argument is meaningless or wrong.

But in fact this objection is not especially compelling, and the proponents of (3) can, and commonly do get around it easily. For they are not saying, in effect, something like 'Everything is crooked' but only that a certain class of things are crooked. Then there might be a class of straight things which would make this statement intelligible. So again, they are not saying that every statement is a distortion, but only that *historical* statements are. The class of historical statements is then contrasted as a whole with another class of statements, presumably undistorted, namely, the class of scientific statements. What Margaret Macdonald says about criticism in the following quotation can be applied readily enough to history:

> Critical talk about a work is a construction of it by someone at a particular time, in a certain social context. Thus criticism does not, and cannot, have the impersonal character of strict rules, applicable independently of time and place, appropriate to science and mathematics.[1]

So we apparently know what sorts of accounts are 'objective', namely those which are independent of the time, place, and personal attitudes of him who gives it. But the precise criteria which enable us to know when an account is objective, enable us, as well, to know when an account is not. We ourselves cannot give an account of the *same kind* as an account we are claiming to be unobjective, which is itself objective. For any such account would again be relative to our own time, place, and personal attitudes. For we know that *any* account of that kind fails to be objective. And historical accounts are all of that kind.

Argument (3), in one form or another, has been defended by a number of thinkers of otherwise different persuasion. Nietzsche, for instance, used it in a celebrated aphorism, which was later approvingly cited by Freud. It runs: 'My memory said I did this. My pride tells me I could not have done this. My memory succumbs, and my pride remains inexorable.'[1] Pride here has distorted memory, and what I want to believe about the past distorts the truth. But it is of course logically possible that each of my memories has been warped by pride, or at all events by my attitudes or desires or feelings. So each memory *may* be a distortion 'for all that I know'. I have no way of knowing, that is, whether my memory is correct or not. So even if it is correct, I have no way of telling that it is. It may be objected that surely I have ways. I can appeal to independent evidence. But if this independent evidence consists in appeal to the memories of others, what grounds have I for supposing their memories to be any less distorted than mine? True, there is evidence of other sorts, for example, diary inscriptions, newspaper clippings, and the like. But just at this point the *general* relativistic argument (3) supervenes, and my assessment of evidence will again be influenced by personal factors, and so on. Nietzsche's argument, after all, is not restricted to memory. It may say about me, in my diary, that I did this or that. I disapprove of myself doing that, and my faith in the diary collapses: I say that someone else must have written it, or that I only did so to be clever.

This argument seems to me the most impressive of the three, despite the fact that their statement of it, by its main supporters, Beard, Becker, Croce, has been distorted by the special attitudes, prejudices, and feelings they had. It needs a good deal of logical scrubbing and polishing, but in the end there is something correct and important in it, and I shall subsequently modify my minimal characterization of history in terms of it. Indeed, I have already committed myself to views it must find congenial. For I have said that historical significance is dependent upon non-historical significance, and that the latter is very much a matter of the local attitudes and interests of the historian. So it will follow that our entire mode of organizing the past is causally involved with our own local interests, whatever they may be.

But I now shall consider all these arguments in the order in which I have stated them, and devote a chapter to each.

IV

VERIFICATION, VERIFIABILITY AND TENSED SENTENCES

I now wish to consider argument (1). I shall approach it from the point of view of two distinct theories, each of which either entails it or provides it with a certain measure of philosophical support. The first is a theory of knowledge, and the second a theory of meaning. The two theories are, of course, importantly interconnected, and whoever subscribes to the theory of knowledge is likely also to accept, in one form or another, the theory of meaning, and conversely. It is nevertheless worth our while to consider each theory separately, for each of them serves to illuminate a somewhat different aspect of the concept of history. And though the points I shall be interested in making are capable of a perfectly general formulation, I shall illustrate the theories with reference to the work of individual philosophers who have, at one time or another, seen fit to defend them. The theory of knowledge I shall discuss is due to C. I. Lewis, and the theory of meaning to A. J. Ayer. Indeed, I shall examine *several* theories of Ayer's, concerned with the same problem, but reflecting certain changes in his basic philosophical programme.

A great deal of careful and important philosophical work has been done on the analysis of empirical knowledge since Lewis wrote *Mind and the World Order* in 1929, some of it by Lewis himself in his later and major work, *The Analysis of Knowledge and Valuation*. No one today, I think, would subscribe to the form of empiricism elaborated in that earlier work without some very severe qualifications. I shall nevertheless restrict my attention to what Lewis says in *Mind and the World Order*, for subsequent refinements do not bear significantly upon the problem which concerns me, and because Lewis says a number of interesting things in it which have to do with our knowledge of the past.[1]

I begin with a summary statement of the general theory of knowledge Lewis proposes, and shall then proceed to its specific application to our

knowledge of the past. Lewis is in general concerned with claims to know that something x has a certain property F, and he maintains that when we in fact claim that x is F, we are to be understood as meaning something about actions and experiences, and it is in terms of actions and experiences that he undertakes to analyse sentences of the form 'x is F.' He writes:

> To ascribe an objective quality to a thing means implicitly the prediction that if I act in certain ways, specifiable experiences will eventuate: if I should bite this, it would taste sweet; if I should pinch it, it would feel moderately soft; if I should eat it, it would digest and not poison me; if I should turn it over, I should perceive another rounded surface much like this. . . . These and a hundred other hypothetical propositions constitute my knowledge of the apple in my hand. . . .[1]

In general,

> The whole content of our knowledge of reality is the truth of such 'If–then' propositions, in which the hypothesis is something we conceive could be made true by our mode of acting and the consequent presents a content of experience which, though not actual now and perhaps not to become actual, is a possible experience connected with the present.[2]

Very roughly, then, the tense and common use and grammatical form of it notwithstanding, a sentence of the form 'x is F' is a prediction, or better, a set of predictions of the form 'If A then E' where A marks an action and E marks an experience. And the original sentence is to be analysed[3] into these conditional sentences, a conjunction of which expresses our knowledge of what the original sentence claimed. Each of these conditionals states a separate process of verification, and the original sentence is *exhaustively* verified when all the conditionals into which it is analysable have been made true through the performance of the specified action, and the having of the specified experience. This is not an unfamiliar sort of analysis of the concept of empirical knowledge, and there are a great many problems which arise in connection with it, but I shall ignore them, and restrict myself exclusively to that part of Lewis's analysis which holds that when I claim to know something, I am implicitly predicting what I will experience if I do something, and that predictions concerning actions and their experiential outcomes represent the 'whole content of our knowledge of reality'.

Suppose, now, that I say, of a particular object a, that a is F, and that

the sentence '*a* is *F*' is uttered at time *t*-1. If *a* exists at *t*-1, I may proceed to act upon *a*, and, depending upon the experiences I have as a result of this action, verify, or partially verify, my original sentence. Or suppose that I put my sentence in the future tense, and *a* exists after *t*-1. Here again, I will be able to perform actions, and have experiences, and so again will be able to verify, or partially verify, or even falsify my original sentence. For in either case, my original statement was a prediction of what I would do and experience. Now suppose *a* existed before the utterance of my sentence, and no longer exists, and that my sentence is in the past tense. Well, I cannot at *t*-1 act upon *a*, nor can I at any future time act upon *a*—things do not exist, stop existing, and come into existence again in the way in which they go from red to green to red again. And I cannot hope, in the future, to occupy that part of time occupied by *a*; so I have no way of verifying my sentence. To be sure, I might already have performed that action on *a*, and have had that sort of experience, which, had *a* still existed, I could respectively perform and experience; so that I would already have verified the sentence I utter in the past tense at *t*-1, the verification having preceded the sentence it verifies. But in fact the claim that I did perform an action, that I did have an experience, is in the past tense, and just the same problems would arise. So with regard to statements purportedly about the past, these preliminary considerations suggest that they cannot be verified, and therefore are not part of our knowledge of reality. Anyone can see his way through this argument, and it doubtless has an artificial ring to it, but Lewis regarded this as an objection which had some paradoxical consequences, and had to be met:

> Knowledge, it is said, is here identified with verification, and verification comes about by proceeding from the present to the future. Then the past, so far as it can be known, is transformed into something present and future, and we are presented with the alternatives, equally impossible, that the past cannot be known or that it really is not past.[1]

Let us now see how Lewis himself handles this objection. He first of all denies that it applies, and insists that sentences about the past are verifiable and that we can know the past after all. But he supports this claim by introducing a novel conception of an *object*, and by permitting himself a variety of metaphysical assumptions which it is exceedingly difficult to justify by his account of knowledge. He says, to begin with, that

> The assumption that the past is verifiable means that at any date after the happening of an event, there is always something which at least is conceivably possible of experience, by means of which it can be known.

Surely this is innocuous enough. Lewis is saying that our knowledge of the past is based upon present evidence, upon things we can in fact experience. These things he terms the 'effects' of the event we may claim to know on the basis of them. Should there be an event with no effects at all, or with no present effects, then, of course, we have no way of knowing that it happened: there would be a permanent hole in our knowledge of the past. This is roughly the solution to the problem which Dewey offers:

> The object [of historical knowledge] is some past event in its connection with present and future consequences and effects.[1]

And again:

> If perchance the past event had no discoverable consequences or our thought of it can work out no assignable difference anywhere, then there is no possibility of genuine judgement.[2]

Who could quarrel with this? His statement can be reduced to the claim that what can be known only on the basis of evidence cannot be known if we do not have the required evidence. And it assumes, what is surely not controversial, that we can only know about past events on the basis of evidence. Yet these genial platitudes must not still the unrest Lewis's analysis has left us with. For, his claim was that in saying something about the past, I am only predicting what experiences I will have in performing certain actions, and that the whole of my knowledge consists of these conditional propositions. So unless we *mean* by 'The Battle of Hastings', for example, some set of actions and experiences which lies in our own future, and it is unreasonable that we should mean this, what sense can we give to the expression 'Knowing that the Battle of Hastings took place in 1066' if the *whole* of our knowledge consists in a set of conditional sentences which refer to future actions and experiences? How, on such analysis, *can* I know the past, or anything other than these conditional sentences? And moreover, if I have no way of referring to past events, if, each time I try to refer to a past event, I find myself instead making a prediction about my future experiences, how am I to describe these

experiences as standing in some evidential relationship to a past event? For, instead, the moment I try to refer to the past event, I must be making a prediction of future experiences. How can I say that these experiences are evidence for *p*, where *p* ostensibly refers to a past event, when *p* itself is just a prediction of future experiences?

Lewis must have been dimly troubled by these problems, for it is just here that he introduces the novel conception of an *object* to which I referred a moment ago. Let *E* be an event, and let {*e*} be the set of its effects at a given time *t*. Then, Lewis suggests, we may regard *E*, together with {*e*}, as one single time-spread object, stretching from the date of *E*, say *t*-1, to *t*. Presumably this object, which I shall call *O*, will go on growing in the direction of time, and fatten as new effects become part of itself. Thus the Battle of Hastings, plus the Bayeux Tapestry, plus all the other effects of the Battle of Hastings, go to form a single time-spread object. Let this be *O*. And since, as he has said, 'at every date after the happening of an event, there is always something . . . possible of experience . . .', there is at this very moment something, which is an effect of the Battle of Hastings, which it is temporally possible for me to experience. Hence I can experience *O*. To be sure, I could just *call O* 'The Battle of Hastings' and so say that I can experience the Battle of Hastings. But it would surely startle students of English history to learn that the Battle of Hastings is still going on. Nor would they be especially comforted by my so changing the meaning (the reference) of 'the Battle of Hastings' as to support this claim. It would be silly to say I saw Abraham Lincoln this morning, if all I meant was that I saw a copy of the Gettysburg address. So, strictly speaking, the introduction of *O* does not help. The fact that I can experience *O* does not mean that I can experience the Battle of Hastings. It only means that I can experience parts of the same temporal object of which the Battle of Hastings is a temporally earlier part. And since I cannot now experience temporally earlier parts of time-spread objects, we are left just where we were. We have only redescribed the problem by shifting from the question of our knowledge of past events to the question of our knowledge of temporally earlier parts of temporally-extended objects, when only present and future parts of such objects are capable of experience. Lewis writes that 'the totality of such effects quite obviously constitutes all of the object which is knowable'.[1] But

this is precisely to say that the Battle of Hastings, not being one of its own effects, is not knowable. Not merely this. All temporally earlier parts of *O* are unknowable if the originating event is unknowable. And if we have ways of knowing *them*, why not ways of knowing the originating event of which they are the effects? Only present and future effects are knowable, and we remain unenlightened with regard to the question of how we know the past. Or rather, we are enlightened. For the answer is that we cannot. And this is absurd.

One word more. Suppose we experience {*e*} and {*e*} is indeed part of *O*. With what justification can we claim to know that {*e*} is part of *O* if *O* contains temporally earlier parts which are themselves unknowable? And if each time we wish to speak of temporally earlier parts, our statement turns out to be a prediction about temporally later parts, Lewis has in effect left no room in his theory of knowledge for the sorts of knowledge which reference to time-extended objects requires. Such reference in fact is impossible in this account of knowledge. But it is instructive to note the manner in which Lewis endeavours to circumvent these difficulties. He speaks, for instance, of 'marks of pastness' which presumably present objects bear, and on the basis of which we can find our way back to the temporally earlier parts of temporally extended objects they themselves are parts of. Thus:

> The past is known through a correct interpretation of something given, including certain given characters which are marks of pastness.[1]

How are we to understand the expression 'marks of pastness'? As having reference to nicks, scratches, scuffs, and general signs of wear and tear? Or to date-inscriptions? Or simply differences from objects which bear marks of presentness? And what would *they* be? Lewis is remarkably evasive here:

> For the present purposes it will be sufficient to remark that obviously *some* kind of identifiable marks must mean the pastness of the thing presented, otherwise the past could not be distinguished from the present.[2]

The question, however, is whether on Lewis's theory, we are able to do this. One is reminded here of a comparable puzzle in the empiricist theory of memory. By what present and identifiable criteria are we to distinguish memories from images, if we suppose that having a memory is to

entertain an image? Hume suggested that we do so on the basis of some differential of vivacity,[1] but it has been pointed out that we can distinguish memories themselves by varying degrees of vivacity,[2] and the problem remains of distinguishing dull images from bright memories. Russell suggested that there is a certain 'feeling of pastness' which marks the difference,[3] and this is remarkably like Lewis's 'marks of pastness'. I do not intend going into the empiricist theory of memory here, but part at least of the difficulty surely lies in the assumption that memory consists in the beholding of an image, just as, in Lewis's case, knowledge is identified with a present experience, or an experience which will sometime be present. Hence the only way to account for our knowledge of the past is to look for some present mark of pastness.

I have no idea what a mark of pastness is, but if I were a forger of, say, Etruscan artifacts, I should want to make sure my nefarious confections exhibited sufficient of them so that gullible curators could not tell them from the real thing by 'marks of pastness'. And in plain fact we don't tell forgeries from real things by noticing that the latter are, in the words of one writer, 'stippled o'er with wasness'.[4] Instead ,we have recourse to differential amounts of manganese and bitumin, to the presence of air-vents, and to the knowledge of the behaviour of terra-cotta under heat.[5] But at all events the issue is irrelevant to the present discussion. The relevant question has to do with taking something presently experienced as evidence for something which is past. 'Is evidence for' is a two-term predicate, and the question here has to do with the other term of the relation. For if we cannot refer to what it is that something is taken as evidence for, it is difficult to see how we can speak of evidence at all. And Lewis's inability to allow reference to the past which does not collapse into reference to present and future experience leaves us without a means for describing something even as evidence. Evidence for *what*? This we cannot say.

The criticism that the past is unknowable, which is entailed by his theory of knowledge, would have, Lewis tells us, 'greater weight if in general those who urge it were prepared to tell us how the past, which is really dead and gone, can be known'.[6] It is premature, perhaps, to rise to this challenge, but a few preliminary remarks can hardly be avoided.

Let us suppose that if E happens at t-1, then no one after that time can experience E. This is clearly presupposed in Lewis's discussion, and raises all those difficulties that such *ad hoc* remedies as time-extended objects and 'marks of pastness' are introduced, unavailingly, as we saw, to mitigate. Now someone is sure to raise here the standard objection that astronomers do, in fact, witness events which took place a very long time indeed before the actual moment of witnessing, e.g. stellar explosions, which we now witness, took place as long ago as it has taken light to reach us, and we can calculate the time that has lapsed between the event and our witnessing of it. It is, moreover, natural for us to speak of witnessing terrestrial explosions. But, in fact, it is just as natural to speak of witnessing terrestial explosions, even though we know that *some* time, if not as *much* time as in the case of stellar explosions, must have lapsed between the time the explosion occurred, and the time at which we witness it. But we can go further even than this. Epistemologists never weary of pointing out that any perception, of anything, must, for purely physical reasons, occur at some time, however small, after the perceived event itself took place, that it takes *some* time, however little, for an impulse to reach the centres of perception, whatever these may be.[1] But then the example of the exploding star loses some of its force if these facts hold. For the difference only is a matter of degree, such explosions being 'more past' or at a greater temporal distance from a bit of perceiving than ordinary, terrestrial explosions, and these again are only 'more past' than, say, perceiving the bursting into flame of an ordinary match held in our hands. And the question is no longer whether it is possible to perceive past events, but whether, instead, it is possible to perceive anything *but* past events.

Let us try to accommodate these facts as best we can. Today, then, I am able, let us suppose, in the required natural sense, to witness the explosion of a star which is located very many years back in time. In just the same spatial position at which I witness this (e.g. my observatory, affixed to the Earth) I shall be unable to witness this same event *tomorrow*. If I did not witness it today, I should, at this spatial position, never again be able to witness it. Perhaps at a different spatial position I should be able to witness it tomorrow, just as, at a different spatial position I should have been able to witness it yesterday. But in fact I am where I am, and was not,

and will not be, in the required spatial positions for having perceived it yesterday, or for perceiving it tomorrow. So this suggests that there is a spatio-temporal range within which an event may be perceived. *E* is perceivable at different times within that range from different positions in that range, and perceiving *E* is a matter of being at the right place at the right time. I can perceive it at different times, but then only from different positions. Now, to say that we cannot witness *E because E* is past is to say (*a*) that *E* took place, and (*b*) that the time at which *E* could be witnessed at the spatial point we occupy is earlier than the present moment. And to say that we cannot now ever witness *E* is to say (*a*) and (*b*) and (*c*) that we cannot reach, at any future time, a different spatial point in time to witness *E*—that is, by the time we reach any spatial point different from the one we now occupy, the time at which *E* could be witnessed from that point would be earlier than the time of our occupying it. One can be within the temporal range, but outside the spatial range for witnessing an event, or within the spatial range but outside the temporal range for witnessing it. Thus someone standing in Strasbourg in A.D. 1066 would exemplify the former case, and someone standing at Hastings in 1963 the latter case. And it is the latter sort of case that is applicable here. It is pointless now for anyone to move into the spatial range for witnessing the Battle of Hastings, for we are forever beyond the temporal range for having the required experience.

With some such emendation, I suppose, we can accommodate the fact that we only witness past events. We can even accommodate the fact that we might at the *same* time witness events which took place at different times, e.g. an astronomer might simultaneously witness a bomb bursting in the air *and* a stellar explosion. We could not tell them apart, of course, by any 'marks of pastness', for if *everything* we witness is a past event, everything must bear marks of pastness, and we should be obliged, on Lewis's suggestion, to speak of one thing as more charged with such marks than another. But little is to be gained by that sort of evasion, for from the fact, if it is a fact, that all we witness are past events, it does not follow that we can now witness *every* past event. For some past events, we are forever outside the required range for witnessing them, and this is now the case with the Battle of Hastings. The question, then, is how we can know unexperienceable past events, events which are really 'dead and

gone'. Clearly, it is because we have evidence that they happened. And we may concur that it is on the basis of something which is presently capable of experience that we are able to know about things that happened, but which we cannot now experience. But it might be said that this is exactly Lewis's thesis. Have I given the account, alternative to his own, which he has challenged critics of his view to give? The answer is that I have not. But the difficulties which arose from Lewis's analysis did *not* arise, surely, from the platitudinous claim that we only know about the unwitnessable past on the basis of evidence. It arose, rather, from the claim that when I make a statement about the past I am implicitly predicting the experiences I will have in the future when and if I perform certain actions. I may indeed be implicitly making such predictions. But surely that is not all that I am doing when I make a statement about the past. And Lewis's mistake is to suppose that this *is* all that I am doing, that the whole of my cognitive claims are expressed in conditional sentences of the sort we have recognized.

Just think, for a moment, of how plainly we understand the sentence 'The Battle of Hastings took place in A.D. 1066', and how vivid an image many of us have of this battle. But try now to think of what we could possibly be predicting about our future actions and experiences when we make such a statement. I know very little about the presently available evidence for the truth of that sentence, I have no idea what sorts of things a specialist in English history would produce in support of it. The best I could be predicting, I suppose, is that if I were to ask an English historian for evidence for the Battle of Hastings, he would produce some: but *what* he would produce I can hardly say. If *all* I was doing when I made the statement, was predicting the outcome of such queries, I should have a very unclear idea indeed of what I was saying. And it would be much the same if I were to have said 'The Battle of Waterloo took place in 1815'. I should hardly be able to distinguish between these statements, since I have no better idea of the sorts of evidence I should find in the one case than I have in the other. So even if, in order to be said to know that such a past event happened, I must be able to produce some sort of evidence, the fact is that when I say that such an event happened, I am not merely predicting what my experiences will be as a consequence of seeking for evidence. I am, rather, saying that such and such an event happened.

These are quite different things. My statement was *about* the Battle of Hastings, and not about what one might find in the Royal Archives. I have no idea what one might find there, but at best I would want to say that what one finds there would perhaps be evidence for a statement about the Battle of Hastings, that it would, speaking optimistically, verify it. But if I could not independently and separately speak of past events, what would such verificatory experiences *verify*? Presumably, they enable us to know about the Battle of Hastings. But surely, knowing about the Battle of Hastings is quite a distinct thing from knowing about the evidence for it. To know about the evidence, for instance, might be to experience certain sheets of parchment. But I am certainly not referring to sheets of parchment when I refer to the Battle of Hastings. I am, instead, referring to a scene of human strife. Yet if I were only making predictions when I make my statement, I would be speaking, not of armed men, nor of kings and captains, but instead of scraps of parchment and worn tapestries. And this is an extraordinarily unplausible view. And how, indeed, should I so much as regard these things as evidence for the Battle of Hastings if each utterance of a sentence about the Battle of Hastings turned out to be but a prediction concerning my experience with parchment and tapestry?

Even, then, if the whole of our knowledge of the Battle of Hastings is in some sense based upon such conditional sentences, it cannot *consist* of such statements alone. Lewis is crudely correct when he says that we know about the past because we have evidence for it, and that we know it in no other way. But he has not allowed us a way to talk about the past, but only to talk about that upon which our knowledge of it is based. He has not allowed us a way of speaking about the past which does not immediately become a way of speaking about the present and the future. This is because he is not merely in the grip of the dogma that all we know is what we can experience (and so we cannot know the past), a dogma which has compelled him to introduce all sorts of wildly unplausible entities and marks, but, more importantly, because he was in the grip of a certain theory of *meaning* in accordance with which the meaning of a non-analytical sentence is taken *to be* the set of experiences which verify it. It is to this, accordingly, that I must turn.

'For my own part', Ayer wrote, in the heyday of verificationism, 'I do not find anything excessively paradoxical in the view that propositions about the past are rules for the prediction of those "historical" experiences which are commonly said to verify them, and I do not see how else our "knowledge of the past" is to be analysed.'[1] He adds that he suspects those who feel dissatisfied with such an analysis to be tainted with the metaphysical view that the past is 'somehow "objectively there"'—that 'it is "real" in the metaphysical sense of the term'.[2] Though it is worth pointing out that it is precisely such a metaphysical assumption which seems to have tormented Lewis, namely, that since the past is *not* 'objectively there,' it cannot be experienced, and hence cannot be known, or that, at all events, we can only know what is 'objectively there' and so what we know of the past must be knowledge of something 'objectively there', and hence not the past. Nor can Ayer himself be very far from holding to such a view, namely, that there must *be* something for our statements to be about, which we can experience, if we are to know them, and so, if we are to know sentences about the past, they cannot *really* be about the past, but about something we can experience. Despite his brave words, Ayer retreated from the position that statements about the past are not statements about the past, but, rather, rules for making statements about the future.

One reason why a reasonable man might wish to retreat from this position, his taste for paradox notwithstanding, is that it entails a revision of what a sentence like 'The Battle of Hastings took place in A.D. 1066' *means* each time that sentence is verified.[3] That is to say, most of us might allow that in *some sense* 'The Battle of Hastings will take place in 1066' differs in meaning from 'The Battle of Hastings did take place in 1066'. Perhaps we would say this because the former could have been, while the latter cannot be, verified by experiencing the Battle of Hastings (though in fact few of us would give this as a reason for saying they differ in meaning). But who would wish to say that 'The Battle of Hastings took place in 1066' differs in meaning from 'The Battle of Hastings took place in 1066'? Yet this is what we might be committed to say on the original verificationist analysis: the sentence changes its meaning each time it is verified. For suppose it is taken at one time as a prediction that a certain experience will be had, and this experience *is* had. Then it can no

longer predict *that* experience, but another one and so its meaning changes. We can give in to our prejudice that it has always the same meaning, only by the artificial means of using it to predict an experience to take place after the absolutely final utterance of the sentence. But in many cases it is too late for that. Thus 'Caesar died' no longer means what it once did, partly as a consequence of the meddling inquests of Marc Anthony. So the theory induces a radical instability in the meaning of most sentences about the past, or at least all of them which ever have been verified. Indeed, in a kind of Heraclitian way, we could never verify the same sentence twice. We should always, instead, be verifying a different sentence, in case difference of meaning means difference of sentence. And this would entail that 'Caesar died' and 'Caesar died' are not the same sentence in the case where one of them has been verified. Yet we surely want to say that these are both statements of the same sentence, and that this same sentence has always the same meaning. Nor would it help much to say that these are different *uses* of the same sentence to make different *statements*. For these different statements could never mean the same if one of them were ever in fact verified, or if they were verified by different experiences.

Ayer came to admit that it is misleading to suppose that statements about the past 'can be translated into propositions about present and future experiences'.[1] He said that 'this is certainly incorrect', and added that he did not any longer think that 'the truth of any observation-statements which refer to the present or the future is a necessary condition of the truth of any statement about the past'. But the question had not to do with truth, but with meaning, and he remained concerned with how such statements could be regarded as meaningful if we could not, by experiencing what they were about, verify them directly. He answered this by introducing the notion of 'verifiable in principle'. This involved a shift in programme. Sentences about the past were not to be translated into sentences about present and future, but they were to be translated from the indicative to the subjunctive mood. And I want to examine this notion now.

It is true that I, who have occupied a stretch of time beginning in 1924, and continuously since then without interruptions in my existence, can never have observed events which happened before 1924, or whose

spatio-temporal ranges fall short of that date at their forward edge. But during that time, I have occupied a variety of different spatial positions. While in those spatial positions at a given time, I could not have observed events contemporary with my occupying them if, at those times, I was outside their *spatial* range. In Rome in 1962, I was unable to witness things going on in New York. But I could have been in New York in 1962, rather than in Rome. It is not logically absurd to suppose this. And had I been in New York, I might have witnessed what happened there. It was a sheer contingent fact that I was one place rather than another. But it is exactly the same with time. I might have lived in a different stretch of time than I, as a matter of sheer contingent fact, have occupied. And just as it is not absurd to suppose that instead of having been in Rome in 1962, I might have been in New York, so it is not absurd to suppose that instead of having been in 1962 in Rome, I might have been there in 44 B.C. Just as it is a contingent fact that I did not witness New-York-events in 1962, but Rome-events instead, so it is a contingent fact that I did not witness 44 B.C. events in Rome, but 1962 events instead. I did not witness those events, but it is not logically absurd to suppose that I might have. So I cannot in fact verify Caesar's death by witnessing it. But I could have verified it had I been there at the time. So the sentence 'Caesar died' is verifiable *in principle*. And, since it is verifiable, it is meaningful. This, roughly, is Ayer's analysis here.[1]

Let us waive the question whether I would have been the same person I in fact am if I had been in 44 B.C. instead of A.D. 1962. Let us only ask whether this new account manages to avoid the dizzying shifts in meaning upon which its predecessor foundered. In a way it does avoid that. We are to take all instances of 'Caesar died' as having reference to the same set of possible experiences, namely those one would have had, had one been in Rome in 44 B.C. Once more, there is a *translation* thesis here, but instead of a translation into a conjunction of conditional sentences,

(1) Caesar died in Rome in 44 B.C.

is to be translated into some such sentence as,

(2) If I had been in Rome in 44 B.C., then I would have had Caesar-dying experiences.

Now (2), as we shall see, is not a full or perfect translation of (1), but it will do well enough for present purposes. Notice, I am no longer referring to my present and future experiences when I want to refer to the past. Indeed, I am no longer obliged to be referring to any experiences I shall ever, in actual fact, have. On the other hand, I am not quite able yet to refer to Caesar's death. Instead, I am obliged to refer to experiences I would have had, had I been in a certain place and at a certain time. We must, of course, not be put off by the possible objection that no two speakers of (1) can mean the same thing since (1) is used, in each case, to speak of the speaker's *own* subjective experiences. This can be avoided I think, quite easily, by suggesting that the experiences in question would have been had by *anyone*, that had you been there instead of me, you would have had these experiences, so that these experiences may indifferently be referred to by each user of (1). We may now consider, as a better (partial) translation of (1)

(3) If anyone were in the appropriate place (etc.), he would have had Caesar-dying experiences.

'Caesar-dying experiences' is perhaps a bit makeshift. It stands roughly for the experiences which would directly verify the sentence 'Caesar dies now'. I remark, parenthetically, that (3) is therefore not strictly speaking true, for it fails to be true for Caesar himself: 'Death', as Wittgenstein wrote, 'is not an event in life. Death is not lived through.'[1] But I shall not press this point, for I am still concerned that we cannot yet talk about Caesar's death—but only about Caesar-dying *experiences*. The reason this *is* a makeshift term is that we don't have, in our language, words which will do the precise job which is required of them by the analysis being considered. It is, rather, to be the job of a different language altogether than the one we speak, a language in which all terms which refer ordinarily to physical events and objects are to be rendered into other terms which refer to experiences. This explains why (2) and (3) are only *partial* translations: 'Rome' designates a specific physical city, and a complete translation would replace 'Rome' with whatever experiential equivalent it is to be provided with in this new language. We are dealing, in other words, with the programme of Phenomenalism. And this is why we have found it hard to refer to Caesar's *death*—a *physical* event. The

acknowledged collapse of verificationism in its original form does not, Ayer writes,

> Mean . . . that propositions referring to the past cannot be analysed in phenomenal terms; for they can be taken as implying that certain observations would have occurred if certain conditions had been fulfilled. But the trouble is that these conditions never can be fulfilled; for they require of the observer that he should occupy a temporal position that *ex hypothesi* he does not.[1]

But, as we have seen, the latter difficulty is not insuperable. Nevertheless, we had better look for a moment at what is really involved in the proposed translation.

Phenomenalism is the thesis that all statements purportedly about physical objects and events must be translatable into sets of statements about actual and possible experiences if they are to be meaningful. The pretence is that I can only understand a term if I know what experiences I would have if I were confronted with the designatum of the term. But then the term must be rendered intelligible by other terms which refer just to these experiences, and nothing can meaningfully be said of the designatum which cannot be so rendered. A full-scale discussion of this programme is not appropriate here, but from this bare statement of it one should be able to see why we were unable to refer to *past* events, in this case the death of Caesar. This is a consequence of the fact that, according to the phenomenalist, we cannot refer to events *simpliciter* if, by events, we mean physical occurrences. For any attempt to refer to an event immediately involves us in reference to actual or possible experiences. So it is not some special fact concerning the past which prohibits reference to past events. It is, rather, a general fact that we cannot refer to events, as physical occurrences, and hence, as a trivial consequence, cannot refer to *past* events. Even Brutus would have been unable to refer to the death of Caesar, but only to 'Caesar-dying experiences'. So this is not a special problem which arises for statements purportedly about the *past*.

I shall not tarry over the question as to whether we can or cannot, in fact or in principle, effect a phenomenalistic translation, a translation into terms referring only to sense-data and to sensibilia—to actual and possible experiences—a statement which refers ostensibly to the assassination and death of Caesar. I do not know whether it can be done, but I shall assume it can be, and that we have succeeded in doing so. But I am not sure I can

understand how the phenomenalist would render *pastness* in phenomenalistic terminology. Ayer has suggested a way in which we can speak of it as *possible* that we might have had the experiences referred to in a phenomenalistic rendering of the expression 'The death of Caesar'. It is possible in the sense that it is not logically impossible that we should have been in Rome in 44 B.C. But he has said that *in fact* the conditions for having these experiences cannot be fulfilled, presumably because we cannot in fact occupy the required time-space position: 'they require of the observer that he should occupy a temporal position that *ex hypothesi* he does not.' Yet one cannot but point out that reference to temporal positions is surely reference to a physical location, and that until we are shown how the notion of temporal and spatial positions are to be rendered in phenomenalistic terms, we must assume that at least some meaningful physical notions do not have experiential equivalents, and if some things cannot be put into the favoured idiom, we have no good reason for accepting the cumbersome locutions of phenomenalists at any point. A *partial* phenomenalism is philosophically worthless, for the *claim* is that whatever is meaningful in discourse is meaningful in terms of actual and possible experience. Comparably, there are *some* angles which we can trisect with ruler and compass. But this does not establish the general case, even though a proof that there is any angle incapable of such trisection *dis*establishes the general case. And if we cannot capture temporal positions by means of phenomenalistic predicates, this means the complete collapse of phenomenalism.

But I continue with my supposition that we have achieved our translation of the death of Caesar, and I shall even assume we have taken care of putting into phenomenalistic language reference to time and space positions. So the sentence

(4) Caesar dies in Rome in 44 B.C.

is successfully rendered by the sentence

(5) If anyone were to have Rome-in-44-B.C. experiences, then he would have Caesar-dying experiences.

It makes little difference that (5) is sketchier than a full translation would be. I shall just suppose that it marks the place and sets the form for the fully

adequate translation, however long and complex the latter may be. For the issue which concerns us really lies elsewhere. It lies, indeed, precisely here: one cannot tell *when* the sentence (4) was uttered, nor whether it refers to something past, present, or future (forgetting that Romans would not have employed the expression 'B.C.'). Nor can one tell this from (5). And the reason for this is because (4), as (5) shows, has been put in a tenseless idiom. What I am interested in is how we put into experiential terms the fact that a given event is *past*. And this, we shall see, is quite a different question from the one that asks how we can put into such terms reference to time-space positions. For we might have succeeded in the latter task without being able to tell whether the time-space position thus translated is past, present, or future.

It is sometimes objected against Phenomenalism that a sentence such as (4) could be false, even though a sentence like (5) were true. Thus there may be no daggers before me though I have dagger-experiences. This objection has little force, however, if the phenomenalist is correct in maintaining that (5) says nothing which (4) does not, that it is only a translation of what is meaningful in (4). Nevertheless, we are entitled here to a comparable and, I hope, a more telling criticism. Notice that (4) is tenseless, and (1) is not. But then it would be a mistake to regard (5) as indifferently a rendering both of (1) and (4). Because, since (1) contains information which (4) does not, (5) is either an inadequate rendering of (1) if it is an adequate rendering of (4), or it goes beyond a translation of (4) if it is an adequate translation of (1). And (1) *does* give information that (4) does not, specifically that the event referred to by each of them took place in the *past*. (4) does not tell us whether the event has happened, is happening, or will happen. Hence (1) could be false while (4) is true: it could be false if the event had *not* happened in the past. So, if (5) is supposed to be an exact translation of (4), (1) could be false while (5) was true, since (5), no more than (4), contains all that (1) does. But more generally, it is possible for *any* tensed sentence to be false even though its phenomenalist translation is true. Unless, of course, we could render tenses phenomenalistically.

It is not easy to see how we should render tenses in experiential terms. One might of course, propose some such stratagem as this: giving an experiential equivalent for *moving through time*.[1] Thus:

we arrive at 44 B.C. by traversing a series of event-stages, and each of these can be rendered phenomenalistically. True, we cannot occupy these positions, but it is possible that we might have, for the reasons already considered. The difficulty, however, would be in making the *first* step between here and 44 B.C. For the first step must be to an event which is past if our trip is to be in the right direction, and the question is how we indicate that the first step is in the direction of the *past*, or differs from a first step in a *future* time-journey. One could say the first step in the direction of 44 B.C. But then we have to express somehow that 44 B.C. is in the *past*, and this then begs the question. Certainly you cannot hope to do the trick in a *tenseless* idiom. For suppose we say that 44 B.C. is 2007 years before *now*. But 'now' indicates the use of a present tense, and would have to be replaced with a date, that is A.D. 1963. We might then say that the statement that 44 B.C. is 2007 years before A.D. 1963 is true, and, for that matter, analytically true. But this does not tell us that 44 B.C. is past. For someone could have uttered this truism at any time, including 43 B.C., when the years referred to were future. We have to know when the sentence is uttered, and then whether this time is before or after or concurrent with the time at which we raise the question. So we cannot readily eliminate the sort of information tense gives us. But then, if we cannot incorporate this information into our phenomenalistic translations, phenomenalism collapses as a programme for expressing all that is meaningful in our ordinary language. To be sure, one could take the heroic course of saying that tense-information is meaningless, but this is unreasonable, for surely we understand what is meant by saying that something is past. At this point a phenomenalist will challenge us, as did the epistemologist in an earlier discussion, to say how, if *not* in experiential terms, we do understand this information. But I shall not even try to say this for the present. I will return to it in a later discussion, and take it on faith that the expression 'for the present' and 'later' will be understood, however they are to be analysed.

Phenomenalism, as much as verificationism, involves an attack upon the success of the minimal historical aim, for we cannot, if the former is correct, make a meaningful statement about the past which does not immediately become a statement about actual and possible experiences.

But I have used this very point to mount an attack upon Phenomenalism itself. If it cannot succeed in accommodating the sort of information we get in tensed sentences into the idiom it favours, this would be a defeat for Phenomenalism. But the exact status of tenses remains to be clarified, and I shall make a first step in this direction by engaging in yet one more polemic; one which will bring this entire discussion to a head. Professor Ayer, whose efforts at analysing sentences about the past have been tireless, has recently produced a distinctive analysis which justifies, if it is correct, the claim that, in his words, 'No statement as such is about the past'.[1] This claim, of course, would once more spell defeat for the minimal historical aim, and it would rescue Phenomenalism from the straits we have cast it into. For if no statement is *as such* a statement about the past, it can hardly be a defect in Phenomenalism that it cannot translate into its own idiom statements about the past. One cannot translate non-existent sentences. But then our minimal characterization cannot be fulfilled either, since there is no sentence of the required sort for historians to succeed in making. Nevertheless, one wants to know what, if not the past, a statement like 'Caesar died' is about. It is just this that Ayer's new analysis seeks to answer.

To begin with, Ayer allows that when we use this sentence, we are referring to an event, in this case, the death of Caesar. We are not, however, referring to a *past* event, for events, as such, are neither past, present, or future. So, 'considering only the factual content of statements',[2] when we refer to Caesar's death, we are referring to an event, but not to a *past* event, for, apparently, the expression 'past event' in some sense involves a mistake of category. This sounds, perhaps, more puzzling than it need sound. It amounts to little more than insisting upon a distinction between one-place and multi-place predicates, or between absolute and relational properties. If it sounds paradoxical, it does so in exactly the same way that the following claim does: that no statement, as such, is ever about anything which is next to something else. True, a bottle may be next to a box, and the statement which asserts this would be true. But in the sense in which it is correct to say that a bottle is green, it makes no sense to say that a bottle is *next to*. Bottles, as such, are not *next to* or *between* or *behind*. So a statement to the effect that a bottle is next to a box is a statement about a bottle, but *not* about a 'next-to' bottle. For

there are no such things. Similarly, then, a tensed statement is about an event, but not a *past* event. For being past is not a property of events, but a relationship in which events may stand as one term. The *factual content* of such sentences has reference to events and to absolute properties of events. If we subtract, from a tensed sentence, this factual content, we are left something which, strictly speaking, indicates the temporal position of the person who utters the sentence vis-à-vis the event to which the sentence refers. We do not have, as grammatical features of our language, in the way tenses (in this analysis) indicate the temporal relationship in which we stand to the events we refer to, devices which automatically indicate the spatial relations in which we stand to the things we refer to.[1] But when I say that the door is on my left, 'on my left' is not a property of the door I refer to, but a relationship between the door and myself. Someone else might say, of that same door, that it is to his right. But the two statements 'The door is on my left' and 'The door is on my right' are not inconsistent, even if asserted of the same door and even if asserted at the same time, providing they are asserted by different persons standing in different spatial relations to the door. But even different persons, supposing them to be speaking of the same door at the same time, *would* be asserting inconsistent statements if they respectively said 'The door is wooden' and 'The door is metal'. But similarly, there would be an inconsistency between 'Caesar died in 44 B.C.' and 'Caesar was alive all through 44 B.C.' if asserted by different persons at any time. But 'Caesar will die in 44 B.C.' and 'Caesar died in 44 B.C.' are by no means inconsistent if uttered at different times by the same or by different persons. Indeed, one feels at first glance, if one of them is true, the other must be true, and if one of them is false, the other must be false, so that, by definition, far from being inconsistent, they are materially equivalent.

It follows, then, that tensed sentences may be analysed into two distinct components, each of which gives a different piece of information; one having to do with an event, and the other a relationship between an event and a time at which the statement is uttered. The following three sentences, accordingly, uttered respectively by Calpurnia, Brutus, and Marc Anthony, are indifferently about the same event: (*a*) Caesar will die; (*b*) Caesar dies now; and (*c*) Caesar died. Concerning just the *factual* content of these three statements, it makes no difference when they are

uttered, for the tense has no bearing on the factual part of the sentence. The two pieces of information conflated together in a tensed statement are 'logically distinct', and the three statements are equivalent: if one is true, all are, and if one is false, all are.

This, if I understand it correctly, is Ayer's analysis. I wish to argue that notwithstanding its ingenuity, this analysis is not wholly sound. Those three sentences are not equivalent, and the component pieces of information brought together in tensed sentences are not logically distinct if, by this, we mean 'logically independent'. My argument, if sound, will entail that one cannot quite so neatly extricate the temporal from the 'factual' information contained in tensed sentences.

Let us begin by considering the following claim, which states, succintly, the thesis I have been describing:

> The truth or falsehood of a statement which purports to describe the condition of the weather at a given date is quite independent of the time at which it is expressed. By combining a description of the event in question with a reference to the temporal position of the speaker, the use of tenses brings together two pieces of information which are logically distinct. It does this in an economical fashion, but it is not indispensable. Either piece of information could perfectly well be given in a language that contained no tenses at all. The temporal position of the speaker, relatively to the event described, which is shown by this use of the present, past, or future tense, could itself be characterized by being explicitly assigned a date.[1]

This seems to me to license the view that a tensed indicative sentence is analysable as a truth-functional conjunction of logically distinct propositions, the conjunction being obscured by sheer grammatical accident. One conjunct (*A*) says something about an event *E*, and the other conjunct (*B*) says something about the temporal position of the speaker relative to *E*. Either piece of information could be given separately, and since we are supposing the two conjuncts to be logically independent, the truth or falsity of either of them leaves undetermined the truth-value of the other. Of course, the truth or falsity of the conjuncts will have something to do with the truth or falsity of the conjunction taken as a whole: this follows from our supposition that a tensed indicative is a disguised *truth-functional* conjunction. In particular, the conjunction will be false if either or both conjuncts are false. In this case, it naturally follows that the

truth value of a tensed indicative will *very much depend* upon the time at which it is uttered, for this will be one of its truth-conditions. For example, if Brutus utters (*b*), his statement will be false, if Caesar had already expired, or if he has not yet done so. Brutus's statement, we are supposing, would have been in the present tense. But then his statement will be false because one of its conjuncts is false: in this instance the conjunct which refers to the temporal position of Brutus, at the time of utterance, relative to the event he describes. He will have misstated the relationship, saying, in effect, that the utterance is concurrent with the event it is about, when in fact it is later or earlier than that event. In this regard, then, it is plain that the three sentences are not equivalent: (*b*) can be false, though (*a*) is true or (*c*) is true. Thus these two sentences do contradict one another if we take into account the time of utterance: (*I*) 'Caesar will die.' (*II*) 'No, he has already died.'—even though each has the same 'factual content.' If (*a*), (*b*), and (*c*) are uttered at the same time, two of them will be false if one of them is true.

In the case considered then, the conjunct (*B*) is false, and the conjunction *as a whole* is, accordingly, false as well. But of course it may be said that this still leaves undetermined the truth-value of the other conjunct (*A*), understood tenselessly about Caesar's death. One might then say that (*A*), if true, is true independently of the time of its utterance, and that (*A*) is therefore independent of the other conjunct (*B*). This is doubtless what Ayer had in mind: the truth of a tenseless proposition does not depend upon the time of its utterance. And doubtless he was thinking of untensed sentences when he said that no sentence, as such, was about the past. But a tensed sentence very much depends, for its truth-value, upon the time of its utterance. It follows, then, either that we cannot give a tenseless rendering of tensed sentences, or that some tenseless sentences very much depend, for their truth value, upon the time of their utterance. So one or the other part of Ayer's analysis has to be rejected. But it is very hard to suppose that a sentence which is about the time of its own utterance does not depend upon the time of its utterance. It would be exceedingly awkward to suppose that 'This sentence is uttered at *t*-1' does not have its truth value determined by the time at which it is said. It can hardly be timelessly true. Even, then, if we introduce the 'explicit date'

into the sentence itself, we have not succeeded in both rendering it tenseless *and* independent of the time of its utterance.

Notice, moreover, that '. . . is independent of . . .' is not a symmetrical relation. Even if the conjunct (*A*) is independent of the conjunct (*B*), the converse does not follow. It may or may not be independent, but in fact it can be proved that it is not independent. And if this is so, it cannot be the case that we can give one piece of information independently of the other, as the truth-functional interpretation suggests. For let us suppose that (*A*) is *false*. 'Caesar dies in Rome in 44 B.C.' could be false in a number of ways: if there were no such person as Caesar, if Caesar were immortal, if Caesar dies at some other time or some other place. In any case, to suppose the sentence false is to suppose that there is (tenselessly) no such event as the statement purports to describe. Now if (*A*) is false, the conjunction, of course, is false. But the question remains how the other conjunct (*B*) could be true if (*A*) is false? How can I stand in *any* temporal relationship with a non-existent event? The relation collapses for want of a term. One might, of course, say that it is a *fact* that Caesar does not die in 44 B.C. But 'facts themselves are dateless', and I cannot then regard a statement as being uttered before, or after, or concurrently with something to which no date can sensibly be assigned. The truth of (*A*) is thus a necessary condition for the truth (or, on an alternative analysis, for the truth or falsity) of (*B*). One might then say, if one wishes to, that the truth of a tensed sentence presupposes the truth of that part of the sentence which may be stated in an untensed way. Nevertheless, a tensed sentence may be false when the untensed component is true, and this shows that they are not equivalent. But moreover, we find here just the same sort of situation we discovered in connection with Phenomenalism: a phenomenalist rendering of that part of a sentence which can be rendered tenselessly may be true while the corresponding tensed sentence is false. And the information which these give us cannot be phenomenalistically rendered. In so far as we are unable to eliminate tenses in such a way that this same information may be stated tenselessly, we are hardly entitled to the view that no statement is, as such, about the past. A true sentence in a past tense is, as such, about the past.

Notice, finally, that this same situation arises if we think of rendering, in a somewhat different way, the two pieces of information conveyed in

a tensed sentence. The only natural alternative to the truth-functional conjunction which I can think of is this. We may regard tenses as operators, specifically, as statement-forming operators which makes statements out of statements. As operators, they of course have no truth-value standing on their own, for example, in the way in which the quantifying operator (x) is not, as such, either true or false. Now let p be an untensed sentence, and let P be a tense-operator which has the force of putting p in the past tense. Thus $P(p)$ says: 'It was the case that p.' Now it could be the case that p is true, and $P(p)$ is true; or that p is false and $P(p)$ is false. What cannot be the case is that p should be false and that $P(p)$ should be true.[1] Nor, more generally, can it be the case that p is false and $T(p)$ true for any value of T, if T be considered an operator-variable which takes tenses as values.

A good many of the problems I have been concerned with, of course, really arise out of the concept of truth. It is not so much that 'Caesar dies in 44 B.C.' is tenseless, but that 'It is true that Caesar died in 44 B.C.' is taken as tenseless—largely because truth is regarded as an atemporal fact regarding sentences. Hence if 'Caesar died in 44 B.C.' is true, then it must be *timelessly* true. So regarded, the time at which it is uttered is apparently irrelevant: if timelessly true, it would be true whether uttered before, or during, or after 44 B.C. And this then renders tense somehow otiose. The idea that truth is atemporal is, however, a singularly mischievous notion, and I shall later[2] seek to give reasons for rejecting it. But for now I wish only to say a few words more concerning the analysis I have just examined.

Why should Ayer wish to say that no sentence as such is about the past (or, for that matter, about the present or the future)? I suggest that the refusal to take tenses seriously is due to the fact that Ayer remains haunted by the old question of the verifiability of sentences about the past. His strategy consists in trying to show that this problem need not arise, inasmuch as no sentence *is* about the past. And so there is no real problem concerning the verifiability of historical sentences. These sentences, not, on his analysis, *being* about the past, are therefore not threatened by the objection that they are not verifiable because what they are about is *past*. Ayer's claim is that they are about events, but not about past

events. The truth or falsity of such statements depends then wholly upon what is (timelessly) the case with the events they are about, and not upon the time at which they are uttered. 'A sentence', he writes, 'which is verifiable when the event to which it refers is present is equally verifiable when the event to which it refers is past or future.'[1] But what he means to say is that an untensed sentence, if it is ever verifiable, is always verifiable, that its verifiability is not a function of the time at which it is uttered. True, this formulation does suggest that the sentence's timeless verifiability depends upon its being verifiable at some *time*, and that, unless the sentence in the present tense is *sometime* verifiable, namely at the time the event referred to occurs, it is not verifiable ever. But this is not the point I wish to insist upon. I wish rather to emphasize that this is so for untensed sentences, but does not establish that *tensed* sentences are verifiable. The truth of an untensed sentence does not guarantee the truth of all tensed versions of it. And it may very well be that the *verifiability* of an untensed sentence does not guarantee the verifiability of all tensed versions of it. After all, the allegedly verifiable content of these sentences is only a *part* of the whole sentence, by Ayer's own analysis. And the verifiability of a part does not entail the verifiability of the whole: the verifiability of 'grass is green' does not entail the verifiability of 'The grass is green and the Tao is purple'. There is *still* room for scepticism about the past.

But in fact such scepticism is quite independent of the entire issue Ayer has spent so much time and effort and ingenuity on in the hope of defeating it: as though he had mounted an army on the wrong battlefield. That the verifiability of untensed sentences has nothing to do with the time at which they are uttered is just what we would expect, given that verifiability is a matter of *meaning*. We are to understand a sentence with reference to the sorts of experiences which would be required for it to be verified. However, one may concur that whether a sentence is meaningful does not depend upon the time of its utterance. A sentence may be meaningful even if, in fact, there is nowhere in the timestream an event or entity for it to refer to. If there is one point most contemporary philosophers are persuaded of, it is that there is a difference between the meaning and the reference of a term. If it should prove true that there was never such a person as Caesar, sentences purportedly about Caesar would not collapse into meaninglessness. False sentences are not meaningless,

nor are fictional sentences: we understand *Hamlet* as readily as we do *Julius Caesar*. I may say that the birth of Caesar's seventeenth daughter by his ninety-sixth wife is celebrated sesquicentennially by the hooved brewmasters of Lebanon, and this sentence, false if any sentence is, is nevertheless meaningful and, for that matter, even verifiable. Surely the predicate 'is verifiable' is not to be restricted to *true* sentences alone. It would be peculiarly self-defeating if being true were a necessary condition for being meaningful, for how should we know then whether a sentence were meaningful unless we first ascertained it were true? But then how should we ascertain it were true unless we knew what it meant? For sentences in the past tense, we could only say that they were meaningful, or verifiable, if we first knew that what they were about actually took place. The attributing of meaningfulness to such sentences then would presuppose knowledge of the past.

Meaningfulness, understood as verifiability, is independent of the truth-value, of the referring relations, and of the time of utterance of sentences. But if, by meaningfulness, we mean verifiability, the question remains how we are to understand the meaning of *tensed* sentences. What experiences verify that what we are speaking of is *past*? This is the problem one found in Lewis, and in the Pragmatists generally, and in Phenomenalism, the problem of defining, in experiential terms, the sort of information furnished solely by the tensed parts of sentences, once we have subtracted the 'factual content'. And at this point one cannot but feel the attractiveness of the Kantian position, that time is not a datum of experience, but a form of experience, a precondition for experience. And the frustration we have continually encountered is reminiscent of the celebrated difficulties Wittgenstein made so much of in the *Tractatus:* how are we to put into language the relationship between language and what it is about? If 'aboutness' is a relation, we can put it into language only by putting its terms into language, and this destroys the relationship between language and the *world*. Reference is not part of language, but parts of language constitute one of the terms of the referring relationship. Comparably, the assertion of a sentence is not *part* of the sentence asserted. Pragmatism, and Phenomenalism as well, are attempts to suck the whole of reality up into experience, or into language. What we have experienced as a continuing frustration is in fact a limit to such a pro-

gramme. In this regard, oddly enough, one might go so far as to say that after all, tenses are not parts of the sentences we assert. One might regard them, instead, as ways of asserting that a certain sentence is, or was, or will be true. And this would be very like saying that the truth of a sentence is not part of the sentence. But the difficulty here is that tenses reappear in the expressions 'is true', 'was true', and 'will be true'. So an analysis of them remains to be given: an existentialist would say that they register the way in which we are in the world of time.

There remains one point more. In this discussion, I have acquiesced in the identification of meaningfulness with verifiability, and have indicated that perhaps part of our understanding of a sentence has to do with our knowing what experiences would verify the sentence. Ayer has said that if a sentence about an event can in principle be verified at the time the event occurs, it is forever verifiable. But this suggests that sentences about the past must be of a kind which could be verified by a witness to the event in question. And this, I am afraid, is too much of a concession. For many, and perhaps the most important kinds of sentences which occur in historical writings give descriptions of events under which those events could not have been witnessed. Petrarch's brother witnessed Petrarch's ascent of Mt Ventoux. Historians might say that when he climbed Mt Ventoux, he opened the Renaissance. But his brother could not have witnessed Petrarch opening the Renaissance. He could hardly have seen the event under that description, not because his senses were defective, but because he could not have understood the description at the time. Not unless he knew what was going to happen in the future, and knew, in addition, what historians were later going to say was the significance of what he saw. What experiences would verify for him, at that time, the sentence 'Petrarch is opening the Renaissance'? I would hardly dare say. I should like to say that however meaningful such a sentence is now, in its appropriate past tense, it would have been on the verge of meaninglessness when the event referred to by it was happening. For strictly speaking, there *are* no experiences which verify that sentence, if, by verification here, we mean experiencing what the sentence is about under the description of it given by the sentence. Verifiability, then, is not an adequate criterion of meaningfulness so far as these historical sentences are concerned.

The philosophical importance of these sentences, then, is this. If there are true descriptions of events under which those events cannot be witnessed, our incapacity to witness those events has, with this class of descriptions, no bearing whatsoever. For even if we could witness them, we could not verify them under *these* descriptions. The *general* analysis of sentences about the past has hardly been broached.

V

TEMPORAL LANGUAGE AND TEMPORAL SCEPTICISMS

Should a man choose to be sceptical of sentences purportedly about the past, he would hardly be daunted by the consideration that such sentences are meaningful or verifiable in principle. Their meaningfulness he might grant out of hand, inasmuch as this is a condition for the intelligibility of his own position. Fictional sentences, after all, are meaningful even if false, and the sentences which go to make up an historical novel are of a piece with those which go to make up a proper work of history. What the sceptic is concerned to do is to challenge us to distinguish between the two classes of sentences. Imagine someone mixing up the history books with the historical novels—or with any kind of novel for that matter—and then asking us to sort them out, by criteria, let us suppose, internal to the books themselves or the sentences which go to compose them. The mere label 'history book' will not help, nor the appearance of the word 'history' in the title. A novelist may employ, in a *roman à clef* the familiar disclaimer that all its characters are fictitious, and resemblances between their situations and those of actual persons are pure coincidence. Or a novelist might write 'All that I am about to say is true, so help me God!' And the first book may be true and the latter pure phantasy. Or a man might write out of his wild imagination a sheer confection which he subsequently discovers, to his horror, to be gospel truth. We speak of things coming true. But we can as easily speak of things *having* come true, the events, as it were, happening before the statements describing them have been made, when he who made the statements had no idea that he was speaking truly. It is not fiction being true, however, which concerns the sceptic, but rather history, or what passes for history being false. He is prepared to say that we cannot tell whether it is so or not. We could hardly sort out the shuffled books by the criterion similar to the one appealed to by Hume when he was seeking to sort out memories from images. For novels are on the whole far more vivacious than historical works. Meanwhile, the quasi-aesthetic criterion

of relative dullness seems somehow insufficient for certifying the truth of stories.

The fact is, of course, that we cannot, special instances apart (and these are of primary interest to logicians), distinguish true from false sentences merely by inspecting, so to speak, the surface of the sentence. For truth has to do with a relationship between sentences and whatever it is that they are about. The sceptic, thinking in terms of having independent access to what sentences are about, and then seeing, by inspection, whether the sentences are true, will argue that we do not have the required access to what historical sentences are purportedly about to determine whether or not they are true. And so we cannot know. True, we have evidence, and make inferences about the past on the basis of this. But, again thinking in terms of inspection, the sceptic contends that we have no way of finding out finally whether our inferences have connected with fact. And so, once more, we cannot know. Concerning these questions, issues of meaningfulness hardly enter: though Pragmatism, and Phenomenalism in a way, could be read as attempts to circumvent scepticism of this (and other) sorts. If we reject *them*, we must meet the sceptic head on.

To be sure, the sceptic can hardly appeal to the fact that we stand at a certain temporal distance from an event when he makes his strictures. He cannot say, for instance, that we cannot know that *E* has happened *because E* is past. For we cannot assert that *E* is past without presupposing the very thing which is apparently to be called into question. If there was one result of our recent discussions, it was that a tensed sentence presupposes the truth of a corresponding untensed sentence. To say that *E* is past is then already to presuppose the truth of a sentence to the effect that the event *E* (tenselessly) takes place at a time *t*, and that *t* is earlier than now. But if we accept that *E* has happened, what further can be wanted by the sceptic? We cannot say both that *E* is past and that we know nothing about *E*. For we know that *E* is past. To say as much goes beyond what a scepticism ought to allow itself. To indicate the reasons why we cannot inspect *E* (because it is past) is to take for granted the truth of at least one sentence about the past, namely that *E* has already happened and cannot be witnessed. But if we allow ourself that much liberty, then it is plain that some statements about the past can be made even though we cannot

witness what they are about. So what is there to insist upon? Considerations such as these suggest that a scepticism about the past which presupposes the very sort of facts it says cannot be established, is a scepticism of negligible philosophical interest. This is especially so in view of the considerations brought out in the final paragraph of the last chapter, namely, that some of the important descriptions we give of past events are such that under those descriptions we could not anyway *inspect* the events they are about.

Scepticism leaves intact the rules of meaning in our language, and attacks instead the rules of reference. It does not say that there are things about which we do not know, but asks, instead, whether there *is* anything for what we say to be about, or whether we have any way of knowing that there is. Scepticism derives its force from the fact that it leaves experience just as it finds it, changing nothing, but only asking whether experience itself relates to anything. And since what it is that experience (or language) is to relate to is not itself *part* of experience (or language), experience (or language) is left untouched. A scepticism concerning the past would have to leave everything just as it is, leave all the techniques for establishing historical statements just as they are, and ask questions which undercut these techniques, which are beyond the reach of these techniques altogether, so far as the answering of these questions is concerned. And since it is only by means of these techniques that we can answer questions about the past, these sceptical questions about the past cannot be answered. This does not mean that scepticism is invulnerable, but it does mean that scepticism about history cannot be settled by history itself. Scepticism nevertheless reveals something about history, if only a limit, and philosophy, concerned with limits, can justifiably examine it.

The argument that, for all we know or can know, the world might have been created, *ex nihilo*, just five minutes ago, raises an initial question for us, the question, namely, of what possible difference it can make to us that there should, in fact, have been anything before that time. For the argument supposes that things would be just as they are, and we should behave just as we do, though the world itself, in which this behaviour is being carried on, is but five minutes old. We should, for instance, have

all the memories we in fact have, though most of our memories, *all* of our memories which pretend to be of events which took place more than five minutes ago, would be *false*.[1] The events we seem to remember just never happened. But, since these are our memories, and are taken as such, what difference would it make if in fact they all were false? Again, we would still consider the same persons as our parents whom we now consider to be our parents, though strictly speaking everyone in the world, except a few newly born babes, would be of precisely the same age. Stylistic differences would still exist amongst the artifacts surrounding us, though Carcasson and Delphi would be no older than Levittown, and the *Merode Alterpiece* no older than the *Demoiselles d'Avignon*. Rocks would contain fossils, bronzes would bear the patina of antiquity, there would be worn-out shoes and broken pots: 'marks of pastness' would be everywhere: at testimonial dinners there would be speakers in the middle of long speeches, whose hearers would be just as fatigued as if they had been listening for hours. And, in particular, historians would be at their work: in some five-minute old archive a five-minute old historian would be sifting five-minute old documents, and drawing inferences about events that never happened. There is, or rather, was, no past for their inferences to be about. Yet their behaviour is totally unaffected by this fact, for they *think* there was a past. But if their thinking in this way is wrong, and nothing they do is affected by this fact, what need have we for the concept of an actual past? What difference does it make if there was one or was not? We have so described the situation that there is no difference.

There is no difference, for instance, so far as carrying on with people whom we feel we have known for ages, but who, in fact, we never saw before: the man returns from the office to his wife from having left 'that morning', but she has no difficulty in recognizing him. As H. H. Price writes:

> What matters . . . is not what my past actually was, or even whether I had one; it is only the memories I have here and now which matter, be they true or false. I recognize something here and now as being red. In actual fact, we are supposing, I have never seen anything red before. But what of it? I still have all my memories, erroneous as they are. Amongst them are memories of red things, and that is enough to make me recognize this one.[2]

Consider, in this context, thinking machines. These get stocked with 'memories', and, on the basis of these, the machine is able to carry out certain tasks. When the tasks are done, the machine's memory device is cleared, and new memories are fed into it. The machine never experienced whatever it is that these are memories of, but pragmatically this makes no difference at all. It uses its memories just the same way, whether they are true or false. On the present argument, we might think of the world as having been made five minutes ago, and stocked, as it were, with memories, or with things that function very much as memories do. There are in it, for instance, libraries. There are copies of Gibbon with footnotes, referring to other books, also in the libraries. So we can check up on Gibbon, remove discrepancies, offer reconstructions different from Gibbon's based upon other documents which are not cited, and so on. We proceed in all this just as we would if there had in fact been a Roman Empire which declined and fell, finally, at the time of Rienzi. But there *was* no such Empire. Nevertheless, the work goes on.

The distinction between memory and imagination is paralleled by the distinction between history and fiction. But in such a world as the one we are discussing (which could easily enough be just *our world*), these distinctions would, for the main part, be without basis. Unbeknownst to themselves, our historians would be writing fiction in a laborious way. Nevertheless, we would still distinguish between history and fiction, as between memory and imagination, just as we do in fact. A child might claim to remember having seen a bear yesterday, and his mother tells him he only imagines he saw a bear. Perhaps she persuades him. But if the world is only five minutes old, her memory goes back no further than his. What might make us say that she remembers and that he but imagines, is that her claim squares, as his does not, with the available 'evidence'. In her account things fit together which, in his account, do not. One might say, then, that it is this fitting together which gives us our criterion of truth: things which don't fit with what we accept, we then regard as false. But someone might now say: this *is* just how we operate. By fitting things together, accepting those propositions which cohere with what has antecedently been accepted, and rejecting those which do not. Notice, if we accept this, how natural *now* is it to say: statements purportedly about the past are really, so far as their cognitive significance is concerned,

rules for predicting the outcome of historical research. We accept or reject historical sentences in accordance with whether they lead us to find further evidence. They enable us to organize what we find in the present world: a document takes us from the Colosseum, which we can experience now, to the Palazzo Farnese, which we can similarly experience now: and there we find the stones missing from the former. The statement 'The Farnese family took stones from the Colosseum to build their palace' serves to organize the two heaps of stones. Certainly there cannot be a question of comparing this statement with what it is ostensibly *about*. And it makes no difference whether there was or was not something for it to be about. Both possibilities are compatible with the conduct of historical research. We find the missing stones. But the world, perhaps, was made five minutes ago, with certain stones in the Palazzo Farnese which are congruent with certain holes in the Colosseum.

It is this that I find so deeply disturbing about the weird argument that the world might have been made, intact, but five minutes ago, everything being just as it is, just as it would have been had the world been as old as we believe it is. It is not simply that I should be disturbed if there were no way of proving it false. It is rather that it seems to make so very little difference whether it is false or not. But then the concept that it challenges seems to be far less important than one would naturally have thought it was. If the entire concept can be given up, this leaving everything else as it was, it seems hardly to be a concept which has any very significant role to play in our general conceptual scheme. And if the sceptical argument here has just the result of showing this, it has shown a great deal. For it is a great deal to have shown that a concept, heretofore considered of some importance, is of very scant importance indeed. I am not, of course, suggesting that there would be no *psychological* differences here. Something, one feels, might very well go out of life were people seriously to suppose there was no past. There would perhaps be little point in carrying on as historians now do, sifting evidence, etc., if there were nothing for the statements they arrived at to be about. Nor would there be much point in building up cases against defendants accused of crimes which could never have transpired, of which they could not in fact be guilty, even though everything 'fits' so that, if there *were* a past,

we would say that they were guilty. There would, perhaps, be vast psychological differences. But here, a sceptic might urge, is one more instance of how much weight is put by human beings on what might, in the end, 'for all they know', prove to be but a fiction. Like, for example, their belief in a god.

The argument may make no difference in our lives, but there is something odd about it, and if we could identify the manner in which it is odd, we might be able to see what, if anything, is wrong about it. One way of making a start in this direction is to consider, for purposes of the contrast it affords, the symmetrical supposition that the world might be *annihilated* five minutes hence. The first thing to notice is that this supposition cannot in any obvious way be regarded as *sceptical*: that there will be no future does not sound of a piece with such propositions as that there was no past, or there is no external world, or that there are, perhaps, no other minds. Why the abrupt disappearance of the world seems feasible in a way in which the abrupt appearance of it does not, is perhaps not very easy to say, but the supposition, while pessimistic, does not seem sceptical, and it is one we have very nearly learned to live with. And one reason why it does not seem philosophically puzzling may be that it, unlike its symmetrical opposite number, does not clash with our notions of reference—a statement 'about' the future does not seem to refer in quite the same way that a statement about the past or present does—nor does it, in quite the same way, clash with the common use of ordinary temporal words. It is odd, for instance, to suppose that everyone in the world, a few very recent births aside, is of exactly the same age, namely five minutes, that most of the things there are have existed for just the same brief length of time. Yet there is no corresponding oddness in supposing that each person, however young or old, has exactly five minutes more to live (except a few who may die sooner): the hot lavae of Pompeii devoured young and old indiscriminately. It is, moreover, not nearly so odd to suppose that Levittown and Carcasson will perish together just five minutes from now, that each city will endure for just the same length of time, as it is to suppose that every city *has* endured the same length of time, and indeed just for five minutes. Again, we can easily suppose that no-one, except a very few persons fortunate enough

to have children born to them within the next few moments, will have descendants, though it is hard to suppose that no-one, unless he has been born within the past few moments, has any ancestors. There is, not normally at least, anything which has the same sort of relationship to future events that memory has to past events, for example, precognition. But meanwhile it does not seem odd (largely because precognitive claims would themselves sound odd), to suppose that all the events precognized as taking place after the next five minutes will in fact not take place—though it is very odd to suppose that none of the events remembered as having taken place earlier than five minutes ago really did take place. And, finally, it is in no way odd to suppose false all those books which pretend to write the history of the next hundred years, because, to begin with, there are few if any such books and we should in the nature of the case expect them to be false. But it is odd to suppose that all the books pretending to exhibit the history of the past hundred years are false, for there are very many such books, and, in the nature of the case we would expect them to be true.

One could go on multiplying asymmetries and dissonances forever, but it does seem plain that the non-future possibility appears to involve none of the conceptual revisions enforced by the non-past possibility. I don't mean we would be unaffected if we were to take the former *seriously*. It would be a cruel blow to fond hopes, to plans, ambitions, and projects. It would terrify us, as the prospect of sudden death does. We are seldom, I think, as concerned over the fact that there was a time when we didn't exist as we are over the fact that there will be a time when we won't exist. I should be frightened were someone to tell me I had but five minutes to live, but should merely be puzzled were someone to tell me that I had lived for only five minutes. It offends me intellectually, but not practically. Practically, I might indeed say: what difference does it make, after all? The corresponding supposition about the future disturbs me practically, but not intellectually. I should have to be very stoic to say: what difference does it make, after all? It is difficult to accept, but easy to believe. Its opposite number is easy to accept, but, for reasons not yet clear, difficult to believe.

Now it is not enough just to register the fact that certain suppositions are odd, that they lead to the sorts of conceptual tensions which we have

been able to reveal by showing that corresponding tensions do not arise on a symmetrical supposition. One wants some kind of explanation, and it seems to me easy enough, in at least a rough way, to account for the fact that we are able to accommodate the non-future supposition to our ordinary ways of thinking and speaking, and why it is with conceptual equanimity that we can tolerate the idea that the world and our way of viewing it should be just the same, though, just five minutes from now, the entire world will cease to be. It is in part because the future is not considered to have any effect on the present to begin with, and that the present is not causally dependent upon the future, inasmuch as effects do not precede their causes in time. By contrast, if we are to employ causal terms at all, the present is very much the effect of the past. Now these facts, if they are facts, are at the very least generally believed to hold, and they are certainly reflected in the language we employ for describing the world. Just to apply certain terms, and certain expressions, to present objects, *logically* involves making reference to certain past objects and events *causally* related to the object to which the term or expression is applied. Or better, let us effect a partition of the expressions and terms in our language into three classes, the members of each of which are normally applicable to present objects and events: (*a*) past-referring terms; (*b*) temporally-neutral terms; and (*c*) future-referring terms. For the present, I shall restrict my discussion just to (*a*) and (*b*).

By a past-referring term, I shall mean a term, whose correct application to a present object or event, *logically* involves a reference to some earlier object or event which may or may not be causally related to the object to which the term is applied. Again, I shall restrict discussion just to the causally related objects and events referred to by past-referring terms. A temporally neutral term, when applied to a present object, makes no reference to earlier or later objects or events. Let us now consider three distinct objects O-1, O-2, and O-3, under the temporally-neutral descriptions 'is a man', 'is a whitish shiny mark', and 'is a cylindrical metallic object' respectively. The criteria for applying these terms are specified with respect to certain manifest properties of the three objects, in the sense that one can tell, by simple inspection, whether or not these terms really apply to the object in question. Now consider, as applying to just the same objects, in just the same order, the three descriptions 'is a father', 'is a

scar', and 'is a cannon placed here by Francis the First after the Battle of Cérisoles in 1544'.

(1) The term 'father' is temporally ambiguous, in that one of its uses is temporally neutral: we appeal to essentially sociological criteria when we apply it to men. Yet this is not its primary use. Someone may, in the temporally neutral sense, be a father, and we might still want to know if he is *really* the father of the individual with regard to whom he carries out the socially appropriate paternal behaviour. As we know, a man may *not* be a father in the sociological sense and nevertheless be a father in the primary sense, as Talleyrand was the father *of* Delacroix, though he never played the role of father *to* Delacroix. To be a father in the primary sense requires that, roughly nine months before the birth of a human being, the individual so-called impregnated the mother of that individual. Here, of course, the word 'mother' is not being used in the temporally neutral sense of 'mother to', but in the past-referring use 'mother of', that is, that the woman so called actually gave birth to the individual whose mother she is, in the way Jocasta was mother of Oedipus but never, or not always, mother to Oedipus. Correctly to call someone a father in the primary sense logically involves reference to an earlier event causally connected, in accordance with known principles, to the present. One cannot tell, by simple inspection, whether *O*-1 is a father in the primary sense. One can infer, of course, that *O*-1 is a father, on the basis of other properties of *O*-1 which can be seen to hold on the basis of simple inspection.

(2) The predicate 'is a scar' is temporally unambiguous. If *O*-2 was not caused by a wound, it just simply is not a scar. It is only scar-like. Correctly to describe something as a scar, then, involves, logically, a reference of some earlier event which stands, to the object so described, in some obvious causal relation. If whitish shiny marks were to appear spontaneously, like stigmata, upon one's body, one would describe them as scar-like, but not as scars. 'Scar-like' is temporally neutral, *unless* we understand it to make a *negative* reference to the past, namely that it was *not* caused by a wound. In this sense, 'scar-like' differs from 'father to' in that the latter makes no reference, positive or negative, to the past. He who is father to x may or may not be father of x.

(3) The third description makes an *obvious* reference to a past event, and

had there been no such past event, the description itself would be false, or legendary, like 'the rock placed here by the Titans after their victory over Uranus'. The only interesting difference between this case and the other two is that there are no obvious causal laws connecting cannons in St-Paul de Vence with actions of sixteenth-century French monarchs. True, one might say that the cannon had to be placed here by *someone*, but in fact it is not clear even that the cannon was *placed* here: it might just have been left here. And this of course determines whether it is to be called a *monument to* the victory or merely a *memento of* the victory.

It seems to me that temporally-neutral predicates are logically independent of past-referring predicates, and indeed I have tried to define them that way. But I don't think I am merely legislating here: it seems plain that something may be a man and not be a father, be a white shiny mark and *not* be a scar, be a cylindrical metallic object and *not* be a cannon, much less a cannon deposited by Francis the First who once employed it. By contrast, past-referring predicates are *not* independent of temporally neutral predicates. Nothing can be a father which is not a man, etc. The compositional relations amongst the two classes of predicates are complex, and the philosophical problems are comparable to those which arise in connection with relations between other classes of terms, for example 'is an arm movement' in contrast with 'is a gesture of farewell', or 'is beautiful' in contrast with 'is red'. Just now all I am concerned to stress is that there is an interesting analogy between temporally neutral terms and past-referring terms, on the one hand, and tenseless and tensed sentences on the other. For a tensed sentence seemed to presuppose, for its truth, a tenseless true sentence. And comparably, for a past-referring predicate to be true of a present object, some related temporally neutral term must be true of it first. We can falsify 'is a father' by demonstrating that 'is a man' fails to apply. But we cannot be certain that 'is a father' applies simply because 'is a man' does.

Our language is saturated with past-referring predicates, and one might plausibly suppose that Lewis's notion of marks of pastness was based upon a not uncommon philosophical tendency to mistake a structural feature of our language for some structural feature of the world, and, in his case, to look to some mysteriously absent properties of things

as what we must be referring to when we use this part of our language. But we are not referring to present properties of things when we use past-referring predicates, though in some sense our application of these terms to present objects *does* depend upon the object having certain properties which can be seen to hold on the basis of simple inspection. Rather, we are referring to certain past objects and events. The house in which George Washington slept looks like a perfectly ordinary house, and there is no special property of it we can look for in order to determine that it was slept in by the First President. There are, if you like, no such properties, or none at least that we can notice on the basis of inspection. The criteria for applying them are rather more complicated, and the decision as to whether they are *true of* the objects they are applied to are more complicated still. Whatever the case, since past-referring predicates, when true of present objects, give us information about events and objects which are *not* present, it is plain enough that we cannot fully translate into a temporally neutral idiom sentences which employ these terms. For a full translation of a sentence S into a sentence T must, in addition to preserving the truth value of S, convey the same information that S does. If *untranslatability* of one set of terms into another set of terms is our criterion for distinct *levels* of language, then the two classes of terms here are of different levels though they apply to the same things, viz. *O*-1, *O*-2, and *O*-3.

Now it may be said that the non-past possibility we have been concerned with does indeed leave unaffected the level of language which uses only temporally neutral expressions. All these predicates are true of objects whether there was a past or not. But this can hardly be said of predicates on the other level. It is not simply, on the non-past possibility, that all statements purportedly about the *past* are false. It is also the case that a great many sentences about the *present* would be false as well, all those sentences, namely, that ascribe past-referring predicates to present objects, objects which would still have all those properties, the presence of which we can discern on the basis of simple inspection. Our two sets of terms are made up of extensionally equivalent pairs, in that each term in one pair designates exactly the same object that the other term in that pair does. But one member of each pair presupposes, for its application, some fact about the past. So everything would be just as it is.

only there would be no fathers, no scars, and no cannons left or placed by Francis the First. But nothing would have disappeared: there would still be all the objects currently designated by those terms, that is, men, shiny and white marks, cylindrical and metallic objects. And not merely would all such sentences be false because the predicates they employ are false of the objects they are applied to but also, all the causal laws presupposed in the use and application of most of our past-referring predicates would be false or, if not false, then vacuous.

Turning now to future-referring predicates, the main thing that must impress us is how hard it is to find any natural examples, if, by such a predicate, we mean one which refers to some *future* event or object, as a condition for applying to some present object or event. Consider the predicate 'is a father-to-be' as applied to the consort of a currently pregnant woman. To be sure, we customarily expect that there will be a child, and that the man will be a father, 'if all goes well'. But in fact we apply the predicate 'father-to-be' on the basis of either temporally-neutral or past-referring predicates, which we suppose hold true of the individual so designated. Thus x is father-to-be in the case where x has impregnated y and y has not yet delivered the child. And nothing more is required. If x should die before the child is delivered, or if y should, or if the birth is aborted, still, x was a father-to-be. It is not required that he should become a father afterwards. His title as father-to-be does not logically depend upon what the future brings. Moreover, our expectation that x will be a father if he is in fact a father-to-be is based upon causal laws which *have* held, and such future-referring predicates as we might ordinarily use would then be parasitic upon our ability to use past-referring predicates, since the future, in regard to causal laws, 'must resemble if not reflect' the past. The main point, however, is that what seem, on the face of it, to be future-referring predicates are for the most part readily translatable into past-referring or temporally neutral language, and their application to present individuals does not *require* any later occurrence. So if the world were to end five minutes hence, none of the sentences which use such predicates in descriptions of present objects would be false. If this is so, then, the truth of no sentence about the present presupposes the truth of any sentence about the future, and this, if so, would explain why we find no difficulty in accommodating to our

conceptual scheme the idea that there might, very soon, be no future at all.

There are, of course, some descriptions of past events which, had they been given at the time the events themselves took place, or even before then, would have *had* to make use of future-referring predicates. Now we may refer to Piero da Vinci as the father of the man who painted *La Gioconda*. To have called him that when he was father-to-be of Leonardo would logically require that his child come to paint *La Gioconda*. Here *would* be a description of a present object whose truth would depend upon what the future brings, and one, moreover, which could not in any obvious way be translatable into either past-referring or temporally neutral expressions. For the required painting did not yet exist, and the description would give us, if true, genuine information about the future, and so it could not be translated into expressions which did not give that piece of information. But when one thinks how odd it would sound to hear such a statement being used, in comparison with the non-oddity of the non-future possibility, one gets some idea, I hope, of what I earlier meant when I spoke of substantive philosophers of history talking about the future in ways ordinarily used only to talk about the past. But the explanation of this oddity must be reserved for a later discussion.

None of these considerations, of course, affects the sceptical argument that, for all we know or can know, the world might have begun five minutes ago, and that at the very least such a claim would be logically possible. It does not affect it because the use of past-referring terms presupposes certain theses regarding causality, and the sceptical argument is precisely an attack on certain notions of causality, an attack, in a way, which goes back at least to Hume, whose point was that causes do not logically entail their effects, that from a description of the manifest properties of one thing, we could not logically *deduce* what effects it would have, nor, from an exhaustive description of another thing, could we deduce what its causes must have been. Our causal concept is built up out of certain associations with respect to what has *in fact* happened, but there is nothing compelling, logically at least, about such associations, and the presence of a given thing is logically compatible with having had different

causes from those which it in fact had or, for that matter, with its having had *no* causes at all. Hume writes:

> When we exclude all causes we really do exclude them, and neither suppose nothing nor the object itself to be the cause of its existence; and consequently can draw no argument from the absurdity of these suppositions to prove the absurdity of that exclusion. If everything must have a cause, it follows, that, upon the exclusion of other causes, we must accept of the object itself or of nothing as causes. But it is the very point in question, whether everything must have a cause or not; and therefore, according to all just reasoning, it ought never to be taken for granted.[1]

In a way, my discussion has but extended Hume's idea that we cannot, from an exhaustive description of the manifest properties of things, deduce their causes. My extension consisted in showing the irreducibility of past-referring predicates to temporally neutral ones. So far I have only tried to show that this, taken together with the fact that all natural predicates which seem to refer to the future are in fact eliminable in favour of temporally neutral or past-referring terms, accounts for the ease with which we can accept the possibility of a non-future, and the corresponding unease that the suggestion of a non-past induces. But this is no proof that there is as yet anything wrong with the non-past hypothesis, if we take it as such. For the use of past-referring predicates presupposes that things in the present world have had causes in the past, and it is precisely this which is in issue. We can hardly defeat an argument by merely presupposing what it attacks. And basically what it attacks is the idea that there *is* some logical connection between events or things, and it is this that makes the argument a logically possible one:

> There is no logical impossibility in the hypothesis that the world sprang into being five minutes ago, exactly as it then was, with a population that 'remembered' a wholly unreal past. There is no logically necessary connection between events at different times; therefore nothing that is happening now or will happen in the future can disprove the hypothesis that the world began five minutes ago. Hence the occurrences which are *called* knowledge of the past are logically independent of the past; they are wholly analysable into present contents which might, theoretically, be just what they are even if no past had existed.[2]

The italicized 'called' might be explained in this way: The context

'. . . knows *a* . . .'—where 'a' denotes anything you choose—entails that *a* exists.[1] If, then, someone could correctly be said to know the past, this would entail the reality of the past, and it *would* be inconsistent both to assert that someone knows the past and to say that what he knows about never existed. A comparable point might be made about scars. Given present rules of usage, to say that someone bears a scar entails that he once suffered a wound. Similarly, in the case of knowledge, we must speak, rather, of what is *called* knowledge (but isn't or at least may not be), just as, in the case of scars, we might rather speak of what are *called* scars, but are not (or may not be). I think enough has been said to suggest that we cannot analyse 'is a scar' into temporally neutral language, into 'present contents', so what we had better say is that if the hypothesis Russell advances is correct, every description of shiny white marks as *scars* would be *false*.[2] But comparably, every description of cognitions as *knowledge of the past* would similarly, and for similar reasons, be false. The world, in short, would be just as it is. But our language for describing it would be different.

These remarks have had, I think, the positive result of showing that our notion of the past is connected with our notion of causality, and that our notion of causality is connected with our language. As a bit of psychological speculation, I should like to suppose that children begin with a temporally neutral language, and then, at the same time, so to speak, acquire together the use of past-referring terminology, a concept of causality, and a concept of the past, all three achievements being interdependent. It would only be natural, then, that any attack on our concept of the past would at once involve an attack on the concept of causality and upon our use of past-referring terms.

'Like all sceptical hypotheses,' Russell wrote, 'it is logically tenable, but uninteresting.'[3] We have seen, I think, that on the contrary it has a considerable interest. Whether or not it is logically tenable remains to be seen.[4] It seems to me possible to offer a certain analysis of the role which sentences purportedly about the past play which the non-past hypothesis merely serves to dramatize. The analysis, roughly, is this. Sentences purportedly about past objects and events are not, as we have seen in earlier discussions, properly to be understood as *about* the evidence

offered on their behalf, nor are they capable of being fully analysed into sets of observation sentences; in fact, the truth of any set of observation sentences fails even to be a necessary condition for the truth or falsity of sentences purportedly about the past. Nevertheless, such sentences might function, in historical inquiry, in a role analogous to the one played by sentences employing so-called theoretical terms in science, and stand to observation sentences in just the same sort of relationship that those sentences do. And one might now say this: their role is chiefly one of serving to organize present experience. If this analysis were correct, the question whether or not they were independently *about* anything would fail to arise, and the non-past hypothesis would then be irrelevant, and has served only to draw our attention to a mistaken notion we have had regarding the function of these sentences in the economy of human cognition. A term like 'Julius Caesar' enjoys, in historical work, somewhat the same role that 'electron' and 'Oedipus Complex' enjoy in physical and psychoanalytical theories respectively. Sentences employing these latter terms do not stand or fall on the question of whether or not they denote actual entities, albeit unobservable ones. For they would play the same role in the organization of experience whether they did this or not. It is well known that there is a problem, which has been solved only in a trivial and unacceptable way, of eliminating theoretical terms in favour of mere observational vocabulary.[1] Yet in using sentences which embody them, we are not thereby committed to allow unobservable entities. There may or may not be such entities, but it makes no difference whether there are or are not. Their essential role is unaffected by the issue of denotation. Such sentences, as instruments, need no more admit of truth-values than do other scientific instruments, for instance test-tubes. And these sentences, like test-tubes, are indifferently available to scientists who may otherwise differ on questions of ontology—a differing which is, if you like, a luxury of intellect which has no bearing on their use of theoretical vocabulary in the organization of experience.

I shall call this analysis the Instrumentalist view of sentences about the past. Instrumentalism, of course, is but one of a number of possible positions which have been taken with regard to theoretical terms. A full-scale discussion of the problems involved is quite beyond the scope of this work, and belongs properly to the philosophy of science. No

Instrumentalist I know of has ever extended his favoured analysis of theories to *historical* sentences,[1] but it seems a natural move in the present context, if only for purposes of neutralizing the force of the sceptical argument and, incidentally, of pointing out a plain analogy between theoretical science and history—an analogy often disregarded in discussions which *contrast* historical and theoretical science. It is an analogy which will later stand us in good stead, whatever stand we take ultimately on Historical Instrumentalism as a *general* analysis of historical sentences.

I think, however, that as a partial, functional analysis of these sentences, Historical Instrumentalism is almost certainly correct. Historical sentences *do* play a comparable role to theoretical sentences with regard to organizing the present. We find, for example, a pair of plays which exhibit, let us suppose, certain striking stylistic similarities. By postulating a single author for them both, we organize these works into a single corpus. Similarly, we find marked stylistic discrepancies in a pair of works considered as forming a single corpus, and postulate *different* authors, reorganizing, in this way, extant literary works. We then proceed to look for further parts of the present world to support these different organizations, and so relate, once more, parts of the present world to other parts. We can regard these as theories, I think, with no great difficulty: we may speak of the Single Author Theory and the Double Author Theory, and allow that such theories serve, *inter alia*, to organize the observable world.

Notice, however, that this notion of a theory does not *rule out* the possibility of such a theory being true as well as useful. Driving, I notice that the indicators show the car to be overheating, and the battery to be discharging: two red data. I proffer the theory that the fan belt is broken, since this would account for the fact that the battery is not charging and the car overheating. This serves, doubtless, to organize my readings off the dash-board, but it is a theory which collapses into a *fact* when, peering under the hood I detect a broken fan belt.[2] Is it simply the lack of access to the past that prevents historical theories from similarly collapsing into facts? For one cannot but feel that one difference between historical theories and the sorts of scientific theories we have been connecting them with is that, while the latter have reference to what, if they were entities at all, would be singularly different from the entities to be encountered in gross observational experience, the entities postulated by

historical theories are exactly of the sort encountered in everyday life. That is to say, no one has in fact observed such things as atoms, electrons, Psi-functions, genes, and ideas surcharged with libidinal energy, but the everyday world contains, amongst other things, authors. So historical theories make use of terms which have a plain application to things which are presently capable of experience. It is not a difference in the kind of entity postulated from everyday entities which then makes the difference, but merely the epistemic inaccessibility of historical entities which has encouraged the move to Historical Instrumentalism.

Now it might be countered that I have shifted ground, and moved from considerations having essentially to do with the concept of causality, to considerations which have essentially to do with knowledge. But the force of the non-past hypothesis derives its force from the fact that we have, apparently, no epistemological access to the past, and hence no independent way of checking up on it. If we could have such access, we would have a means of collapsing theories into facts, and at the same time ways of empirically refuting the non-past hypothesis. It would then be an empirical hypothesis and nothing more, and subject to empirical falsification. So epistemic considerations are surely not irrelevant. Once we introduce them, however, we can map a strategy for handling the non-past hypothesis.

To begin with, we retreated to instrumentalism[1] as a way of neutralizing problems of reference which arise in connection with sets of statements, in this case statements about the past, whose referenda were deemed inaccessible even if they once existed. Instrumentalism proposes to circumvent all questions of reference by showing that it does not matter whether they refer or not: everything would remain the same, but we would only have converted certain sentences from fact-stating to organizational instruments, and in the latter capacity truth or falsity are rendered logically inappropriate: there are only 'better or worse' such instruments, as Dewey would have said, the latter values being functions of the relative organizational achievements of pairs of sentences. Yet it is possible to manufacture an indefinite number of *ad hoc* scepticisms, each of which could be circumvented by a similar retreat to Instrumentalism. Suppose, for instance, that someone were to offer the hypothesis that the world ends exactly five feet beyond one's furthest reach:[2] that just five

feet from wherever one stands, there is nothing, so that statements purportedly about the Empire State Building, made by someone standing in Central Park, would be false for lack of the object referred to. We speak of things as thirty miles distant from *here*, but we have no access to these, and someone might then suggest that we adopt a spatial instrumentalism, avoiding thus problems of reference by relegating 'Empire State Building' to the status of a theoretical term, so that sentences embodying it serve to organize spatially accessible (observable) phenomena.

The fatal difficulty in such scepticisms is their sheer arbitrariness. Why is the line drawn where it is drawn, and not somewhere else?[1] Why draw the line at five feet and not at six or at four feet? Or seven or three? Why five minutes ago and not four, or three or six or ten? Or, for that matter, if one wants to say that objects five feet beyond our furthest reach are inaccessible, because we cannot touch them, and that, for all we know, they are not there, why not say that we have no way of knowing, at the present moment, that there is anything at all except what we are now touching? Or that there is anything at all except what we are seeing *now*? One might suggest that though we are not touching them, we *can* touch them, and know they are there. But then why cannot we move and touch the things now beyond our reach by five feet? You cannot say that they are not there, that five feet away there is nothing, for this quite begs the question, namely, how can we know whether there is anything there or not? The thing is, we are where we are, and not five feet from that place. But, for that matter, we are touching what we are in fact touching, and not something else. So that to suppose continuously tangible entities between touch-events is, if you like, to introduce theoretical entities for purposes of organizing experience, and continuous physical objects serve to show that here, too, we have retreated to a new instrumentalism. It should be plain, then, that these differential scepticisms rather quickly collapse into scepticism per se, and talk of objects in general is cast in the instrumentalist mode.[2]

In my earlier remarks upon the non-past argument, I pointed out that it is not perfectly general, that it does not rule out all statements about the past, but only those which purport to be about something having existed or taken place more than five minutes ago. But I have now emphasized

how arbitrary is the specification of five minutes. There are innumerably many other points at which the line could have been drawn, and, if all the evidence is compatible with a world five minutes old, it is compatible as well with one six or seven or *however* many minutes old. All the evidence is, if you wish, compatible with infinitely many hypotheses, each of which is incompatible with the others. But to justify drawing the line at one point rather than another can surely only be done by some appeal to evidence, and if appeals to evidence are ruled out, there can *be* no possible justification for entertaining one hypothesis rather than another, for instance that the world sprang into being five minutes or five years or five centuries ago. Every differentiating piece of evidence can be neutralized by an adherent of a shorter time span than the one it purports to establish.

Let us now opt for the very hypothesis that the world sprang into being five minutes ago. Notice that this effects a partition amongst the class of statements about the past. If the world began five minutes ago, some statements about the past are true or false, namely, those statements about what have transpired in the past (the only) five minutes.[1] The rest, lacking referenda, are either false, or else their truth or falsity cannot arise, or else questions of truth or falsity are irrelevant since these statements have the status of theoretical sentences. Let us continue with historical instrumentalism, and say that some statements are to be analysed instrumentally, and some not, the latter being about what has happened very recently. Notice, also, that there will be a corresponding partition within the class of past-referring predicates. We can admit those past-referring predicates which refer to past events and objects connected with presently existing objects, so long as they happened or existed within the past five minutes. Thus there would genuinely be three-minute eggs, and not merely eggs *called* three-minute eggs. There would be *some* fathers, *some* genuine memories, and so on. But now, as we shift the arbitrary beginning point back and forth in time, the populations of these various classes will vary. If we move it far enough back, everyone ordinarily called a father will be a father, and there will be genuine memories, genuine scars, and, indeed, cannons genuinely placed by Francis the First. And more and more statements will really be about the past and not merely be useful instruments for organizing the present. As we move it closer and closer

to the present moment, however, there are fewer and fewer genuinely past-referring predicates, and fewer and fewer statements genuinely about the past. We reach a point where the only genuinely applicable predicates are temporally neutral ones, and the *only* role left for statements purportedly about the past to play consists in organizing the data of the present. There is room for nothing *but* Historical Instrumentalism. But is there any good reason why we should not reach that point, why we should not bring the origin of the world closer and closer until, finally, there just is no past at all, not even a five-minute one? Is there no evidential friction from keeping these temporal scepticisms, of which, as I have said, there is an infinite number, from sliding into *instantaneous* scepticism? The answer is that there is not. For no better evidence can be given for one rather than another, even though, as I have suggested, each one of them allows *some* genuine statements about the past. Since they cannot justify this allowance, however, their granting it hardly matters.

I do not believe that instantaneous scepticism is ultimately tenable at all. There is a clear and analytically true sense in which one might say that only the present exists. It follows from this that the past does not exist, but this amounts to little more than the triviality that the past is not the present, and hardly entails that the past *did* not exist. Moreover, it is not clear that when we speak of the present, we are speaking of an *instant*. When we point to something and say that it now exists, we are not saying, so to speak, that its existence is confined within the present instant, for an instant has no confines within which something may exist. An instant is no more a unit of duration than a point is a unit of extension. The spatial analogue to instantaneous scepticism is, I suppose, punctiform scepticism. We can, however, hardly speak of things having punctiform existence. This would require that a circle have its centre and circumference coincident with one another, and this simply disqualifies it from being a circle. Punctiform scepticism entails that nothing exists; this *is* pure scepticism. But so, too, is instantaneous scepticism just plain scepticism. To be a thing is to have extension and duration, and to deny either of these is to deny the existence of things.

We do, of course, recognize these days the occurrence of achievements,[1] in so far as we accept Professor Ryle's important distinction between

achievement verbs like 'winning' and other verbs like 'running'. Running a race takes time, but winning one does not: one wins *at* a time, but not through an interval. But the point of the distinction is lost if every verb is an achievement verb, and surely one must run a race in order ever to be said to have won one. Moreover, it is runners who win races, and runners are entities, and so have some duration: there are instantaneous winners (every winner is one), but no instantaneous racers. An instant marks a temporal position, is a device for calibrating time, but is not, I think, part of time, nor does it have times as parts of itself. Instants do not belong in the list 'year, month, week, day, hour, minute, second'—any more than points belong in the list 'mile, rod, yard, foot, inch'. This can be seen from the fact that nothing can endure two *instants*, though it can endure two hours, minutes, or seconds; nor can anything extend over two points. There are no points if there are no lengths, and no instants if there are no durations. So in a sense, to speak of instants presupposes durations, and one cannot accordingly adopt an instantaneous scepticism and hope, by doing so, to raise doubts about durations.

These considerations, if sound, entail that one cannot coherently maintain instantaneous scepticism. My arguments have not, in any way that I can think of, presupposed anything concerning causality. One can quarrel, if one wishes to, over the precise duration the world is said to have, but not over the question whether the world has any duration at all: just to be a world at all requires that it have *some* duration, and the only remaining question is how much. The man who wishes to claim that it has five minutes' duration only, as we have seen, is committed to saying that some statements about the past are true, those which have referents falling within the temporal restrictions he has imposed. But now we may ask him how *he* knows. This is no longer a problem he can escape, for if he says only that his chosen duration is arbitrary, we can stick him with instantaneity. The point is, he cannot opt for his choice without allowing something to count as evidence, and if he allows any why not all? The issue over the duration of the world is an empirical issue, decidable in principle, and if it is not that, it comes to instantaneous scepticism, and *that*, I am saying, cannot be held. It cannot be held because it is self-contradictory to hold it. One cannot speak of an instantaneous world. It

is comparable to asserting that there was a past but we cannot know there was one. The only position left to occupy then is plain scepticism, and it is not our task to discuss this, for plain scepticism raises no *special* problems for the philosophy of history.

This is as far as we can go, I think. Now to offer a hypothesis concerning the precise amount of duration to be assigned to the world is to be prepared to accept something as evidence for this hypothesis and against competing ones. But the fact that we must accept something as evidence for this proposition about the past brings us to the threshold of our third argument against the possibility of our succeeding in making true statements about the past. For it is just here that the relativistic factors supervene: statements about the past must be relative to bodies of evidence. Before crossing that threshold, however, I want to make one point more about the present argument.

As we revise our estimate of the precise amount of duration to assign to the world, we restore increasing amounts of our temporal vocabulary, and increasing numbers of what are accepted as causal laws. A five-minute world, as things stand, is too short a time for there to be any genuine scars. Suppose, now, it takes a month for an average wound to become a scar. Then to suppose the world a month old gives us some scars but no genuine fossils. To say the world is a million years old restores to genuine usage the past-referring predicate 'is a fossil'. The further back we go, the less strain is put on either our causal scheme or our temporal vocabulary, and if someone were to say: Suppose the world sprang into being a hundred million years ago, it is hard to see how we should find this very sceptical or even very interesting philosophically. It allows us all of history and a good deal of prehistory, and if he were to add 'intact with everything in it' we would hardly find this disconcerting unless we knew what the world was like at that time, and our so knowing would then create tensions with known causal laws and a temporal vocabulary in use. If the intact world contained, say, gravid dinosaurs, we should have to revise some causal notions if we were to accept this estimate. But the simpler the contents of the world, and the fewer temporal predicates required to describe it, the less jarring would the notion of intactness be. Even the story of creation does not require that the world sprang into being, but only that it was made, and then that it took six days to stock

it properly. There is nothing logically absurd in the idea that the world was created, or that it was created however long ago one pleases. I have only tried to show that any such hypothesis, if arbitrary, slides quickly into absurdity. But not every such hypothesis is arbitrary, and only the possibility of empirical support prevents its logical collapse. With this we may finally turn to the fresh set of difficulties which the admission of evidence apparently imposes upon us.