VI

EVIDENCE AND HISTORICAL RELATIVISM

Historical Relativism, as a form of scepticism regarding our ability to make true statements about the past, stands in marked contrast to the two forms of scepticism we have so far considered. To begin with, it has been taken seriously, and has been actively endorsed, by a great many practising historians, including some very distinguished ones. And, in setting the position up, one apparently requires, in contrast with the first sort of scepticism, that some statements really are about the past, and, in contrast with the second sort of scepticism, that there really is a past for such statements to be about. That there really is, or was, a past, is insisted upon by Charles Beard, who speaks of 'history as past actuality', meaning, by this, 'all that has been said, done, felt, and thought, by human beings on this planet since humanity began its long career'.[1] We do not, of course, have direct access to history-as-actuality, but only indirect access through using 'history as record', that is to say, documents, monuments, symbols, memories, or bits and pieces of the *present* world which stand in certain relations with history-as-actuality. Finally, Beard speaks of history-as-thought. This is *about* history-as-actuality, but 'instructed and delimited by history as record'.[2] So far there is plainly nothing much out of the ordinary in this analysis:[3] indeed it *is* simply the ordinary way of looking upon the activity of the historian. Beard really departs from the ordinary account only by holding that certain causal factors, operating upon the individuals who seek to make statements about history-as-actuality, somehow deflect them from making true and objective statements. I shall, however, begin by concerning myself only with the ordinary part of Beard's discussion, and deal with the relativity factors afterwards, hoping to show that they are not so damaging as Beard and some of his supporters and critics have been led to suppose.

It is refreshing, after all this time, to deal with a view so soothing to our ordinary notions about history, a view which holds that we are after all

logically enabled to make statements about the past, instead of statements which, though aimed at the past, are somehow always turned aside from their target and hit, instead, the present or the future. Beard's contemporaries, the Pragmatists, insisted that statements about history-as-actuality are to be analysed, in the end, as statements about history-as-record, as though the documents, monuments, and so on, stood as a statement-proof curtain between ourselves and a past we could not so much as mention. It is not the documents, however, which stand *between* us and the past, on the contrary, they are just what enable us to find out about a past we could not begin to chart without 'record and knowledge authenticated by criticism and ordered with the help of the scientific method'.[1] They provide the means but not the object of historical query. Ronald Butler puts this succinctly:

> When we claim to know a past event, we are doing something different from merely evaluating the evidence. On such occasions, we do not think of the evidence as an impenetrable curtain: we claim to be looking through the fabric and beyond. . . . We have yet to analyse 'looking through the fabric and beyond'.[2]

This is certainly a difficult notion to analyse, partly at least because—if I may protract the metaphor which does not quite permit one to say what one wishes—it is only by 'looking through the curtain and beyond' that we can see the fabric. Less metaphorically, just to apprehend something as *evidence* is already to have gone beyond the stage of merely making statements about *it:* to count something as evidence is already to be making a statement about something else, namely, that for which it is taken as evidence. And taking *E* as evidence for *O* is to see *E* differently from the way we would if we had no notion at all about *O*. Thus, just to see something as *evidence* is already to be 'looking through the fabric and beyond'.

With regard to statements about the past, to see something *E* as evidence for one of them is to be seeing *E* in a certain temporal perspective. And indeed, it is only with reference to the past that we can license certain descriptions we give of what we see. Of a traveller returned from Venice, I may ask whether he saw the *Rondanini Pietà* of Michelangelo. This is an instructive example, for, not very long ago, those who saw the same object which is now so-called would not have said they saw

the *Rondanini Pietà*: until quite recently, this object was taken to be a detached piece of the foundation work in the Palazzo Rondanini in Rome, and those who saw it, saw it as *that*. Now, restricting ourselves to temporally neutral vocabulary, there are predicates true of this object that are compatible with both descriptions, for example, it is marble, is so many centimeters along its longest axis, weighs so many kilograms, and so on. To speak of it as a foundation stone is already to give it some temporal dimension, that is, to relate it to antecedent acts of masonry. Similarly, to speak of it as a statue is to relate it to antecedent acts of stone carving. To describe it as a statue by Michelangelo, or better, as the last of his four known pietàs, is to make use of a rather precise temporal predicate. It is because people did not see the pietà as something this predicate was true of that it ended up in the *palazzo* basement. The important thing, however, is that to designate it thus is to connect it with the past; to see something *more* than a piece of marble, so many centimeters long along its longest axis. To be able to see it as Michelangelo's work is to have looked through the curtain and beyond. Employing our temporal vocabulary, irreducible, as I have argued, to a temporally neutral idiom, is to be past the curtain. Or, if you wish, the curtain falls between past-referring language and temporally neutral language. But in temporally neutral language we cannot so much as speak of what we see as historical *evidence*.

Asked for a closer analogy, I would recommend that one think of objects in the present world as comparable to words, and the historical use and understanding of them as comparable to reading. It does not ordinarily occur to us to think of the words in which something is written as an inky curtain *between* us and the meaning they have: in reading, if you like, we see through the words and 'beyond', and indeed hardly ever notice the words in their status as physical objects, that is, as hooks and circles of dried ink. There are, I suppose, three main classes of individuals who see *only* marks when presented with a sheet of words: the illiterates, people literate in one notation but illiterate in another, and those who suffer from a certain sort of brain damage. The Sicilian peasant who does not see a certain stone pile as a Norman tower is historically illiterate: he does not know what the stones *say*. A classical scholar examining an Etruscan inscription, knows already that these marks are meaningful, but

does not know what they mean: he has not learned to read these marks and, in a sense, is therefore abnormally concerned with the marks *as* marks. It is not easy to find an example of someone here who fits the case of the man with brain damage. The closest I can come to it is the philosopher who insists that *all* we see are present things, that we do not see the past; a person, in short, for whom reading is somehow an unintelligible activity. We do not see the past now; we see only what is before us. But reading is an interpretative activity, and just to see marks as words is already to see them as demanding interpretation. We cannot, surely, translate what a book is about into an indefinitely long set of statements about the letters it is printed in, unless we stretch our concept of 'letter' and so build into it the precise concepts we would have sought, through translation, to eliminate. It is in just this sense that I have been insisting that the language of time cannot be paraphrased in temporally neutral vocabulary.

Returning now to Beard's distinction, we might say that it is only with reference to 'history as actuality' that anything is to be constituted as 'history as record'. Accordingly, it is a shade disingenuous to wonder how it is possible to move from 'history as record' to 'history as actuality'. For just to be seeing something as 'history as record' is already to have made that move. Otherwise we would just be seeing *things*. Too frequently, epistemological discussions in history begin by assuming something that is false: that we are all of us temporally illiterate. It then becomes a pressing question how we can go from present to past. The answer is that we cannot. We could not for the plain logical reason, that in any inference from present data to past fact, we would certainly require some general rule, some principle, some proposition amongst the premisses of our inference of *this* form: 'If E then F' where E refers to a present datum and F to some past event. And it would be a baffling problem to account for such propositions if we had only what is present to go by. We could, indeed, not understand such propositions. We do understand them readily enough, however, and those who could make sense of nothing but temporally neutral language can hardly account for this fact. One may insist, in a kantian way, upon the categorical character of time. But whether this is correct or not, it is a fact, I think, that we automatically acquire our concept of a past as we acquire our language,

which is rich in past-referring predicates. Without this, I cannot see how history should so much as begin. It was a great insight on Vico's part to regard the beginning of language and the beginning of history as of a piece. No one who is master of his language can, I say, live wholly in the present. Or he can do so only by a special wrench of the will, and is, because he must be *rejecting* a richer temporal existence, living in the present in only a derivative sense. Roughly in the way that Marie Antoinette was living an Arcadian life at the Petit Trianon at Versailles: a matter of *mauvaise foi*.

These considerations might be brought out in another way. It has been shown, I think conclusively,[1] that one cannot give definitions of our various temporal distinctions without making at least tacit reference, in the definientia, of the temporal notions already contained in the definienda. Someone, for instance, might try to define the past as that which it is logically possible to remember. But the use of the word 'remember' in the defining expression already makes some tacit reference to the notion pastness: it is part of the *meaning* of 'remembers' that what is remembered is past: 'remembers', as I would say, is a *past-referring term*. So such a definition would be contaminated by circularity. One might, comparably, undertake to define the *present* as that which one *is* in fact experiencing.[2] It follows that one cannot be experiencing the past or the future. But 'is experiencing' involves a relation between an individual and an experiendum, in particular a confrontation of the latter by the former, and one can only confront, in the relevant sense, what one is contemporary with. So the notion of presentness is, once more, already contained in the defining expression. True, one might go on to say that it is logically possible to experience both past and present, but this means, once one has analysed it, that one could have experienced something when it was present, or that one will be able to experience something when it will be present. The concept of presentness is built into the concept of experience, so that it is analytically necessary that one can only experience the present. Given this logical fact, together with an identification of knowledge with experience, it becomes difficult to see how one can know the past: the past is one of the things which is not experienced. But if we go on to ask how, if all we experience is the present, we can possibly know the past, we are assuming a temporally neutral sort of

experience. And this, I have been arguing, is unrealistic. If we heed the manner in which we do in fact experience the world, the really pressing question would be this: how, if we did not know the past, could we possibly experience the present world as we do? For in fact, and our language shows this, we are always experiencing the present world in a logical and causal context which is connected with past objects and events, and hence with reference to objects and events which we cannot be experiencing at the time when we are experiencing the present. And there is no way of widening, so to speak, our concept of the present so as to bring these into the present. When Proust experiences the tea-steeped *madeleine*, he is not also *experiencing* Tante Leonie and Combray: he is remembering them with a remarkable clarity, and the whole force of the passage in which he describes all this depends upon our recognition that these things are not present and will never be, that they are irremediably past, and can only be artistically recaptured. But we do not recapture what we experience at the *time* we experience it: 'recaptures', in the specific Proustian sense, is logically a past-referring term. His experience with the madeleine is a dramatized example of what happens typically and commonly on the part of those who have acquired any past at all. His sense of *puzzlement*, just after tasting the cake and tea, about what these *mean*, is special, of course: it is a case of not being able momentarily to read something that one knows how to read. But it is for all that, experiencing the present as significant of the past without being able quite to say what it is that it is significant *of*. In fact he has experienced the present in the light of the past without, for a difficult moment, being able to establish a connection, until finally it becomes clear that 'the taste was that of the little crumb of madeleine which on Sunday Mornings at Combray . . . when I used to say good day to her in her bedroom, my Aunt Leonie used to give me . . .'. In a less personal manner, of course, and without any comparable reference to memory, all of us might sense the same puzzlement in looking at the slabs of Stonehenge: our experience is that of being unable to read, knowing, meanwhile, that there is a message to be made out. And this is to be experiencing the present in the light of the past.

There are two exercises which are indispensable to the analytical philosopher of history. The first is to try to imagine what it would be like

to experience the present without knowing anything at all about the past. The second is to try to imagine what it would be like to experience the present if we *also* knew the future. Concerning the latter, I shall have more to say later on. But concerning the former, this much at least can be said, that our experience of the *present* is very much a matter which depends upon our knowledge of the past. We will, then, necessarily experience the present differently in accordance with the different pasts to which we are able to connect it. Proust is full of instructive examples of this. There is, for example, the inability of Mme Sazarin to experience Mme de Villeparisis as an old woman, for she recalls that woman when she was full of a fatal charm, and from a time when she exercised an immense erotic power over Mme Sazarin's father; while Marcel, who has no access to that past, is unable to experience Mme de Villeparisis as anything other than an old woman in connection with whom erotic considerations can scarcely arise. I emphasize this before turning once more to Beard. It is not simply that present factors tend to distort our statements about the *past*. *Past* factors tend to distort our experience of the present, so that, loosely speaking, one might say that Marcel and Mme Sazarin were hardly experiencing the *same person*. It is, as we shall see, as difficult to extract the past from the present as it is to join the future with the present. The Rondanini Pietà was carved from a Greek column. One could see that column, before its transformation, as ancient. But who could see it in, say, the fourteenth century as the column out of which the Rondanini Pietà was to be carved by Michelangelo?

Beard, and historical relativists generally, complain of the advantages enjoyed by scientists which are unavailable to historians. He says, for example, that unlike the scientist, the historian cannot observe his subject matter: 'He cannot see it *objectively* as the chemist sees his test tubes and compounds.'[1] This is in some way an odd kind of lamentation. Our incapacity, which is granted, to observe the past, is not a defect in history itself, but a deficiency which it is the precise purpose of history to overcome. It is not, comparably, a deficiency in medical science that people fall ill, but rather, the deficiency in human existence in which illness consists is precisely what we have medical science *for:* we would not need it if we were always sound. That cities lie at a spatial distance

from one another is not to be regarded as a defect in our systems of transportation: it is a deficiency, if one may style it such, which systems of transportation are precisely designed to overcome. It is just because we do not have direct access to the past that we have history to begin with: history owes its *existence* to this fact: it makes history possible rather than impossible or unnecessary.

But it is too obvious to require labouring that scientists do not as a general rule have access, via direct observation, to their subject-matter. It is precisely because what they often deal with *is* unobservable that they have recourse to elaborate theories and techniques, and what scientists can directly observe may stand in no more intimate a relationship to their subject-matter than what historians can observe—medals and manuscripts and potsherds—stands to theirs. The unobservability of subject-matter may be due to different reasons. It is perhaps a logical truth that we cannot observe the past, and merely a matter of contingent fact that we cannot observe electrons or genes. But that the grounds should be logical in the one case and factual in the other does not entail any difference in current *practice*. There may be branches of science in which the subject-matter is observable: certain parts of chemistry, of zoology, and geology, for instance, come to mind. But these are apt to be very elementary sciences in contrast with, say, atomic physics, and the fact that the most highly developed sciences are concerned specifically with unobservables shows, I think, that the unobservability of subject-matter is not an overwhelming disadvantage for science, or that access to subject matter is an overwhelming advantage. Therefore, when Beard complains that the 'historians must "see" the actuality of history through the medium of documentation. That is his sole recourse'—we need waste little sympathy. It is too common a feature of scientific work for it to raise any *special* problems for history. I have argued that without reference to history-as-actuality, historians could not so much as see documents as such. And comparably, in science, without relying upon concepts concerned with unobservable entities, scientists could not read the marks on photographic plates or the tracks in cloud chambers or oscilloscopes. Again, this is an obvious point. It takes a considerable training in theoretical work before one is in a position to see the relevant aspects of such marks. Optically we may be the scientist's equal, but we do not,

for all that, see things as he does.[1] And surely this is the case with historical documents. If we are unable to read these documents, it is not glasses but historiographical instruction which is required. There are plain and obvious differences between history and the sciences, but they do not lie here.

There is a second contrast between history and science which Beard draws, and this brings us to the heart of the relativist's chief position. It is a contrast which turns upon a different sense of the word 'objective', the sense, namely, in which 'objective' is contrasted with 'biased'. There is something inherent in the subject-matter dealt with by scientists and historians respectively which permits an attitude of neutrality on the scientists' part and which forces a partisan attitude on the historians. 'The events and personalities of history in their very nature involve ethical and aesthetic considerations,' Beard writes, while, by contrast, 'events in chemistry and physics [invite] neutrality on the part of the "observer".'[2] It is true that historians deal with human beings, and that human beings have attitudes. But that this entails any difference between historical and scientific practices is surely wrong, and questions of entailment apart, it is remarkable that an historian should make such a claim. The slightest familiarity with the history of science would contradict it. In the seventeenth century, for example, scientists were overwhelmingly motivated by ethical and aesthetic considerations, nor could it easily have been otherwise, given the religious and moral atmosphere in which they worked. It is doubtful if these considerations are wholly absent from science today. The image of the dispassionate and coldly objective scientist is itself an ethical ideal, and even if it is one to which a good many scientists perhaps conform, it would be evidence of the most extraordinary naïveté to suppose that scientists are in fact as neutral as we should like them to be. There are just too many rewards connected with scientific achievement, not to mention the sheer desire to be *right*, for us to suppose that scientists do not have to make sometimes quite strenuous efforts towards being neutral. Claude Bernard wrote:

> Men who have an excessive faith in their own theories or in their ideas are not only poorly disposed to make discoveries, but they also make very poor observations. They necessarily observe with a preconceived idea, and, when they have begun an experiment, they want to see in its results only a confirmation of

> their theory. . . . It quite naturally happens that those who believe too much in their own theories do not sufficiently believe in the theories of others. . . . The conclusion of all this is that it is necessary to obliterate one's opinion as well as that of others when faced with the decisions of the experiment.[1]

Pierre Duhem comments on this passage:

> Such a rule is not easily followed. It requires of the scientist an absolute detachment from his own thought and a complete absence of animosity when confronted with the opinion of another person; neither vanity nor envy ought to be countenanced by him. . . . Freedom of mind, which constitutes the sole principle of experimental method, according to Claude Bernard, does not depend merely on intellectual conditions, but also on moral conditions, making its practice rarer and more meritorious.[2]

Note that the deliberate distortion of results is not what is in issue here. Beard does not mean of historians, nor Bernard and Duhem of scientists, that it is hard for them to forebear from forgery and hoax. It is rather a case of *involuntary* distortion, induced for whatever reason. But here again, Duhem's observation that it is *hard* to retain objectivity; that retaining it is altogether praiseworthy and hence not automatic on the part of a scientist, goes a considerable distance towards softening, if not, indeed, obliterating Beard's distinction. A disposition towards bias is something common to the different disciplines.

There are certain factors which, in Beard's view at least, finally render nugatory any attempt by historians to maintain an openness to fact and a freedom of mind: 'Whatever acts of purification the historian may perform, he remains human, a creature of time, place, circumstance, interest, and culture.'[3] It is hard to see whether there is here an implicit slur or an implicit compliment for *scientists*. But if the fact that they too are human, and have human interests and predilictions, is not incompatible with their finding truth, it is difficult to see why it should be different for historians. Historians from different backgrounds may naturally be concerned with different things, but their differing provenances surely do not automatically require that they would not each be making true statements. The classical philosophical criticism of the relativist view is that it rests upon a confusion of the causes of a belief and the reasons for a belief. The fact that there should be *causes* for a belief is utterly independent of the question as to whether that belief is well grounded, and *that*

question we can decide in utter ignorance of the causes which may have operated on the man who held it. A writer may, because of his Catholic background, take a favourable view of the proposition that the Borgia family were virtuous to a member, and that they have been badly maligned. It is up to him to make his case, however, and it is on the basis of the evidence he turns up that we decide for him or against him. Indeed his motives may make him sensitive to documents and possible interpretations of them which *less* committed historians might never have noticed. Scientists, no less than historians, are subject to causes. But in science, no more than in history, are beliefs accepted or rejected on *ad hominem* grounds. There are few more pernicious beliefs than the one which suggests that we have cast serious doubts upon a belief by explaining why someone came to hold it. One might, for instance, explain Beard's belief by appeal to the fact that he was an historian, and hence much concerned with the *causes* of mens' beliefs. But to *point out* that fact does not *refute* Beard's thesis, nor can we say that his thesis is erroneous *because he was an historian*. It is erroneous in the way in which any thesis which fails to square with the facts is. This does not mean that what Beard says is not important however. I myself have been insisting that the time at which they are made is one of the factors which have to be taken into consideration when we evaluate an historical sentence, and it may very well be true that this is not always the case with scientific sentences when the latter, for instance, make no specific temporal claims.

Even here, of course, some careful qualification must be made, for it has been clearly established that in some sense it is important to assign a date to a given theory. For instance, Ernest Nagel has shown that we cannot,[1] without some such restriction, speak of the reducibility of thermodynamics to mechanics. If we are thinking of the mechanics of Newton's time, the reduction will not go through. So we have to speak of the mechanical theories as held at a certain date. Nevertheless, it is a contingent fact that one mechanical theory should have been held in the seventeenth century, and another in the nineteenth century. In regard to the logic of reduction, no essentially temporal reference is required, and this is not quite the case with history. But this is a matter to which I shall turn later. I want now to bring out what I think is the essential misconception in Beard's analysis.

There are many crucial differences between history and science, but, in our first skirmishes with Beard, we have been able, I think, to see that he has almost uncannily managed not to identify any of them. I shall endeavour to explain this curious blindness by suggesting that Beard had an almost total misconception of science. Holding, as he did, to an erroneous picture of science, he contrasted it with history, a discipline he practised with paramount skill. Finding a discrepancy between history, as he understood it, and science, as he misunderstood it, he concluded that there were inherent defects in history which had nothing corresponding to them in the sciences. These 'defects' are, in fact, inherent features of science, and once we have come to recognize this, we will be able at once to see the source of Beard's error, and rid ourselves of the contrast between history and science as he framed it. But it is not merely that these so-called defects in history are something to be found in science as well. They are rather *sine qua non* for *empirical* inquiry, *including* history.

What Beard found unsettling about history was not so much that historians' hypotheses are *caused*, but that historians must have recourse to hypotheses at all. As though the use of hypotheses were some fatally disfiguring *faute de mieux* in historical inquiry, brought in as a consequence of our granted incapacity to see and observe what it is that we are interested in finding out about. It is precisely here that we can begin to discern the misleadingness of the analogy, or metaphor, that we 'see' the past (history-as-actuality) through the medium of documents (history-as-record). The prejudice here is that we know what we can see, and only what we can see, and that, accordingly, if we are to know the past, we must somehow be able to see it: for otherwise (and this was the problem that tormented Lewis) how can we know the past at all? While there can be little doubt that observing is an essential, indeed uneliminable feature of empirical knowledge, it is not by any means the whole of it. It is sufficiently striking a feature of scientific inquiry, however, that, coupling it with the prejudice which identifies knowledge with observation, one can understand the great desire of empiricism to effect a total translation of the language of science into observational vocabulary. Hence the appeal of Pragmatism and Phenomenalism as variants of the radical empiricist programme, an appeal dimly sensed by Beard, who wrote as one who believed that major premisses are somehow fatally disfiguring

blemishes in syllogisms, or that, at any rate, the use of syllogisms is, in some sense, a fatally disfiguring blemish in historical work. One has access to the past only through inference, and to make such inferences requires, or presupposes, certain theoretical sentences, whether made explicit or not, which connect present evidence with past fact. But it is not in fact such sentences which primarily concern Beard. It is rather, I think, the fact that we use theories in some manner or other to *organize* the events, evidence for which is to be found in history-as-record. And it was Beard's odd persuasion that theories in this sense are not used in science, that in science one can just see things the way they are. If we could just see the events which concern us as historians, that would be ideal. But we cannot. And so we resort to hypotheses. And this, somehow, is a bad thing.

Beard writes:

> Any overarching hypothesis or conception employed to give coherence and structure to past events in written history is an interpretation of some kind, something transcendent.[1]

Now I think it true that historians do, that written history must, employ such 'overarching hypotheses', and I shall later argue this in detail. Here, however, I am concerned to raise two questions. The first is whether this fact about history serves, as such, to make the contrast Beard wishes to establish between history and science. And secondly, whether there might be some contrast *within* history, between pieces of written history which do and which do not make use of such overarching hypotheses. That is to say, even if in fact every piece of written history should prove to have employed these conceptions, could we, at least ideally, conceive of a piece of written history which did not, and which then would satisfy Beard as being the sort of *objective* history which history, to its detriment, has not so far succeeded in achieving? What would such an account look like?

Let us first state, what the argument entitles us to state: that (*a*) a theory may be correct or incorrect independently of what caused somebody to entertain it, and (*b*) as a general rule we determine whether a theory is correct by making observations, and, finally, (*c*) nothing is an observation apart from a theory of some sort. Let us abandon, then, the image of the

historian peering through a screen of documents and trying to make out a landscape of past events. Let us rather see him as trying to test, or support, or check up on some *account* of past events by peering at 'history-as-record'. This would give some further sense to my earlier observation that we could not see what we see as history-as-record without implicit reference to history-as-actuality. One wants to find out whether a certain account of the past is correct. One then makes what might properly be called an historical observation. One checks the records, loosely speaking. But notice in passing that 'is a record' is a relational predicate. We speak of things as records *of*. So to be correctly designated a record, the thing so called must already stand in a certain relationship with something else. My point, however, is that one does not go naked into the archives. But then, it might be argued, neither does one go naked into the laboratory. 'It is impossible,' Duhem wrote, 'to leave outside the laboratory door the theory that we wish to test, for without theory it is impossible to regulate a single instrument or interpret a single reading.'[1] Without theories, 'the readings would be devoid of meanings'. It will be obvious that my sympathies are wholly with this account of Duhem's, an account to which, were this a work in philosophy of science, one could devote a great deal of careful analysis. I cite it here, however, because of the marked contrast in which it stands to the implicit picture of science Beard seems to have been dominated by.

Beard, I want to suggest, was essentially a Baconian in philosophy, and there is an essentially Baconian error in his thought. Bacon correctly and importantly indicated that human beings are subject to the distorting influence of a variety of different prejudices which he labelled 'Idols of the Human Mind'. We must, he felt, if we are to advance in knowledge, rid ourselves of these idols, and approach Nature fresh and without preconception. But then, and almost as though he were seduced by a pun, Bacon went from this salutary advice to the decidedly unsalutary injunction that we go to Nature without *theories*. He thought, indeed, that his own method of 'true induction', employed by men of open minds, would permit them, by means of a complex set of tabulations, finally, and without theories, to arrive at the 'form' of phenomena. We know now that Bacon's system is inherently impossible,[2] that science, were it to have heeded Bacon,[3] would have ground to a dead halt, and

that Bacon, accordingly, was not the instigator of the scientific revolution he hoped for, since *that* revolution was based upon the use of a method, the hypothetic-deductive method, which Bacon himself would have found repugnant. Beard was a Baconian in the sense that he assumed, not merely that science can, but that science does get on without hypotheses; and that hypotheses are of a piece with the Idols of the Human Mind.

The question 'Can physics be objective?' sounds strange, I think, but not nearly so strange as *this* reason for a negative answer: physics is not objective because it employs theories and hypotheses. The strangeness of this answer lies in the fact that it is hard to know what, apart from a set of theories and hypotheses, together with testing and evaluating them, one can *mean* by physics anyway. But moreover, while it is a fact that physicists may be objective in varying degrees, may or may not allow personal and philosophical considerations to determine the readings they give of phenomena, this fact would come to very little if, simply by virtue of using *theories*, they were automatically to be disqualified as objective. Were a physicist to take seriously the idea that there is some incompatibility between his desire for objectivity and his use of theories, it is not easy to see how, except by finding employment elsewhere, he could continue to regard himself as an objective person. He had better not seek employment as an historian, however. Not if Beard is right. And I have argued that he is right about history. It is only that he is wrong about science, and, for that matter, wrong about the whole structure of empirical knowledge. For the precise criterion he sought to use to distinguish invidiously and despairingly between history and science turns out to be one of the important features they share. The remarkable thing is, however, that he should have been right about history at all. For it is not a common thing to say that history employs conceptions and theories. Usually, indeed, just the *reverse* contrast is drawn between history and science, and the two are opposed in roughly the way in which fact and theory are.

At this point I should like to consider a variant of Beard's views which has been defended by Professor W. H. Walsh, a variant whose examination will help, I hope, to show some further philosophical features of the Relativist's position. Walsh, to be sure, is highly critical of Beard's theses, but

nevertheless feels that something can, in the end, be said in their favour. He points out that historians often have theoretical commitments of rather a special sort, and that, though some historians, for example Marxists, exhibit these more dramatically than others, some such set of commitments is adhered to by all historians. There are schemes of interpretation he suggests, which an historian is likely to insist upon even in the face of what might appear to others as overwhelmingly contrary evidence. And some theories are held 'with greater confidence than . . . if they were merely empirical hypotheses'.[1] Assuming there are such theories, what would account for the pertinacity with which they are asserted? Walsh finds the answer to be 'differing philosophical considerations . . . moral and metaphysical beliefs . . . a general philosophy which is confirmed in many fields'.[2] Historians, then, 'approach the past each with his own philosophical ideas, and that . . . has a decisive effect on the way they interpret it.' But then, he contends, it is difficult to see how historians do otherwise: we could not 'even begin to understand unless we presupposed some propositions about human nature, unless we applied some notion of what is reasonable or normal in human behaviour'.[3] If this is so, then the historian's interpretations of the past will in some measure depend upon that set of presuppositions concerning human behaviour he is committed to; and historians, with differing philosophical commitments, will give interpretations which differ from these. Walsh goes on to say that this line of reasoning is simply an extension to human behaviour of that followed by Hume in his famous repudiation of miracles. Hume maintained that 'we cannot give credence to accounts in the past the occurrence of which would have abrogated the laws of physical nature'.[4] It was because he was philosophically committed to certain presuppositions regarding what is 'normal or reasonable' in nature that Hume would have given a considerably different interpretation of biblical events than someone who was, say, more pious or more accommodating.

Here again there is no point in denying what is plain fact. Historians do, with varying degrees of explicitness, adhere to often varying sets of presuppositions regarding the manner in which human beings behave. Let us grant even that they must, if dealing with human behaviour, adhere to *some* such set of preconceptions. The question for the moment is

whether these are facts of a kind uniquely pertinent to history, and it seems obvious to me that they are not. We have in any field of inquiry some criteria concerning normal behaviour, and tend to be hostile to or suspicious of accounts which seem to violate these criteria. And we are often inclined to insist upon our criteria here for rather a long time before we will so much as admit that we have genuinely contravening evidence. But this is so in science no less than in history. Considering just Hume's argument, the alleged occurrence of miracles would be at least as incompatible with our criteria for accepted *physical* behaviour as they would be with our criteria for human behaviour. And indeed it was as a consequence of an apparent conflict between miraculous claims, on the one hand, and physical theories on the other, that Hume felt rationally constrained to reject the former.

The matter does not quite end here, however, and what Beard and Walsh together are insisting upon may yet bring out some important fact about history. Someone might contend that we can easily enough tell when this historian or that is a committed Marxist or a committed Freudian. We can readily identify the theoretical presuppositions in such cases. But Walsh wishes to emphasize that it is not merely those historians who are unique in having sets of preconceptions. We are not without them ourselves, only ours are perhaps different, and if we reject their preconceptions, it is only because we are committed to a set of our own, a set perhaps so deeply embedded in our general conceptual scheme that we are hardly conscious of the fact that we have them. Indeed, what passes for 'common sense' might be precisely just such a set of preconceptions. It is perhaps not easy to state these preconceptions in any exhaustively explicit way. Nevertheless, we might roughly be able to say at any given moment when something fails to square with what we regard as normal or reasonable behaviour. We feel a certain shock or register a certain feeling of surprise upon hearing of some piece of behaviour, and this shock or surprise is a sign that our common-sense views have been offended. If the shock is great enough we are disposed simply to reject the account as incredible. This must surely be what Walsh has in mind when he writes as follows:

I cannot escape, if I am to make any sense of my material, making some general judgements about human nature, and in these I shall find my own views constantly cropping up. I shall find myself involuntarily shocked by this event and pleased by that, unconsciously seeing this action as reasonable and that as the reverse.[1]

Now so stated, this is, I think, a very much milder view of things than Hume's. For there is, here, no suggestion that we are to employ our sense of shock as a criterion for what must actually have happened or must not have happened. It is hardly incompatible with common sense to suppose that strange and conceptually shocking things do in fact occur, much less queer and morally shocking things. I may find Suetonius's account of the *dolce vita* of the Emperor Nero morally shocking, and you may take it in your stride: I may be pleased that he is done in, and you may blandly accept the fact. You share neither my indignation nor my jubilation. But this need be the only disagreement between us. Indeed, unless we agreed on the facts, there would be no room for a genuine moral difference. That we morally differ is hardly incompatible with our mutual capacity to regard the same accounts as true or false. So the factors which Walsh here draws to our attention may affect our moral attitudes towards events, but leave quite unaffected our powers as historians. Surely he must have meant something more exciting than this if he is to couple his own views with those of Hume. So I shall assume that what he meant to say is this. Granted that common sense permits the occurrence of some surprising and shocking things, relative to a given set of presuppositions—and there would be no such thing as a shock or surprise if we *didn't* have some preconceptions[2]—there are certain accounts which we simply would not *allow* as true no matter what the 'evidence' for them might be. For instance, if someone were to say that Plato wrote the *Laws* when he was three days old, using 'three days old' as it is in fact used, and designating by the *Laws* just that piece of writing customarily so designated, we would, I think, generally consider that no amount of evidence could get us to believe this statement.[3] So let us say that there are certain preconceptions, such that any account which is incompatible with them is rejected as historically inadmissible. This was more or less Hume's position on miracles. And it was more or less Bradley's point, as Walsh himself suggests, when, in the *Presuppositions of a Critical History*, Bradley proposes that we are to regard as believable (or admissible) only those accounts of events which have some analogy in present experience.[4]

Criteria for the admissibility of historical accounts carry us, of course, very scant distance in historical work. It tells us at best which accounts are believable, but there is no compulsion to *believe* a believable account. That the philosopher Kant took his mistress to Crete is *believable*. It even has analogues in present experience: some people take their mistresses to Crete. For all that, we are not required to *believe* the statement, but only to allow it is not ruled out by our preconceptions. Bradley was looking to find a criterion for ruling out certain accounts as *impossible*. Accounts of miracles are not, in fact, in violation of any logical criteria: they are, commonly, *logically* possible. But Bradley wanted a notion of empirical impossibility, and recommended that we use consonance with present experience as a criterion for empirical possibility. But not every *possible* account is *true*, nor, if I may be pardoned for so speaking, is every possible event actual.

But it is hardly to be expected that historians should, in fact, differ very markedly over their criteria for *impossible* accounts. Indeed, we might very nearly appeal to Bradley's own criterion by way of ruling out the possibility of there having ever been historians whose criteria of possibility were significantly different from ours: for we could find nothing analogous to such a person in *present* experience. And we might almost appeal to Hume's criterion of veracity in such cases, and ask whether the probability is not higher that such a personage was writing fiction than that the events he narrates should have ever happened. It would almost be the case that we would not allow, by our criteria, that such a person be considered an historian, whatever 'evidence' he might produce that he was one. Nevertheless, if this is what it comes down to, we have not achieved much. Historians with shared criteria of admissibility may give conflicting accounts, and the fact that we share these criteria would only permit us to say that both accounts are believable. For if one account is possible, it hardly follows that the other is *impossible*. *Each* of a pair of conflicting accounts may have some analogue in present experience.

We are, nevertheless, now in a position to state the form of historical relativism which these considerations suggest. It is that certain accounts are to be construed as *possible* relative to a set of preconceptions, and that any account inconsistent with these preconceptions will not be tolerated by historians whose preconceptions they are. But there may be differing

sets of preconceptions. Accordingly, a given account *A* may be possible relative to one set and impossible relative to another. Notice, incidentally, that if *A* is impossible relative to a set of presuppositions *P*, one would not, as it were, be insisting upon *P* in the face of contrary evidence, that is, evidence in favour of *A*. If *A* is impossible in the light of *P*, there just could not be evidence for it, so far as those who subscribe to *P* are concerned. One could only admit evidence for accounts which were *possible* relative to one's presuppositions. This would create something of a problem so far as accounting for changes in peoples' preconceptions was concerned, but it may very well be that these are not changed as a consequence of evidence coming to tell against them. At all events, I should like to examine briefly this version of relativism, a version, I think, which is invariant to the distinction between history and science.

Suppose we take an ideal case where two historians subscribe to a pair of conflicting historical sentences *S*-1 and *S*-2. Suppose, moreover, that the first historian has a set of preconceptions *P*-1, relative to which *S*-1 is admissible, and *S*-2 not; while the second historian subscribes to a set of preconceptions *P*-2, relative to which *S*-2 is admissible and *S*-1 not. It is important that we recognize that 'admissible' and 'impossible' are not, as it were, simple properties of sentences: we had better speak of 'admissible relative to' and 'impossible relative to' where what it is that statements are admissible or impossible relative to are sets of preconceptions. But let us emphasize the consequences of this relativization.

The first is that once we have relativized the sentences at issue, there can be no logical opposition between the results. Even though *S*-1 and *S*-2 are in logical opposition, '*S*-1 is acceptable relative to *P*-1' and '*S*-2 is acceptable relative to *P*-2' are not merely not logically opposed: they are both true. This result is similar to what would take place if one were to insist that every statement be relativized to its utterer. In that case, two sentences *p* and *q*, originally in opposition, become, once relativized, perfectly compatible. That is '*A* says that *p*' and '*B* says that *q*' are not merely not incompatible: they are both true.

But secondly, there can be no genuine disagreement between historians regarding the acceptability or impossibility of historical sentences. For either they share the *same* set of presuppositions, and hence cannot

genuinely disagree, or they have different sets of presuppositions, in which case they cannot genuinely disagree. They cannot genuinely disagree here because they must agree that a mooted sentence is acceptable relative to the presuppositions of the one and impossible relative to the presupposition of the other. To be sure, one might go on to say that there can nevertheless be some genuine conflict between sets of *presuppositions*. Or one can say this unless some further relativization occurs, for example they might have different criteria for the acceptability of a set of presuppositions, in which case there is no genuine disagreement about presuppositions, but at best a disagreement about criteria. My point is that there can be genuine disagreements only where there is common ground, and only where one may bring things into logical opposition. Otherwise we continue to dissolve disagreements through relativization.

With this we can finally evaluate one of the chief arguments sometimes brought forward in defence of historical relativism. Walsh writes: 'there is without doubt a *prima facie* case for an ultimate historical scepticism, a case which the spectacle of actual differences amongst historians greatly strengthens.'[1] But in fact the case is weakened if these differences amongst historians are genuine, and then only if they are differences of the right *kind*. For there are, I submit, levels of disagreement. To make the matter simple, let us suppose that there are just three levels of disagreement: disagreement over historical statements, over presuppositions, and over criteria for a given set of presuppositions. Now it seems to me that the bulk of historians' differences arise at the first level, over statements which are equally *acceptable*, the question being only over which of them, if either, is true. Historians, for example, differ over the question whether Caesar was or was not in Britain. But the fact that they differ lends not a scrap of support to the case for historical scepticism, for surely the statement that he was in Britain is acceptable to most historians, and impossible to very few. But the fact that it is acceptable to most entails that all historians to whom it is acceptable share the same set of presuppositions: otherwise none of them could genuinely differ. So there is a whole class of differences we may automatically discount.

Nevertheless, there can be disagreements over presuppositions, for instance, presuppositions regarding normal or reasonable human

behaviour, to take Walsh's example. Such disagreements surely exist. Nevertheless, each of a set of differing sets of presuppositions may, in turn, be equally acceptable to historians who share criteria for the acceptability of sets of presuppositions. It does not follow from the fact that a theory is acceptable that people will in fact accept it, for acceptability entails, not that the theory is correct, but that it satisfies the criteria for a theory. The phlogiston theory, for example, is scientifically acceptable, but nobody any longer accepts it. Indeed, it is precisely as a consequence of its scientific acceptability that it is not any longer accepted: had it failed to satisfy the criteria for a scientific theory, it would have been rejected for far different sorts of reasons than it was in fact rejected: if it failed to satisfy those criteria, it would not even have been regarded as a theory. So, in general, differences over presuppositions lend not a scrap of support to historical scepticism. For such differences are removable in principle, so long as those who differ in fact share criteria of acceptability for sets of presuppositions. And there can be little doubt that we change our presuppositions regarding rational human actions from time to time. So, once more, we can discount a whole class of disagreements as either irrelevant or inimical to historical relativism.

But, finally, there may be differences of a more ultimate sort. Men may differ on the very criteria in accordance with which they would adjudicate between theories, even general philosophical theories. The so-called conflict between science and religion might very well be an instance of this ultimate sort of disagreement, a disagreement so deep that there is nothing those who differ may appeal to as common ground. And it is just here, I think, that we can make a connection with the sorts of *moral* considerations which Walsh alluded to. There are perhaps differences of belief which resemble differences of attitude, differences of so fundamental a sort that we might term them *disagreements of principle*. One can perhaps do little better here than to speak of certain basic decisions, decisions of a sort which will determine what other kinds of decisions one is to make at higher levels. And such differences may disappear only when one or another party decides to cross over to the other side, to change his ultimate commitments. So, in a general way, one might say that whatever we believe finally is relative to some such basic decision, and that, in an important sense, such decisions are arbitrary. They are

arbitrary in the sense that they are not made in accordance with any criteria, for they determine, finally, what are to be the criteria we shall accept. But having allowed this much, we can, I think, now bring this entire discussion to an end by emphasizing that if one chooses to regard these facts as a basis for a scepticism with regard to history, one has no good grounds for doing so. Not because history is not relative to such basic decisions, but because every human cognitive enterprise is. One could not be sceptical about history without being sceptical about everything else, and this, finally, destroys whatever specific force relativism might be thought to have with regard to history. It was as though a man were to lament that it is a sad thing to be a Frenchman, for all Frenchmen die. He may easily and obviously be disabused of his melancholy through having it pointed out to him that Frenchmen are not uniquely mortal. If he persists, saying that he knows this, but what a pity it is that *Frenchmen* should die, we can point out that there is no reason why Frenchmen should be specially privileged, unless one has some peculiar prejudice. And so it is with history. History is no more and no less subject to the relativistic factors than science is. And if one says that there is a special pity in the fact that history is, there is nothing to say except this is a prejudice, and that one could not legitimately demand any exemptions here.

Walsh's argument, then, comes to very little because it comes to rather too much. If one were to demonstrate that it is impossible to make a true statement, it would follow, of course, that one could not make a true statement about the past. But why then call this *historical* scepticism? It is scepticism '*überhaubt*,' and we are not obliged to deal with '*überhaubt*' scepticism.

There were, however, two contrasts in Beard I wished to discuss. The first was his contrast between history and science. This turned out to be illegitimate. It was based upon a total misconception of science in that it suggested that science does not, while history does (to history's detriment), employ certain overarching schemes of organization which go beyond what is given. We destroyed this contrast through pointing out that the employment of such organizational schemes was a generic feature of empirical knowledge. The second contrast was within history

itself, a contrast between history which employs such schemes and history which does not. The question is whether, even ideally, there can be history of the latter sort. I shall now proceed to argue that this contrast too is bogus. To be sure, this might be said to follow from our results so far, so that no further argument here is required. Nevertheless, the matter demands some special analysis, and in carrying this out I shall be interested in making two points. First of all, there is an essential mistake, though an understandable one, in the model of historical activity implicit in Beard's language: that *there* is history-as-actuality, and *here* is history-as-record, and that it is the task of the historian to seek to reproduce (via history-as-thought) the former by means of the latter, though never quite succeeding. I shall try to show that we cannot succeed in this for rather different kinds of reasons than mere paucity of documentation, and I shall try to bring this out by trying to imagine what a *perfect* account would look like. Having seen why we cannot have a perfect account, we shall, I hope, see why it is not even an ideal for history to achieve, and that *in the nature of the case* historians are obliged to aim, not at a reproduction but at a kind of organization of the past. And this, finally, I shall try to exhibit as logically dependent upon topical interests which motivate historians, so that, if I am right, historical relativism will finally be vindicated. It will be vindicated in the sense that it is, in a general way, correct, and that we cannot conceive of history without organizational schemes, nor of historically organizing schemes apart from specific human interests.

My second point will be this. The difference between history and science is not that history does and science does not employ organizing schemes which go beyond what is given. Both do. The difference has to do with the *kind* of organizing schemes employed by each. *History* tells stories.

VII

HISTORY AND CHRONICLE

I began by saying that historians seek to make true statements about their past. And I have been maintaining, against certain philosophical arguments to the contrary, that they can in principle succeed in doing this, so the question, if I have been right, is not whether they can, but whether they do succeed in making such statements. That they do succeed in this I do not doubt, but I now wish to consider what further can be said regarding the kinds of statements it is their purpose to establish. Often, I think, the statements they make may be regarded as explicit answers to what I have elsewhere called 'historical questions';[1] questions of the form 'What happened at *x*?' where '*x*' stands for a spatial region during some past interval of time. The answers, even to the same historical question, may have varying degrees of explicitness and detail. Asked, for instance, what happened at Waterloo in 1815, I may answer merely 'Napoleon lost'. And this may be a perfectly good answer if this is all that he who posed the question wished to know. For people enter into historical questioning with varying amounts of antecedent information. We may indeed say that whole books exist which answer just the same question that 'Napoleon lost' also answers. Let us then say that one can specify a range of statements, relative to a single historical question, which differ in point of detail. These statements will all be about the same event, for example the Battle of Waterloo, but tell increasing numbers of things about it. At the opposite end of the range from the bland statement 'Napoleon lost' is what we might term the *maximally detailed account* of the Battle of Waterloo. It is *that* end of the range which will occupy me now.

It is sometimes contended that it is not merely the aim of historians to make true statements about the past, but to give, ideally, the maximally detailed statement about the past. And the question I shall concern myself with is whether they can, at least in principle, succeed at this end of the

range, given that we have been correct in concluding that they can succeed with statements at the other end.

Beard, at one point, complains that we cannot, though this, as a general rule, is a consequence of the fact that there are always parts of history-as-actuality for which we have no history-as-record, or at least none that we know about.[1] So, given that there are gaps in history-as-record, there are corresponding gaps in history-as-thought, holes, as it were, in our knowledge of the past. So *in fact* we have something which is always less than perfect knowledge of history-as-actuality, and sometimes, indeed, Beard means, by historical relativism, that our knowledge of the past is relative to a body of evidence actually in the possession of historians. But I want to know whether it is *only* a matter of fact that we have less than perfect knowledge here. And this can hardly be answered until we have some rather clearer idea than I think we have of what perfect knowledge would consist in. This, however, is a question which is not merely capable of being raised with regard to things past, things which, because they are past, are incapable of being known directly and must be found out about on the basis of what we can observe. We might raise it about things that we can in fact observe. With such things, I suppose, there is no problem of evidence, for we have, or can have, the thing itself to scrutinize. If there is a difficulty, it might lie elsewhere, and specifically, I think, it lies in the question of giving some meaning to the expression 'perfect knowledge of *x*'. What, for instance, would it be like to have perfect knowledge of the Empire State Building? Or the apple on the table? Or Brigitte Bardot? And if we have difficulty in saying what we mean by 'perfect knowledge' of contemporary objects, the lament that we lack perfect knowledge of the past is not very impressive. For the problem would have nothing to do with presentness or pastness, but with the very notion of perfectly knowing something.

The lament is nevertheless an interesting symptom in the syndrome of relativism, for it helps us to see why Beard was so deprecating of his profession. It was not merely that he saw it as defective in comparison with science, but defective, as well, in terms of its own implicit ideal of achieving the perfect account of events for which we have at best imperfect ones. And he blamed history-as-record for this instead of

questioning the validity of the ideal itself. Imagine an artist who subscribed to the Imitation Theory of art, and who became so obsessed with the imitation of reality, which falls always short of reproducing the subject, that he decided only the thing itself will do as an imitation of itself. He tries, accordingly, to go *all the way*, duplicating the landscape, using real trees, real water, real birds. Perfect success would, of course, be utter failure. For he would have produced, as a consequence of all his labours, not a work of art but the subject for one, and the labour of now making paintings of it would remain to be done. Not being what it is a picture of is not a defect in pictures, but a necessary condition for something to be a picture at all. And it is a mistake to suppose that everything which is in the subject must be reproduced in the picture when it is quite enough only that whatever is in the picture should be in the subject, or correspond to something there. Pictures, in the nature of the case, leave things out. And we may say as much of histories of things. What Beard fails to understand is that even if we could witness the whole past, any account we would give of it would involve selection, emphasis, elimination, and would presuppose some criteria of relevance, so that our account could not, unless it wished to fail through succeeding, include everything. It is true, of course, that there are gaps in the record, questions we would like to have answers to which we cannot have because we lack data. But this incontrovertible fact only conceals Beard's real complaint. Comparably, a man might want desperately to paint, but cannot because it is raining outside or the paint-shop is closed. But it would be almost pointless to mention these facts in connection with an artist who thinks of painting as actually duplicating his subjects. His incapacities are logical and not contingent, for he does not want to do art, he wants to be God, and painting for him is an unsatisfactory *faute de mieux*. This is an old platonic attitude, which considered it a scandal that pictures of beds were not themselves real beds, much less Real Beds. Beard's Baconian attitude towards science, which lay at the heart of one of the illegitimate contrasts he drew, was complicated by a platonic attitude towards art, or history, and this lay at the heart of the other illegitimate contrast. History-as-thought is the faulty imitation of history-as-actuality, where the term *faulty* is not used, as it were, to distinguish amongst imitations, but to characterize imitations as a class: an imitation of *x* just is not *x*. Something is missing. So we do not have perfect accounts, though this in part is due to the fact that an account of *x* is not *x*, and indeed can only be an account of *x* if there are things about *x* it leaves out.

I shall, however, return to the notion of a perfect account later. For I wish here to introduce another and different view of the task of historians. It is a view which, in a way, accepts the ideal of imitation of the past, but wants to insist that there is something beyond giving accounts, even perfect accounts, of the past, or parts of the past, which it is also the aim of history to do. For in addition to making true statements about the past, it is held, historians are interested in giving *interpretations* of the past. And even if we had a perfect account, the task of interpretation would remain to be done. The problem of just giving descriptions belongs to a humbler level of historical work: it is, indeed, the work of chroniclers. This is a distinction I am unable to accept. For I wish to maintain that history is all of a piece. It is all of a piece in the sense that there is nothing one might call a pure description in contrast with something else to be called an interpretation. Just to do history at all is to employ some over-arching conception which, in Beard's terms, go beyond what is given.[1] And to see that this is so is to see that history as an imitation or duplication of the past is an impossible ideal. Once these points have been established, we may, I think, go back to the notion of a perfect account somewhat better prepared to understand what, finally, is wrong with that notion. And I shall try to show that the reasons why we are unable to give a perfect account of the past do not have so much to do with the concept of an account, or to any fact about the past, or to gaps in history-as-record, but rather, and far more importantly, to certain facts about the future. Indeed, I shall contend, what *ultimately* makes the perfect account unfeasible is precisely what makes speculative philosophy of history unfeasible. I shall, accordingly, be engaged in a somewhat complicated polemic, but I shall begin with defending the notion that history is all of a piece. This will take up the entirety of this chapter, for there is a great deal involved in the issues it concerns.

The distinction between history and chronicle or, more invidiously, between *mere* chronicle and history *proper*, is frequently to be encountered in philosophical writings on history, and it is made with various intents.

Croce, for example, made the distinction with respect to accounts of those parts of the past in which we are vitally interested, in contrast with accounts that connect with no such vital interests, the latter being chronicles.[1] Chronicle, then, is academic history, though Croce trivialized his point by suggesting that we never at any rate write the history of things we are not interested in, so that *all* history, to use his celebrated *mot*, is contemporary history. In that case we could not write chronicles if we wanted to. Croce, to be sure, is infuriatingly inconstant in his writing, and it is hard to attach any single meaning to his celebrated slogan. He sometimes means, not that a piece of history must answer to some present interest, but rather must report something which has only an analogue in present experience, and, if it has no analogue, *then* it is chronicle and not history: he never, after all, said that all *chronicle* is 'present' chronicle. But apart from connecting with the present in one or another way, there is for him no further difference between history and chronicle, and certainly no formal difference. Chronicle, as he puts it, is 'dead history' while history is 'live chronicle', which is a little like saying that a man is a live corpse while a corpse is a dead man. Whatever the case, it is not this form of the distinction which is important for us.

A more pertinent way of framing the distinction is this. Chronicle is said to be just an account of what happened, and nothing more than that. It is a statement, of whatever degree of complexity, which lies in the range one end of which is given by the 'perfect account'. In fact, the perfect account, were it possible to state it, would still be nothing more than chronicle, for it would differ from other statements in the range only quantitatively, giving more details. Giving, indeed, *all* the details. So the very best kind of chronicle would still not quite be history in the proper sense, and something could then be properly a piece of history even if it reported far fewer details than the perfect account. *Proper* history regards chronicles as preparatory exercises. Its *own* task is rather concerned with assigning some meaning to, or discerning some meaning in, the facts allegedly reported by chronicles. Some such view as this seems to have been held by Professor Walsh, who sees two possibilities for historical work:

The first is that the historian confines himself (or should confine himself) to an exact description of what happened, constructing what might be called a plain

narrative of past events. The other is that he goes beyond such a plain narrative, and aims not merely at saying what happened, but also (in some sense) explaining it. In the second case the kind of narrative he constructs may be described as 'significant' rather than 'plain'.[1]

Chronicles, then, would be plain narratives; and history proper would be expressed in significant narratives. This is just the view I want to examine.

Let me first of all suggest that whatever piece of historical writing one chooses as an instance of a chronicle, or as even closely approximating a chronicle, it must do *something more* than satisfy the following two necessary conditions for any piece of history: *any* piece of history must (*a*) report events which actually happened; and (*b*) report them in the order of their occurrence, or, rather, enable us to tell in what order the events did occur.

I take it that these necessary conditions are not controversial, that they state the very least we expect of a piece of history, even though they by no means constitute, jointly, a *sufficient* condition for something to qualify as a piece of history. This is readily demonstrated. For anyone can produce something which satisfies (*a*) and (*b*) and which would *not* be admitted to be a piece of written history. Here, for instance, is one.

> *S*. Naram-Sin built the Sun Temple at Sippar; then Phillip III exiled the Moriscos; then Urguiza defeated the forces of Bueno Aires at Cepada; then Arthur Danto awoke on the stroke of seven, 20 October 1961.

Not merely is *S* not a narrative, but I think it readily demonstrable that a *significant* narrative is not merely a statement which satifies (*a*) and (*b*) together with a further necessary condition: (*c*) it explains what happened.

That a statement which satisfies all three of these conditions can still fall short of being a significant narrative is plainly demonstrable, for one can readily produce a statement which satisfies these conditions and is not a narrative *at all*. Here, for instance, is one.

> *S'*. Naram-Sin built the Sun Temple at Sippar as a consequence of pressure brought on him by the priestly class; then Phillip III exiled the Moriscos because of his religious convictions; then Urguiza defeated the forces of Buenos Aires at Cepada because he was better equipped; then Arthur Danto woke on the stroke of seven, 20 October 1961, because he wanted to get an early start for the excavations at Cervetri.

Accordingly, (*a*) through (*c*) cannot be said to constitute a sufficient condition for a significant narrative.

It may be objected here that these examples are not fair, since what was intended was a distinction between narratives, and neither *S* nor *S'* is one of these. This is a just criticism. But I have at least shown that '*N* is a narrative' cannot be analysed as '*N* satisfies (*a*) through (*c*)', much less '*N* satisfies (*a*) and (*b*)'; and for the moment this is enough. If we consider it to be the aim of historians to write narratives, then they plainly must do something more than describe things that happened, in the order in which they happened, even if, in addition, they explain why the things they describe did happen, and *even* if they correctly explain them, as *S'* does not. (What is wrong with *S'* is *not* that its explanations happen to be incorrect.) Whatever this something more is to be, I think I have proven that there must be something more.

I think, moreover, that we may assume it to be proven that whatever this 'something more' is to consist in, it must be invariant as to the distinction between plain and significant narratives, and cannot accordingly be used to distinguish *between* plain narratives and significant ones. Our problem, then, is to find out what this something more is, and then, when we find it, to find what *further* thing will serve to sort narratives into the two classes. And here, concerning just this latter part of our problem, I should like to point out two things which the difference cannot consist in, if we are to suppose that the distinction between plain and significant narratives is to be a distinction *within* history, so that some historians will be writing plain, and others significant narratives, or that some will be writing narratives more plain (or more significant) than others, and still be doing *history*.

First, a significant narrative must be something less than a substantive philosophy of history, for a contrast exists between history and philosophy of history, and if a significant narrative were an instance of the latter, the intended contrast would not be a contrast *within* history. This is so even if a speculative philosophy of history, such as Hegel's, contains an ordinary historical narrative as part of itself (as Hegel's does). There can be little doubt that some statements which occur in philosophies of history might (indeed must) also occur in ordinary pieces of historical writing, since philosophies of history are concerned with the *whole* of

history, including the past. Notice that philosophies of history *do* try to give explanations of the events they describe, and to attach some meaning to these events as well. So presumably the kind of explanation, and the kind of meaning relevant to genuinely significant narratives (which remain within history) must be different from these. I do not mean incidentally to argue that historians may not, wearing, so to speak, another hat, engage in philosophical speculative history. I only mean to say that when they do this, they are doing something *outside* history. If, finally, significant narratives were merely identified as speculative philosophical narratives of the whole of history, the distinction between plain and significant narratives would be between history and something else, not a distinction within history.

Secondly, there may be some theoretical works in the social sciences which contain, as parts of themselves, straight historical narratives. A book on business cycles may pause and tell a story. Nevertheless, a significant narrative cannot be this sort of story *together* with the rest of the book, because the book taken *in toto* is not a narrative of any kind, even if it happens to have a narrative part. If we were to call these books significant narratives, we would be doing more than abusing the notion of narrative, however. We would be contrasting plain narratives with works of a wholly different genre, contrasting history with the social sciences, and this, not being a distinction within history, would be inappropriate.

Bearing these limitations in mind, we turn now to the main question of seeking to determine by what criterion one might plausibly effect a distinction between kinds of narratives within history. It is true that Walsh has said that one kind of narrative explains, where the other kind merely describes. But he has gone on to say a good deal more than this, and what he says has a considerable interest in itself.[1] I want to examine his views, even though I shall ultimately reject his distinction, for we can, I think, learn a great amount about history in this way. *Enough* about history, in fact, to enable us to reject the distinction between history and chronicle, or between plain and significant narratives, or, what comes to the same thing, between explaining and describing in historical narration.

Walsh proposes that the difference between plain and significant narratives corresponds to, or represents, (1) two different levels of under-

standing and (2) two different kinds of knowledge. I shall consider these separately.

(1) Walsh offers, as instances of chronicle and history respectively, the sort of account we can, in the light of the information available to us, give of Greek painting in contrast with nineteenth-century political happenings. Thus illustrated, the 'distinction does answer to a real difference of historical understanding'.[1] The difference, in fact, is 'so profound that they might almost be said to constitute different genres'. Thus

> The narrative we can construct of nineteenth-century political history is both full and coherent; events in it can be presented in such a manner that their development seems to be orderly and intelligible. . . . But a history of Greek painting, or what passes for such a history, is a sorry affair by comparison, consisting of little but the names and approximate dates of a few celebrities with the titles of their works as recorded by ancient authors . . . really an unsatisfactory chronicle, a mere skeleton of a history.[2]

Now if this is a correct description of the level of understanding we have of Greek painting, it seems obvious to me that the distinction wanted cannot be supported by these illustrations. For should an account of Greek painting be but 'a bare recital of unconnected facts', then, obviously, we have no narrative account at all of Greek painting. A list is not a narrative: the New York Telephone Directory is not a piece of historical writing, though it might have its uses were someone to set out to write the history of New York City. Consider a similar example. Contrast a table of the important and the secondary painters of the Italian Renaissance with a full history of Italian Renaissance painting. Here we would be contrasting, not two narratives, but a table and a narrative. As we would be if we were to compare a table of the Kings of England with a history of English Royalty. But now suppose that all we had, by way of information on Italian Renaissance painting, was a list of names and dates of painters and pictures. This would correspond to our alleged portion of information regarding Greek painting. Were this our situation (and it happens not even to be our situation with Greek painting), it would hardly follow that we could not write a narrative of Italian Renaissance painting. It is only that we could not adequately

support, at every point, whatever narrative we might produce. And what is being overlooked in Walsh's analysis is the creative activity of what I shall term the 'historical imagination'.

References to imagination, in philosophical discussions, are almost certain to sound pious and windy. But there is, here at least, a logical point which this reference may bring out. To begin with, nobody need construct *de novo* the narrative history of the nineteenth century. It was an age permeated with an historical self-consciousness; men recorded, in narrative form, the events they were living through; and some of the greatest of its statesmen were amongst the greatest of its historians as well. We have inherited this, and our task has been to expand and modify, to correct and extend, this inherited account. We stand, perhaps, to this body of written history in something like the relation in which Lagrange stood to Newton. We are not so much obliged to invent a whole new theory as we are to tidy up and render elegant what is already received as a theory.

With Greek painting (or with our imaginary example of Italian painting), this is not the case. The Greeks did not see fit to write their own histories of art (which in itself tells us something about Greek painting), though bits and pieces of information about their art crept into the histories they did write, as well as into other writings. So here we are obliged to carry through a bit of imaginative reconstruction, to invent a theory, so to speak, in contrast with having only to polish up a theory already given to us. Too often, it seems to me, philosophers who have studied science have regarded science as a finished business, as a body of propositions already available which can now be reconstructed or rationally translated into some philosophically favoured language. And this tends, often, to induce a philosophical neglect of what has been called the logic of scientific *discovery*. But a comparable point may be made with regard to history.

Let us protract for a moment this analogy between a theory and a piece of historical narration—an analogy we have already considered in the discussion with Beard. We are, I think, entitled to suppose that a theory is logically distinct from the evidence that supports it. But then we might also say that a narrative is logically distinct from the evidence that supports it: footnotes are not proper parts of a story, but

rather support the story at various points with evidence. It is true that historians might hesitate to publish a narrative which they were unable to support at every point. The historian might say, at a certain point, that he is resorting to conjecture: but this would mean a break in the footnotes rather than a break in the narrative. At all events, a narrative is not just a summary of its own scholarly apparatus. It operates, instead, as a proposed account of what happened, and it can hardly be denied that such an account, operating as an hypothesis, might go to suggest support in favour of itself which was not initially available. There is *that* much truth in the view, considered earlier, that a statement about the past is a covert prediction of the outcome of an historical inquiry. But the relationship between a narrative and the materials which initially support it is, in a sense familiar to students of Peirce, *abductive*.[1] And in an important sense, we cannot really make historical sense of whatever bits and pieces we may possess of 'history-as-record' until we are able to find a narrative for them to support. Indeed, until we have a narrative for them to support, it is something of a misnomer to regard them as evidence.

There are many sources from which support for a story, as well as suggestions for a story, might be drawn. In addition to actual records and documents, we almost certainly rely upon what we might call *conceptual* evidence. Simply to identify someone as an artist, for instance, already locates that individual under a concept, and permits us, with some measure of plausibility, to apply a whole set of different and, in the sense of the last chapter, *acceptable* or *possible*, sentences to that individual. What I wish to suggest is that these concepts not merely function as criteria of plausibility for narratives already written, but provide, as well, some basis for constructing a new narrative; in this particular case, a narrative of the life of someone identified as an artist. This narrative will be plausible to the extent that it tells us what might typically happen to an artist in his lifetime. Imagine that we had only this information: an artist, Leonardo da Vinci, lived in Florence at a certain date, and painted *The Last Supper*, a fresco in Milan. That the names of artists should have been recorded at all indicates a certain attitude towards painting: societies seldom leave lists of their cobblers or chimney-sweeps. That da Vinci should have been mentioned in such a list indicates that *he* was worthy of mention, for not *every* artist gets mentioned in such lists. The fact that the *Last Supper* is

mentioned suggests that it was regarded as of some special importance, since it is the only painting by him mentioned (it is not plausible to suppose he did just one painting), and he is identified as the painter of it. To be sure, there is a problem as to whether the question asked was 'What did Leonardo paint?' or 'Who painted the *Last Supper*?' Whatever the case, we may suppose it be his most highly appreciated work and can assume it to have been his masterpiece. This, if we know the date of the picture, gives us some idea of his period of journeymanship, and whether he was a prodigy or not: knowing the life-dates of Masaccio, and the dates of the frescoes in the Brancacci Chapel *would* suggest he was a prodigy. Knowing the title of the painting and *understanding* it allows us to entertain some idea of the sorts of things it had to contain,[1] and we can suppose, as well, that if an artist of note painted a picture of note, and the latter had a religious motif, there was some more or less intimate connection between art and religion: at all events, we can get some general idea of who the patron was. These connections having been established, we can go on seeking for further ones, and for evidence to support the ones we had made. Bit by bit we would put together a *plausible narrative* of Leonardo's life. It would, to be sure, be a fairly general and schematic kind of account, and one might never have deduced from it, nor even have plausibly imagined from it, the sort of particular genius Leonardo was. It must not be overlooked that our actual knowledge of Leonardo's life has, in fact, entered into our concept of what an artist is, so that it is not easy to say what our concept would be if all we had to go on, in the case of Leonardo, were those few facts I mentioned. But the point is that we can stretch a few facts rather a long way, and that an imaginative appeal to our general concepts will fairly soon get us a narrative of some sort which we might then use as a guide for further research, seeing whether some further but independent evidence might be found for our narrative.

Without this further independent evidence (and here we *are* at the mercy of the resources of history-as-record), our narrative would float on air: it would, for all we knew, be fiction. But this surely helps us to see what is the difference between narratives and the evidence we have for them (a fictive narrative is one which requires *solely* conceptual evidence). One might say that the difference between a chronicle and a

proper piece of history is the difference between a well-supported, in contrast with a poorly supported, narrative. And this, in turn, would suggest a comparison between a well-confirmed and a poorly confirmed theory. But this is not a difference between kinds or genres of theories, or, for that matter, between kinds or genres of narratives: it is a wholly quantitative difference between degrees of confirmation or amounts of support.

At one point Walsh suggests that, in addition to the decidedly limited amount of information currently available on Greek painting,[1]

> There is also the fact that, because we stand nearer to the nineteenth century, we can enter into the thoughts and feelings of that age, and so use our evidence in a more effective way.[2]

This is an interesting view, in so far as it recognizes that it is not merely the amount of information we have, but also the way in which we use the information we do have that is important. There are, however, some highly controversial notions implicit in this statement. First, there is the implicit suggestion that we must make reference to the thought and feeling of human beings in order to make what they do appear intelligible. This is a rejection of behaviourism. Secondly, there is the implicit suggestion that we can succeed in such references, and hence succeed in making the behaviour of individuals intelligible inversely as the temporal distance between us and the individuals concerned increases. I shall not discuss the first of these. It is controversial to the extent that philosophical behaviourism is controversial, and, without for the present defending myself, I will register an agreement with Walsh's anti-behaviouristic stand for a limited number of cases. A defence would involve us in larger issues than those involved in understanding the past: issues having to do with the understanding of *actions*. And if a philosopher were to say, as a behaviourist thesis, that we need never make reference to the thoughts and feelings of actors in order to understand their actions, it would follow from his stand that we would not need to make such reference to past actors and their actions, for his views are time-invariant. Walsh, of course, is by no means sceptical in general about either our ability or our need to make such references, but he does apparently subscribe to a qualified scepticism about past individuals, and the

he does in proportion to the extent of their pastness. Therefore I shall address myself only to that suggestion.

There is one fatal objection against the thesis that increasing temporal distance entails decreasing intelligibility of human actions. It is that our temporal distance from the Greeks ought to make it equally difficult to write, or to understand, an account of *political* happenings in 300 B.C. and an account of artistic activities at that same period. But this simply is not the case. Thucydides' book is very nearly a paradigm of intelligible political history. His account, indeed, is so astute that we can apply it to our own time, and argue, if we wish, that people have changed very little. What it comes to, then, is *not* that we are temporally more remote from the Greeks of the third century B.C. than we are from, say, the French of the nineteenth century A.D.; but that we simply have a better understanding of political than of artistic behaviour. And this means that we have a more extensive and perhaps a more reliable stock of what I have termed *conceptual*, in contrast with *documentary* evidence for political constructions in contrast with artistic ones. One may then go on to suggest that our conceptual evidence, in the case of politics, will enable us to construct more complex narratives, independently of specific documentary evidence, than our corresponding conceptual evidence for artistic activity will permit us to achieve. If there should be any doubts about this, let someone imagine trying to write the history of nineteenth-century painting on the basis only of a list of names of artists and works. I dare say that relative proximity in time will help us very little. And if we knew all about the nineteenth century *except* what was painted, we could hardly *imagine* Impressionism.[1]

There are at least two difficulties with the notion of conceptual evidence which I had better remark upon.

The first is that it presupposes that the behaviour, towards the understanding of which it is applied, is invariant over time. And in so far as this is not the case, our use of conceptual evidence is decreasingly effective, not so much as a function of *time*, but as a function of the number and kinds of changes which may have taken place.[2] Just as the application of a scientific theory presupposes an isolated system, so, I think, the application of a narrative based upon conceptual evidence presupposes, in a somewhat similar way, constancy of institutions and practices. We

could utilize conceptual evidence with impunity to reconstruct the history of a society, however long it might have endured, providing only that there were no changes in the sorts of practices covered by our concepts. But when this is not satisfied, there are some peculiarly historical difficulties. Ibn Khaldun stated them perfectly:

> Now a dynasty will adopt many of the customs of its predecessors, while not forgetting its own, hence the prevalent set of customs will differ from the preceding generation. Should the ruling dynasty be supplanted by yet another, which in turn will mix its own customs with those prevailing, a new state of affairs will come about, which will differ from the first stage even more than it differs from the second.
>
> This gradual change, in the direction of increasing difference, will proceed until it ends in total dissimilarity. . . .
>
> Now men are naturally inclined to judge by comparison and analogy; yet these methods easily lead into error. Should they be accompanied by inattention and hastiness, they can lead the searcher far astray, far from the object of his inquiry. . . . Forgetting that great changes, nay the revolutions, in conditions and institutions which have taken place since those times, [they] draw analogies between the events of the past and those which take place around them, judging the past by what they know of the present. Yet the difference between the two periods may be great, leading to gross error.[1]

Now it may very well be that political behaviour has greater constancy over time than artistic behaviour does (think of the difference between the history of American politics in contrast with the history of American art over the past sixty years !), and this, then, would account for the difference in use of evidence which Walsh supposes. This, however, interests me less than do the special difficulties which apparently arise in connection with conceptual evidence. A narrative, for example, which does make considerable supporting use of it, and relatively little use of *documentary* evidence, necessarily depends upon certain general ideas which hold true, or are *held* to hold true, of the time at which it is written. Were our only evidence of *this* sort, all written history would indeed be 'present history'. This phenomenon we should want to call *temporal provincialism*. Certainly, it is a familiar enough phenomenon. One need think only of the great religious paintings, where the miraculous births, the adorations and annunciations, the passions and resurrections, are depicted as taking

place in the Umbrian landscape, with Italianate donors looking on. A narrative which depends much upon conceptual evidence, has an inevitable contemporary or timeless ring about it, as though it were not about the past but the present, or not about a given time, but any time.

We are, I think, all of us temporally provincial with regard to the *future*. And this, in part, because for the events of the future, we have *only* conceptual evidence, and no documentary evidence at all. This will be an important fact for us later on when we shall consider the question whether we can write the history of events before they have happened. We can, of course. But we would hardly be able to support them, as we can narratives about the past, with documentary evidence, and, for this reason, our conception of the future has a curiously open and curiously abstract quality about it. If it is possible to make mistakes of the sort Ibn Khaldun mentioned regarding statements about the past, it is *a fortiori* possible to make mistakes about the future, for the precise reason that we lack the controls, which Ibn Khaldun was doubtless referring to, over the narratives we project—the controls of documentary evidence now available. This is, I should think, the final importance of history-as-record. Without it we would live quite wholly in the present, and have no idea that the past would or could have been different. But this too connects with our temporal provincialism regarding the future. For our conceptual evidence has to be modified in the light of documentary evidence, or, rather, narratives based upon the former need to be modified in the light of that latter sort of evidence when it can be found. But this helps show, and indeed gives some inductive grounds for saying, that conceptual evidence will not carry us very far. For if we are obliged to adjust it in the face of documentary evidence, so that we can say that concepts themselves have changed, surely we might expect as much for the future ? Thus future concepts will be as dissimilar to ours, as ours are to past concepts. We can *expect* that the future will be different from what our conceptual evidence would lead us to expect. That it *will* be different we can suppose. But in what way different is hard to say for not only do we lack documentary evidence: our conceptual evidence itself is not even *generally* adequate. If it is not for the past, why should it be so for the future ? These, then, are the limits of conceptual evidence, and if it were all we had, our conception of the future would resemble our conception

of the past, and each would resemble our concept of the present. But this is to say that we would have no *historical* sense of the past or the future, and we would think timelessly. Narratives, then, based solely upon conceptual evidence would truly be historical and schematic, in contrast with our actual narratives of, say, political happenings in the nineteenth century. So in the end a narrative concerning the history of painting in Greece, eked out of the scraps of available documentary evidence plus whatever conceptual evidence we may have, would, after all, make a sorry contrast.

A second, and related difficulty, is this. Suppose we had a list of artists, together with their dates, and the titles of their works, but all of their works bore the title 'The Last Supper'. Using only conceptual evidence as a basis for constructing narratives of their individual lives, these narratives, in so far as they were supported by conceptual evidence, would be remarkably uniform. No statement could be included in one which could not, with equal justification, be included in another, and in all the rest. They would differ only in regard to name and date. This, of course, is just what we would expect, since all we could manage justifiably to say about any individual would have reference to just what he might have in common with every other individual covered by the concept. So unless, and until, we had further documentary evidence, we would have no way of justifiably individualizing the monotonously similar narratives. To be sure, we could arbitrarily *make* some differences, but we could not *justify* making them in one case rather than another. Meanwhile, the narratives based upon merely conceptual evidence would have the special abstract quality remarked upon before: they could be true of *any* artist (or any artist of that period) in the way in which '*x* was born, and sometime later, *x* died' is true of any man no longer alive. Now I think it is clear that historians are not concerned to write such abstract narratives. They are, rather, interested in writing individuated narratives, narratives, if you wish, which are true of at most one individual. It is always, of course, a problem whether a given narrative (or a given description) we happen to produce is, in fact, true of at most one individual.[1] But this need not concern us here. What need concern us, rather, is that the distinction between an 'abstract' narrative and an individuated one does not represent the intended difference between plain

and significant narratives. Every narrative, produced by any historian, intends to be an individuated narrative. In this sense, I think, significant narratives, no less than plain ones, would have it as their aim to say what really happened at a certain place and time, and this would not be altered by any further distinction we would want to make between kinds of narratives. Notice, however, that a narrative of Greek painting, based mainly on conceptual evidence, *fails* to do this. Thus if that sort of narrative is taken to be a chronicle, or a plain narrative, we could hardly then characterize chronicles, or plain narratives, as being 'an exact description of what happened'.

We might, then, say that we have two different levels of understanding here. But this does not correspond at all to a difference between saying what exactly happened, and then doing something more than that. It corresponds, rather, to the degree of individuation, which is the consequence of the different amounts of documentary evidence, we are able justifiably to give to our narratives. A history of Greek painting is clearly less individuated than a history of political happenings in the nineteenth century.

(a) At one point Walsh suggests that chronicles have the same relation to history as sense perception has to science. There are, of course, many different kinds of relations between sense-perception and science, but I suppose the most natural interpretation of Walsh's suggestion is this: the difference is comparable to the difference between perceiving that something is the case, and explaining why it is so. Certainly one could not accept the suggestion that the difference is instead comparable to the frequently discussed contrast between the common-sense, and the so-called scientific description of the world. For this seems quite inapplicable to history, and certainly inapplicable to the specific examples Walsh himself provides us with. The history, for instance, of nineteenth-century political happenings would just be an instance falling within the ordinary or common-sense view of the world: it describes people and their actions in just the way in which we would ordinarily describe them, and this, in part, because such narratives are written in the ordinary language we all speak, and with which we express the so-called common-sense view of things. If anything, a narrative concerned with Greek painting would be a shade *more* remote from

common-sense views, but this would be due to the fact that common sense (as we saw in our discussion of conceptual evidence) is better able to deal with political than with artistic behaviour. Nevertheless there is little difference, for the language of historical narration is seldom technical, in the way in which scientific vocabulary is, and most literate persons would be able, without having to acquire any special vocabulary or any special skills, to follow narratives of nineteenth-century political behaviour. Indeed, they would very likely have to master a great deal *more* special language in order to follow a narrative of Greek painting. So let us consider simply the natural interpretation of Walsh's suggestion.

There is, I think, little doubt that one can draw a distinction between perceiving that *x* is the case, and explaining why it is so. Here, to be sure, one would want to make some careful distinctions. One man might say that he sees a blinding flash, while another, witnessing the same phenomenon, would say that he saw a magnesium explosion, and the latter description of the same phenomena is very nearly an explanation of what was seen. Nevertheless, complexities of description to one side, one might surely agree that there is a difference between saying only that Napoleon lost at Waterloo, and going on to explain why he did lose. The only difficulty here is that we are concerned to find a difference between two kinds of *narrative* and 'Napoleon lost' is not a narrative. But now it might be argued that we could nevertheless have one narrative which merely described what happened, and another which explained why it did happen. I wish to argue, however, that a narrative which *fails* to explain is very likely to be a statement like *S*, and hence not really a narrative; while a narrative which does explain does exactly this: it says what actually happened, and so qualifies as a *plain* narrative by Walsh's criteria. We would be left then with the problem of finding out what a significant narrative might do which is different from this. And I shall say there is nothing it can do, beyond saying what precisely happened, so long as it is to remain an *historical* narrative. The distinction, then, is not one which may be made *within* history.

Plain narratives, writes Walsh, have as their purpose to report 'in the famous phrase of Ranke's "precisely what happened" and leave the matter at that'.[1] There is apparently some difficulty in interpreting

Ranke's claim that his history wants to show what actually happened (*wie es eigentlich gewesen*).[1] He himself was only pointing a contrast: he did not aspire, he says, either to judge the past or to 'instruct the present for the benefit of future ages'. He was only interested in saying what had actually happened. Even so, men have found this originally humble disclaimer an extraordinarily boastful claim, and one which a man cannot live up to. He has been understood to mean, for example, that nothing of himself should be revealed in his wholly objective history;[2] or that everything about his subject should be mentioned in it.[3] And both these things, it has been suggested, are impossible. Let us just consider the latter rendering. It is, I dare say, true that one could not at once obey the command to give an account of some happening, and the command to mention *everything*. Accounts, I have argued, must by their nature leave things out, and in history as elsewhere it is the mark of someone capable of organizing a subject that he knows what to exclude, and is able to assert that some things are more important than others. Suppose I wish to know what happened at a court trial. I may ask my informant to leave nothing out, to tell me all. But I should be dismayed if, in addition to telling me of the speeches of the attorneys, the emotional attitudes of the litigants, the behaviour of the judge, he were to tell me how many flies there were in the courtroom, and show me a complicated map of the precise orbits in which they flew, a vast tangle of epicycles. Or mention all the coughs and sneezes. The story would get submerged in all these details. I *can* imagine him saying: 'At this point a fly lighted on the rail of the witness-box.' For I would expect something odd and interesting to follow: the witness screams, displaying a weird phobia. Or a brilliant attorney takes this as an occasion for a splendid forensic display ('As this fly, ladies and gentlemen . . .'). Or in trying to brush him away, a bottle of ink gets spilled over a critical bit of evidence. Whatever the case, I shall want to know: what *about* that fly? But if there is no 'what about', if this is only 'part of what happened during the trial', then it does not belong in the account of the trial at all. When I say, then: 'tell me the whole story, and leave nothing out' I must be (and am) understood to mean: leave out nothing significant: whatever belongs in the story I want to be told of it. And this, surely, is what Ranke must have meant in the main.

There are few problems in philosophy which merit closer analysis than the question of relevance, but here I shall be appealing only to our intuitive ideas, in accordance with which we are able to recognize something as belonging or not belonging to a certain story: even a child can do that. If telling what precisely happened means what some critics of Ranke seem to think it means, what Ranke would ideally have produced would not even have been a *plain* narrative: for it would not have been a narrative. I shall say, then, that any narrative is a structure imposed upon events, grouping some of them together with others, and ruling some out as lacking relevance. So it could not be a distinguishing mark of any given kind of narrative that it does this. If you wish to put the matter trivially, you can say that a narrative mentions only the significant events: but in this respect every narrative would be concerned with finding the significance of events: each narrative would ideally want to include only those things relevant to some other events, or significant to them. We could hardly divide narratives into classes by this criterion except, perhaps, into good and bad ones, where the bad ones contain some amount of insignificant detail.

It is not easy to see what kind of significance it could be that historians could attach to events which would go to make a philosophically important distinction between kinds of narratives. There are, for instance, various events or figures which are regarded as more significant than others. The Battle of Waterloo, let us say, was more significant than the Battle of Wagram, and Napoleon a more important general than Blücher was. In a parasitic sense, narratives of Waterloo and Napoleon might be more significant than narratives of Blücher and Wagram. But this is of scant philosophical importance, I should think, and at all events either narrative might tell precisely what happened. What might be philosophically important would be to specify some of the different senses in which we speak of an event or an individual as significant, and this I shall now proceed to do. I shall try to show, moreover, that some of these senses do involve historians in something more than saying precisely what happened. Therefore, I shall also try to show that none of these extra things really make the required distinction a philosophically important one.

(1) *Pragmatic Significance*. Sometimes an historian chooses a certain

happening or individual to write a narrative of because the subject has, for him, a moral interest, so that, in addition to writing what precisely happened, he hopes to be making a moral point of some sort. His narrative will then serve a certain purpose over and above telling us what really happened. Frequently, the historian's tone will show what moral point it is that he wishes to make. Gibbon, for instance, writes in a contemptuous tone of the excesses of Byzantine rulers. He meant, by so doing, to point a contrast between them and the rather more enlightened monarchs of his own age. There can be little doubt that some of the things he included in his book are specifically there because of his moralistic purposes. A converse point was made by Tacitus in *Germania*. Here he specifically chose to write of Germany in order to point an individious contrast with the behaviour, and in particular the sexual behaviour, of his own countrymen: he stresses thus the virtuousness of the Germans. One could multiply such examples. Histories of the lives of popes, or Captains of Industry, or courtly ladies of old Japan, will often have a significance in this sense, and such histories are specifically intended, and sometimes explicitly constructed, to serve a moralistic purpose. All such narratives might then be regarded as significant rather than plain. A relativist, of course, might wish to say that *all* narratives are significant in this sense, since all historians are dominated by some sort of moral purpose and pragmatic intent, and this serves to determine what sorts of things they write of, the way in which they write of them, and the events they regard as relevant. Whether this is so or not, the fact remains that we can at least conceive of narratives which do not, and Ranke, at least, claimed not to have such ulterior purpose: *he* was concerned to say only what really happened and, in this sense, to write a *plain* narrative.

(2) *Theoretical Significance*. A set of happenings may be significant to some inquirer because he sees them as standing in an evidential or illustrative relationship to some general theory he is concerned to establish or disestablish. Thus, the Cromwellian revolution may be taken either to confirm a general theory regarding revolutions, or to be a counter-instance of such a theory; and it is relative to some such theory that the event derives its significance. The particular narratives concerning French history by Marx are examples of this, serving to illustrate a general theory of class-struggle. A narrative of the same events, written

to rebut the Marxian theory, would be equally significant if we regard now 'significant narrative' as a narrative written for this sort of theoretical purpose. A plain narrative would then be one which had no such purpose. Once again, in a loose sense, every narrative might be significant from this point of view and even Ranke's narrative *might* be significant in the sense that it was explicitly written to show that objective history was possible: its significance would lie in its plainness.

(3) *Consequential Significance.* An event E may be said to be significant to some historian H when E has certain consequences to which H attaches some importance. This is, for instance, the psycho-analyst's sense of 'significance' when he finally says to a patient, in the latter's review of his past, that he has touched upon something significant. And it is far and away the typical use of the term in historical writing. When we say of an event that it has no significance, we mean, not that it has no consequences, but rather that it has no *important* ones. So this sense of significance is logically connected with an independent notion of *importance*, where the latter may depend upon any number of different criteria. Examples here are easy to find. We say that as a consequence of the Persian Wars, the Hellenic people, and particularly the Athenians, were able to develop along autonomous lines and to consolidate their cultural achievement. We say that the significance of the Black Death was that it created a sellers' market in labour, hence a rise in wages, hence contributed to the break-up of the feudal structure of tied labour. It is this sense of significance which is appropriate when, in accordance with a well-known *mot* of Pascal's, we say that the size of Cleopatra's nose was of historical significance. A narrative which describes or shows the significance of this or that event might be called a significant narrative. It is, on the other hand, difficult to conceive of a contrasting sort of plain narrative, for this notion of significance seems essential to the very structure of narratives. If an earlier event is not significant with regard to a later event in a story, it does not belong in that story. And one can always justify inclusion of one event by showing it to be significant in just this sense. If every pair of events mentioned in a story are so unrelated that the earlier one is not significant with regard to the later one, the result is in fact *not* a story, but rather a set of statements approaching S.

(4) *Revelatory Significance.* I have suggested that the relationship of a

story to a body of evidence may, at a certain stage, be abductive. That is, on the basis of some set of records, we *postulate* a kind of story, and then go on to seek out further supporting evidence. Such evidence, once found, may be regarded a significant find in that it finally supports a claim we were hitherto uncertain of. Now comparably, there may be some gap in a story, or a part of a story may be quite wrong, or there may be things which happened which we are unaware of and so do not feel that there is a gap in the story we have. And then we hit upon some record which tells of events which fill the gap, or are different from what we thought actually happened, or which tell us something we had not known. Such discoveries are significant because they reveal something heretofore unknown, and we might derivatively regard the events themselves as significant. This, of course, is relative to a state of knowledge: you cannot reveal things to people who are already aware of them, and yesterday's revelations are the stale news of today. Nevertheless, this is an important notion of significance, and I shall apply it in the following way to sets of events. I shall say that a set of events E is significant to an historian if, on the basis of them, he is able to reconstruct or somehow infer the occurence of some other set of events. Asked, for instance, what is the significance of Descartes' having moved to Holland, I might say that this event signifies the fact that there were forces afoot in France which were repressive of free thought, and that these forces were absent in Holland. *Postulating* this thesis, I might set about trying to verify the presence of such forces in France and the absence of them in Holland. Here again there is a psycho-analytical analogue. I might say that the significance of x having married an older woman is that he was seeking to replace his mother. One might now say that a significant narrative is one which narrates events, or sets of events, related in this manner. On the other hand, it is not easy to see what a plain narrative would consist of. For example, suppose E is significant of a set of events which stand in some *explanatory* role to E. I should think it odd if an event included in a narrative did not stand in an explanatory role to another event. For what after all is the relationship here if not this, that we help make sense of E by reference to some other event? And if none of the events mentioned in a narrative help make sense of any of the others, we again have something more like S than a narrative.

Now this list of senses of 'significance' is hardly exhaustive, and it perhaps not even exclusive: (3) might be merely a special case of (4); a narrative might be significant in both the sense of (2) and of (4); and so forth. But it will still serve my present purposes well enough, and I shall now proceed to comment briefly upon each of the entries I have made.

a. It cannot be denied that historians can and do find moral guidance, moral parallels, horrible examples, and moral paradigms in the events of the past. Nor can it be denied that their motive for writing history at all is frequently pragmatic: they wish to restore or ruin a reputation, to offer moral instruction, or to support or reinforce a moral position. Nevertheless, none of this is incompatible with reporting what exactly happened, and indeed, unless they do that, they are not writing history at all. To be sure, different historians, with differing moral persuasions and purposes, might write different stories. But then each might be writing precisely what happened despite this, for they are writing, in the end, about quite different things, and the only quarrel between them would *be* a moral quarrel, the subjects of their narratives being distinct. If, on the other hand, they both attempt to tell the same story, and the stories differ, their quarrel is not merely moral but factual. In that case, however, one or both of the narratives will be defective in the only relevant historical sense, namely, in failing to state precisely what happened. Assuming this is corrected, they may continue to disagree morally, but this is no longer an *historically* relevant disagreement, for they might disagree independently of historical information, and, indeed, if they do agree on all the facts, their further disagreement regarding moral interpretations is plainly irrelevant to history, and history is irrelevant to it. What cannot be represented as a factual disagreement is irrelevant to history, and what can be so represented is nothing more than a disagreement over what precisely happened. A significant narrative, in the present sense, would be a plain narrative plus a moral interpretation. But it is the plain narrative which is history. The moral interpretation is extra-historical, so the contrast between a plain and significant narrative is not a contrast within history, but between history and something else.

Someone may, of course, argue that the so-called distinction between beliefs and attitudes is not clear. I should reply that to the same extent, the distinction between plain and significant narratives is not clear. Similarly,

should someone argue that it is impossible to say what happened without, as a consequence of the very language we employ, making some moral judgement or other, then, of course, there just are and can be no plain narratives, so the distinction is non-existent. *Per contra*, should someone wish to argue that ethical predicates are *not* expressions of attitude, but describe real properties of things and events, and that any description which fails to use them is incomplete, then we might indeed allow a difference between plain and significant narratives. A significant narrative would succeed in what a plain one falls short of, namely to report precisely what happened. For a factual *plus* an ethical description would be a more accurate account, or a fuller one, than a merely factual account.

I myself think the distinction is clear enough. Were someone to say that here is a good piece of history though it makes no moral point, everyone would understand him. He would certainly be saying nothing inherently inconsistent. If he were to say it is a bad piece of history because it makes no moral point, he would not, in fact, be dispraising it by any normal criterion for classifying histories as better or worse. It is *not* generally accepted as a reason for saying that something is bad history that it is morally neutral, any more than saying that it does not mention Napoleon is taken to be a reason for calling something a bad piece of history. On the other hand, if someone were to say that something is good history, though it does not say what happened, he seriously raises the question why anyone would call it history to begin with. To say that it is good history *because* it tells what happened is to offer the standard reason for calling a piece of history good, while to say, finally, that something is a good piece of history though it tells what happened is to say something verging on unintelligibility. But to say that it is good history though it makes a moral point is intelligible enough. It means that its making a moral point has not interfered with its satisfying the criteria of good history. We may, I think then, forget about sense *a*.

b. I have been endorsing the view that narratives may be regarded as kinds of theories, capable of support, and introducing, by grouping them together in certain ways, a kind of order and structure into events. A narrative, so considered, is nevertheless localized as to space and time, it forms an answer to an historical question, and is accordingly to be distinguished from a general theory which is not thus localized, and is not,

therefore, an answer to an historical question. Sense *b* of 'significant' has application to narrative written specifically to illustrate or confirm some general theory which is not itself an answer to an historical question, but rather to a scientific, or to one kind of scientific question. To be sure, the identical narrative might have been written, whether the writer had this ulterior purpose in mind or not. We might judge it, as a narrative, quite independently of whether it serves or fails to serve any extra-scientific task it might be set to do. I would say, then, that illustrating or confirming a general theory is a non-historical task, and questions like 'Is it a good illustration?' or 'Does it confirm theory *T*?' are *not* answers to historical questions, though the narrative itself will certainly *fail* to do these things if it fails to be an answer to the historical question appropriate to it. Thus, if it fails to satisfy the minimal historical requirements, it can hardly do a higher- (or different-) order job. We do not, at any rate, have here two distinct kinds of narratives, but only one kind, though it is sometimes put to a non-historical use. The relationship between a narrative and a general theory may be profitably understood as similar to the relationship between a narrative and a moral thesis or purpose. I shall be wanting to make some further remarks on this relationship, but for the present, I think, we may regard sense *b* as irrelevant to any distinction within history, and as failing to provide us with a suitable distinction between plain narratives and significant ones.

c. Suppose the difference between a plain and a significant narrative consists in the fact that the latter spells out the consequence of some set of events, while the former simply relates those events. Let us call these two narratives *N-s* and *N-p* respectively. Now, *ex hypothesi N-p* is a narrative. Accordingly, it must satisfy some further conditions than our paradigm non-narrative, *S*. But this means that at least some of the later events mentioned in *N-p* must be significant with regard to some of the earlier events, that is, those later events *are* the significance of the earlier ones in that they are their consequences. If, by mentioning no event mentioned by *N-p* we are able to answer the question, what is the significance of this event, asked of *any* event in *N-p*, then *N-p* fails to be a narrative. Accordingly, every narrative must spell out some consequences of some events, and the difference between *N-p* and *N-s* is one of degree. In view of this fact, it is hard to see, if *N-p* can be taken to report what precisely happened, why *N-s* should be differently characterized. It may report *more* of what precisely happened than *N-p* does, but this is not the same thing as doing more than reporting precisely what happened. On the other hand, if *N-p* fails to report precisely what happened *because* it spells out some consequences of some events, then it is hard to see how a narrative can report precisely what happened. The intended contrast would not, accordingly, be between kinds of *narratives*. By sense *c* of 'significant,' then, every narrative is significant. But then, if one narrative should happen, in whatever sense is acceptable, to describe precisely what happened, and the other does not, then the latter is, in so far as it does not describe precisely what happened, disqualified as history. From this it follows that every narrative in history is a *plain* narrative. So every historical narrative is indifferently plain or indifferently significant.

d. We may deal quite briefly with *d*. Suppose we have a gap in a narrative *N-p*, and for want of available documentary evidence, we are unable to fill it except by resorting to some sort of conceptual evidence. We know, say, that *E-1* and *E-3* happened, and we have the sense that they are connected, but we do not know what the connection is. Notice that the gap here is relative to a narrative organization. Let us postulate an event *E-2*. Now, however, a revelatory piece of evidence is discovered, on the basis of which we can fill this gap in and close the narrative, so to speak. Our new narrative happens to succeed where *N-p* failed, namely in reporting what exactly happened. This in general is what discovering something of revelatory significance helps us to do. In revealing something we had not known before, or only suspected, it enables us to report what happened more precisely than we would have been able to do without it. Revelatory significance will not thus effect the required distinction.

For these reasons, it seems to me fair to say that there are not two kinds of narratives in history, or at least not two kinds of the sort we have been discussing here. Ranke's characterization, whatever its vagueness, and whatever implausible readings of it may have been given by unsympathetic critics, is an admirable characterization of what historians seek to do. Indeed, I might regard it as a variant statement of what I have called the minimal historical aim. Yet, in the sense in which historians describe

what happened by means of narratives, they are, since a narrative itself is a way of organizing things, and so 'goes beyond' what is given, involved in something one might call 'giving an interpretation'. Presumably there are problems which arise in connection with the semantical connection between narratives and 'history-as-actuality', and the truth conditions for narratives are apt to be complex. But so far as genre is concerned, history, I am saying, is of a piece. Any kind of narrative, assuming there were kinds of narratives, would require and presuppose criteria of relevance in accordance with which things would be included and excluded. This means, I think, that the maximally detailed account, that ideal duplicate of history-as-actuality, would not be a narrative.

Professor Walsh has argued,[1] in one place, that there is a difference between establishing a fact and establishing a connection between facts; that these two kinds of activity are on distinctly different levels. One might, I suppose, say that the notion of a fact is not clear, but that it is a *fact* after all, that two things are connected. Yet it might be argued that there are levels of fact. To establish that *Ei* happened, and then to establish that *Ej* happened, is to do something philosophically distinguishable from establishing some connection between *Ei* and *Ej*. On this point I wish to make a few comments.

(1) It is certainly true that there is, in historical practice, such a thing as establishing it as a fact that a certain event occurred. The extent to which this can be done without having established connections between this event and other events in the past is not easy to say, and I am inclined to believe it could not be done at all. This, however, I let pass, because someone might, I think, merely be interested in establishing that a certain picture, say, was painted at a certain date, and not be interested in telling any story. Suppose the historian establishes that the painting was done in 1817, and publishes a paper showing this. The paper might not be a narrative at all, though doubtless a narrative will be presupposed, and though the newly established fact may eventually enter some narrative. Nevertheless, if the paper is not a narrative, it is not a plain narrative. The historian has indeed answered an historical question. He has made a true statement about the past. What he has done, however, is not to be understood as establishing a narrative; and to contrast his work with historians who do write narratives is *not* to make a contrast between kinds of

narratives. I have been concerned only with whether there are kinds of narratives to be contrasted.

(2) How is one to write a narrative without establishing connections between events? To contrast an account which connects events with an account which does not, is hardly to be contrasting a narrative with a narrative, but rather a narrative with something quite different, something like *S*.

(3) We sometimes have a Humean tendency to think of events as discrete and pellet-like, and to think of connections between events as not consisting of some intervening pellet. I shall not quarrel with this view here. What I do wish to insist upon is that not every true description of an event can be made by means of monadic predicates solely. Similarly with descriptions of things. It is a true description of my typewriter that it is black; it is also a true description of it that it is on the table in my room, and it is also true that it is the machine on which I wrote a letter five days ago. To establish some descriptions of things or events *requires* that we establish connections between them and other things and events. Here, for instance, are a pair of descriptions of the same event.

D-1. Jones struck a match.
D-2. Jones revealed the position of his squad to the enemy, inadvertently destroying the tactical advantage they had enjoyed.

One cannot establish *D-2* without establishing a whole host of connections with other events, and some of these connections cut across time.

(4) It might be agreed that all narratives connect events. But then, it might be pressed, some do more than this. They *explain* in addition to reporting precisely what happened. It is this that makes the difference between plain narratives and significant ones. The trouble with this suggestion is that it overlooks the extent to which a narrative is already a *form* of explanation. To contrast narratives with other forms of explanation may be important, but this is not the required sort of contrast. A narrative describes and explains at once.

(5) There are descriptions of the past other than narrative ones. This does not, of course, help the distinction, but it raises some interesting questions. I shall be concerned with this question only. Narratives, by definition, leave things out. Yet if one did not use the narrative form, one

might be able to give the complete description ideally presupposed as the aim of history, and so effect the statement ideally at the nether end of the range of statements marked out by an historical question. I shall say now, that you cannot give a complete description of any event which does not use narratives. Completely to describe an event is to locate it in all the right stories, and this we cannot do. We cannot because we are temporally provincial with regard to the future. We cannot for the same reason that we cannot achieve a speculative philosophy of history. The complete description then presupposes a narrative organization, and narrative organization is something that *we* do. Not merely that, but the imposition of a narrative organization logically involves us with an inexpungable subjective factor. There is an element of sheer arbitrariness in it. We organize events relative to some events which we find significant in a sense not touched upon here. It is a sense of significance common, however, to all narratives, and is determined by the topical interests of this human being or that. The relativists are accordingly right. All of this I shall try to show next.

VIII

NARRATIVE SENTENCES

I mean to isolate and to analyse here a class of sentences which seem to me to occur most typically in historical writings, although they appear in narratives of all sorts and may even enter into common speech in a natural kind of way. I shall designate them as 'narrative sentences'. Their most general characteristic is that they refer to at least two time-separated events though they only *describe* (are only *about*) the earliest event to which they refer. Commonly they take the past tense, and indeed it would be odd—for reasons I shall want to consider here—for them to take any other tense. The fact that these sentences may constitute in some measure a differentiating stylistic feature of narrative writing is of less interest to me than the fact that use of them suggests a differentiating feature of historical knowledge. But even this is less interesting to me than the fact that narrative sentences offer an occasion for discussing, in a systematic way, a great many of the philosophical problems which history raises and which it is the task of the *philosophy* of history to try to solve. Indeed I shall introduce them in the context of some of these problems. My thesis is that narrative sentences are so peculiarly related to our concept of history that analysis of them must indicate what some of the main features of that concept are. In addition they help show why the proper answer to the tedious question 'Is history art or science?' is: 'Neither'.

Peirce wrote to Lady Welby: 'Our idea of the past is precisely the idea of that which is absolutely determinate, fixed, *fait accompli*, and dead, as against the future which is living, plastic, and determinable.'[1] Certainly this *is* what most of us think. But could we hold a different view? For a variety of reasons, some men have held that the *future* is fixed and determinate as well as the past. Suppose all we know about Caesar is that he existed. Whether or not he was even in any particular place, say England, is not known. Yet we might appeal to a venerable notion, the Principle of Excluded Middle, and say that either he was

there or he was not there, and that at least one of these alternatives is true. Why might not someone in the fifth century B.C. have invoked the identical Principle to argue that Caesar either will be in England or not? Perhaps because nobody then could have known that Caesar would exist the way we know that he *has* existed. Still, he might have said that either Caesar would exist or not, and that one of these statements would have to be true. *If* the Principle may be invoked for this future matter of fact, why not for all? What, however, could the name 'Caesar' mean to such a person, just what sort of thing is it he is saying will exist or not? Well, I have supposed that all *we* know is that he existed. Doubtless this is unrealistic. But flesh a description out as we will, what is to have prevented a fifth-century B.C. speaker from saying that someone of just that description would exist or not? Should he have spoken in this way why should the Principle not guarantee that at least this description or its negate is true? Or does it hold only for the past? After all, there are *four* possibilities, including the possibility that the future is determinate and the past 'living, plastic, and determinable'. Why is it that our 'idea' of past and future corresponds only to the possibility which Peirce described? Granted that this is our idea, the question remains *why*.

Our natural temptation these days is to say that it is a matter of definition. Consider, however, the wild fantasy of the whole course of history going suddenly into reverse, like a film strip running backwards. After a time would come the sound 'thgil eb ereht teL' and darkness would once again settle upon the face of the waters. The future would then be the exact mirror-image of the past, and there would be a rule by means of which an exactly corresponding sentence about the future could be found for every true sentence about the past. In such a case the future would be on an exact footing with the past in point of determinateness. True, we cannot put ourselves in this picture: nobody could *know* that what was happening was the reversal of history—for this would destroy the symmetry. Perhaps what we mean by the indeterminateness of the future is that we *can* put ourselves in the picture, there is room for us to move. But for that matter we can, in imagination at least (and this is all that matters here) put ourselves into the past, as in *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. In fact, of course, there is

no room in Arthur's England for twentieth-century strangers. However, there would also be no room in the corresponding segment of the future were history to reverse itself. No-one is saying that history will do this: but it is not a matter of *definition* that it will not.

Let us say that we are empirically certain that the future will not be the image of the past. What then *will* the future be like? People may guess this and that, but in contrast with our knowledge of what has taken place, we are very uncertain indeed with regard to what will happen. Can this be what is meant by the past being determinate and the future merely determinable? So that our 'idea' is based not upon some definition of past and future but rather upon our knowledge of each? Then Peirce's statement is false. We are always revising our beliefs about the past, and to suppose them 'fixed' would be unfaithful to the spirit of historical inquiry. In principle, any belief about the past is liable to revision, just in the same way perhaps as any belief about the future. Actually we are sometimes more certain about the future than we are about the past. At a given moment I am far more certain where a falling pine-cone will land than I am with regard to where it fell from. At best the difference is one of degree.

Peirce also wrote 'the existent is determinate in every respect'.[1] Possibly what we want then is a kind of ontological interpretation of his original claim. The future, if it is not determinate, does not exist. But if the contrast is to work, the past must exist, however this is to be understood. This may even take care of the Principle of Excluded Middle! Since there is nothing for sentences purportedly about the future to refer to, the question of their truth or falsity fails to arise.[2] Or we might say: the past has been constructed, but the future has not, and so make a somewhat punning extension of Intuitionism to get rid of that vexing Principle.[3] Of course it would hardly do to say that our idea of the past is of something existent and our idea of the future of something non-existent. If anything, our idea of the past is of something that *has* existed while our idea of the future is of something which *will* exist. Very few people think that the past exists. But some very good philosophers have thought this way. 'It appears to me that, once an event has happened, it exists eternally,' writes C. D. Broad.[4] For surely, he argues, we can meaningfully say that a certain event is past, that is,

stands in a certain temporal relation with some other event. But if it did not exist, the relation would collapse for want of a term, and our statement about it would be nonsense. So all such events must constitute a 'permanent part of the universe'.[1] This seems a very weak argument indeed to support so vast a consequence, and we might as consistently argue, *mutatis mutandis*, that if we can meaningfully say that a certain event is future, that event must either exist eternally or all statements about the future are nonsense. But let us suppose that Broad is right, and let us manufacture a metaphysical model to satisfy our idea about the past and future which this interpretation of Peirce's statement of it seems to require. The important feature of this model is the fixedness of the past. Notice that this metaphysical excursus does not explain *why* we have the idea that the past is fixed and the future fluid. It only shows what the world must be like if our idea is to be *true*.

Let the Past be considered a great sort of container, a bin in which are located, in the order of their occurrence, all the events which have ever happened. It is a container which grows moment by moment longer in the forward direction, and moment by moment fuller as layer upon layer of events enter its fluid, accommodating maw. The forward lengthening of the Past is irrepressible, and regular; and once within the container, a given event E and the growing edge of the Past recede away from one another at a rate which is just the rate at which Time flows. E gets buried deeper and deeper in the Past as layer after layer of other events pile up. But this constantly increasing recession away from the Present is the *only* change E is ever to suffer: apart from this it is utterly impervious to modification. E, moreover, will generally be but one of a set of events which enter the Past together. In this case, E and its contemporaries constitute an exclusive class, in the sense that no *further* event will ever join them as, so to speak, a new contemporary. So the Past is not to change either through any modification of E apart from its momently increasing pastness, or through the addition of some other event contemporary with E which E lacked as a contemporary upon its entry into pasthood.

This 'model' construes events as time-extended entities in a Universe extended in time, a view conceivably licit. What is *not* quite licit in the model is that part of it which suggests that E and its contemporaries

are exact co-evals, having each the same amount of temporal thickness and coincident termini. Common use of the term 'event' is fairly chaotic, and we are likely to apply it to occurrences of varying duration, even null duration. Seeing a robin, for instance, is perhaps an important event in the bird-watcher's morning. But such an event might be classed with what Ryle has called 'achievements', and can, in his phrase, be dated but not clocked.[1] We can both date and clock events such as flashes of lightning. We speak of the French Revolution or the Civil War as major events in the history of France and America respectively, and these are better measured by the calendar than the clock, provided we agree where in time to begin. Fidelity to usage requires us then to think of events as of varying duration, the only alternative being arbitrarily to decide that an event is exactly so long, say three minutes.[2] But if we follow usage, we may be obliged to say that E, though it may have many contemporaries, might still have no precise co-evals, so that a line drawn perpendicular to the direction of time at the anterior terminus of E would conceivably not intersect the anterior terminus of any of E's contemporaries. This, however, has untoward consequences for that part of our model which has events piling up, layer after layer, and proceeding away from the present in an orderly manner. For suppose that E has wholly entered the Past while its contemporary E' has only partially achieved pasthood, having part of its career yet to run. One may now ask *where* is the rest of E' when that part of it which overlaps E is in the Past. Somehow one feels uneasy thinking of it protruding like a worm half buried in a can of dirt. True, we can say that part of it which is not in the Past is in the Future, E' merely passing from one container into another. But then suppose that E' overlaps both E and E'' though neither of these overlaps the other. Then when E is wholly in the Past, E'' is wholly in the Future. But then the Future exists after all, and the desired contrast between the determinateness of the Past and the indeterminateness of the Future falls through. No, we shall have to say that the rest of E' does not exist. But suppose the 'rest' of E' fails to happen? Well, then, the Past must contain fragments of events as well as events. With this lame addendum, we may continue to employ the model, for what it is worth.

I admit that it is not worth much. The Future, for one thing, has been

dealt with very casually. But anyway, 'there', in the Past, are situated all the events which ever have happened, like frozen tableaux. They are stowed in the order of their happening, they overlap (for they are of varying sizes) and interpenetrate (for an event *E* may have another event *E'* as a part of itself). More importantly, they cannot change, nor can the order amongst them change, nor can the Past acquire fresh contents save at its forward end. *Why* they cannot change is not yet clear. But there must be strong reasons, for according to an old tradition not even *God* can undo what once has been done: '*Niente diminisce la sua omnipotenza il dire che Iddio non puo fare che il fatto non sia fatto.*'[1] But I shall leave that problem for the time, and turn to the matter of describing our inert Past.

By a *full description* of an event *E* I shall mean a set of sentences which, taken together, state absolutely everything that happened in *E*. Since the sequence of happening is important, we should want this order reflected in the full description by some device or other. Indeed, a full description will be an order-preserving account of everything that happened. As such, a full description bears some analogy to a map: there is an isomorphism between the full description and the event of which it is true. Now with maps there are two sorts of problems. First, there are things in the mapped territory that are not designated in the map, so that in common practice maps are incomplete, and do not exactly duplicate the territory.[2] Second, maps go out of date because territories change: coast-lines get washed away, cities are destroyed and others spring up, boundaries are drawn afresh as a consequence of wars and treaties. This second problem does not arise for full descriptions of past events inasmuch as the Past does not change. But then neither need the first problem. We can imagine a description which really is a full description, which tells everything and is perfectly isomorphic with an event. Such a description then will be *definitive*: it shows the event *wie es eigentlich gewesen ist*. The maps of all the events may now be supposed assembled, to constitute a (really *the*) map of the whole Past. This global map then changes only in the way the Past itself changes: it is added to along the forward edge. It now hardly matters whether we talk about the Past or its full description.

I now want to insert an Ideal Chronicler into my picture. He knows whatever happens the moment it happens, even in other minds. He is also to have the gift of instantaneous transcription: everything that happens across the whole forward rim of the Past is set down by him, as it happens, the *way* it happens. The resultant running account I shall term the Ideal Chronicle (hereafter referred to as I.C.). Once *E* is safely in the Past, its full description is in the I.C. We may now think of the various parts of the I.C. as accounts to which practising historians endeavour to approximate their own accounts.

Let us say that every event in the Past now has its full description shelved somewhere in the historian's heaven. Remember: the events in the Past are 'fixed, *fait accompli*, and dead'. Only a modification in the events could force a modification in the I.C. But this is ruled out. The I.C. is then necessarily definitive. By contrast, the actual accounts offered to their audience by the working historians are always liable to modification. They may contain false sentences, they may have true sentences asserted in the wrong order, and they are almost certainly incomplete. At times bogus evidence or wrong interpretations of *bona fide* evidence may cause our historians to exchange a true sentence for a false one, so we shall want to distinguish a *correct* modification of an historical account. This, on our present view, will consist in bringing it into line with the I.C. Such a modification can then take at most three forms: (*a*) we add sentences which appear in the I.C. but not in the historian's account; (*b*) we eliminate sentences which appear in the historian's account but not in the I.C.; (*c*) we interchange the positions of all the remaining sentences in the historian's account to conform to the position of the corresponding sentences in the I.C. By repeated applications of these three rules of rectification we finally get a corrected version of the original account. It would in fact be an exact duplicate of the appropriate part of the I.C.

This is just the sort of thing a machine could do. Perhaps even the work of the Ideal Chronicler might be given over to a machine. The only place then where merely human effort is required is in the construction of an 'uncorrected account'. This, of course, has to be done through old-fashioned methods, e.g. gathering data, framing hypotheses, making and testing inferences, and the like. One is never sure of accounts

which are constructed in this pedestrian manner: new evidence may turn up, a fresh hypothesis may be licensed by new scientific developments, completely new interpretations given when a genius appears. Painfully, old accounts are revised and replaced with new ones, and all the work that went into the earlier account has produced something now gone out of date. A thankless, endless business. What a pity it is the historian has not in his own archives a certified copy of the I.C. against which to check his own account by applying our few simple rules.

Well, let us *give* him the I.C.! Now he can know everything. Yet it is a pernicious gift. For what now is our historian to do? He can go into another field of history, but our bounty knows no end: we give him whatever parts of the I.C. he wants. Clearly there no longer seems anything for him to do *qua* historian, such as gathering data, framing hypotheses, constructing accounts, and so on. Why, after all, work hard to make shoddy accounts needing correction when the correct account is there to be read? To be sure, it may just have been in the use of the old practices that the historian's *raison d'être* was to be found. Sir Edmund Hillary would doubtless have taken it ill had a great hand reached down from heaven and set him atop Everest like a toy soldier. He would have arrived where he wanted to get, but nobody would recognize this as a great feat in mountaineering—not even if Sir Edmund had prayed for something like this to happen. For praying is not an exercise of the mountaineer's skill. I say: too bad for the historian. We shall have to remind him that history is not a sport, that his use of scholarly apparatus has always been a means to an end, namely the discovery of Truth. And this is just what we have given him. What is the difference if his historiographical tools turn out to have been *faute de mieux*? What more does he want or *can* he want?

Croce flings a similar challenge at those who see the task of history to describe the Past 'the way it really happened'. Suppose you have a complete description: what then will you do?[1] Croce says: 'Act!' I take this to mean: the historian must make some more history before he can write some more history, a distressingly sisyphean labour, something like a compulsive housekeeper who must keep scattering dust in order to go on fulfilling her essence. But I want to take this challenge to

heart. What will be left for historians to do? They can, of course, simply be suspicious of the boon. Let them test it, then. It will always come out right if their methods are sound. Or they may take refuge in scepticism, but this will be just as damaging to ordinary historical practice as it would be to the I.C. Or they can ignore it. But is the historian to be like some Galahad who, turning the Grail about sadly in his hands, realizes that what he wanted after all was to just go on questing for it? There would be no point in this: further searching must henceforth be tainted with bad faith. The fly is in the fly bottle! The task of the philosopher is to lead it out.

My suggestion is: let him use the I.C. as he would any eye-witness account of an event in which he was interested. It will not tell him everything he wants to know about the event. This sounds as if it contradicts what we have said. Is not the I.C. definitively complete? And have I not said that nothing can happen to the Past to render it wrong or partial in any respect? Of course it is complete—but complete in the way in which a witness might describe it, even an Ideal Witness, capable of seeing all at once everything that happens, as it happens, the way it happens. *But this is not enough.* For there is a class of descriptions of any event under which the event cannot be witnessed,[1] and these descriptions are necessarily and systematically excluded from the I.C. The whole truth concerning an event can only be known after, and sometimes only long after the event itself has taken place, and this part of the story historians alone can tell. It is something even the best sort of witness cannot know. What we deliberately neglected to equip the Ideal Chronicler with was knowledge of the future.

Yeats, describing in his poem the rape of Leda by Zeus, writes: 'A shudder in the loins engenders there/ The broken wall, the burning roof and tower/ And Agamemnon dead.' Waiving for the moment questions regarding the historicity of episode, the *sentence* itself is of a kind which could not appear in the I.C. even if the event happened—in contrast with 'He holds her helpless breast upon his breast' which conceivably could appear there. For the latter describes what could be witnessed. But nobody could witness the act under the description 'Zeus engenders the death of Agamemnon'. For that king is not yet even born, and much will happen before his tragic end, as we now know. The death of

Agamemnon may be witnessed, only much later. Then someone might trace it all back to the violation of Leda, and he could see, in historical retrospect, that action of Zeus's as laden with a kind of destiny. To all of this the Ideal Witness is blind. Without referring to the future, without going beyond what can be said of what happens, as it happens, the way it happens, he could not even write, in 1618, 'The Thirty Years War begins now'—if that war was so-called because of its duration.

The class of descriptions I am concerned with refer to two distinct and time-separated events, *E*-1 and *E*-2. They *describe* the earliest of the events referred to. Yeats's sentence refers to the rape of Leda and to the death of Agamemnon, but it describes only the raping of Leda. 'The Thirty Years War began in 1618' refers to the beginning and to the end of the war, but it is about the beginning of the war. On the assumption that the war was so-called because of its length, nobody could presumably describe it in 1618—or at any time before 1648—as the 'Thirty Years War'. Of course someone might *predict* that the war would last just that long, and put sufficient confidence in his prediction to actually *describe* the war that way. But he would be making a claim on the future, which is what we are not allowing the I.C. to do. If we describe an event *E*-1 by making reference to a future event *E*-2 before *E*-2 occurs or is supposed to occur, we will have to withdraw the description, or reckon it false, if *E*-2 fails to happen. But the I.C. is so constructed as not to be mistaken at any point. There are to be no erasures. What it describes is fixed, and it says nothing which is not true. I shall later have more to say about predictions and descriptions, and I shall want, moreover, to explore some of the consequences of allowing the I.C. to make claims on the future. As matters now stand, however, it can make no such claims, and cannot, accordingly, employ the sorts of sentences—hereafter to be designated *narrative sentences*—I have just characterized. In this case there are no beginnings and endings in the I.C. 'If there are no beginnings and endings,' wrote Virginia Woolf in *The Waves*, 'there are no stories.' 'Cut away the future,' wrote Whitehead, 'and the present collapses, emptied of its proper content.'[1] It begins to dawn on one that a 'full description' does not adequately meet the needs of historians, and so fails to stand as the ideal which we hope our own accounts will approach; and that not being witness to the event is not

so bad a thing if our interests are historical—which shows, I suppose, that some of the arguments of historical relativism are inappropriate.[1]

Factually false sentences may be converted into truths in two ways, provided the meanings of the words used remain constant: we may correct the sentences or rectify the facts they mean to describe. If there are three chairs in the room and someone says falsely 'There are four chairs in the room', he may achieve a true description by adding a chair or by striking out 'four' and replacing it with 'three'. With regard to false sentences about the past, however, I have only the option of correcting the sentences if truth be my aim. For some centuries there has been no opportunity to morally re-educate the Borgias so as to make the statement 'The Borgias were decent folk' come out true. At best I can replace 'decent' with 'wicked' or, if committed to the sentence, I can try to get the meaning of 'decent' changed—a self-defeating enterprise if I am committed to the proposition that the Borgias were *decent*. 'You can't make the Borgias decent' changes its meaning radically after 1503: before that time it might mean only that the Borgias were invincibly malfeasant, after that time that the appropriate Borgias, and the events in their lives, were totally embedded in the Past. Suppose, however, that there were a time-machine: our programme then might be to return to the Past, work hard on Alexander and his spawn, get them to walk in the ways of righteousness, and return to the present with a sentence made true *via* rectification of the facts. This is of course a hopeless undertaking, not because of the Borgias, but because of the unalterability of the Past. But *why* is the Past unalterable?

One may be tempted to say: because effects cannot temporally precede their causes, so the events of the Past cannot be the effect of causes now or at any future time in operation. Certainly the reason cannot *simply* be that the events in question are not 'here' so that we cannot, so to speak, lay hands on them: for future events are not 'here' either, and yet causes now in operation may be expected to have some effect on future events. On the other hand, the sort of situation I am considering differs from *this* one: a later event, say a coin falling heads, is said to cause an earlier event, say a man *saying* 'Heads'.[2] For in such a

case, when the coin falls heads at *t*-2, the man has already actually said 'Heads' at *t*-1. But what would count as *changing* the Past would perhaps be something like this: someone undertakes to change the Borgias at *t*-2, the Borgias are vicious at *t*-1, the man succeeds in making them virtuous instead of vicious *at t*-1. To make the cases parallel, we should have to think of the man saying 'Tails' at *t*-1, the coin falling heads at *t*-2, and *this* then causing the man to say 'Heads' instead of 'Tails' at *t*-1.

Now if the Past cannot be changed in this manner, it cannot be simply because effects cannot precede their causes. For suppose the historian, interested in the latter day vindication of the Borgia's reputation, should admit that there is nothing *he* can do along these lines. Still, he might argue, they can change for all that. For there might be events *earlier* in the time-scale than the wicked behaviour of the Borgias which will still somehow cause the Borgias to mend their ways: it is simply that they have not yet discharged their causal energy, but have lain dormant all these centuries, like a volcano. This is surely an extravagant proposal, but the causes in question obviously precede their proposed effects, so the incapacity of the Past to change can no longer be charged to the temporal asymmetry of cause and effect. Moreover, we cannot simply say that the alleged events, earlier in the time-scale than the hoped for effects, must, just because they are past, be causally inoperative—for this would immediately entail a general argument against causality; our concept of causality requires action at a temporal distance. Otherwise no time-separated events can be related as cause and effect and we could not, accordingly, expect the future to be in any sense affected by things happening now. Worse, there would still remain the possibility that the events of the Past just spontaneously change, without anything causing them to do so.

But in the end all these difficulties are irrelevant. For what we are ruling out, so far as causality is concerned, is that any cause, earlier or later than an event *E* can act on *E* once *E* is past. For suppose *E* has occurred at *t*-1. Then any change in *E* will have to consist in either adding a property, eliminating a property, or both. Let *F* be a property to be added: then at *t*-1 *E* is both *F* and not-*F*, which is contradictory by definition. But it would similarly be contradictory if a property *G* is eliminated: *E* would then be both *G* and not-*G* at *t*-1. This then takes

care even of spontaneous change. But since *E* is at *t*-1, no change can take place in *E* at any other time, say *t*-2. For then something would have to be happening at *t*-1 and at *t*-2 at the same time, in other words, two distinct times would have to be simultaneous. And this again is contradictory.

When it comes to false descriptions of the events of the Past, then, the only means of converting them to truths is 'rectification of terms'. On the other hand, there is a sense in which we may speak of the Past as changing; that sense in which an event at *t*-1 acquires new properties not because we (or anything) causally operate on that event, nor because something goes on happening at *t*-1 after *t*-1 ceases, but because the event at *t*-1 comes to stand in different relationships to events that occur later. But this in effect means that the *description* of *E*-at-*t*-1 may become richer over time without the event itself exhibiting any sort of instability, and it is for this reason that what I have called the 'full description' of *E* at *t*-1 cannot be definitive.

Suppose that *E*-1 at *t*-1 is a necessary condition for *E*-2 at *t*-2. Then it immediately follows that *E*-2 at *t*-2 is a *sufficient* condition for *E*-1 at *t*-1.[1] A sufficient condition for an event may thus occur later in time than the event. We cannot readily assimilate the concept of cause to the concept of necessary and sufficient conditions unless we are prepared to say that causes may succeed effects.[2] So it is difficult to suppose that *E*-2 *makes* *E*-1 happen. But at the very least it permits a *description* of *E*-1 under which *E*-1 could not have been witnessed and which, accordingly, could not have appeared in the I.C. Now there may be indefinitely many such descriptions, for each temporally later sufficient condition for *E*-1 affords a fresh description of that event. And precisely the same considerations apply for temporally later necessary conditions for *E*-1.

Suppose, for example, that a scientist *S* discovers a theory *T* at *t*-1. *S* perhaps does not publish *T*. At some later time *t*-2, a different scientist *S'* independently discovers *T*, which is now published and taken into the body of accepted scientific theories. Historians of science subsequently find out that *S* really hit on *T* before *S'*. This need take away no credit from *S'*, but it allows us to say, not merely that *S* discovers *T* at *t*-1, but that *S anticipated* at *t*-1 the discovery by *S'* of *T* at *t*-2. This will indeed be a description of what *S* did at *t*-1, but it will be a description under

which S's behaviour could not have been witnessed and it will be an important fact about the event which accordingly fails to get mentioned by the I.C. Meanwhile, the historian who describes the event in this way will have used a *narrative sentence*.

For it to be true that a man *anticipates* T at t-1, it is *logically* necessary that T be later set forth, say at t-2. There are, however, some complications. We cannot *simply* say that the discovery by S′ of T at t-2 was a necessary condition for the anticipation by S of T at t-1. We cannot, that is, simply say that had S′ not hit upon T at t-2, S would not have anticipated T at t-1. For after all, some scientist other than S′ could have arrived at the same theory, or S′ himself might have discovered it at a different time than t-2. We can only say that for it to be true that S anticipates T at t-1, *someone*, at *some* time later than t-1, must also discover T. And obviously 'Someone discovers T later than S discovers T' is *not* equivalent to 'S′ discovers T at t-2, and t-2 is later than the time at which S discovers T'. The former is entailed by, but does not entail the latter.

Nonetheless, a finer description of both events readily enough converts the latter into a necessary condition of the former. Let S be Aristarchus and S′ be Copernicus. Then we might describe what Aristarchus accomplished at some time in 270 B.C. as follows 'Aristarchus anticipated in 270 B.C. the theory which Copernicus published in A.D. 1543'. If Copernicus had not published the theory, or had not published it at that time, or if someone other than Copernicus had published the theory at the stated time, this sentence about Aristarchus would be *false*. Hence, under the appropriate description, something done by Copernicus is a temporally later necessary condition for something done by Aristarchus. It immediately follows under just this description that what Aristarchus did in 270 B.C. is a *sufficient* condition for what Copernicus did some seventeen centuries later. It does not follow, of course, that what Aristarchus did caused, or figured as part of a cause of, the affirmation of heliocentrism by Copernicus. This would have to be established independently. In a way, of course, the concept of causality is not as clear as one would wish. What Aristarchus did may in no sense have caused Copernicus to discover the heliocentric theory, but in a very definite sense it caused Copernicus to *re-discover* the heliocentric theory.

It is not that Copernicus here did two distinct things: it was just the same action, seen under two distinct descriptions.

'Being a cause' may indeed be a special case of the sort of characterization of events which narrative description affords. Causes after all cannot be witnessed *as* causes: Hume pointed this out long ago. To say of E-1 that it caused E-2 is to give a description of E-1 by referring to another event (E-2) which stands as a necessary condition for E-1—under the appropriate description. If E-2 fails to occur, if it is false that 'E-2 takes place', then it would follow that 'E-1 caused E-2' is in turn false. From this it does *not* follow that E-1 is a sufficient condition for E-2. We would presumably not want to say in general that every cause of an event is a sufficient condition for that event. Nor again would we want necessarily to say that E-2 is a necessary condition for E-1. What it would be proper to say is that the occurrence of E-2 is a necessary condition for E-1 being a cause, or more precisely, a cause of E-2. Briefly, then, the occurrence of E-2 is not a necessary condition for the occurrence of E-1; it is only a necessary condition for E-1 being correctly describable as a cause of E-2; and accordingly the I.C. could not say, of E-1 when it occurs, that E-1 is a cause of E-2. Hence 'is a cause of' would not be a predicate accessible to the I.C.

Nor, as we have seen, would 'anticipates' be a predicate accessible to the Ideal Chronicler. But there are many more such examples. For it to be true that Petrarch opened the Renaissance, it is logically required that the Renaissance take place, though in point of fact the Renaissance might have taken place whether Petrarch opened it or not. Again, for it to be true that Piero da Vinci begat a universal genius, his offspring (in this case Leonardo) logically *had* to become a universal genius. Other examples would be: 'correctly predicted', 'instigated', 'began', 'preceded', 'gave rise to', and so on. Each of these terms, to be true of an event E-1, logically requires the occurrence of an event temporally later than E-1, and sentences making use of such terms in the obvious way will then be narrative sentences.

In addition to lacking narrative sentences altogether, the I.C. is deprived of certain referring devices; expressions which uniquely designate certain events, persons, and places, by making use of relative pronouns—'the place where . . .', 'the person who . . .',—where the

blank is filled with an expression which refers to an event which takes place temporally later than the earliest time at which there is such an individual to refer to. Newton wrote his *Principia* from 1685 until 1687, when it was published. After that date it would be natural to refer to Newton as 'the man who wrote *Principia Mathematica*'. Indeed, from that time forward it would not be unnatural to refer to Newton by means of that expression no matter what period in Newton's life we were concerned to speak about. We may for that matter speak of Woolsthorpe as the place where Newton was born *or* the place where the author of *Principia* was born. We, but not the I.C., may say that the author of *Principia* was born at Woolethorpe on Christmas Day, 1642. The sentence 'The author of *Principia* is born in Woolethorpe' cannot appear in the I.C. for Christmas Day, 1642. Only after 1687 could this sentence, appropriately tensed, appear in historical writings.

The house in Woolethorpe still stands. It is the same house which peasants, or English yeomen, might have seen in the seventeenth century. It doubtless looks much the same now as it did then. We may make a pilgrimage there if we wish. We will see the same house which those yeomen and peasants saw. But we will see it as the birthspot and early dwelling of one of the greatest scientists of all ages, the place where Newton made those great discoveries in the Plague Year of 1665. Because of the importance of these discoveries, and hence the importance of the man himself, the house at Woolethorpe has for us a special significance. No one could have felt this significance in 1642: it is something which only events future to 1642 could bestow upon it. It is because of the significance we attach to *those* events, now of course in the Past, that we are sensitive to the significance of the stone cottage.[1]

We can visit the house at Woolethorpe, but we cannot visit it at the *time* when Newton was born: just to visit the Past would be to change the Past, and this cannot be. If *per impossibile* we could witness the birth of Newton, we would see that event as fraught with a sort of destiny to which even the most ambitious mother must be blind. A shepherd on a hill in Greece might have seen a woman ravished by a swan (a monstrous enough occurrence), but he would not see engendered there the death of Agamemnon. This is something which could have been 'seen' only by someone who knew what could not have been known at the

time. Were we able to visit the Past we would bring with us our knowledge of the Future (we would in effect be remembering events which occurred later in time than what we would be witnessing). We could only witness the Past as 'it actually happened' if we somehow could forget just the sort of information which may have motivated us to wish to make temporal journeys in reverse.

'But,' it might be argued, 'a clairvoyant might both witness a set of events as they happened *and* see them as significant in the light of future events. We, remembering Einstein's accomplishments, might have seen the old man in the light of these. Why might not one who *foresaw* these accomplishments see the young man in the light of these same achievements? Think of the Magi!' Well, perhaps. But we have not yet allowed the Ideal Chronicler precognitive gifts. He only knows what happens, as it happens, the way it happens. Every event is equally significant to him, or equally insignificant; which is to say that the category of significance fails to apply. How could it apply since he does not know the future? For it is only in the light of the future that the events he witnesses will take on a measure of significance.

If we refuse to allow the I.C. to make *any* claim on the future, to refer to future events, what language is it going to use to describe what happens, as it happens, the way it happens? I have argued that events cannot be described by the I.C. as causes, nor can it characterize them by means of narrative sentences. Narrative sentences refer to at least two time-separated events, and describe the earlier event. But in a sense this structure is also exhibited by a whole class of sentences normally used to describe *actions*. Is the I.C. then to be deprived of the entire language of action? I want to pursue this question, for it will help isolate some further features of narrative sentences.

Before the maiden voyage of the ill-starred ship *Andrea Doria*, a series of advertisements was run showing men painting pictures, carving statues, making mosaics, and the like. Under each such picture was printed 'This man is building a ship'. The pictures did not show men engaged in the sorts of skills obviously involved in the building of a ship, but we were to understand by this that the *Andrea Doria* was to be no ordinary ship. *If* we thought of such activities as mosaic-making

as part of what would normally be done in the building of a ship, the advertisements would fail to make their point—a picture, of men laying a keel would not make the point that the ship in question was to be *extraordinary*. Yet if the expression 'building a ship' were incapable of being extended to cover such un-normal activities, the advertisements again would fail to communicate their message: we would be puzzled indeed if, under a picture of a man lying drunk in the gutter, it said 'This man is building a ship' in a way in which we are not at all puzzled by the pictures we were shown. The predicates of action obey extremely flexible rules: indefinitely many sorts of behaviour may be covered with 'is building a ship'.

Literally speaking, a man may just be putting a seed in a hole when we describe him as 'planting roses', or simply turning screws when we describe him as 'repairing the radio'. Yet no one expects such literal descriptions. We would no more think of correcting the description 'planting roses' by the more literal 'putting seeds in holes' than we would think of accusing a man of falsehood when he answers 'What are you doing?' with 'Planting roses' because what he is *literally* doing is answering our question. The range of behaviour covered by 'is planting roses' includes digging, fertilizing, sowing, even purchasing shovels and seeds, even reading seed catalogues or hiring expert gardeners. Indeed it is the rare case where the action-predicate is literally applicable, for instance, where a man is actually putting rose plants in the ground. The presence of roses is the *result* which all these separate pieces of behaviour are meant to lead to; and because we see some connection between them and such a result, we tend to describe these different pieces of behaviour in terms of the result. Let R be any result, and let E be any behaviour engaged in so as to bring about R. Then what a man is doing may *either* be described with E or R. Then 'a is R-ing' will be a correct description of what a is doing if a does E and E is a means to R. But in fact 'is R-ing' will generally cover a whole range of different pieces of behaviour $B_1 \ldots B_n$, so that when it is true that a is R-ing, we may provisionally suppose that a B_i's, where B_i is a member of the range and where 'B_i's' is a *literal* description of what a does. The range marked out by a predicate like 'is R-ing' is almost certain to be very flexible, and of whomever it is true that he is R-ing it will generally be true that

he will do different things in the range. Or it may be the case that 'is R-ing' is indifferently applicable to a group of individuals each doing one of the things in the range, such as, in a mass-production factory. I shall term predicates like 'is-R-ing' *project verbs*.

Now suppose a does B_i at t-1, and we describe his action with the appropriate project verb, 'a is R-ing'. Is this not to be describing his behaviour in the light of some future occurrence, namely the coming about of R? And does the sentence then not refer to two time-separated events, namely B_i at t-1 and R at t-2? But this would then seem to qualify all sentences which use project verbs in the way I have indicated as narrative sentences. Yet if we allow this, and if narrative sentences are ruled out for the I.C., it would follow that the I.C. could not use project-verbs, and the problem of how it would describe actions becomes acute. If, on the other hand, we permit use of project verbs by the I.C., are we not then allowing it to make claims on the future? In which case why draw the line at all? Or, if we decide that sentences employing project verbs are not narrative sentences, what further characterization of narrative sentences must we give in order to bring out the difference? Let me take these queries up singly.

Suppose the I.C. were restricted to using only predicates of the sort which can appear in the range $B_1 \ldots B_n$ when ordinarily we would use project verbs. Then if we construe the relationship between terms in the range and project verbs as analogous to the relationship between phenomenal predicates and physical object terms, no difficulty need arise, at least in principle. For then a project verb would be eliminable in favour of a set of range-terms, and the I.C. would merely present a more detailed description of what people did than the use of project verbs affords. Such detailed accounts would be wholly consonant with what we expect of the I.C. We, in reading the I.C., if equipped with the appropriate rules of translations, could always replace a series of such descriptions with a single description using a project verb. Unfortunately, the problem of describing actions is even more complex than we have so far made it out to be. To begin with, it may be the case that a project verb is true of a man at a time when *no* term from the range $B_1 \ldots B_n$ is true of him. For a project verb may be true of a man during an indefinitely long period without his having, at every moment during that

period, to do one or another of the things included in the corresponding range. We may speak of Jones writing a book all during the year. During that time Jones, amongst other things, sleeps. Yet the fact that he sleeps during that time does not falsify the claim that he is writing a book. Moreover, suppose a man does B_i and B_i is in a range marked out by 'is *R*-ing'. Still, it would not immediately follow that he is *R*-ing. Thus Jones may be digging holes, and though digging holes is part of what a man of whom 'planting roses' is true *does*, we could not infallibly infer that Jones is planting roses: he may be planting lilacs or *just* digging holes. But again, suppose Jones in temporal succession puts a seed in a hole, scratches his head, strikes a match, blows a smoke ring, thinks of his wife, and shifts his foot. Asked at any moment during this stretch of time, *what* he is doing, Jones will answer correctly 'Planting roses'. But only the first item in the series belongs in the range marked off by this project verb. In an important sense, then, reading the I.C. for this interval of Jones's morning will give no real notion of what Jones was doing unless we were able to collect from the series just those pieces of behaviour which, so to speak, belong together as part of the single project of rose-planting.

There is a kind of ambiguity in the word 'doing'. In one sense, if we knew all of a man's behaviour during a certain interval, we would *know* everything he was doing. In another sense, however, we should have only the raw materials for knowing what he was doing. In the one sense, the I.C. tells us everything we want to know, in another sense it doesn't. Not to have the use of project verbs is to lack the linguistic wherewithal for *organizing* the various statements of the I.C., but more importantly, for the I.C. to lack the use of project words is to render it incapable of describing what men are *doing*—and so disqualifies it from setting down whatever happens, as it happens, the way it happens.

Yet, if we do permit use of project verbs to the Ideal Chronicler, so that it can give a humanly coherent account of what goes on, have we not then violated our restriction against his making claims on the future? If the I.C. is to be allowed to say that Jones is planting roses, when he is only putting a shovel over his shoulders while setting off for the rose fields, why can it not say that Mrs Newton is giving birth to the author

of *Principia* when she has literally only been producing an infant with a weak neck? It would strike *anyone* as odd were he to be told that a universal genius had been born next door, though it would strike nobody as odd were he told that a rose had been planted next door—even though the rose could not be seen for some months. I venture to say that the difference lies in the sort of claim on the future which is made, and shall now try to make this clear.

When is a sentence like '*a* is planting roses' ever *falsified*? The question is exceedingly complex, due, amongst other things, to the indefiniteness of the range of things marked out by the project verb and to complications in the concept of intention. If we see a person just standing still, we cannot surely say that 'is planting roses' is false of him, even though he is at that moment engaged in no obvious activity at all: simply resting in the course of carrying out his project. Nor, if we *ask* him what he is doing and he sincerely replies 'planting lilacs' does this falsify the proposition that he is planting roses, for even though he does not intend to plant roses, he is in fact doing just that, having mistakenly assumed that the seeds were lilac when in fact they were rose seeds. *If* lilacs rather than roses come forth, this will perhaps falsify the proposition that he was planting roses, provided that we are certain that no one surreptitiously replaced his rose seeds with lilac seeds. But if roses fail to come forth, this does *not* falsify our proposition, so long as he did *whatever* might, by current criteria of rosiculture, count as planting roses. So let us assume that there is a definite range of operations, the doing of which constitutes planting roses, and let us suppose further that these operations constitute necessary conditions for the coming forth of roses (forgetting about wild roses). If this were the case, then failure to do these things would not merely guarantee the non-coming-forth of roses ('these things' being necessary conditions for that) but would also falsify the claim that the person was planting roses. On the other hand, since the operations are merely necessary conditions, should *a* do all of them there would be no guarantee that roses would come forth—a hurricane might come up and undo all *a*'s labours—but it *would* be true that *a* was planting roses.

So it can be the case that, while true that *a* is planting roses, it will be false that roses come forth. More generally, if 'is *R*-ing' is any project

verb, it may be the case that a man is *R*-ing without it having to be the case that *R* happens—where *R* is the accepted outcome of *R*-ing. A man then may correctly be said to be repairing the radio—though the radio fails to get repaired—providing only that by common criteria the man is doing the things which fall within the admittedly elastic range marked out by 'repairing the radio'. Hence, though a sentence which asserts a project verb of someone may indeed refer to two time-separated events —B_i which the man *literally* does, and *R*, which is the expected result— and describes the earlier event in the light of the later one, it is not *logically* required that the later event take place for the sentence to be true. So, when we correctly say that *a* is *R*-ing, the reference made to the future does not enter as part of the truth conditions for the sentence.[1] Accordingly, the I.C. might be allowed to say that *a* is *R*-ing without making the kind of claim on the future which would require an erasure in case *R* fails to result. So *R* is not what we earlier called a 'future-referring' term.

Now Jones, sowing rose seeds, is planting roses come what may. It may turn out that he has planted roses which come forth and win prizes at the rose festival. This would allow the *narrative* description, covering exactly the same actions that 'Jones is planting roses' once covered, that Jones was planting prize-winning roses. Two witnesses to Jones's actions might say, respectively, 'Jones is planting roses' and 'Jones is planting prize-winning roses'. The first will be right no matter what the future brings. The second will be wrong if the future brings no prizes to Jones's roses, or if indeed no roses of Jones's come forth. Unless the second man is merely expressing his hopes or saying encouraging things to Jones, his sentence is exposed to more exacting truth conditions than is the first man's. For *his* sentence to be true it is *logically* required that Jones's work result in roses, and that the roses result in prizes. In this sense, he is making a stronger claim on the future than the simple 'Jones is planting roses' does.

In the past tense, 'Jones was planting the prize-winning roses' does, and 'Jones was planting roses' does *not*, require, for its truth, the resultant coming forth of roses. A narrative sentence then does not merely refer to two time-separated events and describe the earlier with reference to the later. It in addition logically requires, if it is to be true,

the occurrence of *both* events. In the present tense, 'Jones is planting roses' is not, while 'Jones is planting the prize-winning roses' *is* partially predictive. As a prediction, it will have been false if no roses come forth (and if they fail to win prizes). Were the I.C. then to have said 'Jones is planting the prize-winning roses', an erasure would be called for unless the later event come out. To guarantee no erasures, we must either prohibit use of narrative sentences in the present tense, or grant special cognitive powers to the Ideal Chronicler. Before considering that alternative, I want to introduce some further complications.

I have claimed that a project verb may be true of an individual through an extended spell of time without the individual needing to be doing, at every moment during that time, one or another of the specific actions in the range marked out by that project verb. This follows from the fact that more than one project-verb may be true of an individual during the same temporal stretch: *a* may be writing a book and courting a widow all during June. Suppose we are interested not in *a*'s total biography, but merely in the history of his book. Then we shall require some criteria for picking out all and only those performances of *a*'s which are exercises of his authorship or which are related in some manner or other to these. Which events in *a*'s life we shall thus collect will depend very much on our criteria for what counts as writing books: the extent of our collection will vary with the stringency of our criteria. Moreover, *a* is almost certain to be engaged with other projects during that time, so there will be gaps between the events our criteria enable us to collect. The events we *do* collect will constitute a gerrymandered subset of whatever *a* does during the time covered. '*R*-ing' is continuously true of *a* so long as *R*-ing is his project, but *a R*'s only intermittently through that time.

Inasmuch as we have adopted the convention of regarding events as extended in time, projects are time-extended events. But given the chequered history of typical projects, we may classify events as continuous and discontinuous, roughly on the analogy of the distinction between smooth and dotted lines. A dotted line is a series of smooth lines with separating interstices, and a discontinuous event may then be characterized as a series of continuous events separated by irrelevant

happenings. True, on a microscopic inspection what looks smooth to the naked eye will be shown up as riddled with breaks. So in the end the difference may be one of degree only, and I have no wish to argue by transcendental deduction, so to speak, that there must be ultimately smooth lines. No more do I wish to argue that there must be continuous events if we set our temporal termini sufficiently close. Indeed it is much more to my point that there should be discontinuous events in the sense illustrated by the history of *a*'s book. The difference I mean to bring out is essentially that of a project and the serial events which count as in the range of actions marked out by the use of the appropriate project word. Briefly, if B_i and B_j are in the range of '*R*-ing', then if B_i is done at *t*-1 and B_j is done at *t*-1 plus delta-*t*, and if nothing is done in the interval between B_i and B_j which is in the range of '*R*-ing', *R*-ing will be discontinuous and each of B_i and B_j will be continuous relative to *R*-ing. Events discontinuous in this sense I shall designate as *temporal structures.*

Now such projects as writing books and courting widows are amongst the simpler sorts of temporal structures. Some projects, for example, involve numbers of individuals. With some violence to ordinary usage, we may speak of innumerable Frenchmen as engaged in French-revolutionizing during an interval of time in the neighbourhood of 1789. The makeshift project verb 'is French-revolutionizing' is not, of course, true of every individual in France during that interval, and is true of some individuals not in France. Nor, of those of whom it is true, were each of them at every moment during that interval French-revolutionizing. So not everything which went on in France is within the range marked out by our project-word: the project was exhibited thus discontinuously over French soil and eighteenth-century time. Just which happenings there and then are to be counted part of the temporal structure denoted by 'The French Revolution' depends very much on our criteria of relevance. Doubtless there are shared criteria so that no disagreement exists over certain events. But insofar as there is disagreement over criteria, the disputants will collect different events and chart the temporal structure differently, and obviously our criteria will be modified in the light of new sociological and psychological insights. The Past does not change, perhaps, but our manner of organiz-

ing it does. To return to our map-making metaphor (see p. 148): there is a sense in which the territories (read: temporal structures) which historians endeavour to map *do* change. They change as our criteria change, and at best our criteria are apt to be flexible, as we saw when speaking of ship-building.

Any term which can sensibly be taken as a value for *x* in the expression 'the history of *x*' designates a temporal structure. Our criteria for identifying *a*, if *a* be a value of *x*, determines which events are to be mentioned in our history. Not to have a criterion for picking out some happenings as relevant and others as irrelevant is simply not be in a position to write history at all.[1] Temporal structures are, of course, *ad hoc* in some degree. The identical event may indeed be a constituent in any number of different temporal structures: *E* may be collected with any number of otherwise disjointed collections of events into distinct temporal wholes. Thus, our description of *E* may accordingly vary as we group it with different collections of events into different temporal structures. Thus to describe *E* with a narrative sentence—to relate it to some later event *E'*—is to locate both *E* and *E'* in the same temporal structure. But no *a priori* limit may be set to the number of different narrative sentences, each of which truly describes *E*, and hence no limit may be set to the number of different temporal structures within which historical organization of the Past will locate *E*.

Nonetheless, just as different contexts will determine which of the innumerable possible descriptions of an object is the appropriate description to give, so the particular temporal structure in which an historian is interested will often determine which is the correct description of a given event. I have contended that a particular thing or occurrence acquires historical *significance* in virtue of its relations to some other thing or occurrence in which we happen to have some special interest, or to which we attach some importance, for whatever reason. Narrative sentences then are frequently used to justify the *mention*, in a narrative, of some thing or event whose significance might otherwise escape a reader. A novelist, for instance, may interrupt his story in order to comment narratively on some happening to which he wants to draw our attention, for example, 'Little did Smith know that his innocent sally was to cause the Bishop's death'. He thus refers ahead to that

particular episode from which the earlier and otherwise trivial-seeming event derives its import. Historians, too, often use such devices. Why, in a history of the Crimean War, single out Captain Nolan for special mention when so many soldiers are not spoken of? Because, when Captain Nolan joined Lord Raglan's staff, 'It was a fatal moment'.[1] 'This officer, brave, brilliant, devoted, was destined to be the instrument which sent the Light Brigade to its doom.'[2]

Words like 'fatal', 'destined', 'doom', dramatize what is an essential fact about the historical organization of the Past. The Charge of the Light Brigade was a piece of idiotic splendour that impressed the minds of men: it was a fit subject even for poetic treatment. Had it never taken place, or had it been routine or inglorious, the light of historical interest might never have fallen on Captain Nolan, or might have illuminated him differently, for example, in some other temporal structure, say the history of cavalry.

Examples of such retroactive re-alignment of the Past might be multiplied indefinitely. Any novel philosophical insight, for instance, may force a fresh restructuring of the whole history of philosophy; one begins to see earlier philosophers as predecessors—which, ironically, can lead men to understress the originality of him whose novel insight brought to historical attention otherwise unremarked traits of antecedent philosophical utterances. Kant complained bitterly about this.[3] We have recently seen, as a result of the products of the New York School of abstract expressionism, a comparable revaluation of Monet. One might find that Monet influenced not a single member of the New York School: but because these men began to paint in a special way Monet *became* a predecessor in his late works. 'If,' wrote Bergson, 'there had been no Rousseau, no Chateaubriand, no Vigny, no Victor Hugo, not only would one never perceive, but indeed there would *not have been* any romanticism in the classics of the past.' For

> this romanticism of the classicists was only actualized by the carving out of a certain aspect of their work. But this *découpure*, with its specific form, no more existed in the literature of classicism before the advent of romanticism than the amusing design exists in a passing cloud before an artist perceives it there in organizing that formless mass according to his fancy.[4]

This, of course, is extravagantly put. I should prefer to say that the

romantic elements were there, in classicism, to be discovered. But it is a discovery for which we require the *concept* of romanticism, and criteria for identifying the romantic. But a concept of romanticism would naturally not have been available in the heyday of classicism. I want parenthetically to remark that whatever in classical writings turns out to fall under the concept of romanticism was doubtless put in those works intentionally. But they were not intentional under the description 'putting in romantic elements', for the authors lacked that concept. This is an important limitation on the use of *Verstehen*. It was not an *intention* of Aristarchus to anticipate Copernicus, nor of Petrarch to open the Renaissance. To give such descriptions requires concepts which were only available at a later time. From this it follows that even having access to the minds of the men whose action he describes will not enable the Ideal Chronicler to appreciate the significance of those actions.

To be alive to the historical significance of events as they happen, one has to know to which later events these will be related, in narrative sentences, by historians of the future. It will then not be enough simply to be able to predict future events. It will be necessary to know *which* future events are relevant, and this requires predicting the *interests* of future historians. I want now to turn to the matter of predicting events in this manner. But I note in passing that if the Ideal Chronicler is to do this, it will be the works of human historians which will be his models rather than, as we earlier supposed, the other way around.

We cannot identify a sentence *S* as a prediction simply by tense, for some sentences may be predictions and yet atypically be in the *past* tense. Thus 'Aristarchus anticipated Copernicus' is predictive at any time after 270 B.C. and before A.D. 1453.[1] Nor is it simply a matter of the user of *S* intending *S* to be a prediction, for the user may be confused on dates, and the race whose outcome he *tries* to predict may already have been run and won by the time he utters *S*.[2] I shall stipulate, not a definition of, but only a necessary condition for, predictive sentences: *S* is a prediction when *S* refers to *E* and *E* does not occur earlier than, or concurrently with, the utterance of *S*.[3]

A narrative sentence, referring as it does to a time-ordered pair of

events *E*-1 and *E*-2, will then be a prediction if used by the Ideal Chronicler. For he will write it down *when* *E*-1 takes place (narrative sentences being about the earliest of the events they refer to), and so temporally earlier than *E*-2. Moreover, if the I.C. is to remain definitive, these must be *correct* predictions. But this now modifies the task of the Ideal Chronicler considerably. For since the pair of events referred to by a narrative sentence belongs to the same temporal structure, the Ideal Chronicler has to be structuring the Future in the same way that future historians will be structuring the Past. Since the I.C. is to be *complete*, all narrative sentences true of *E*-1 must be written down at once, and accordingly the Ideal Chronicler must lay out all the temporal structure in which *E*-1 will be located. In effect the I.C. is writing history before it has happened. So if we *now* allow pieces of the I.C. to fall into the hands of historians, they will find out a great deal more than simply what happened, as it happened, the way it happened. They will also find out what *will* happen (unless the events, whose account they have, are totally unrelated to future happenings). But with this we destroy the asymmetry in our concept of Past and Future: Past and Future now are one in point of determinateness. Indeed, this is analytic. For the truth of *p* is logically entailed by the truth of '*a* correctly predicts that *p*', and every prediction made by the Ideal Chronicler is by definition correct.

So everything is changed. In particular the cognitive powers of the Ideal Chronicler have been changed. Before, though he was privy to a great deal more than a mere human could be, his manner of knowing was simply an extension of a familiar human cognitive situation: he *witnessed* the events he wrote about. But one cannot witness *future* events without changing the meaning of 'witnessing'. How then can he know the future? Is the behaviour of the Ideal Chronicler any longer even intelligible to us? Let us turn to more strictly human cases in which predictions are made, and work our way gradually back to these questions.

When, at *t*-1, a man predicts *E*-at-*t*-2, we may always ask how he knows, or why he thinks, that *E*-at-*t*-2. This will generally be by way of request for evidence, and our confidence in the prediction will vary with our assessment of that evidence. Let the prediction be 'Rain at *t*-2'. Then evidence may range from rheumatic twinges or mere

hunches, to gravid clouds or the behaviour of birds, to the outcome of tests with cloud chambers, X-rays, electronic diffraction, or the like. Or it may simply be the weather report in the paper. Whatever the case, that which is cited as evidence is accepted as such only when some answer can be given to the question *why* it is thought to provide some basis for believing that rain at *t*-2. The answer may range from a plain inductive generalization to the latest meteorological theory. Briefly, we need, for predictions, some event and some law-like sentence or other which allows us to infer, from that event, a future happening. Now I am for the moment not interested in whether something is good or bad evidence, but only in the most general requirement which that something must satisfy if it is to be evidence *at all*, namely, that whatever is offered in evidence must be available at the time the prediction is made. Given our characterization of predictions, *one* thing systematically excluded by this requirement is the event predicted. Any statement to the effect that *E* will happen, when *E* has already happened, will automatically be false by virtue of misrepresenting the temporal relationship between the utterance of that statement and *E*. Hence *E*, if offered as evidence for a prediction about itself, will automatically render that prediction false.

At *t*-2, then, we have access to information *in principle* unavailable to a man who predicted what would happen at *t*-2. Specifically, we are in a position to *know* that his prediction was correct or incorrect. Asked how we know that it is raining, we can in principle show evidence which even the most sophisticated forecaster could not have shown earlier: we can point to the rain-fall. Now if narrative sentences refer to two time-separated events, and are predictive until the second event occurs, it would seem that after that event, persons (historians) can always cite evidence in favour of the narrative sentence which would in principle have been unavailable before the occurrence of the temporally latest event referred to by it: they can cite the *event itself*. And they are then in a position to know, as no one before the occurrence of that event would be, that the narrative sentence is true. Whether it was true before is a question for our next chapter: I am interested only in the epistemology of the matter here.

But if we are really doing epistemology, we have leapt too far. For

suppose that at *t*-1 it is predicted that *E*-at-*t*-2. Then indeed someone will, at *t*-2, have information lacking at *t*-1, namely the event itself, if the prediction turns out to have been correct. Presumably he witnesses *E*, whereas only signs of *E* could be witnessed at *t*-1. But then *E* can be witnessed *only* at *t*-2: at *t*-3 it is already too late for that, and so on for every *t*-*n* ($n > 3$). From *t*-3 on we are roughly in the same position as he who predicted at *t*-1: like him, we can only witness *signs* of *E*-at-*t*-2. In a sense, we are in a less favoured position. For the predictor may at least hope to witness the event he has predicted. But our own argument systematically falsifies 'I will witness *E*' if *E* occurs temporally earlier than the utterances of this sentence. The predictor is in a position to be in a position of witnessing, and hence knowing whether or not he predicted correctly. But not the retrodictor.

This disadvantage is partially offset by the fact that those who predict the occurrence of *E* and those who retrodict the occurrence of *E* may witness disjoint classes of signs of *E*. Possibly wet streets are not stronger signs that it has rained than gravid clouds are that it will rain, but copies of *De Revolutionibus Orbium Caelestium* would appear offhand to be stronger signs that *somebody* wrote the book than any signs I can think of would be that somebody will write it. At any rate, the retrodictor may have the testimony of witnesses to an event, and this sort of evidence is systematically outlawed for him who predicts, given our general restriction. As a special case we have histories of events after and not before they occur.

Granted that the possibility of someone saying he has witnessed an event, and is now waiting for it to happen, is ruled out by our restriction; granted again that we would simply find absurd the statement by somebody that his book has been published so that he had better get busy and write it, is it similarly to be granted as absurd that someone should claim to have the history of a set of events written, it only now being a matter for the events to *happen*? Let us try to imagine such a case.

Suppose we pick up a book titled *The Battle of Iwo Jima*. It describes in *minute detail* the men and movements of that conflict: it tells who gets wounded and when, who gets killed and why, and we then discover that the book was written in 1815! For all that, we find that the book tells us more than we already know, even if we are, say, the foremost

historical experts on that battle. Using the book as a guide, we look up survivors heretofore unknown to us. Their testimony always squares with this strange, anachronistic windfall, which now becomes an invaluable guide to historical research, like a treasure map!

After all, a man may draw the treasure map *first*, and then afterwards place the treasure, or have the treasure placed. A man may lay out a programme and afterwards carry it out, or have it carried out. Here are instances of 'rectifying the facts'.[1] Why then cannot we write a history before the events about which it is written actually happen? Someone might argue that we would not *call* this history, that history by definition is about the past, that it violates usage, accordingly, to say the history of happenings in 1945 can be written in 1815. I am not one to quibble over usage: let it not be called 'history'. But suppose we only found out *after* having accepted the book as the definitive account of the Battle of Iwo Jima that it was written in 1815. I should find cold comfort in the fact that we could no longer call it history. It is the possibility of such an account, however it be designated, that I find disturbing.

A baby in the course of its babbling might, by sheer accident, utter a string of vocables which turn out to be a proof of Fermat's last theorem. Call this a coincidence: one string of vocables may be equiprobable with any other string. Or consider the baby an oracle, and bring in mathematicians to heed its noises. Anything counts as reasonable in such a case. But suppose our problem manuscript is discovered in a bundle of papers, the literary estate of a nineteenth-century writer, and there are with it letters. Typical of what these say may be: 'I have been hard at work on my book on Iwo Jima. The work goes slowly. . . .' Enough such secondary documentation convinces us that the book is due to deliberate human contrivance. We find passages crossed out and replaced with what turn out to be factually correct emendations, all in that quaint nineteenth-century handwriting. Everyone would say: this is a forgery. But if we found amongst Newton's papers a celestial map for the year 1960, and checked and found it wholly accurate, we would not suspect a hoax. We would not feel the unease which comes when a fundamental concept is threatened. Why though?

Wittgenstein wrote: 'The future is hidden from us. But does an astronomer think like this when he calculates an eclipse of the sun?'[2]

The question is rhetorical: astronomers apparently *don't* think that way. The thing is, we know more or less what the astronomer does: he determines initial positions, solves equations, and so on. Our precocious historian wrote: 'The work goes slowly.' But what *kind* of work? And here we *don't* know. We only know that it can be not at all like what historians commonly do: work through the archives, authenticate documents, sift testimony, interview survivors and examine photographs. Our inclination now may be to say there can be no writing of history before events because nothing is to count as historiography. For the astronomer, the future is no more hidden than the past, and prediction and retrodiction are of a piece. But there is a special asymmetry between signs and traces of events, which we have already noticed. Footprints exist after, not before footfalls. Photographs, eye-witness reports, and the like exist after, not before the events they testify to, and it is with such things that historiography has to do. Think of the immense difficulties in trying to predict just those spots upon which a man's feet will fall as he crosses the sand: and how simple it is, so long as footprints remain, to retrodict the positions.

These asymmetries run deep. Seeing gravid clouds I may say 'It will rain unless . . .' and seeing wet streets I may say 'It rained unless . . .'. But the expression which will indifferently complete either sentence is rare. Thus 'a water-truck came by' naturally completes the second sentence, but—shifting tense—'a water-truck comes by' fits ill with the first. Again, 'It will rain unless the wind shifts' may be said when gravid clouds are seen, but 'It has rained unless the wind shifted' sounds odd when wet surfaces are seen. Moreover, if a man witnesses *E* at *t*-2, he is still regarded as a witness at *t*-3 but, although he will witness the event, he is not regarded a witness at *t*-1.

Yet, if we use the testimony of such a witness as the basis for a retrodiction, we are relying on his memory. Why might there not after all be a symmetry with using some precognitive deliverance from he who *will* be a witness as the basis for a prediction? Call such a person a 'pre-witness'. A pre-witness precognizes that he will witness, the way a witness remembers that he *has* witnessed an event. Someone might now argue: to say that *a* is a pre-witness is logically to presuppose that *a* will witness *E*, and to say that *a* will witness *E* is logically to presuppose

that *E* will occur. But we cannot then accept, as evidence that *E* will occur, *a*'s testimony—as a pre-witness—to that effect, for to *accept* him as a pre-witness is logically to presuppose the very question in issue, namely, the occurrence of *E*. Unfortunately, an exactly analogous argument would disqualify the evidence of witnesses, for to accept *b* as a witness of *E* logically presupposes that *b* did witness *E*. This in turn logically presupposes the occurrence of *E*. Hence to accept *b* as a witness, and his testimony as evidence for the occurrence of *E*, is to beg the question in issue. The truth of *p* is entailed by the truth of '*b* remembers that *p*'. But then the truth of *p* is also entailed by the truth of '*a* precognizes that *p*'.

Of course, if we insist on regarding precognition as symmetrical with memory, we would presumably have to rule out precognition as that upon which the 'historian' of the Battle of Iwo Jima based his account. For if we cannot remember events we have not witnessed, we cannot precognize events we *won't* witness, and the 'historian' will almost certainly not witness the battle. So the alleged symmetry between memory and precognitions comes to very little. This hardly affects the typical historian, who seldom has personally witnessed the events he writes of: but it is disastrous for the person who writes of events he *will* not witness.

Perhaps then he has some sort of second sight, and bases his account on prophetic visions. We might then explain his emendations on the grounds that a later vision supersedes an earlier one, as in the composition of the *Koran*. Yet we might ask how he really knows he has this sort of second sight, how he distinguishes between having a proper vision and simply imagining things. It may be that what he meant by 'The work goes slowly' was: 'Visions are few and far between.' But how should he distinguish his case from that of a novelist with a grudging muse? Note that we can match our strange prophet with an equally strange person who has *retroactive* visions: a person who writes, in 1960 and on the basis solely of visions, the history of what happened in 1815! Suppose indeed that this person writes in this manner a wholly accurate account. But at least we can *check* this man's visions against standard accounts. Even when he reports things not in standard accounts we can know in principle what sort of evidence it would take to verify

what he says. But in 1815 there would have been nothing comparable against which the 'History of the Battle of Iwo Jima' could have been checked. Certainly not against *other* accounts. For the question would then arise how these accounts were arrived at. If they too were written on the basis of visions, we would only have transferred the problem. A visionary history and an orthodox history might arrive at the same conclusions: there would be orthodox ways of checking both. But when the account is written *before* the events in question, there are neither orthodox accounts nor orthodox ways of checking unorthodox ones. There may *be* such visions. Having them is just someone's huge good luck—like begetting a universal genius. Piero da Vinci's behaviour is instructive: he tried to duplicate the exact circumstances under which Leonardo was conceived in the expectation of duplicating Leonardo. You can say he did just the right thing, or just the wrong thing. It makes no difference. For in the end nothing is right or wrong when it comes to begetting the universal genius. There is no recipe.

However, when the astronomer calculates the future eclipse, we don't suppose *him* to enjoy special precognitive gifts or to require second sight. When we say the Future is hidden, all we may mean is that we lack the sorts of laws and theories which the astronomer *has*. Might not the precocious historian have used Science? By 'The work goes slowly' we are now to understand that he meant: it is damned hard to determine values for all the variables, damned hard to make the intricate calculations which lead deductively to the conclusions presented in 'The History of the Battle of Iwo Jima'. Well, this may very well be. We have fair reasons for believing that there were no such theories in 1815. We lack them today. And we cannot then really understand, since we don't ourselves have such theories, what sorts of things counted as initial and boundary conditions. But let us suppose the man knew these things, and that his work was 'scientific' work. He predicted the Battle the way the astronomer predicts the eclipse.

Once again, let us work from simple cases. We shall suppose a theory T in accordance with which an event E may be predicted from another event C. Let T be: 'Whenever gravid clouds, then rain.' The vocabulary of T then consists of two special terms, 'gravid clouds' and 'rain'. Now many things are true of rain-storms other than their just being rain-storms. Accordingly we may readily frame a description D of E which cannot be formulated in the skimpy lexicon of T.

Now E may certainly be predicted by means of T, but not under description D. In order to be able to do *that*, we shall have to show that the predicates of D are explicitly definable with the terms already included in T or—more likely in the present case—we shall have suitably to enrich our stock of terms. T becomes proportionately more complicated as a consequence of this, and we shall now suppose T to be brought to that level of complexity currently exhibited by the latest theory of meteorology. Supposing the vocabulary of T now consists of a set of terms $F_1, F_2, F_3 \ldots F_n$, we may say that the description under which E is predicted will ideally use each of these terms or its negate. This will then be the fullest description current theory affords.

We all know, of course, that any such description, however rich, is meagre in contrast with what is logically possible: that every predicate in the language (or its negate) could apply to E, and that even then, *omne individuum est ineffabile*, the properties of E would not be exhausted: the richness of E's properties outdistances the maximum richness of descriptive power in our language taken *in toto*. But this does not concern me particularly. For suppose E has happened, according to its prediction. Then there may be descriptions of E which we find it important to give, but which fall outside the linguistic reach of T. It may not have been just a rainstorm: it may have been the rainstorm in which our basement was flooded, or which washed away the wharf that Smith built in 1912. I do not mean to say that these things could not have been predicted. I only mean to say that they could not have been predicted by means of T alone. For 'floods Jones's basement' or 'washes away Smith's wharf' are almost certainly not terms true of rainstorms which are included in T or explicitly definable by means of the terms which are.

It is generally admitted that a scientific theory cannot predict an event under every true description of that event. Indeed, part of what we think of as scientific activity consists in finding the appropriate language for describing events, picking out those terms which designate relevant properties of events, or making up terms for this purpose. It is quite enough to know the initial position and motion of a body to be able

to predict its path: one need not also know that a particular such ball is a china egg made for the elder daughter of Czar Nicholas. So it would be pointless and, in the end, destructive of the whole concept of scientific theory to recommend incorporation into a theory such as those terms with which our own local interest in basements and what move us to describe rainstorms. Moreover, it would be an impossible demand. For there is no end to the number of temporal structures in which the historians of the future might see *E* as located. It may come to be known as the storm in which Alice and Bernard had their first quarrel, or during which the man who solved Fermat's last theorem was born. So it is a sufficient achievement to be able to predict *E* under *some* description of it. The claim, less frequently met with today than formerly, that there are two distinct kinds of events—scientific events, which can be predicted and explained, and historical events, which cannot—is erroneous. There are not two classes of events, but perhaps two classes of descriptions. Science may indeed fail to give us the information about events which we want, but this is because such information cannot always be stated in the abbreviated language of scientific theories. It would *destroy* the concept of meteorology to make such demands.

So it may be, but we are now interested in a different theory: the one used to predict, not just the occurrence of the Battle of Iwo Jima, but that event under the enormously detailed description found in our controversial 'history'. There must be such sentences in the latter as 'At 3.30, February 20, Sgt Mallory, while arming a grenade, is killed by Pvt Kito—the latter's fifth and only successful shot of that day'. Small wonder the work went slowly! It would be labour enough merely to write the *history* in such detail. At any rate, the theory used to predict all this must be as linguistically rich as ordinary language. We are supposing after all that the account is readily intelligible to the plain reader.

But then suppose the manuscript had been discovered in, say, 18[illegible]. Readers then might have been puzzled by some of the language (as we are often puzzled by some of theirs), but, struck with the fertility of the writer's imagination, they might have assigned it to the same genre as the writings of Jules Verne—though it would perhaps be too wordy, too detailed, for a proper novel. Edited versions, even boys' editions of it would appear. Only after 1945 would people see it as pre-written history. Or suppose it had been discovered sometime in 1944 and really taken seriously as a piece of scientific prediction. The High Command might discuss it, compare it with their own plans, perhaps even alter their own plans. Sgt Mallory would see to it that he was elsewhere at 3.30 on 20 February. And then all the work, which went so slowly, would have come to naught: the predictions were false! For men refused to follow the manuscript, behaving like rebellious actors dissatisfied with the script. It is a common enough thing to falsify predictions. Someone predicts that the ball will strike the ground at a certain time, and someone else catches it. Surely it would be to a man's interest to falsify the prediction that he will lose his life at a certain time and place. The only way for the prediction to go through *is* for it to be discovered after the event. For we cannot, remember, change the Past.

Maybe that man in 1815 was aware of all this. Maybe he even so predicted the future that the manuscript would fall into peoples' hands in 1944, and that they would try to falsify the predictions made in it. He predicted what they would do, and wrote about this! Then the same situation as before would arise if this 'fuller' account were to fall into men's hands in 1944. What we cannot imagine is their knowing what prediction was made and *not* being able to falsify it, so long as the event predicted had not already happened. Imagine having the prediction that one will move one's left foot at t-1 and one's right foot at t-2. One tries to falsify this: one tries just to stand still at t-1, or move one's right foot, but *despite* all one's efforts, the prediction comes out! The feet fall into foreshadowed foot-prints: as though one had lost all control of one's limbs, they are now moving off on their own. Or imagine trying not to yell, and then finding despite this a scream tearing past one's lips. Think of a whole battlefield of men going through this weird alienation. In horror, men find themselves aiming guns; fingers move spontaneously to grenades and pluck out pins; men try to shout 'Retreat' but the predicted 'Attack!' comes out instead. Everyone watches his own behaviour in an almost spectatorial way, detached from every act, knowing in advance what will be done and unable to *do* anything to

prevent its happening. These things happen in nightmares perhaps, or in the dreams of the Mad Scientist. In dreams it might happen that someone shouts 'Stop falling!' and I, in my flight through space, obey —arresting myself in mid-air. 'Stop falling!', in a real context, is a paradigm case of an order we cannot obey. 'Move your right foot!' in normal contexts is a paradigm case of an order we can disobey if we wish. The elaborate case I have just imagined could only occur if men lost what we normally regard as control over their actions. The one book we cannot imagine the man of Iwo Jima having in their hands is 'The History of the Battle of Iwo Jima'. Or rather: we cannot both imagine their having it *and* the book remaining true.

What we don't know, then, is what the historians of the future are going to say about us. If we *did*, we could falsify their accounts in just the same way that we could falsify predictions made before the time at which we are acting, or we can do this within the limits of normal human control; a set of limits which we expect science to widen rather than narrow.

So let us now suppose that the Battle was predicted, and the prediction then only discovered afterwards. We regard it as a great achievement, and regret only that it was discovered too late. Since it was discovered too late, it is true. Nothing can happen to the Past to make it false, but as time passes, we will find it more and more necessary to add fresh descriptions of the Battle of Iwo Jima. A man who was a private then survives, due to the heroic action of a man whose dying thought might have been that he had sacrificed himself for so insignificant a person. That private then goes on to do great deeds! The episode takes on a special significance: it is taught to school-children. They enjoy enacting the scene in which was saved the life of the man who . . . . And more and more narrative sentences enter later accounts of the Battle: sentences which even the genius of 1815 did not know.

Could the Ideal Chronicler have known? It is up to us to say. He is our creation, we can do with him as we will. It was we, after all, who *decided* that he should be capable of simultaneously transcribing everything as it happened, when it happened, the way it happened. But why prolong the fiction? It has served our purposes, and may now be abandoned. And with it goes the I.C., of which we failed to find a

version which did not either tell us less than we want to, or more than we can know. What about our lame metaphysical model? What did it serve to do except to say metaphorically that true sentences about the Past are not false—which may be all that 'The Past cannot change' comes to. What then about true statements concerning the Future? Well, if we can falsify a statement about the future, it simply is not true. If 'changing the Future' means only falsifying predictions, then we can surely change the Future. Why then can we not falsify retrodictions? The answer is we could, in one sense, do that. If I knew that someone would retrodict that I ate a peach at t-1, I could eat an apple instead, and so falsify this retrodiction. But this is just what I do not know. If we knew what the historians of the future would say about us, we could falsify their sentences if we wanted to, just as we can, if we wish, falsify what people before us have predicted that we shall do. Why do we not know the future in this sense? I am not able to say. But does that sentence of Peirce's, with which we began, mean any more than that we do not know what the historians of the future will say? 'The Future is open' says only that nobody has written the history of the Present.