Alfred Stern

THE IRREVERSIBILITY OF HISTORY

One of the characteristic features of our time is the growth of its historical sense. The reason for this development is clear: we have lived more history than any other epoch in the evolution of mankind. In the past, during that short period of historical stability which—*cum grano salis*—characterized the forty-three years between the French-German War of 1870–71 and World War I, a person could live without being interested in history. In our days such an attitude is no longer possible. We may try in vain to take no interest in history. History takes interest in us, in each of us. The last half-century showed us that to understand history is of equal importance to those who make it and to those who endure it. After having gone through two world wars and being confronted with the threat of a third one, people of my generation finally learned to understand that history is a perpetual collective becoming, of which each individual is, willy-nilly, a part. At the cost of great sacrifices we have acquired a new sense unknown to our fathers: a historical sense which guides us in life. As the seagull has a sense for meteorological storms, man, in the middle of the twentieth century, has developed a sense for historical storms: he feels the coming of wars and revolutions.

This new historical sense explains the reawakening of the interest in the philosophy of history. Having recognized that our individual desti-

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nies are intimately linked to the historical evolution of the group to which we belong, we seek to understand history in its wholeness, the principles by which it is governed and the meaning it may conceal. The totality of the endeavors to understand history and to integrate it into the wholeness of human existence is what, according to a term coined by Voltaire, is called "philosophy of history."

Has philosophy any influence on history? In his *Philosophie des Rechts* Hegel pronounced the celebrated sentence that "the owl of Minerva takes its flight only when the shades of night are gathering."[1] Only *post festum,* after the event, can philosophy begin its erudite work of interpretation. Thus philosophy arrives always "too late" to influence the course of events.

By these words the ultraconservative Hegel wanted to discourage the enthusiastic, youthful followers of philosophical doctrines aiming at a reform of the political realities of the absolute Prussian monarchy. It was for fulfilling this task that Hegel had been called to the University of Berlin in 1818 by the Prussian minister of education, von Altenstein. However, Hegel's point of view did not take into account the true influence exerted by philosophy on the great historical events. A witness of the French Revolution, which he admired as the supreme triumph of reason and the idea of right in political reality, Hegel had been, after all, in a position to see the formidable influence of philosophical ideas—those of Rousseau and his confrères of the *Encyclopédie*—on the march of history.

Evidently, Hegel could not foresee that his own system was going to constitute another, no less impressive example of the decisive influence of philosophical ideas on political history. It is well known that fascism drew its inspiration from the right-wing Old Hegelians, while communism is the intellectual child of the leftist Young Hegelians. It was said that the two opposing Hegelian factions met finally in the mortal embrace of the Battle of Stalingrad.

But if Hegel's reference to Minerva's owl is not valid for philosophy, it seems to describe perfectly the function of historiography. The latter, indeed, begins its work of interpretation only when the fact is accomplished. It is truly always in arrears with respect to the event. "As soon as Clio begins to speak, and were it only one second later, that she is

1. F. W. F. Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (Stuttgart, 1928), p. 37.

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speaking about has ceased to exist," says Étienne Gilson.[2] Narrated history can only be a history of the past. This fact confronts us with a difficult problem. For, evidently, the history which happened exists for us only in that which is narrated. And since, besides narrated or written history, we do not have any with which we could compare it—for history as reality no longer exists—certain ultracritical philosophers go as far as to call in question the existence of a historical reality. This fact seems to confirm Cicero's ironical word: "Nihil tam absurde dici potest quod non dicatur ab aliquo philosophorum" ("Nothing so absurd can be said which would not have been said by some of the philosophers").[3]

I admit that historical reality can be grasped only in the form of historical knowledge. But this is true only under the condition that we limit history to the past, as most thinkers have done since the days of Herodotus. To Raymond Aron history is "la science du passé humain" ("the science of the human past"),[4] and to Faustino Ballvé it is "el estudio de la vida de la humanidad por documentos" ("the study of the life of humanity by documents).[5] History, certainly, is also this, but not only this. There are indeed two histories: the one which is narrated and the one which is happening. That which is narrated can, evidently, only refer to that which happened in the past, be it only one moment before. This is history as knowledge, history told orally or in written documents. But this history as knowledge has an object: history as reality. As far as the latter is concerned, it evidently has a past, a present, and a future; it flows from the past to the present and projects itself to the future.

As soon as we admit a history of the present, the difference between history as knowledge and history as reality becomes obvious, and the latter detaches itself from the former as an independent entity. Whoever lived through World War II, whoever participated in the great battle of France in May and June, 1940, or in the landing in Sicily, whoever entered Paris with the victorious Allied armies, whoever was wounded or deported by the Germans and who reads now the history of World War II by Churchill, Eisenhower, or De Gaulle will realize that there is

2. É. Gilson, *L'École des muses* (Paris, 1851), p. 12.

3. Cicero *De divinatione* ii. 58.

4. R. Aron, *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1938), p. 17.

5. F. Ballvé, *Diez lecciones de economía* (Mexico, 1956), p. 1.

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such a thing as historical reality and that it cannot be confused with the history written in books. We gain this conviction of the existence of a historical reality by a recourse to subjectivity, a kind of pathetic *cogito* which could be expressed in the following terms: "I am suffering from it, or I have suffered from it—consequently, there is a historical reality." By the sufferings it imposes upon man history reveals itself as a *present* reality, neatly distinct from the shadow it throws behind itself under the form of historical knowledge. Historical reality is *experienced* history.

The sufferings imposed upon individuals by the collective tragedies called "historical" have been, in all epochs, the main motives for the developments of a philosophy of history. The first fully conscious attempt to create such a philosophy—Augustine's *City of God*—was motivated by the conquest of Rome by the Visigoths. The triumph of these hordes, their atrocities, especially "the outrages suffered by Christian women on the part of the Barbarian soldiers"—all these events concerning the collectivity posed a grave problem which, necessarily, aroused a philosophical mind like Augustine's. What had that city, considered eternal, done to deserve such a cruel fate? Thus the fall of the capital of the civilized world invited Augustine to meditate on the caducity of secular civilizations and to seek the salvation of mankind in its supernatural vocation. The result of these meditations was the first great treatise on the philosophy of history.

The intimate relation between Augustine's philosophy of history and the pillage of Rome by the Visigoths in A.D. 410 becomes obvious from the beginnings of the *City of God*. In its first book the author rises "against the pagans who ascribed to the Christian religion, because it prohibits the worship of the gods, the disasters of the world and especially the recent pillage of Rome by the Goths (*maximeque Romanae urbis recentem a Gothis vastationem*)."[6]

The invasions of Italy in the sixteenth century and the moral sufferings they imposed on his patriotism and national pride had a decisive influence on the philosophy of history of Niccolò Machiavelli. The final chapter of his *Prince* has the title "Esortazione a liberare l'Italia da barbari" ("Exhortation To Liberate Italy from the Barbarians").[7]

6. Sancti Aurelii Augustini, *De Civitate Dei contra Paganos*, Book i.

7. *Opera di Niccolò Machiavelli*, Vol. VI (1727), chap. xxvi, p. 356.

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Hegel's, the greatest attempt of a philosophy of history in modern times, was partly conceived under the thunder of Napoleon's cannons. Hegel was a young professor in the University of Jena when the victorious French troops took the city. In the night before the Battle of Jena, he saw through the windows of his room the fires of the French battalions camping on the market place. During this historical night he revised the last pages of the manuscript of his *Phenomenology of the Spirit* (*Die Phänomenologie des Geistes*). The next day the Prussian troops were beaten, and Hegel's apartment wrecked, so that the minister of state, Goethe, had to grant him a subsidy.

On the eve of the Battle of Jena, Hegel saw Napoleon and wrote to a friend: "I have seen the emperor—that world soul—riding on horseback through the city. . . . It is indeed a sublime feeling to see such an individual, who, concentrated on one point, on horseback, spreads over the world and dominates it."[8] The whole of Hegel's philosophy of history was to bear the stamp of these individual experiences of a collective destiny. His ideas on the "stabilization" of history, on great men as "managers" of the universal spirit, on their passions and sacrifices, on their right to place themselves above morals, etc.—all these were intimately linked to Hegel's personal experience of the Battle of Jena and its hero, Bonaparte, an experience at the same time distressing and sublime.

The most sensational book on philosophy of history in the twentieth century, Oswald Spengler's *Decline of the West,* was published in 1917, under the impact of World War I, and Arnold Toynbee's new philosophical interpretation of history underwent the influence of two world wars. Referring to the first of these disasters, Toynbee wrote: "My mind was . . . not yet set hard when history took my generation by the throat in 1914."[9] Even the most static, unhistorical, supratemporal philosopher of our century, Edmund Husserl, had to reinterpret his doctrine in a new, historical sense when the historical catastrophe of Hitler's so-called "National Revolution" took him by the throat, almost in a literal sense.[10]

8. K. Fischer, *Hegels Leben, Werke und Lehren* (Heidelberg, 1911), I, 70.

9. A. J. Toynbee, *Civilization on Trial* (New York, 1948), p. 3.

10. Cf. E. Husserl, *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendentale Phänomenologie* (The Hague, 1954).

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The new vigor of the philosophy of history we have noticed since the days of World War II is thus well explained by the personal sufferings of so many individuals, undergoing a cruel collective destiny which befell their time, their generation. From the standpoint of their psychological motives philosophical systems may be divided into *theorogone* and *pathogone. Theorogene* philosophy is motivated by observing the world: the antique θεωρός was the observer who attended public games in official mission. *Pathogone* philosophy, on the contrary, is motivated by the sufferings, the πάθος, which our human existence imposes on us. If epistemology is, in general, theorogone, we may affirm that in most cases philosophy of history is pathogone. The examples I gave show this with sufficient evidence.

In my book on the philosophical foundations of truth, reality, and value I outlined the differences between philosophy and the sciences by stating that philosophy examines the relationships between determining thought and the objects determined, that is, between man as a subject and his world. The sciences, on the other hand, examine the mutual relationships among the objects determined which constitute the world.[11] Many people do not consider history as a science. What it has in common with science is, however, the characteristic feature of examining the mutual relationships among its objects. For history these objects in a logical sense are frequently psychological subjects. *Philosophy of history,* on the contrary, tries to find out how determining thought can determine the concept of *history* as distinct from the concept of *nature;* how it succeeds in determining the logical, epistemological, and axiological conditions of historical knowledge: if and how it ends by determining *historical laws* and conceiving the concepts of *meaning* and *value* of history.

It is interesting to note that, in spite of having been the creators of occidental philosophy and of historiography, the Greeks did not develop a philosophy of history. In searching for an explanation of this fact, many authors put the blame on the idea of the cycle, which dominated Greek thought. According to an ancient tradition (Sumerian and Greek), there is a regularity in the changes of time which, after an always identical cycle, produces a recurrence of the same days, months,

11. A. Stern, *Die philosophischen Grundlagen von Wahrheit, Wirklichkeit, Wert* (Munich, 1932), pp. 290 ff.

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years, and, with them, events. This idea of an eternal return deprives events of their individual character. "Aimez ce que jamais on ne verra deux fois" ("love that which one will never see twice"), said Alfred de Vigny. The Greek historian had that love, and therefore there was Greek history. But, under the domination of the idea of an eternal return, the Greek *philosopher* did not believe in events which one would never see twice, and therefore he did not create a philosophy of history. The idea of an eternal return deprives history of all significance and transforms it into a mechanical, unchangeable repetition of confused images of that which really exists: the *One* and *Permanent* which, as a typical feature of Greek thought, can even be found in so dynamic a philosophy as that of Heraclitus.

However, the idea of the cycle alone does not explain the absence of a philosophy of history among the Greeks, for that cyclic idea is to be found also in some philosophers of history of the Christian Era and of modern times, such as Vico, Croce, Spengler, Toynbee. There is, however, a difference between the Greeks, on the one hand, and the Christians and moderns on the other. For most Greek thinkers matter was eternal, uncreated, without beginning or end, and the universe was without progress. Thus time for them was free from any direction, from any privileged dimension, from any evolution toward an end. All this changed radically with the adoption by medieval thinkers of the Hebrew genesis. For the Christian thinker time is linear. It has a beginning: the creation of the universe and Adam. It has a central date: the birth of Christ. It moves toward an end: the Last Judgment. Since time is thus finite, all nations have to achieve their destiny between the creation of Adam and the Last Judgment. Thus time acquires a one-way direction; it becomes irreversible and therefore precious, for, being finite, it must be used before it passes. With this idea of finitude the *value* of time is established, and with it its historicity. Seneca, that great forerunner of Christianity, had already written to his friend Lucilius: "Omnia, Lucili, aliena sunt, tempus tantum nostrum est. . . . Dum differtur, vita transcurrit. . . . Fac ergo . . . quod facere te scribis, omnes horas complectere" ("All things, Lucilius, are strange, time alone belongs to us. . . . While you are postponing things, time flows away. . . . Therefore, do what you write you are doing: use every hour").[12]

12. *L. Annaei Senecae ad Lucilium epistulae* i. 2,3.

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As for modern thinkers, it was Carnot-Clausius' second principle of thermodynamics which taught them the irreversibility of time. If entropy tends toward a maximum, if the amount of free energy diminishes constantly, there is a difference between "earlier" and "later," and the historicity of time becomes obvious. This argument has, however, met with criticism. Some thinkers insisted that the second principle of thermodynamics is only valid for certain parts of the universe considered as closed systems. Consequently, it does not state anything about the unique character of the history of the world in its totality, or on the history of one of its parts, since neither is a closed system.[13] It has also been objected that the entropy law cannot be used to define the forward direction of time, for, if we declare that, of two given entropy states, the state of greater entropy will be said to be "later" than the state of smaller entropy, then we have only stated a tautology.[14]

It would be wrong to suppose that modern science opposes a linear conception of time to the cyclic conception of the Greeks. Professor Gödel has shown that there exist solutions of Einstein's field equations which yield closed time-like world lines, thus making time cyclic in the large.[15]

A recent hypothesis seems to accentuate the cyclic character of cosmic time. According to this assumption, the universe is comparable to a breathing organism: the expanding universe, in which we live, would be followed by a phase of contraction, and this alternation would go on and on, time thus running in alternating cycles. But even if this hypothesis were valid—it is in fact rejected by many leading astrophysicists—the cyclic character of cosmic time which it implies would not affect the linear character of our historical time. The reason is that our historical, telluric time will long have "ended" before the beginning of the hypothetical opposite time stretch of a contracting universe. History means to us only the evolution of mankind on this earth or in its immediate neighborhood, if we take into account the possibility of space flight. According to recent computations, the end of this history must

13. H. Rickert, *Kulturwissenschaft und Naturwissenschaft* (Tübingen, 1915), pp. 142–43.

14. A. Grünbaum, "Time and Entropy," *American Scientist*, XLIII (October, 1955), 552.

15. K. Gödel, "Example of a New Type of Cosmological Solutions of Einstein's Field Equations of Gravitation. 2," *Review of Modern Physics* (Lancaster, Pa.), XXI (1949), 447–50.

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occur in about six billion years. Then 12 per cent of the sun's hydrogen supply will have been converted into helium, and astrophysicists know that beyond this limit a star must lose its stability. The sun will then expand, brighten, and drive the earth's temperature first above the boiling point of water, then beyond the melting point of lead, up to 800° C. At its maximum size the aging sun will have thirty times its present radius, burn up its fuel at a tremendous rate, and rapidly exhaust its hydrogen supply. But to man this will be no longer of any practical consequence, because ages earlier organic life will have ceased on earth, the oceans will have boiled away, and our civilizations, with all their treasures, will have been turned into ashes.

This end of history will look quite different from the mythical picture painted in Augustine's description of the "eternal Sunday." It will much more resemble the Greek myth of Phaeton, son of Helios, who yoked his father's sun chariot and, unable to drive it along the course taken by his father, scorched and burned up all that was on earth.[16]

To be sure, the irreversibility of thermodynamic processes which gives time its direction depends on an interpretation of statistics and, therefore, is in the realm of probability. It is only extremely probable that energy runs down toward a state of uniform temperature, and it is not impossible that, from a certain moment on, energy runs up again. Such a shift would mean a change in the direction of time the other way round. But, although this is a theoretical possibility, envisaged by Boltzmann, its probability is so small that the philosophy of history may neglect it, which seems to me justified, and only take into account the following, rather elementary facts.

While mechanical work is completely convertible into heat—by friction or by shock—it is impossible to retransform these energies entirely, since a part of the heat passes over to cooler bodies. This empirically verifiable fact finds its expression in the second principle of thermodynamics. While according to the first principle the amount of energy in a closed system remains constant, the second principle states that the amount of *free* energy, that is, of energy which can be changed into work, diminishes constantly. By determining all terrestrial processes in a unique, irreversible sense, the second principle gives its direction to our historical time.

16. Plato *Timaeus* 22C; Ovid *Metamorphoses* i. 751 ff.

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In the world of classical mechanics all systems can be restored to their initial states; but this world is only an abstraction, a simplification of facts—in short, a fictitious world. Admitting absolutely smooth planes, liquids without frictions, and completely flexible ropes, that world does not take into account the real conditions of our physical bodies. The second principle of thermodynamics, however, no longer describes an ideal world but rather our physical world, with its progressive and observable dissipation of free energy.

Wilhelm Ostwald, who, with Duhem, established the doctrine of energetism, considered the second principle of thermodynamics as the source of all values.[17] In the world of classical mechanics a person would be able to commit the greatest stupidities and the worst ignominies to no real detriment, since all events are supposed to be reversible, and it would always be possible to repair the evil consequences of an act by restoring the initial state. In a world exclusively governed by the first principle of thermodynamics there would even be no reason for complaining about a loss of time, since time itself would be totally reversible. The inexorable dictum, "Facta infecta fieri nequeunt" ("Things done cannot be made undone,") would no longer be valid, and life and history would therefore not be tragic.

According to Ostwald, a reversible world would, consequently, offer no possibility of distinguishing between a positive and a negative value. In such a world the notion of value would be theoretically impossible. Having the possibility of directing the sequence of events also in an opposite direction, man living in a reversible world would have the possibility of an eternal life. It would suffice to go, at any moment, in the opposite direction in order to become younger and to begin again a life which would have no privileged direction.

Our historical world, however, is not this ideal, fictitious world, and in it everything happens in a different way. The reason for this is the degradation of free energy, which gives all terrestrial processes an irreversible one-way orientation and thus forces our time into one direction. Whatever the statistical probability of an inversion of the law of entropy, it could be of interest only to the theoretical physicist, not to the historian. The historical world has always been one in which events were irreversible, a world in which no damage could be completely

17. W. Ostwald, *Die Philosophie der Werte* (Leipzig, 1913), p. 112.

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repaired, a world where no individual and no nation could ever go through life more than once. In short, the historical world is and always was a one-way temporal world. This is the best proof for the validity of the second principle of thermodynamics, at least for the world in which we live and where history takes place—despite all objections.

This irreversible, historical world is and always was one characterized by Bergson's "duration" (*durée*), with its individual and collective aging and that prolongation of the past into the present which we call "memory." If in such a world one conceives historical cycles, they can no longer be considered identical, as they were in ancient philosophy. For Benedetto Croce, for example, the evolution of the spirit in four moments—from the aesthetic to the ethical activity, by passing through the logical and economic activities—certainly repeats in cycles, but no cycle is identical with another. For, as soon as the dialectical evolution of the spirit reaches its fourth degree, the dialectical movement starts a new cycle *on a higher level,* enriched by the experiences of the previous cycles.

As far as Spengler's historical cycles are concerned, there exists among them only a relation of "analogy" and never of identity. If, as Spengler says, "every culture has its own civilization," it is evident that there must be an analogy beween Roman civilization (the conclusion of Greek culture) and American civilization (the conclusion of European culture). But the one is not a repetition of the other. Spengler declares, on the contrary, that "every culture has its new possibilities of expression which appear, ripen, wither, and *never recur* [*nie wiederkehren*]."[18] Consequently, each of these cultures has its unique, specific, and irreplaceable character and therefore constitutes a *value.*

Thus it is superficial to say, as is currently done, that Greek thought did not develop a philosophy of history because of its cyclic conception. Only if this cyclic conception is applied to a time without privileged direction can these cycles become an eternal return which would deprive the different historical epochs of their unique character, their interest, their value. The only great modern philosopher, Nietzsche, who, lacking scientific knowledge, adopted the doctrine of eternal return, rejected history and tried to heal modern man from his "historical sickness."[19]

18. O. Spengler, *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (Munich, 1923), I, 29.

19. *Nietzsches Gesammelte Werke* (Munich, 1922), VI, 321.

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If, however, the idea of the cycle is applied to an irreversible time, such as that of modern physics or that of Bergson's "duration," it is perfectly compatible with a historical conception, as our examples have shown. Because then the later cycle differs from the earlier by the increase of entropy, by the decrease of free energy, by biological aging, and by the survival and accumulation of the past in the form of memory, and no later period can be identical with an earlier one even if it advances in cycles, each having its specific character, and being unique in its historicity.

It is well known that, while conserving cyclic conceptions, Plato still admitted creation, although not *ex nihilo*. This is at least the impression given by the myth of Timaeus. Plato's "time," as that of Augustine, the first great Christian philosopher of history, begins with the creation of the universe and with the movements of created things. It is only the measure of motion. Thus, by the mediation of Cicero, Plato became Augustine's inspirator. Nevertheless, we must keep in mind that even in his *Timaeus* Plato insists on the difference between *τὸ ὂν ἀεί*, perpetual being, which is without genesis, and *τὸ γιγνόμενον ἀεί*, the perpetual becoming, which is without being.[20] According to Plato, the temporal distinctions of past, present, and future cannot be applied to that which really *is*, that which is uncreated.[21] And for Plato, as for the majority of Greek thinkers, becoming is inferior to being, which is the only object of true knowledge. I believe that this inferiority of becoming in comparison with being is the main reason for the absence of a philosophy of human history among the Greeks. For what is history if not the becoming of mankind?

But, if the Greeks did not create an *explicit* philosophy of history, their myths contain a whole implicit philosophy, as we can see in examining them. According to myth, Clio was the muse of history and, at the same time, the muse of epic poetry. This union of the two functions shows that the Greeks must have felt what we know today, thanks to the additional experience of twenty-five hundred years: that in historiography it is difficult to trace a neat demarcation line between historical truth and poetical fiction. History inevitably contains fictitious elements as well as truth; it is a product of documentation and imagination. By

20. Plato *Timaeus* 27D-28.

21. *Ibid.* 37D, E, 38 A,B.

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intrusting Clio with the functions of the muse of history *and* of epic poetry, the Greeks repudiated in advance the historical realism of the nineteenth century which, in the words of the German historian Leopold von Ranke, imposed upon history the duty to tell us how things have happened "in reality" ("wie es eigentlich gewesen ist"). For other modern philosophers and historians—I mention at random Renan, Carlyle, Dilthey, Croce, Windelband, Simmel, Russell, Gibbon, Cournot, Korn, Toynbee—the historian must also be an artist, endowed with imagination. In this contemporary conception we may see a triumph of the Greek myth of Clio, muse of history and of epic poetry.

In giving the muse of history the name "Clio," the Greeks wished perhaps to say that history is not the simple inquiry suggested by the word στορία but also an exaltation, a glorification of events, the word "Clio" coming from the verb κλείω which signifies "to glorify," "to celebrate." This etymology shows that, for the Greeks, historiography implied an *evaluation* of the facts, a selection of the events considered as great, marvelous, glorious.

This selection presupposes a concept of *value,* a whole hierarchy of values in the historian's mind. The Greek historian applied this hierarchy consciously. Why did Herodotus, the father of historiography, write history? "In order that the memory of the past may not be blotted out from among men by time, and that great and marvelous deeds done by Greeks and foreigners and especially the reason why they warred against each other may not lack renown."[22] With these words Herodotus intrusted history with three tasks: that of commemorating (Clio was indeed the daughter of Mnemosyne, goddess of memory), that of searching for causes, and that of evaluating. For more than two thousand years historians have carried out this program, although sometimes in spite of themselves.

We must conclude that from its beginnings historiography has been indissolubly linked to the domain of values, and for this reason it has often been blamed for being partial and lacking scientific generality, since value judgments are subjective and variable. To our day philosophers of history have not ceased to struggle in order to get out of the epistemological difficulties of that somehow disreputable situation which, for the Greeks, was in no way reprehensible. On the contrary, Clio,

22. *Herodotus* Book i, A.

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crowned with laurels and distributing glory and blame, fulfilled in their eyes a majestic function. The Greeks, we should note, represented Clio with clepsydra. This word, composed of the verb κλέπτω, "to steal," and the noun ὕδωρ, "water," designated a kind of water clock which, in the Greek assemblies, measured the time granted to the different speakers by the running of a certain quantity of water. The latter passed "stealthily" through an orifice and dropped slowly from one vessel into another. In my opinion the clepsydra as an attribute of Clio not only symbolizes the temporality of history; it also reminds us that the time granted to the actors of that great drama called "history"—be they individuals, parties, nations, classes, or whole continents—is measured. In the nineteenth century this idea hidden in the Greek myth found its explicit expression in the philosophy of Hegel, who tells us that each nation is the expression of a certain "moment" in the evolution of the "universal spirit." As soon as a nation has expressed the idea it represents, as soon as it has fulfilled its mission, it loses its rights and yields them to another nation.

We have seen, indeed, the appearance and disappearance of the great empires of the Babylonians, the Egyptians, the Greeks, the Romans, the Spaniards, the Germans. Spengler proclaimed the decline of the West; Europe had to yield a part of its power to America, and already we see Asia emerging as a new giant. Russia, a nation which is at the same time European and Asian, carries out Nietzsche's prediction by becoming a first-rate world power. In a group of nations representing a billion people the reign of the working class has taken over the government from the capitalistic class. All these events of modern history, unforeseeable for the Greeks, justify their symbol of Clio's clepsydra, measuring and limiting the time granted to the actors of the historical drama.

At the beginning of this article I said that one of the characteristic features of our time is the growth of its historical sense. One may be of the opinion that the acquisition of this historical sense is a questionable gain for human happiness. Nietzsche envied the animals, those unhistorical beings which know neither past nor future and live only in the present. Having no memory of a grievous past and no imagination of an anguishing future, they must be happy. In order that happiness *be* happiness, one thing is indispensable: "the ability of forgetting,

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or—expressed in a more erudite way—the faculty of feeling . . . in a non-historic way."[23]

Hegel tried to invalidate this thesis in advance by declaring that world history is not the domain of happiness and that the periods of felicity are "the empty pages of history."[24] Since the pages of the history of our century are full to the point of overflowing, we may understand why we are not happy. It is the price we have to pay for acquiring the historical sense.

23. *Nietzsche's Gesammelte Werke* (Munich, 1922), VI, 234.

24. G. W. F. Hegel, *Sämtliche Werke,* ed. Glockner (Stuttgart, 1928), XI, 56.

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