

The Conquest of the Historical World

(Ernst Cassirer, *The philosophy of the enlightenment*, Chapter 3: 1955, Boston: Beacon Press.)

THE common opinion that the eighteenth century was an "unhistorical" century is not and cannot be historically justified. This opinion is rather a battle cry coined by the Romantic Movement when it entered the field against the philosophy of the Enlightenment. But if we examine this campaign more closely, it soon appears that the Enlightenment had forged the weapons for it. The concept of historical cultures, which Romanticism summons up against the Enlightenment and under whose banner it disputes the intellectual presuppositions of the preceding century, was discovered only as a result of the effectiveness of those presuppositions, that is to say, as a result of the ideas and ideals of the Enlightenment. Without the aid of the philosophy of the Enlightenment and without its intellectual heritage, Romanticism could not have achieved and maintained its own position. However remote from the Enlightenment the Romantic view of the content of history - its material "philosophy of history" - may be, in method it remains dependent on, and most deeply indebted to, the Enlightenment. For it was the eighteenth century which raised the central philosophical problem in this field of knowledge. It inquires concerning the "conditions of the possibility" of history, just as it inquires concerning the conditions of the possibility of natural science. To be sure, the eighteenth century seeks only to establish these conditions in preliminary outline. It tries to grasp the meaning of history by endeavouring to gain a clear and distinct concept of it, to ascertain the relation between the general and the particular, between idea and reality, and between laws and facts, and to draw the exact boundaries between these terms. If Romanticism largely failed to recognize this decisive pioneer work, and if it frequently brushed it aside scornfully, its judgment need no longer influence and dim ours. There is a strange irony in the fact that Romanticism, in the charge it brings against the Enlightenment in the name of history, makes the [197] same mistake of which it accuses its opponent. Parts suddenly seem to be exchanged, and a complete dialectical reversal appears to take place. For Romanticism, which is incomparably superior to the eighteenth century in the breadth of its historical horizon and in its gift of the historical sense, loses its advantage in the very moment when it seeks to place this century in proper historical perspective. This movement, which devotes itself so whole-heartedly to the past in order to grasp its pristine reality, fails to live up to its ideal when it encounters that past with which it is still in direct contact. The principle which it establishes for the historically remote proves unmanageable when applied to the immediate past. Romanticism was historically blind to the generation of its own fathers. It never attempted to judge the Enlightenment by its own standards, and it was unable to view without polemical bias the conception of the historical world which the eighteenth century had formulated. And this polemical bias not infrequently approaches caricature. It was not until the period following Romanticism that this distortion was corrected. This period had had enough of the Romantic spirit, yet it firmly upheld the postulate of historicity which that spirit had established. It had also gained proper perspective in regard to the eighteenth century and so could now as it were, extend the benefits of the historical approach to that age as well. Dilthey in his essay, "The Eighteenth Century and the Historical World,"¹ was one of the first to bestow this benefit in full measure on the epoch of the Enlightenment. Though this essay succeeded in dispelling the

¹ "Das achtzehnte Jahrhundert und die geschichtliche Welt," first published in the *Deutsche Rundschau*, August and September 1901; now available in *Guammelte Schriften*, vol. III (1927), pp. 209 ff.

popular error concerning the unhistorical and anti-historical spirit of the eighteenth century, the concrete problem which arises at this point is still far from solved. For it is not sufficient simply to add the historical sense as a necessary and indispensable feature of the total picture of the Enlightenment; the specific tendency of the new force which now appears must be determined and its precise effect traced. The eighteenth century conception of history is less a finished form with clear outlines than a force exerting its influence [197] in all directions. The manner in which this force starts at a certain point in the sphere of theology and spreads from there until it pervades progressively all the fields of knowledge is the subject of this chapter.

1

The philosophy of the eighteenth century from the outset treats the problems of nature and history as an indivisible unity. It tries to attack both types of problem with the same intellectual tools; it endeavours to ask the same questions and to apply the same universal method of "reason" to nature and to history. Above all, scientific and historical knowledge in their new form now encounter a common opponent. In both cases a purely immanent intellectual foundation is required; natural scientists and historians attempt to leave nature and history in their own spheres and to establish them on their own soil. Science as such refuses to recognize an absolutely supernatural or an absolutely super-historical sphere. We have already seen how a new form of the concept of God and of theology, and a new form of religiosity, spring from this refusal. The view of the theological innovators, the "neologists," of the eighteenth century is always based on the concept of and the demand for historical criticism of religious sources. In Germany, Mosheim and Michaelis Ernesti and Semler became the real teachers of the generation of "neologists." History bears the torch for the Enlightenment; it frees the "neologists" from the bonds of Scripture dogmatically interpreted and of the orthodoxy of the preceding centuries.² But the relation to history was of course not so simple and unambiguous as in the field of natural science. For eighteenth century philosophy looked upon this field as an old and recognized possession. Here the decisive step had been taken at the time of the Renaissance; Galileo's "new science" had asserted and demonstrated the value and independence of scientific thought. Like Kant every philosopher of the Enlightenment could treat mathematical physics as a "fact" whose possibility could, to be sure, become an epistemological problem but whose reality remained unchallenged and unshakable. In the case of history, however, the task was different and more difficult. For here it was not possible to start with a scientific fact which in the nature of its certainty and the firmness of its foundation could be compared with theoretical physics. The world of historical phenomena had to be conquered and conceptually established in one and the same process of thought. It is clear that such a task could not be solved at once, but required long and laborious preparations. These preparations summoned up all the intellectual powers of the Enlightenment and proved the efficacy of these powers in a new field. The philosophy of the Enlightenment had to become creative and to produce; it could not be content with epitomizing and systematizing scientific results furnished by the various special disciplines; it had to accomplish something itself and to do the work of a basic science in a broad field. In natural science Voltaire is only the literary disciple of Newton and the populariser of his ideas and principles; but in the field of history he ventures to formulate an original and independent conception, a new methodological plan, for which he paves the way in his *Essay on Manners*. All great historical works of the eighteenth century were henceforth written under the influence of this philosophical achievement. As in

² Cf. above pp. 176 ff. For a more detailed treatment see Aner, *op.cit.*, pp. 204 ff., 233, 309, and *passim*.

France Turgot and Condorcet are influenced by Voltaire, similarly in England Hume, Gibbon, and Robertson take Voltaire as their model. And Hume is a concrete illustration of the close personal union between history and philosophy. The epoch of "philosophical historiography" which begins in the eighteenth century endeavours to balance these two elements. It by no means subjects the writing of history one-sidedly to the constructive force of philosophy; it seeks rather to derive new philosophical problems immediately from history, from the vital wealth of historical detail. The exchange of ideas which is initiated in this way now steadily grows in intensity and in scope, and it proves fruitful for both philosophy and history. Just as mathematics becomes the prototype of exact knowledge, so history now becomes the methodological model from which the eighteenth [200] century acquires new understanding for the general task and the specific structure of the abstract sciences. Here again the first step consisted in emancipating these sciences from the tutelage of theology. In permitting the use of historical method to an increasing degree and in treating the history of dogmatics and of the church as its own field, theology had recognized an ally which was to prove stronger than itself, and which in the end was to challenge it on its own grounds. Friendly competition turns into a controversy, and from this controversy the new form of history and of the abstract sciences develops.

The beginnings of this movement can, philosophically, be traced back as far as the seventeenth century. Cartesianism indeed, with its exclusively rational tendency, remained aloof from the sphere of history. According to this philosophy, nothing merely factual can claim any real certainty, and no kind of factual knowledge can be compared in value to the clear and distinct knowledge of logic, to pure mathematics, and to the exact natural sciences. Malebranche's thought also clings strictly to this rule; he too declares that only that belongs to philosophical knowledge which "could have been known by Adam." In Bayle, however, general methodology undergoes a change. In his first philosophical writings Bayle is a confirmed Cartesian, and he never ceased to admire Cartesian physics. But his method of doubt follows a new direction and sets up a new goal. Descartes' doubt is dominated by the principle that we cannot trust any source of certainty which has deceived us even once, or which involves the possibility of such deception. Measured by this standard, not only the testimony of sense perception, but all knowledge not strictly demonstrable, not reducible to self-evident axioms and logical proof, is to be rejected. The entire dimension of the historical is thus eliminated from the field of the Cartesian ideal of knowledge. No factual knowledge can lead to this ideal, to genuine wisdom (*sapientia universalis*). With respect to history Cartesian doubt retains a purely negative character; it rejects and ejects. Bayle, however, does not deny the factual as such; on the contrary, he makes it the real model of his doctrine of science. The accumulation of well established [201] facts is for Bayle the Archimedean point on which he seeks to base all knowledge. He thus becomes the first confirmed and consistent "positivist" in the midst of a strictly rational and rationalistic century. D'Alembert's comment that metaphysics must either be a science of facts or it must become a science of illusions could also have been spoken by Bayle. He rejects all knowledge of the first absolute "grounds" of being; he merely wants to survey the phenomena as such and within this sphere to distinguish clearly and sharply between the certain and the uncertain, between the probable and the erroneous. He does not, therefore, direct his doubt against the historical; he uses it rather as an instrument for discovering the truth of history and for reaching that form of certainty of which history is capable. In this process of testing historical truth Bayle is indefatigable and insatiable. He is motivated by a desire to survey the factual and given world of history and to orient himself here. Within this world nothing is indifferent or unimportant; there are scarcely any gradations of value and significance. It is no accident that he chose for his critical work the form of a *Historical and Critical Dictionary*. For the dictionary allows the spirit of mere co-ordination to prevail by contrast with the spirit of subordination that dominates the rational systems. In Bayle

there is no hierarchy of concepts, no deductive derivation of one concept from another, but rather a simple aggregation of materials, each of which is as significant as any other and shares with it an equal claim to complete and exhaustive treatment. Nor is Bayle ever discriminating in his acquisition of materials. In this matter he entertains scarcely any scruples and doubts whatever; he never follows a definite plan assigning limits to the various types of material and distinguishing the important from the unimportant, the relevant from the irrelevant. Frequently the most insignificant subjects, or even completely nonsensical ones, are treated in the *Dictionary* elaborately and conscientiously, while most important matters are neglected. It is not the importance of the things themselves which is decisive in the selection of materials, but the accidental, particular preference and subjective interest of Bayle, the scholar, in the most remote facts, in antiquarian [202] details, and in historical curiosities. Bayle was well aware of this characteristic of his, and he often mentions it in autobiographical remarks in his writings and in his personal letters. In a letter to his brother, for instance, he remarks: "I know very well that my insatiable love of novelties is one of those obstinate maladies against which all remedies fail. It is a genuine hydropsy. The more you give it, the more it wants." ³ Love of the factual for its own sake, devotion to detail, are highly developed traits of Bayle's nature. This conception of knowledge and of its goal is deliberately opposed to the ideal of exact logical knowledge. However much the latter may surpass merely empirical historical knowledge in exactness and rigor, it must always pay for this advantage by an essential shortcoming. Precisely its strictly logical character prevents it from direct contact with reality and excludes reality from its own sphere. The formal conclusiveness of mathematical demonstrations cannot-compensate for the fact that their application to the concrete reality of things remains basically dubious. Historical knowledge belongs to another kind of certainty (*genre de certitude*) than mathematical knowledge, but within its own kind the certainty of historical knowledge is capable of constant improvement. Metaphysically, it is more certain that an individual named Cicero lived than that any object as defined by pure mathematics really exists in the nature of things. ⁴

Such considerations as these give access to the world of fact, but no principle has as yet been developed for taking real possession of this world and for controlling it intellectually. For historical knowledge still represents a mere aggregate, an accumulation of unrelated details exhibiting no inner order. History lies before Bayle like an enormous heap of ruins, and there is no possibility of mastering this abundance of material. To keep up with the rising tide of specialized knowledge would require the inexhaustible assimilative powers of Bayle himself. Even the external framework of the *Dictionary* proves insufficient for this task. The original core of articles is reinforced by an army of notes and elucidations which finally completely bury the original text. Bayle's real interest is seldom connected with the main articles and with the important points of these articles; it usually manifests itself rather in the apparently irrelevant material. Again and again he luxuriates in this material. For such, to his way of thinking, is the new task of the historian. He does not fear the objection that he is indulging in trifles, nor does he shun the title of "most minute explorer of most minute things" (*minutissimarum rerum minutissimus scrutator*). He declares that his mode of treatment of

³ The translators have been unable to identify the source of this quotation. The German edition gave the following reference: "Letter to his brother, February 27, 1773, in 'Lettres de Bayle a sa famille' in the appendix to his *Oeuvres diverses*, The Hague, 1737, vol 1." Since Bayle died in 1706 and the letters appeared in 1737, the year is obviously wrong. Nor is there any letter in this collection dated February 27.

⁴ *Projet d'un Dictionnaire Critique* (Dissertation du Rondel), Rotterdam, 1692; cf. Delvolve, *Religion Critique et philosophie positive chez Pierre Bayle*, Paris, 1906, pp. 226 if.

materials is not an indulgence of personal inclination but the result of deliberate intention." ⁵ For modern historiography surpasses its ancient predecessor in this very matter of investigating and critically weighing every feature of a historical phenomenon rather than being content to sketch the broad outline as the ancient historiographer did. ⁶ A philosophical approach to history or a teleological interpretation of historical phenomena is far from Bayle's intention. His profound pessimism prevents him from finding anywhere in history evidence of a uniform plan or of a rational purpose. A glance at the facts, at the real history of mankind, suffices to cure us of all such premature speculation and system building, for the facts teach us that history was in reality never anything else but an accumulation of the crimes and misfortunes of the human race. ⁷ Obviously, the more sharply we scrutinize the parts, the farther we are from a clear comprehension of the whole. Knowledge of details does not add up to an understanding of the whole; on the contrary, it destroys all hope of ever attaining such understanding.

Yet from this dissolution and disintegration of the historical world Bayle brings forth, nevertheless, a new, positive, and highly fruitful general conception. The parts unite again and [204] crystallize around a firm nucleus. This nucleus arises in that Bayle understands the nature of the "fact" not only in a material but in a formal sense, and in that he looks upon this nature both as a problem of method and of content. It is through this insight that Bayle achieves originality and importance in the history of thought. Hardly a single "fact" which Bayle's *Dictionary* culled with truly heroic labour is of real interest to us today from the point of view of its content. But what gives this work lasting value, nevertheless, is the circumstance that the pure concept of the factual is here grasped as a profound problem. Bayle no longer looks upon individual facts as the solid bricks out of which the historian constructs his edifice; he is fascinated rather by the intellectual labour which goes toward the acquisition of these bricks. With unsurpassed clarity, with the most subtle analytical art, Bayle dissects the complex of conditions on which every factual judgment as such is based. And with this knowledge he becomes a logician of history. For a "fact" is no longer the beginning of historical knowledge, but in a certain sense its end; it is the "point toward which" (*terminus ad quem*), not the "point from which" (*terminus a quo*) such knowledge proceeds. Bayle does not take the fact as a starting-point, but as his goal; he seeks to prepare the way to a "truth of facts." One should not imagine~ that this truth is tangible, that it can be grasped in immediate sense experience; it can only be the result of an operation no less complex, subtle, and precise than the most difficult mathematical operation. For it is only by the finest sifting, by the most painstaking examination and evaluation of the bits of evidence that the kernel of an historical "fact" can be isolated.

The essential value of Bayle's conception of history is that he did not lay down this requirement in the abstract, but that he illustrated it to the last detail in actual practice. Never before had criticism of tradition been carried out with such severity and such inexorable ardour and exactness. Bayle is indefatigable in revealing the gaps, obscurities, and contradictions of history. In this process his real genius manifests itself. Bayle's genius, paradoxically enough, does not lie in the discovery of the true [205] but in the discovery of the false. The external plan of the *Dictionary* and its original literary conception illustrate this. His first idea was not to write an encyclopaedia of knowledge but rather a record of errors. "About the month of November 1690," Bayle states in a letter, "I formed a plan to compose a *Critical Dictionary* which would contain a' collection of the mistakes which have been made by compilers of dictionaries as well as by other writers, and which would summarize under each name of a man

⁵ "Dissertation a du Rondel," *op.cit.*

⁶ *Dictionnaire*, article "Archelaus"; cf. Delvolve, *op.cit.*, p. 226.

⁷ *Ibid.*, article "Manicheens," Remarque D.

or a city the mistakes concerning that man or city." ⁸ Bayle's intellectual superiority and his scholarly and literary virtuosity found their proper medium here. In this activity his eagerness for the chase celebrates its real triumphs; his delight is never greater than when he comes upon the track of some hidden error which had survived through the centuries. The magnitude of the error is an almost indifferent matter; its mere existence and quality are sufficient to fascinate Bayle. Error must be pursued to its last retreat whether its object is great or small, sublime or humble, important or trifling. Bayle's critical fanaticism concerns itself with the most indifferent matters; in fact, it is precisely these which inflame his enthusiasm over and over again. For here the specific form of historical error, irrespective of its content, can be observed. Here we see how the most insignificant error in the transmission and continuation of tradition can have the most fateful consequences, and how it can lead to the most radical falsification of the true situation. Every such mistake must therefore be ruthlessly exposed, and this purely negative work of the historian must not weaken at any point or shun any detail however unmeaningful it may appear. No alteration of a report escapes his scrutiny; no quotation is admitted which is inaccurate or based on mere memory without reference to the real source. ⁹ Requirements like these made Bayle the originator of the ideal of historical accuracy. But so far as his real philosophical achievement is [206] concerned, such accuracy is a means, not an end in itself. If one wishes to understand the goal toward which Bayle's conception of history strives, one must compare his work with the last great attempt at a purely theological presentation of history, namely, with Bossuet's *Discourse on Universal History*. Here once more is a sublime plan of history, a religious interpretation of the universe. But this bold structure rests on feet of clay so far as its empirical foundations are concerned. For the truth of the facts on which Bossuet builds can only be assured by a logically vicious circle. The authority of all historical facts, according to Bossuet, is based on the authority of the Bible. The authority of the Bible in turn rests on that of the Church, whose authority rests on tradition. Thus tradition becomes the foundation of all historical certainty - but the content and value of tradition can only be proved on the basis of historical evidence. Bayle is the first modern thinker to reveal this circle with ruthless critical subtlety and to point untiringly to its fateful consequences. In this respect Bayle accomplished scarcely less for history than Galileo did for natural science. Just as Galileo demands complete independence of the Bible in the interpretation of natural phenomena, and as he realizes and justifies this demand by his method, so Bayle lays down this requirement in the field of history. It is he who carries out the "Copernican revolution" in the realm of historical science. For he no longer bases history on some dogmatically given objective content which he finds in the Bible or in the doctrine of the Church; he returns rather to the subjective origins and conditions of this truth. The criticism of historical sources, which was at first his sole purpose, expands as he proceeds until it finally becomes a sort of "Critique of Historical Reason." According to Bayle, nothing is more erroneous and harmful than the prejudice that historical truth can and must be accepted like a stamped coin on trust and faith. It is rather the function of reason to stamp its own coin and always to examine each individual product with the greatest care. "Do you think, then, that there is any honest gain from trafficking in hearsay? Tradition, O fool, is indeed a chimera! Judgment is required; reason alone can rescue you from the bondage of belief-reason which

⁸ Letter to Naudis, May 22, 1692, "Lettres de Bayle a sa famille," *Oeuvres diverses*, vol I, appendix, p. 161.

⁹ "It is not to be tolerated that a man who quotes should in the least alter the testimony of his witness." *Nouvelles de la Republique des Lettres*, *Oeuvres diverses*, vol. I, p. 530. Cf. *Dictionary*, article on Pericles, Remark E. See also Lacoste, *Bayle. Nouvelliste et critique litteraire*, Paris, 1929, pp. Z7 ff.

you have already [207] renounced.”¹⁰ These lines from Goethe's *West-Eastern Divan* characterize perhaps most clearly and pregnantly the gist of Bayle's contribution and its real trend. His sharp and unsparing analytical mind freed history once and for all from the bonds of creed and placed it on an independent footing. Bayle begins with the criticism of theological tradition, but goes further and extends his investigation to include the whole body of secular history as well. In taking this step he becomes the forerunner of the eighteenth century which found in his *Historical and Critical Dictionary* not only an inexhaustible treasury of knowledge, but an incomparable intellectual and dialectical exercise. From Bayle the philosophy of the Enlightenment learned to formulate its own problems; in his *Dictionary* it found already forged the weapons required for the emancipation of historical thinking. Bayle became indeed not only the logician of the new historical science but also its ethical teacher. He is the promulgator and the living embodiment of all the virtues of the true historian. He repeatedly declares that history is to be touched only with unsoiled hands, that the presentation of historical phenomena must not be hindered by any prejudice or distorted by any religious or political bias.¹¹ "All those who know the laws of history, will agree that a historian who wishes to fulfil his tasks faithfully must free himself of the spirit of flattery and slander. He must, as far as possible, adopt the state of mind of the Stoic who is moved by no passion. Impervious to all else, he must heed solely the interests of the truth, to which he must sacrifice resentment aroused by an injustice as well as recollection of favours - and even his love of country. He must forget that he belongs to any particular country, that he was brought up in any particular faith, that he is indebted to this person or to [208] that, and that he has these or those parents and friends. A historian in these respects is like Melchizedech, without father, without mother, and without genealogy. If he is asked: 'Whence art thou?' he must reply: 'I am neither a Frenchman nor a German, neither an Englishman nor a Spaniard, etc.; I am a citizen of the world; I am not in the service of the Emperor, nor in that of the King of France, but only in the service of Truth. She is my queen; to her alone have I sworn the oath of obedience.'" Through these sentiments and the ethical imperative on which they are based Bayle became the spiritual leader of the Enlightenment. He anticipated its "idea of a general history with a cosmological design," and he gave this idea its first classical expression.

2

Bayle does not give us a philosophy of history in the strict sense; in fact, as we have seen, in the light of his general conception of history and his methodological premises, he could not even strive for such a philosophy. The first to point the way to a philosophy of history in the eighteenth century was Giambattista Vico, whose *Principles of a New Science of the Common Nature of Nations* is the first systematic delineation of this field of knowledge. But this work, which was conceived in deliberate opposition to Descartes and was destined to remove

¹⁰ "Glaubst du denn: von Mund zu Ohr
 Sei ein redlicher Gewinnst?
 Überlieferung, o du Thor,
 Ist auch wohl ein Hirngespinst!
 Nun geht erst das Urtheil an;
 Dich vermag aus Glaubensketten
 Der Ventand allein zu retten,

Dem du e chon Verzicht gethan." - *West-ostlicher Divan*, Rendsch Nameh. Buch des Unmuths, "Wanderers Gemüthsruhe."

¹¹ *Dictionnaire*, article "Usson," Remark F.

rationalism from historiography and which is based rather on the logic of phantasy than on the logic of clear and distinct ideas, exerted no influence on the philosophy of the Enlightenment. It remained in obscurity until Herder late in the century brought it to light again. Within the era of the Enlightenment the first decisive attempt at the foundation of a philosophy of *history* is made by Montesquieu in *The Spirit of the Laws*. This work ushers in a new epoch. It did not arise directly from historical interests. Bayle's interest and delight in factual detail is foreign to Montesquieu. The very title of Montesquieu's book shows that he is concerned with the spirit of the *laws*, not with that of the facts. The facts are sought, sifted, and tested by Montesquieu not for their own sake but for the sake of the laws [209] which they illustrate and express. Laws are comprehensible only in concrete situations; only in such situations can they be described and demonstrated. On the other hand, these tangible situations take on real shape and meaning only when we employ them as examples, as paradigms, illustrating general connections. Like Bayle, Montesquieu shows a decided love of detail; by extensive studies and travel he tries to acquaint himself with the minutiae of his subject. His delight in particulars is so great that at times his illustrative anecdotes overshadow the main lines of thought and threaten to make them unrecognizable. But with respect to content all this material is dominated by a strictly logical principle. In the preface of his masterpiece Montesquieu writes: "I began to examine men and I believed that in the infinite variety of their laws and customs they were not guided solely by their whims. I formulated principles, and I then saw individual cases fitting these principles as if of themselves, the history of all nations being only the consequence of these principles and every special law bound to another law, or depending on another more general law."

Factuality as such 'is thus no longer the guiding star of Montesquieu's study. It is simply his medium for attaining an understanding of something else which he is seeking. One can say of Montesquieu that he is the first thinker to grasp and to express clearly the concept of "ideal types" in history. *The Spirit of the Laws* is a political and sociological doctrine of types. Montesquieu proposes to show that the forms of government which we call republic, aristocracy, monarchy, and despotism are not mere aggregates of accidentally acquired properties but that each of these forms is, as it were, pre-formed the expression of a certain structure. This structure remains concealed from us as long as we merely observe political and social phenomena. For no configuration of phenomena resembles any other; they offer us complete heterogeneity and almost unlimited variety. But this illusion vanishes as soon as we learn to go back from appearances to principles, from the diversity of empirical shapes to the forming forces. Now we recognize among many instances of republics the type of the republic, and among the countless monarchies of history we find the type of [210] the monarchy. In particular Montesquieu tries to show that the principle on which the republic rests and to which it owes its existence is civic virtue, while monarchy depends on the principle of honour, and despotism on fear. Here we see as the essential distinction between forms of government the difference in the spiritual and moral impulses which shape and motivate each commonwealth. Montesquieu states: "Between the nature of a government and its principle there is this difference that its nature makes it what it is, while its principle determines its behaviour. The one consists in its special structure' the other in the human passions which set it in motion." ¹² Montesquieu is fully aware. of the peculiar logical nature of the basic concepts introduced in this manner. He considers them by no means simply as abstract concepts possessing a purely generic generality, which are only designed to single out and crystallize certain common features found among actual phenomena. Montesquieu attempts rather to establish by these concepts, beyond any such empirical generality, a universality of meaning which is expressed in the individual forms of government; he is endeavouring to "elicit the inner rule by which these governments are guided. The fact that this rule is not perfectly expressed in any particular

¹² *L'Esprit des Loix*, Book III, ch. I; cf. also chs. II if.

instance of government, and that it cannot be completely and exactly realized in any historical case, in no way lessens its importance. If Montesquieu assigns to each of the various forms of government its own principle, and if he has the nature of the republic depend on virtue, of the monarchy on honour, etc., this nature must never be confused with concrete empirical existence, for it expresses rather an ideal than an actuality.¹³ Accordingly, the objections which can be raised against the application of Montesquieu's system are not necessarily valid objections to his fundamental ideas. However imperfect the empirical groundwork on which he seeks to base this system may appear today in the light of our broadened historical horizon [211] this fact need not prevent us from recognizing that Montesquieu in fact grasped a new and fruitful principle and founded a new method in social science. The method of ideal types, which he introduces and first applies effectively, has never been abandoned; on the contrary, it reached its full development only in the sociology of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. On this method Montesquieu founds the doctrine that all elements which constitute a certain commonwealth stand in a strictly correlative relationship to one another. They are not merely the elements of a sum, but interdependent forces whose reciprocal action depends on the form of the whole. This interaction and structural arrangement can be shown to exist in the minutest details. The kind of education and justice, the form of marriage and family, the whole structure of domestic and foreign politics, depend in a certain way on the fundamental form of the state; these aspects of the state cannot be arbitrarily altered without affecting the form of the state and finally destroying it. For corruption in a commonwealth does not begin in particular activities but with the destruction of its inner principle: "The corruption of every government begins almost always with the corruption of its principles."¹⁴ As long as the principle of a form of government as such is preserved, as long as it is healthy in itself, it has nothing to fear; and the shortcomings of its individual institutions and laws are not injurious. On the other hand, if the principle deteriorates, if the inner moving force weakens, then the best laws can offer no protection. "Once the principles of a government are corrupt, the best laws become bad and turn against the state; when the principles are healthy, bad laws have the effect of good ones. The force of the principle carries everything with it Few laws are not good when the state has not lost its principles; and, as Epicurus says in speaking of riches, it is not the liquor which is corrupt, but the vase."¹⁵

The outlines of a philosophy of politics have now been sketched, but the foundation of a philosophy of history has not of course been laid. For the ideal types which Montesquieu depicts [212] are purely static forms; they offer a principle of explanation for the structure of the social body but they contain no means of revealing the functioning of this body. However, Montesquieu does not doubt that his method will also prove fruitful in explaining this problem too. For he is convinced that the functioning process, like the structure, is not an aggregate or a sequence of individual and unrelated events but that it will also reveal certain characteristic tendencies. What we term history, seen from without, may nowhere exhibit such tendencies. It may seem like a tangle of accidents. But the further one penetrates into the real depth of the phenomena, the more this illusion vanishes. In this way the chaos and conflict of individual events is resolved, and the phenomena can be reduced to a certain foundation by which they can be explained and understood. At the outset of his work Montesquieu asserts: "Those who

¹³ Cf. *L'Esprit des Lois*, Book II, ch. II: "Such are the principles of the three governments: which does not signify that in a certain republic one is virtuous, but that one ought to be so. This does not prove that in a certain monarchy one has a sense of honour, and that in a particular despotic state one has a sense of fear but that one ought to have such: *without these qualities the government will be imperfect.*

¹⁴ *L'Esprit des Lois*, Book VIII, ch. I.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, Book VIII, ch. II.

have said that a blind fatality has produced all the effects we see in the world have uttered a great absurdity; for what greater absurdity could there be than a blind fatality which had brought forth intelligent beings? There is then a primitive reason, and laws are the relations which exist between this reason and individual beings and the relations which exist among the various individuals themselves.”¹⁶ It often seems indeed as if a mere accident decided the fate of a people and determined its rise or fall. But closer examination discloses a different picture. “It is not fortune which rules the world There are general, as well as intellectual causes active in every monarchy which bring about its rise, preservation, or fall. All accidents are subject to these causes, and whenever an accidental battle that is, a particular cause, has destroyed a state, a general cause also existed which led to the fall of this state as a result of a single battle. In short, it is the general pace of things which draws all particular events along with it.”¹⁷ Physical circumstances also affect this general trend; and Montesquieu is one of the first to indicate the importance of this trend and to show the connection existing between the form of government and [213] laws of a country and its climate and soil. But here too he rejects a simple derivation from the purely physical factors and he subordinates the material to the spiritual causes. Not every soil and climate are suitable and possible for a given form of government; yet this form, on the other hand, is not merely the result of physical conditions. It is the business of the legislator to bring about a proper and wholesome adjustment between the form of government and the prevailing physical circumstances. Bad legislators submit to unfavourable climatic conditions; good legislators recognize these disadvantages and counteract them by spiritual and moral forces. “The more physical causes produce inertia in men, the more moral causes should wake them from this state.”¹⁸ Man is not simply subject to the forces of nature; he recognizes these forces and by his knowledge of them is able to guide them toward a goal of his own choosing and to bring about an equilibrium which assures the preservation of the community. “If it is true that mentalities and passions are extremely different in different climates then the laws must correspond to the difference of passions and to the difference of mentality.”¹⁹ The general course and trend of the history of man shows, then, that there is a law in man comparable in rigor and certainty to the laws of nature. At our present stage of development, to be sure, the moral world lacks the order of the physical world. For although the moral world has definite and immutable laws, it does not seem to follow them as persistently as physical nature follows its laws. The reason is that individual creatures endowed with understanding are limited and hence subject to error, and that they also act according to their own ideas and wills. Thus they do not always obey their fundamental laws or the rules they have laid down for themselves.²⁰ But Montesquieu is a man of his time, a genuine thinker of the Enlightenment, in that he expects from the advancement of knowledge a new moral order and a new orientation of the political and social history of man. And this is what brings him to the philosophy of history. From knowledge of the general principles and moving forces [214] of history he looks for the possibility of their effective control in the future. Man is not simply subject to the necessity of nature; he can and should shape his own destiny as a free agent, and bring about his destined and proper future. But the mere wish remains powerless as long as it is not guided by sure insight. Such insight can result only from a concentration of all the energies of the mind; it requires the most painstaking observation of empirical and historical details, just as logical analysis does when it offers various possibilities

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, Book I, ch. I.

¹⁷ *Considerations sur les Causes de la Grandeur des Romains et de leur decadence* ch. XVIII.

¹⁸ *L'Esprit des Lois*, Book XIV, ch. 15; cf. also XVI, 12.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, Book XIV, ch. 1.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, I, I.

and distinguishes clearly among these. Montesquieu is equally masterful in the solution of both problems. Of all the thinkers of his circle he has the most profound historical sense, the purest intuition of the manifold forms of historical phenomena. He once said of himself that when he came to speak of ancient history, he tried to assume the spirit of antiquity and to become an ancient himself.²¹ His eye for the particular and his love of detail protected him, even in his purely theoretical works, from anyone-sided doctrinarism. He always successfully resisted any merely schematic presentation, any reduction of the variety of forms to an absolutely rigid pattern. In the *Spirit of the Laws* Montesquieu gives a striking characterization of this danger. In his account (of the English constitution, which he admires as a political model, he emphasizes, nevertheless, that he by no means desires to urge the adoption of the same form by other countries and to assert that it is the sole standard: "How should I say that, I who believe that the very excess of reason is not always desirable and that men almost always accommodate themselves better to the mean than to the extreme?"²² Even in his theoretical writings Montesquieu tries to hit upon the proper middle course; he tries to preserve an equilibrium between experience and reason. It is thanks to this gift that his influence has I extended far beyond the narrower circle of the Enlightenment. Montesquieu's great work not only became the model for the Encyclopaedists' conception of history, but it cast its spell on the most outspoken opponent and critic of this conception. Herder attacked Montesquieu's method and his premises, but [215] he also admired his "noble gigantic work" and endeavoured to imitate it in his own writings.²³

3

When Lessing in the year 1753 announces Voltaire's *Essay on Manners* in the *Vossische Zeitung*, he begins his review with the remark that the noblest study of mankind is man but that there are two approaches to this study. "Either one considers man in particular or in general. Of the first approach one can hardly say it is the noblest pursuit of man. What is it to know man in particular? It is to know fools and scoundrels The case is quite different with the study of man in general. Here he exhibits greatness and his divine origin. Consider what enterprises man accomplishes, how he daily extends the limits of his understanding, what wisdom prevails in his laws, what ambition inspires his monuments No writer yet has selected this subject as his special theme, so that the present author can rightly boast: 'I was the first to take free steps through empty space' (*libera per vacuum posui vestigia princeps*)."²⁴

In these words Lessing, who was Voltaire's greatest opponent and sharpest critic in the eighteenth century, did full justice to the importance of Voltaire's historical work. He hit the mark in this critique and expressed the fundamental trend of Voltaire's historical writing. For it is Voltaire's intention to raise history above the "all-too-human," the accidental, and merely personal. His aim is not to depict unique incidents, but to express the "spirit of the times" and the "spirit of nations." It is not the sequence of events which interests Voltaire, but the progress of civilization and the inner relationship of its various elements. The first draft of the *Essay on Manners* was intended, as Voltaire states, for the Marquise de Chatelet, who had complained of the disconnected state of historical knowledge as compared with natural science. An analogue of Newtonian science, a reduction of facts to laws, should also be possible in history. But here,

²¹ Cf. Sorel, *Montesquieu*, Paris, 1887, pp. 15 1 if.

²² *L'Esprit des Lois*, XI, 6.

²³ Cf. Herder, "Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit," *Werke*, ed. Suphan, vol. v, p. 565

²⁴ Lessing, *Schriften*, ed. Lachmann-Muncker, vo1. v, p. 143

as in nature, there can be no thought of any [216] knowledge of law until a point of rest has been found in the flux of phenomena. This immutable and self-identical element is not to be found in the course of human destinies which are infinitely variable and changeable; if at all, it can be met with only in human nature. Historians should cease then to heed only political events, the rise and fall of great' kingdoms the crumbling of thrones. They should study the human race.' The saying: "I am a *man*" - *homo sum* - should have been the motto of every writer of history. But instead, most historians have done little else than describe battles. The true object of history is the story of the mind, not the tale of facts which are forever being distorted. "My aim has been much less to accumulate a vast quantity of facts, which are always self-contradictory, than to select the most important and best documented facts in order to guide the reader so that he may judge for himself concerning the extinction, revival, and progress of the human spirit, and to enable him to recognize peoples by their customs."²⁵ As the real weaknesses of previous historiography Voltaire sees, on the one hand, the mythical conception and interpretation of events and on the other, the cult of heroes. These weaknesses are mutually interdependent, representing simply a twofold expression of the same fundamental deficiency. For the cult of heroes, leaders, rulers sprang from this mythologizing tendency of history writers, who still continue to satisfy this appetite. I do not like heroes; they make too much noise in the world. I hate those conquerors, proud enemies of themselves, who have placed supreme happiness in the horrors of combat, seeking death everywhere and causing a hundred thousand men of their own kind to suffer it. The more radiant their glory, the more odious they are"²⁶ These are the lines Voltaire wrote to Frederick the Great after his victory at Chotusitz. The centre of gravity now moves from political history to cultural history by conscious methodological intention. In this transition we have an underlying tendency which distinguishes Voltaire from Montesquieu. Voltaire's *Essay on Manners* and Montesquieu's masterpiece appeared almost simultaneously and they sprang from similar cultural conditions; yet they pursue different objectives. In Montesquieu political events still occupy the centre of the historical world; the state is the main, in fact, the only subject of world history. The spirit of history coincides with the spirit of laws. In Voltaire, on the other hand, the concept of the mind has gained broader scope. It comprises the entire process of inner life, the sum total of the transformations through which humanity must pass before it can arrive at knowledge and consciousness of itself. The real purpose of the *Essay on Manners* is to reveal the gradual progress of mankind toward this goal and the obstacles which must be overcome before it can be reached. If political developments alone are considered, this purpose can never be realized. The progress of mankind can only be understood if one also takes into account the growth of religion, art, science, and philosophy, and in this way sketches a complete picture of the various phases through which the human spirit has had to evolve in order to reach its present state.²⁷

²⁵ Cf. Voltaire, "Remarques pour Servir de Supplement al'Essai sur les Moeurs" *Oeuvres*, ed. Lequien, Paris, 1820, vol. XVIII, pp. 429 ff.

²⁶ "J'aime peu les heros, ils font trop de fracas,
 Je hais ces conquerants, :tiers ennemis d'eux-memes
 Qui dans les horreurs des combats '
)nt place le bonheur supreme,
 Cherchant partout la mort, et la faisant soufi"rir
 A cent mille hommes leurs semblables.
 Plus leur gloire a d'eclat, plus ils sont haissables." - Letter of May 26, 1742, *Oeuvres*, ed. Lequien, LI, 119.

²⁷ This expression of Voltaire's conception of history very closely resembles the author's own view as expressed, for instance, in the conclusion of his *Essay on Man: An Introduction to*

But in offering this basic plan for the writing of history Voltaire poses a difficult question. If we consider the matter more closely and analyze its basic presuppositions, we are led to a strange dilemma. Voltaire is the enthusiastic herald of the idea of progress, and it is through this idea that his influence on his own time as well as on following generations has been greatest. Condorcet's *Sketch of a Historic Tableau of the Progress of the Human Spirit* is a direct continuation of Voltaire's ideas and principles. But how, one asks, does Voltaire reconcile his belief [218] in the progress of mankind with his no less strong conviction that mankind has always been basically the same, that its true nature has never changed? If the presupposition of the immutability of the human spirit is correct, then the real substance of this spirit remains aloof from all historical events, and these do not affect its innermost being. Whoever is able to separate the shell from the kernel of historical phenomena, knows that the forces which control and guide history are always and everywhere the same. This View of history which is typical of the Renaissance and is represented by Machiavelli and Lodovico Vives ²⁸ is retained throughout by Voltaire. He states it expressly in various passages in his historical works. Summing up his total accomplishment at the end of his *Essay on Manners*, Voltaire declares: "As a result of this presentation of the subject, it is clear that everything which belongs intimately to human nature is the same from one end of the. Universe to the other; that everything that depends on custom is different, and it is accidental if it remains the same. The empire of custom is much more vast than that of nature' it extends over manners and all usages, it sheds variety on the scene of the universe; nature sheds unity there; she establishes everywhere a small number of invariable principles. Thus the basis is everywhere the same, and culture produces diverse fruits." ²⁹ If this is the case, can there be a philosophical history in the strict sense? Does not the illusion of change and development vanish the moment one penetrates beneath the glittering surface of appearances and approaches the underlying principles which are always one and the same? Would not then philosophical insight put an end to history? Can the philosopher take delight in the striking variety of events even though he has recognized it as illusion and realized that it is not derived from nature, but merely from habit? Voltaire's philosophy of history gives us no satisfactory explicit answer to all these questions. The implicit solution which the *Essay on Manners* offers is that Voltaire is never content with an account of mere happenings, but that he connects his presentation directly with an intellectual analysis of phenomena by means of which the accidental is to be [219] separated from the necessary, the permanent from the ephemeral. In this respect Voltaire considers the work of the historian in the same light as that of the natural scientist. The natural scientist and the historian have the same task; amid the confusion and flux of phenomena they seek the hidden law. Neither in history nor in natural science is this law to be considered as a divine plan which assigns to every particular thing its place in the whole. In the knowledge of history as in that of nature we must forego a naive teleology. Such a teleology Voltaire finds in Bossuet's *Discourse on Universal History*, which he admires as a literary masterpiece; but Voltaire objects that Bossuet continually sets false gems in real gold. ³⁰ Genuine critical historiography should perform the same service for history which mathematics has performed for natural science. It should free history from the domination of final causes and lead it back to the real empirical causes. As natural science was emancipated from theology by the knowledge of the mechanical laws of natural processes, the same service is to be performed by psychology for

a Philosophy of Human Culture (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1944, p. 228): "Human culture taken as a whole may be described"; the process of man's progressive self-liberation. Language, art, religion, science, are various phases in this process." -Tr.

²⁸ Cf. the author's *Erkenntnisproblem*, vol. I, pp. 164 ff.

²⁹ *Essai sur les moeurs*, ch. CXCVII, *Oeuvres*, vol. XVIII, p. 425.

³⁰ Voltaire, *Le Pyrrhonisme de l'histoire* (1768), ch. II, *Oeuvres*, vol. XXVI, p. 163.

the historical world. And psychological analysis finally determines the real meaning of the idea of progress. It explains and justifies this idea, but it also indicates its limitations and keeps its application well within these bounds. Psychological analysis shows that humanity cannot exceed the limits of its "nature"; but its nature is not given all at once, for it has to evolve gradually and assert itself constantly against obstacles. "Reason" is of course given from the first as a fundamental endowment of man, and it is everywhere one and the same. But reason does not manifest itself externally in this stable and uniform aspect; it hides behind the profusion of customs and habits and succumbs to the weight of prejudice. History shows how reason gradually overcomes these obstacles, how it realizes its true destiny. Hence real progress does not concern humanity as such; it refers only to the objective, empirical manifestation of humanity. But the process by which reason emerges empirically and becomes comprehensible to itself, represents the fundamental meaning of history. History need not raise the metaphysical problem of the origin of [220] reason, nor can it solve this problem. For reason as such is super temporal. It is something necessary and eternal; the question of its development is meaningless. History can only show this much: how this eternal entity manifests itself, nevertheless, in time; and how it enters the stream of time and reveals there in gradually increasing purity and perfection its basic and original form.

In this conception of historiography Voltaire has set up the program followed henceforth by all historians of the epoch of the Enlightenment. He himself, to be sure, was unable to carry out this program fully in his *Essay on Manners'* but one must not impute the deficiencies of execution which occur in this work to its underlying systematic conception. Only superficial criticism would point to these deficiencies to demonstrate the basically unhistorical attitude of the Enlightenment. For the weaknesses with which Voltaire as a historian has so often been reproached are far less weaknesses of his system than those arising from his personality and temperament. Voltaire is not inclined to pursue the peaceful path of historical exposition through to the end. When he turns to the past, he does so not for the sake of the past but for the sake of the present and the future. History for him is not an end but a means; it is an instrument of self-education the human mind. Voltaire does not try simply to reflect and investigate; he demands and passionately anticipates the substance of his demands. For he no longer believes he is merely on the way; he imagines himself very near his goal, and he revels in expectancy and triumph at having attained his goal after so many toils and perplexities. Such personal feelings break into his historical exposition again and again. And the exposition becomes more perfect in the degree that Voltaire rediscovers his own ideals in the past. It reaches its climax in the *Age of Louis XIV*. Voltaire can of course see clearly and distinguish sharply outside this sphere; but his eagerness to judge or to condemn is often too great to permit calm consideration. The philosopher's pride in reason forestalls sober historical judgment. Again and again Voltaire reflects how far superior in true insight and knowledge the classical age of reason is, not only to the Middle Ages but even to the great eras of antiquity. He falls prey here [221] to that naive teleology which as a pure theorist he so strongly rejects and attacks. Just as Bossuet projects his theological ideal into history, so Voltaire projects his philosophical ideal; as the former applies to history the standard of the Bible, so the latter freely applies his rational standards to the past. There is no doubt that such deficiencies impeded the execution of Voltaire's great plan for a truly universal history which was to embrace all cultures, all epochs, and all peoples with equal love. On the other hand, it is undeniable that these deficiencies belong for the most part to the "defects of his virtues." For that which objectively considered appears to be a limitation of his viewpoint, constitutes on the other hand the personal charm of his exposition lending it that individuality and vitality which fascinated his contemporaries. Voltaire is the first thinker of the eighteenth century who recreated and embodied in a classical example the type of the great historical work of art. He lightened history of the ballast of mere antiquarianism and freed it from the form of the mere chronicle. He prides himself especially

on this achievement on which he bases his self-esteem as a historian. When in 1740 the Swedish Chaplain Nordberg published his learned account of the reign of Charles XII and in the course of his petty criticism pointed to various errors in Voltaire's *History of Charles XII*, Voltaire countered with satirical magnanimity. In his letter to Nordberg he writes: "It is perhaps an important matter for Europe that one know that the chapel of the castle of Stockholm, which burned down fifty years ago, was situated in the new northern wing of the palace ... and that on days when sermons were preached the seats were covered with blue tapestry, that some of the seats were of oak, others of walnut. . . . We are quite willing to believe that it is of the utmost importance to be thoroughly informed that there was no counterfeit gold in the dais under which Charles XII was crowned and to know the width of the canopy and whether it was decked with red or blue cloth provided by the church All this may have its value for those who desire to learn the interests of princes.... A historian has many duties. Allow me to remind you here of two which are of some importance. The first is not to slander; the second is not to bore. I can excuse [222] you for neglect of the first because few will read your work. I cannot, however, forgive you for neglecting the second, for I was forced to read you." ³¹ This is more than mere sarcasm; it is the expression of the stylistic ideal of historical writing which Voltaire realized in his work and established as a norm. Lord Chesterfield said of Voltaire's historical works that they contained the history of the human spirit written by a man of genius for the use of a man of spirit. But in this field Voltaire succumbed less than in any other to the danger of being merely witty. For he fortifies himself with extensive and thorough research, and he was no stranger to historical scrutiny. His attention is particularly attracted by sociological details. He would rather know and depict the condition of society in various periods, the forms of family life, the kind and progress of the arts and crafts than describe over and over the political and religious aberrations of nation, their wars and battles. He seeks the aid of etymology, declaring that frequently a single reliable derivation of a word can give us insight into the wanderings of peoples. The alphabet a people uses appears to Voltaire to be indisputable proof as to who the real teachers of the nation had been and as to the sources from which it drew its first knowledge. ³² The history of science itself could not escape these methodological demands, and d'Alembert became Voltaire's pupil in this matter. The decisive influence which d'Alembert's preface to the French Encyclopaedia has exerted in both philosophical and literary respects is largely due to the fact that here for the first time the development of science was approached from the new viewpoint. D'Alembert does not look upon this development as simply an accumulation of more and more new scholarly information but as the methodological self-development of the idea of knowledge itself. He demands that histories of individual subjects be replaced by a philosophical science of principles, and that the history of Science be treated according to such principles. In the encyclopaedic plan of knowledge which d'Alembert gave in his *Elements of Philosophy*, [223] he defines the task of history in the same sense. "The general and classified history of the arts and sciences comprises four great subjects: knowledge, opinion, disputes, and errors. The history of knowledge reveals to us our wealth-or rather, our real poverty. On the one hand, it humbles man by showing him how little he knows; on the other hand, it elates and encourages him, or at least consoles him, by showing the effective use which he has been able to make of a small number of clear and certain concepts. The history of opinion teaches us how men, now activated by necessity, now by impatience, have with varying success put probability In the place of truth· it teaches us how

³¹ Voltaire, "Lettre a Mr. Nordberg," Preface to new edition of *Histoire de Charles XII* (1744), *Oeuvres*, vol. XXII, pp. 12 ff. See the account of Nordberg and his criticism of Voltaire in Georg Brandes, *Voltaire*, vol. I, pp. 107 ff.

³² Introduction to *Essai sur les Moeurs*, *Oeuvres*, vol. xv, p. 110. Cf. also Gustave Lanson, *Voltaire*, sixth ed., ch. VI, pp. 107 ff.

that which at first was only probable, later became true and, so to speak, purified by further and deeper investigation in the course of the continued labours of several centuries. It offers for our scrutiny and for that of our descendants facts to be verified, viewpoints to be pursued, conjectures to be examined, incomplete information to be perfected. ... Finally, the history of our most notable errors ... teaches us to mistrust both ourselves and others; it shows us, moreover, the ways which have led away from the truth, and it helps us to find the right pathway.”³³

The plan here outlined by d'Alembert, so far as the history of the exact sciences is concerned, was brilliantly executed by his most gifted pupil. Lagrange's *Analytical Mechanics* offers us a model history of science which to this day has scarcely been surpassed. Later works, as for instance Eugen Duhring's *Critical History of the General Principles of Mechanics*, have generally followed the methodological model established by Lagrange. But d'Alembert himself goes still further; he attributes to history not only a theoretical but also an ethical value and he expects from history the true completion of the knowledge of moral man. "The science of historical facts encounters philosophy in two places, that is, by means of the principles which constitute the foundation of historical certainty and by means of the utility which one can derive from history. Men who are placed on the stage of the world are considered by the wise man [224] either as spectators or as actors. Such a man contemplates the intellectual just as he does the physical world without prejudice; he follows writers' reports with the same caution as he applies to natural phenomena. He observes all the subtle distinctions by which the historically true is differentiated from the probable, and the probable from the fictitious. He understands the different languages spoken by honesty and flattery, by prejudice and hatred; and he determines accordingly the various degrees of credibility and the importance of testimony and of the authority of witnesses. Guided by these subtle and dependable rules he studies the past above all in order to become better acquainted with his contemporaries. For the average reader, history is only so much food for curiosity or it is simply a momentary escape from boredom; for the philosopher it is a collection of intellectual and moral experiments (*experiences morales*) on the human race. It is a collection which would be more complete if it had been assembled by the wise alone; yet, incomplete as it is, it still contains the greatest teachings, such for instance as the accumulation of medical observations of all times, which, though it is constantly being enlarged and always remains incomplete, constitutes nonetheless the main body of medical science."³⁴ So it is that the Enlightenment derives from history the idea of a philosophical study of man, the idea of a general anthropology as Kant systematically developed and discussed it in his lectures.³⁵ The first attempts at a critical philosophy of history are closely connected with these speculative adventures. Diderot's articles in the *Encyclopaedia* on the various philosophical systems show little historical originality and his dependence on Bayle, von Brucker, and on Deslandes' *Critical and Philosophical History* (1756 ff.) is very noticeable throughout. Yet a new spirit permeates these articles, especially in the accounts of modern philosophy of Hobbes, Spinoza, and Leibniz. The mere enumeration of opinions is now gradually superseded by historical and systematic analysis of the content of individual doctrines and of the historical conditions of their development. [225]

The analytical spirit, which is characteristic of the eighteenth century, reigns supreme in this field as well. This spirit tends to stress uniformity and constancy rather than change and flux in the treatment of historical phenomena. Only one thinker of the eighteenth century preserves

³³ D'Alembert, *Elements de Philosophie*, sect. II, in *Melanges de Litterature*, vol. IV, pp. 9 ff.

³⁴ D'Alembert, *Elements de Philosophie*, sect. III, in *Melanges*, pp. 16 f.

³⁵ See Kant's lecture plan for the winter semester of 1765-1766 in *Werke*, ed. Cassirer, vol. II, pp. 319 ff

even here his own independent attitude despite prevailing tendencies. Hume agrees as little with the general type of philosophy of history of the Enlightenment as he does with its theory of knowledge or its philosophy of religion. In him the static approach to history, which is oriented to the knowledge of the permanent properties of human nature, begins to relax; he looks more to the historical process as such than to the solid substratum presupposed by the process. Hume criticizes the concept of substance not only as a logician but also as a philosopher of history. He does not indeed portray history as a steady development but he delights in its unceasing change; in the observation of process as such. He neither looks for nor believes in any "reason" implicit in this process; it is rather a psychological and aesthetic than a rational interest which leads him back again and again to the study of the flux of things. The "imagination," which he opposes to abstract reason in his theory of knowledge, and on whose importance he insists, takes on a decisive preponderance in history. Hume looks upon the imagination as one of the basic forces of all historical thought. "In reality, what more agreeable entertainment to the mind than to be transposed into the remotest ages of the world, and to observe human society, in its infancy, making the first faint essays toward the arts and sciences; to see the policy of government, and the civility of conversation refining by degrees, and everything which is ornamental to human life advancing toward perfection."³⁶ In this general presentation Hume is not seeking to anticipate the final goal of history; he is absorbed in the sheer wealth of concrete material. History, little as we can know of its ultimate grounds, is to Hume the noblest and most beautiful occupation of the mind. ('Shall those trifling pastimes, which engross so much of our time, be preferred as more satisfactory, and more fit to engage our attention? How perverse must that taste [226] be which is capable of so wrong a choice of pleasures?")³⁷ High as Hume exalts history and much as he praises it as the noblest adornment of human existence, he does not suppress his scepticism here either. If one compares his praise of the science of history with the expectations, demands, and ideals which the eighteenth century originally cherished for history, the contrast becomes quite evident. With respect to these ideals Hume's statements have a very hollow ring; they are in a key of resignation and renunciation. What a dramatically stirring life does history parade before our eyes! What a pleasure to observe the rise, progress, fall and final extinction of the most prosperous kingdoms, and to see the virtues which made them great and the vices which led to their ruin. "In short, to see all the human race, from the beginning of time, pass, as it were, in review before us; appearing in their true colours, without any of those disguises, which, during their life time, so much perplexed the judgement of the beholders. What spectacle can be imagined, so magnificent, so various, so interesting? What amusement, either of the senses or the imagination, can be compared with it?"³¹ What a spectacle-but, alas, it is only a spectacle! For Hume no longer believes it possible to grasp the ultimate significance of natural processes and to reveal their plan. He discards the question of the innermost relations of things and contents himself with the mere spectacle, without trying to bring the ever changing scenes which history causes to pass before him in line with any particular idea. But here again we shall fail to do justice to Hume's scepticism if we consider only its negative side. In history too this scepticism fulfils an important function despite its apparently destructive tendency. For Hume's resistance to any kind of hasty generalization, his concern with the pure facts of history implies not merely a methodological warning but also a new methodological orientation. Hume's doctrine advocates the uniqueness and specific status of the particular and opens the way for its acknowledgment. To bring about really philosophical recognition of the aspect of Hume's thought, required, however, a further step which he could not take. The particular had

³⁶ Hume, "Of the Study of History," *Essays Moral, Political and Literary*, ed. Green and Gross, new impression, London, 1898, vol. II, pp. 388 ff.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, II, 388 ff.

to be presented not only as a "matter of fact," but as a problem. It [227] was not sufficient to summon up the realm of facts against the realm of reason; the precise position of the particular within this latter realm had to be determined. The deeper requirement, which is also systematically more difficult to fulfil, consisted in formulating a new concept of the individual human being and tracing its various meanings, its applications and modifications. Hume's scepticism and empiricism were not prepared for such a task. To this end the eighteenth century had to find a new way and to turn to a new leader. It had to attempt to unearth the methodological treasure which lay hidden in Leibniz's doctrine; for this doctrine in its principle of the monad had given the clearest expression to the problem of individuality, and had indeed assigned to individuality a firm central position in a comprehensive philosophical system.

4

Leibniz's concept of substance is also intended to show permanence in change; but it is distinguished by the fact that it conceives the relationship between unity and multiplicity, between duration and change, as a pure correlation. Leibniz no longer wishes to subordinate the many to the one, the mutable to the permanent; he proceeds from the assumption that the two terms of the correlation can only be explained by each other. Genuine knowledge, accordingly, cannot be knowledge of the enduring or of the mutable; it must exhibit the correlation and mutual interdependence of these two elements. The unity of law and of substance can only be exemplified in constant change. Indeed, its only possible expression is in change. Substance remains but its stability implies no standstill; on the contrary, this stability involves the constant rule of its progression. A dynamic conception of substance now takes the place of the static conception. Substance is only a subject or substratum in so far as it is force, as it proves to be directly active and reveals its own nature in the sequence of its activities. The nature of substance does not consist in its being self-inclusive but rather in being fruitful and in producing ever new varieties of things. Its stability lies in this capacity to emanate new content without cessation, in this constant [228] production of phenomena. The totality of these phenomena IS of course pre-formed in the nature of substance· there is no such thing as epigenesis, as a new formation conditioned wholly from without. Everything that seems to accrue to substance by the influence of external forces must nevertheless be rooted in its own nature, must be pre-formed and predetermined in this nature. But such determination is not to be conceived as a rigid stereotyped pattern. The perfection of substance is revealed rather in the completeness of its development; its middle and end are as essential and necessary as its beginning. Leibniz bases the nature of the monad on its identity but he includes in this Identity the idea of continuity. Identity and continuity combined are the basis of the totality of the monad, and they constitute its completeness and characteristic wholeness." ³⁸

This fundamental conception of Leibniz's metaphysics signified a new and promising step toward the understanding and conquest of the historical world. But it was a long time before further steps were taken and before this conception could unfold freely. Wolff's system had not entirely excluded the historical it had sought rather to establish a strict relationship between the historical and the rational. Wolff's theory of knowledge every particular discipline is divided into an abstract-rational a concrete-empirical, and a historical part. In the structure of this system full justice is to be done to experience; general cosmology is supplemented by empirical physics, and rational psychology by empirical psychology. But the equilibrium which Wolff is striving after cannot be maintained by method alone. For the very form of the system with its mathematical deduction and demonstration is an obstacle to such an equilibrium. Philosophy is and remains by the nature of its task the science of the rational not of the historical; the science of the possible, not of the factual and real: "knowledge of

³⁸ Cf. above ch. 1, pp. 29 ff.

possibilities as far as they can be" (*scientia possibilium quatenus esse possunt*). A philosophy of history in the strict sense, therefore, can find no acceptance in Wolff's system; it would involve a mixture of the modes of knowledge and an obliteration of their boundaries, a real [229] "transformation into another kind" (*xxx*). The object of philosophy is not the world of fact with which history is concerned but that of the grounds of being; and the law of sufficient reason is the guiding star and first axiom of philosophy even in its relationship with empirical facts. The generality and necessity of the ground, however, is in conflict with that contingency and uniqueness which characterizes and is inseparable from all historical existence. The ideal of mathematical and philosophical lucidity cannot be realized in this field; hence history cannot gain admittance to the inner sanctum of knowledge and philosophy.

"But this inner sanctum now seemed to be accessible to history from another approach. Philosophy in its abstract purity remained aloof from the historical; it thought it could and was forced to defend itself against such knowledge. But theology first opened its frontiers and removed the rigid barrier between the dogmatic and the historical content of belief. We have seen how this development began and by what intellectual motives it was determined.³⁹ In German intellectual history it is Lessing who follows this development through to its logical conclusion and with respect to method, to its culminating point. His *Education of Humanity* reconciles religious and historical knowledge and recognizes the latter as a necessary factor, an indispensable element, of religion. But Lessing does not extend his consideration to world history as such. He does not doubt that providence "has had a hand in the matter" of world history, even to its last detail but he does not presume to lift the veil of this mystery. Herder takes the final decisive step. Considered in its totality, his achievement is incomparable and without any real preliminary stages. It seems to descend spontaneously from the Gods and to be born out of nothing; it is derived from an intuition of the historical hitherto unequalled in its purity and perfection. But this new conception of the historical world could not have been properly established and it could not have been systematically developed if Herder had not found the intellectual tools ready at hand. His metaphysics of history is based on Leibniz's [230] central doctrine,⁴⁰ while his vital intuition of history protects him from the first against any merely schematic application of the doctrine. For he is not merely striving for an outline of historical development; he tries to see and to assimilate every individual form as such. Herder definitely broke the spell of analytical thinking and of the principle of identity. History dispels the illusion of identity; it knows nothing really identical, nothing that ever recurs in the same form. History brings forth new creatures in uninterrupted succession, and on each she bestows as its birthright a unique shape and an independent mode of existence. Every abstract generalization is, therefore, powerless with respect to history, and neither a generic nor any universal norm can comprehend its wealth. Every human condition ~as its peculiar value; every individual phase of history has its immanent validity and necessity. These phases are not separated from one another; they exist only in and by virtue of the whole. But each phase is equally indispensable. It is from such complete heterogeneity that real unity emerges, which is conceivable *only* as the unity of a process not as sameness among existing things. The first task of the historian is, then, to suit his standards to his subject and not, conversely, to make his subject fit into a uniform, stereotyped pattern. Of Egypt, Herder says: "It is silly to take a single Egyptian virtue out of the context of its country and time, out of the youth of the human spirit, and then to appraise it with a standard of a different time! Even if the Greek could ... be so mistaken in his judgment of the Egyptian, and if the Oriental could hate the Egyptian; yet it

³⁹ Herder, "Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit,"

⁴⁰ 40 For the connection between Herder's philosophy of history and Leibniz's fundamental concepts, see the author's treatment in *Freiheit und XXX*

seems to me, one's first thought should be to see him in his proper place. Otherwise one sees, especially from the European viewpoint, a most distorted caricature." History can and should give up all general characterisation. "Let somebody portray an entire people, an age, a region. What has he portrayed? Let him give an account of peoples succeeding one another and of events in everlasting alternation like the waves of the sea. What has he portrayed? What did his powerful words characterize? ... He who has [231] observed what an ineffable thing is the unique nature of a single human being with his ability to express his distinctive characteristics in a distinct manner, to say how he feels and lives, how different and unique all things become once his eye has seen them his soul measured them and his heart felt them; he who has noticed too what depth lies in the character of a single nation which, even though one has watched and admired it often enough, begs all description and is rarely recognizable in historical accounts so that one can understand and feel its character as it really is—such a one knows that insight into these things is like trying to survey and grasp the whole expanse of nations, times and countries in a single glance, a feeling, a word! What a pale, blurred reflection is conveyed by words! The whole vital portraiture of the mode of life, habits, needs, geographical and climatic qualities would have to be added to the words, or to have gone before by way of introduction; one would have to feel with a nation in order to sense the meaning of a single one of its desires or actions; one must feel all of a nation's desires and actions simultaneously in order to find words for them and to think them in their rich variety. Otherwise one reads merely words.⁴¹ In the finding of words which immediately conjure up imaginative forms of things, which not only analytically divide but synthetically put together, Herder is inexhaustible; and herein lies his real mastery. He describes and characterizes and he imaginatively transports himself into the various epochs and creates for each its proper and unique atmosphere. For he rejects the dream picture of an "absolute, independent, and unalterable happiness, as the philosopher defines it." Human nature is no receptacle of such happiness: "It enjoys at all times as much happiness as it can; it is a moulding clay which assumes different forms in accordance with different situations, needs, and afflictions.... As soon as the inner sense of happiness, the inclination, has changed, as soon as the external occasions and needs have formed and sustained another sense; who can compare the different satisfaction of different senses in different worlds? ... Every nation has its own core of happiness just as every sphere [232] has its centre of gravity!" Providence did not seek monotony and uniformity; it sought rather to attain its goal through change, through the constant production of new forces and the extinction of others: "Philosopher in a northern valley, with the infant's scales of your century in your hand, do you know better than Providence?"⁴² With these words Herder, under the influence of Hamann, parts company with his age. No such tone as this had hitherto been heard in the philosophy of history of the eighteenth century; it had been as foreign to Montesquieu as to Voltaire or Hume. And yet, much as he outgrows the intellectual world of the Enlightenment, Herder's break with his age was not abrupt. His progress and ascent were possible only by following the trails blazed by the Enlightenment. This age forged the weapons with which it was finally defeated; with its own clarity and consistency it established the premises on which Herder based his inference. The conquest of the Enlightenment by Herder is therefore a genuine self-conquest. It is one of those defeats which really denote a victory, and Herder's achievement is in fact one of the greatest intellectual triumphs of the philosophy of the Enlightenment.

⁴¹ Herder "Auch eine Philosophie der Geschlechter zur Bildung der Menschheit,"

⁴² *Ibid.*, vol. v, pp. 507 ff.