

# THE IDEA OF A HERMENEUTIC OF HISTORY

---

Rosalind Posel



Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of History at the University of Natal.

Durban, 1982.

## PREFACE

Constantly confronted by history, man has what may be termed a natural impulse to make sense of the past. And indeed, the past cannot be understood without also understanding the present. Thus that fundamental historical impulse is profoundly philosophical in the Socratic sense. It is because hermeneutics explicitly identifies itself with the Socratic tradition, that my attempt to elucidate the nature of written history as an academic discipline has been located within a hermeneutic point of view.

In the course of this thesis I refer to several major debates in social theory. However, I make no pretense at covering these debates fully. They are cited insofar as they bear on issues arising in the development of the idea of a hermeneutic of history.

I wish to express my thanks to my supervisors, Prof. J.W. Horton and Dr. J.A. Stofberg for their encouragement and constructive criticisms offered during the writing of this thesis.

The examiners' assessments have been useful in stimulating me to rethink some of my ideas, thereby clarifying and in some cases modifying earlier arguments (and thus, of course, engaging in a hermeneutic exercise). Where I have disagreed with any points made, I have tried to express my own position more precisely.

My thanks also go to Mrs. Esmé Serfontein who very patiently typed and retyped the thesis.

In conformity with the regulations of the University of Natal, I hereby state unambiguously that what follows is my own original work unless specifically indicated to the contrary in the text.

Durban, 1982.

## CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
INTRODUCTION ...	1
CHAPTER ONE : EARLY HERMENEUTIC TRADITION	
(i) Interpretation of texts ...	9
(ii) Contribution to history ...	23
CHAPTER TWO : DILTHEY	
(i) Historicity ...	37
(ii) Understanding ...	43
(iii) Objectivity ...	52
CHAPTER THREE : UNDERSTANDING AND MEANING	
(i) Understanding ...	59
(ii) Meaning ...	72
CHAPTER FOUR : RAPPROCHEMENTS	
(i) Winch ...	92
(ii) Giddens and Taylor ...	97
(iii) Critical hermeneutics ...	101
(iv) Science's hermeneutic turn ...	109
(v) Reassessing the relationship between the <i>naturwissenschaften</i> and the <i>geisteswissenschaften</i> ...	120
CHAPTER FIVE : THE HERMENEUTIC CIRCLE OF UNDERSTANDING	
(i) Points of view:	
(a) Kinds of history ...	125
(b) Presuppositions about a particular event ...	137
(ii) Questions, dialectic and self- understanding ...	153

CHAPTER SIX	:	MORAL JUDGMENTS AND OBJECTIVITY		
(i)		Moral judgments	...	167
(ii)		Objectivity	...	183
CHAPTER SEVEN	:	EXPLANATION IN HISTORY		
(i)		Explain "what"	...	193
(ii)		Explain "how"	...	197
(iii)		Explain "why"	...	202
		(a) The hypothetico-deductive model of explanation	...	204
		(b) Rational explanations	...	217
		(c) Explanations of irrational actions	...	227
CHAPTER EIGHT	:	CONCLUSION	...	232
APPENDIX A	:	Extract from: Jeffrey B. Russell, <u>A History of Witchcraft, Sorcerers, Heretics and Pagans</u>	...	239
APPENDIX B	:	Functional explanation	...	241
APPENDIX C	:	Extract from: Otto Pflanze, "Toward a Psycho-analytic Interpretation of Bismarck"	...	245
BIBLIOGRAPHY			...	247

## INTRODUCTION

Hermes was the messenger of the Gods. His task was to transform divine communications, which were beyond human comprehension, into a form intelligible to human understanding. Hence the verb, "*hermēneuein*" and the noun, "*hermēneia*", meaning to interpret and interpretation respectively. Hermeneutics may therefore be broadly defined as "the science of interpretation"<sup>(1)</sup> with the connotation that its concern is to render intelligible what is unintelligible. However, is this not what any explanation tries to do? Passmore, after examining various kinds of explanation, has argued that there is no one logical form of explanation; rather what is common to all explanations is that in each case the explanation is a response to the puzzlement felt by the questioner. Hence, as he remarks, "an assumption of unfamiliarity is written into every request for an explanation".<sup>(2)</sup>

Hermeneutics as interpretation is, by general consent, concerned with theoretical reflection on what may be termed special kinds of explanation. The objects of such interpretations are texts, both in the literal sense and also text analogues such as human actions; the aim of the interpretation is to disclose the meaning of the text, and to make sense of an action by "showing the coherence between what the agent is doing and the meaning the situation had for him".<sup>(3)</sup> The proper method is to trace out the

- 
1. Richard E. Palmer, Hermeneutics (1969), p.33.  
The system of footnoting used in this thesis is that advocated by the University of Oxford. It is also a recommended procedure in the recent handbook issued by the University of the Witwatersrand. (Reuben Musiker, "Style Guide for Theses and Dissertations", Occasional Publications, no 7, July 1980).
  2. John Passmore, "Explanation in Everyday Life, in Science and in History", History and Theory, Vol. 2, 1962, p.108.
  3. Quentin Skinner, "Hermeneutics and the Role of History", New Literary History, Vol. 7, no 2, 1972, p.210.



hermeneutic circle "by placing the text to be interpreted within the field of assumptions and conventions to which it contributes and from which it derives its distinctively meaningful character".<sup>(4)</sup>

Historically the field of hermeneutics has denoted the theory of biblical exegesis, a general philosophical methodology, the science of all linguistic understanding, the methodological foundations of the *geisteswissenschaften* and systems of interpretation directed at reading the meaning behind myths and symbols.<sup>(5)</sup> The hermeneutic assertion, however, that understanding a text or text analogue is "an historical encounter"<sup>(6)</sup> has had the consequence of extending hermeneutics to include reflection on the question of the nature of understanding itself, "in its most foundational and 'existential' sense", as Palmer puts it.<sup>(7)</sup> Insofar therefore as hermeneutics focusses both "on the problematic of a general theory of interpretation as the methodology for the...*geisteswissenschaften*",<sup>(8)</sup> as well as on the phenomenon of understanding, we may agree with Palmer that hermeneutics is "more than merely interdisciplinary". For, "through a study of hermeneutical theory, the (*geisteswissenschaften*) can achieve a fuller measure of self-knowledge and a better understanding of the character of their task".<sup>(9)</sup>

Ricoeur has pointed out that while hermeneutics has concerned itself with "a consideration of the historicity of human experience in general, it has taken little cognisance of "the practising ~~X~~ historian's kind of inquiry".<sup>(10)</sup> In this thesis the idea of a

---

4. Ibid.

5. Palmer, op.cit., p.33.

6. op.cit., p.10.

7. Ibid.

8. Josef Bleicher, Contemporary Hermeneutics: Hermeneutics as Method, Philosophy and Critique (1980), p.1.

9. Palmer, op.cit., p.10.

10. Paul Ricoeur, "History and Hermeneutics", Journal of Philosophy, Vol. 73, no 19, 1976, p.683.

hermeneutic of history will be developed as an extended conception of a hermeneutic interpretation, that is an attempt will be made to elucidate a theoretical framework within which problems involved in the interpretation of historical texts and text analogues may be analysed. An exposition of the history of hermeneutics is one necessary prerequisite for the development of such an idea. However, it is not within the scope of this thesis to provide a detailed exegetical study of the field of hermeneutics per se; the writings of various philosophers within the field of hermeneutics are assessed in terms of the specific contributions they are held to make to the issues at stake in this thesis.<sup>(11)</sup>

Consideration is also given to seminal historiographical issues. Furthermore, it must be stressed that the perspective in this thesis is not a purely philosophical one; it has also adopted the view point of a practising historian. Thus attention is focussed on the mutual encounter of philosophy and history, the point at which philosophical insights can open up the past to the historian's understanding, while at the same time making transparent to the historian his point of view without which understanding is impossible. During the development of the idea of a hermeneutic of history an attempt will be made to demonstrate the sense in which a hermeneutic philosophy makes explicit the methodology implicit in the historian's craft. This junction of philosophy and history, the philosophical interpretation and evaluation of what historians have been doing has not, so far,

---

11. It must be pointed out that because the original works of some of the early hermeneutic thinkers such as Ast, Wolf, Schleiermacher and Gatterer, have proved inaccessible to the writer, reliance has had to be placed on secondary material.

been effectively demonstrated by philosophers of history. Commenting on this point, Newman writes that "it might well be that philosophers concerned with methodological problems in certain areas must learn to live with the fact that they are writing about nothing of particular interest to people participating in the discipline about which they are writing".<sup>(12)</sup> But as Newman has pointed out, this should not be the case. Similarly there are historians who disclaim the relevance of a general philosophical analysis for their concrete empirical investigations. But the alleged polarity between philosophy and history, between general theoretical analysis and the unique event is a false one. Knowingly or not, the historian always incorporates a particular theoretical perspective in the practice of his craft, and a successful philosophical analysis is tested and elucidated with reference to particular situations. This thesis will therefore attempt to demonstrate the unity of philosophy and history as a means of elucidation and vindication of the idea of a philosophy of history. The historical examples chosen are from reputable historical works, and they range from well-established points of view to an example of what might be called 'history in the raw', that is works dealing with the witch-craze of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a phenomenon not fully understood, and which therefore provides an interesting example of the search by NB  
X historians for explanatory frameworks.

The idea of a hermeneutic of history must come to terms with two fundamental issues, namely, how the past is interpreted and how such interpretations are to be judged.

Hermeneutics began as a philological enterprise concerned with the postulation of rules for understanding the meaning of texts. That meaning was identified with the intention of the author and had to

---

12. Fred D. Newman, Explanation by Description (1968), p.11.



be understood contextually, within the hermeneutic circle. The Scientific Revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and the Enlightenment helped to widen the scope of hermeneutics as the provision of a methodology for the *geisteswissenschaften*, with the concept of *verstehen* regarded as appropriate to its particular subject matter as opposed to *verstand*, which characterised the *naturwissenschaften*. But Dilthey's analysis of historicity,<sup>(13)</sup> the view that man is fundamentally historical, implied that there is no absolute starting point for thought, no body of absolute standards outside experience which can be reached by pure speculation.<sup>(14)</sup> This seemed to lead to relativism and a denial of the possibility of objective knowledge, issues which Dilthey tackled but was unable to resolve in a way ultimately coherent with the rest of his thought.

The development of a methodology for the *geisteswissenschaften*, which took cognisance of that historicity, was made possible when the focus of hermeneutics was directed towards a phenomenological elucidation of understanding as a specific mode of being-in-the-world.

Enlarging on Heidegger's analysis, Gadamer's thought emphasized the role played by the interpreter in the constitution of the meaning of texts or text analogues. Thus the early hermeneutic

- 
13. I use the word 'historicity' to refer to one's situatedness in history, as Gadamer himself does. (Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (1975), (henceforth *TM*)). See for example pp.235-274. Historicity is 'the affirmation of the temporality of human experience', as Palmer puts it. (Palmer, *op.cit.*, p.111). Other writers use the word 'historicity' in a sense which seems to be synonymous with historicity. For example, according to Hoy, historicity is 'the recognition that man's existence is always temporally and historically situated'. (David Couzens Hoy, *The Critical Circle* (1978), p.3.)
  14. H.P. Rickman, 'Wilhelm Dilthey', *Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (1967), Vol. 2, p.404.

belief that the meaning of a text lay solely in the recovery of intention required reassessment, a need reinforced by a critical reflection on meaning within the parameters of the speech act. Giddens' conception of a double hermeneutic, involving the mediation of frames of meaning, that is the imposition of theories which may have been unknown to the original authors or agents in order to elucidate what is held to be the fuller historical meaning, therefore substantially enlarged the initial hermeneutic enterprise. ✕

Insofar as historians employ the double hermeneutic, focus is directed upon the possibility of giving explanations of the hypothetico-deductive kind, thereby challenging the early hermeneutic insistence on its own methodological autonomy. However, science's "hermeneutic turn", reflected particularly in the writings of Popper and Kuhn, demands a reassessment of the relationship between the *geisteswissenschaften* and the *naturwissenschaften*. Without denying the differences between them, both with respect to subject matter and aspects of their methodologies, the changed status of scientific laws gives credence to Nagel's view that there is no radical difference in the logical structure of the hypothetico-deductive model used in each case.

Other explanatory techniques, the elucidation of contextual meaning and the giving of narrative explanations, contribute towards the fulfilment of the double hermeneutic. While, therefore, there is no specifically hermeneutic mode of explanation, all explanations are held to be ultimately hermeneutic insofar as the historian's aim is to reveal the fuller historical meaning, that enterprise being conducted within the hermeneutic circle of understanding by the self-reflective historian.

The recognition that all historical interpretation, like scientific investigation, must always take place from a point of view, requires that a hermeneutic analysis of objectivity takes cognisance of that

historicality. The past may be approached from different possible points of view, each delineating its field of research, those questions which are regarded as legitimate and sometimes sanctioning the use of specific methodological techniques, as for example in cliometrics. Historical objectivity within a point of view depends on the account having satisfied the professional and intellectual criteria to which historians subscribe. But critical self-reflection alone cannot guarantee that this has been achieved. Objectivity is therefore founded upon the social aspects of historical research, that is the co-operation and competition which take place in learned institutions and within the forums provided by books, journals and congresses. The possibility of communication amongst *all* historians, irrespective of their point of view and notwithstanding ideological preferences, is contained within Habermas' concept of an ideal rational community which spells out the kinds of conditions required for perfect mutual understanding.

The concept of a fuller historical meaning of the past provides a justification for the explicit imposition of moral values on historical accounts, thereby also supplying the opportunity for self-critical examination by historians and readers of their moral values. However, insofar as such accounts subscribe to the necessary intellectual values, their objectivity may be assessed separately from judgments of their moral relevance.

Carr has argued that in the light of recent epistemological developments, there is a need for a new explanatory model in history and the social sciences:

...I have already argued that the social sciences and history among them cannot accommodate themselves to a theory of knowledge which puts subject and object asunder and enforces a rigid separation between the observer and the thing observed. We need a new model which does justice to the complex process of inter-relation and interconnection between them. (15)

The idea of a hermeneutic of history developed in this thesis is offered as an attempt to provide such a model.

---

15. E.H. Carr, What is History? (1961), p.119.



## CHAPTER ONE

### EARLY HERMENEUTIC TRADITION

Two events were crucial in the early development of hermeneutics. Firstly, the Reformation, which gave impetus to the formulation of rules for the interpretation of texts, and secondly, the Scientific Revolution which, by stimulating attempts to extend the methods of the science of the time to the study of man and society, provoked a reaction from thinkers who differentiated between what was to be called the *geisteswissenschaften* and the *naturwissenschaften*, the former being concerned with the meaning of texts and actions which could not be recovered by scientific methodology.

#### (i) The interpretation of texts

The interpretation of texts both secular and sacred has a long history. As Dilthey has pointed out,<sup>(1)</sup> in Classical Greece the education system devoted much time to an interpretation of Homer and other poets. Formal attempts to systematize interpretation were made by Aristotle, who in his works, *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*, discussed methods of analysis of literary texts. In Alexandria in the third and second centuries B.C., collections of literary works from Ancient Greece were subjected to tests for authenticity based on an examination of the content and coherence of the texts.

The sixth century A.D. marked the appearance of the Jewish *Talmud* formed by a union of the *Mishnah* and *Gemara*. The former was a compilation of the answers given by Rabbis to the interpretation of issues in the *Torah* with respect to contemporary problems. Further commentary and interpretation of the *Mishnah* constituted the *Gemara*.

---

1. Wilhelm Dilthey, 'The Rise of Hermeneutics', New Literary History, Vol. 3, no 2, 1972, p.234.

The Renaissance period was of considerable importance in the resurgence of interpretative scholarship after the Medieval period. The need to examine texts rigorously for their authenticity and reliability became recognised as an essential prerequisite for the task of interpretation.<sup>(2)</sup>

Probably the best example of the Renaissance achievement in this sphere is to be found in the demonstration by Lorenzo Valla (1404-1457) of the forgery of the document, "The Donation of Constantine". Valla's analysis illustrates clearly the hermeneutic method in terms of which a text must be located within the context to which it contributes and from which it derives its own meaningful character:

Let us talk to this sycophant about barbarism of speech; for by this stupidity of his language his monstrous impudence is made clear, and his lie.

'We give', he says, 'our imperial Lateran palace': as though it was awkward to place the gift of the palace here among the ornaments, he repeated it later where gifts are treated. 'Then the diadem': and as though those present would not know, he interprets, 'that is, the crown'. He did not, indeed, here add 'gold of gold', but later emphasising the same statements, he says, 'of purest gold and precious gems'. The ignorant fellow did not know that a diadem was made of coarse cloth or perhaps of silk; whence that wise and oft-repeated remark of the king, whom they say, before he put upon his head the diadem given him, held it and considered it long and exclaimed, 'O cloth more renowned than happy . If any one knew you through and through with how many anxieties and dangers and miseries you are fraught, he would not care to pick up; no, not even if you were lying on the ground!'. This fellow imagines that it is of gold, with a gold band and gems such as kings now

---

2. The invention of the moveable-type printing press gave an added stimulus to the need for accurate texts.

usually add. But Constantine was not a king, nor would he have dared to call himself king, nor to adorn himself with royal ceremony. He was Emperor of the Romans, not king. Where there is a king, there is no republic. But in the republic there were many, even at the same time, who were *imperatores* (generals); for Cicero frequently writes thus, 'Marcus Cicero, imperator, to some other imperator, greeting': though, later on, the Roman ruler, as the highest of all, is called by way of distinctive title the Emperor. (3)

The development of hermeneutics as that discipline specifically concerned with the interpretation of texts received a major impetus from the Reformation. One of the areas of disagreement between Protestant and Catholic theologians concerned the question of the interpretation of the Bible. Martin Luther rejected the Catholic adherence to an institutionalized interpretation of the scriptures.

In his seminal work, *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation*, Luther argued against accepting an interpretation given by members of the Church, who assume authority but do not actually study the scriptures themselves. Therefore, Luther asked, "where were the need and use of the Holy Scriptures?"<sup>(4)</sup> Specifically Luther rejected the authority of the Pope as final arbiter with respect to questions of interpretation:

And though they say that this authority was given to St. Peter when the keys were given to him, it is plain enough that the keys were not given to St. Peter alone, but to the whole community. Besides the keys were not ordained for doctrine or authority, but for sin, to bind or loose; and what they claim besides the keys is mere invention...<sup>(5)</sup>

- 
3. Peter Burke, *The Renaissance Sense of the Past* (1969), pp.55-6.
  4. Martin Luther, *To the Christian Nobility of the German Nation* in K.M. Setton and H.R. Winkler (eds), *Great Problems in European Civilization* (1954), p.272.
  5. Ibid.

Luther's position was that all those who had faith had an equal right to interpret the Bible:

...we are all priests...and have all one faith,  
one gospel, one Sacrament; how then should we  
not have the power of discerning and judging  
what is right or wrong in matters of faith?...<sup>(6)</sup>

This stand provoked a sharp reaction from Erasmus who correctly foresaw that it would now be necessary to try to formulate rules in order to be able to arbitrate amongst interpretations. Pointing out that the Scriptures are not always perfectly clear, Erasmus argued that if they were, why over the centuries had "such eminent men" been blind to their truth?<sup>(7)</sup> While admitting that it might be possible that the Holy Spirit might reveal truths "withheld from a host of learned men" to a "humble and illiterate person", Erasmus opted for an acceptance of the authority of the Catholic Church:<sup>(8)</sup>

...it is more probable that God has infused His  
Spirit in those to whom he has given holy orders;  
just as we believe that grace is more clearly  
given to the baptized than to the unbaptized. <sup>(9)</sup>

In a letter to Paul Volz (14 August 1518) Erasmus expressed his views succinctly:

...the strange and often confused terms, the  
metaphors and oblique figures of speech, hold  
so much difficulty that we most often perspire  
with effort before we understand the meaning.

---

6. Ibid.

7. Erasmus, De Libero Arbitrio in Setton and Winkler (eds),  
op.cit., p.274.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.



In my opinion it would be best if some men of both piety and learning were assigned the task of distilling from the purest sources of the Evangelists and the Apostles, and from the most approved interpreters the essence of the whole philosophy of Christ - as simply as is compatible with scholarship, as briefly as is compatible with clarity. (10)

The recognition that the Protestant view would result in a variety of interpretations prompted the Council of Trent to rule as follows:

...to check unbridled spirits, it decrees that no one relying on his own judgment shall, in matters of faith and morals pertaining to the edification of Christian doctrine, distorting the Holy Scriptures in accordance with his own conceptions, presume to interpret them contrary to that sense which holy mother Church, to whom it belongs to judge of their true sense and interpretation, has held and holds, or even contrary to the unanimous teaching of the Fathers, even though such interpretations should never at any time be published. (11)

---

10. op.cit., pp.273-274.

In what is arguably an uncharacteristic departure from his eminently rational method of argument, Erasmus wrote in De Libero Arbitrio as follows, '...assuming that the Spirit of Christ should have left His people in error on some secondary point with immediate repercussions on human salvation, how can we admit that for thirteen hundred years He abandoned His Church to error and that in all the host of holy people not one could reveal to the Church that truth which, our recent rivals pretend, constitutes the heart of all Gospel teaching?', op.cit., p.276.

11. op.cit., p.277.

Thus, as Dilthey has pointed out, it now became necessary for Lutheran scholars to refute this doctrine of Tradition.<sup>(12)</sup> The Protestant, Flacius (1520-1575), tried to show that it was possible to give interpretations which were universally valid provided that two "rules" were followed. Firstly, argued Flacius, the interpretation must take into account the actual linguistic usage at the time of writing the text, and secondly the historical circumstances surrounding the creation of the text must be considered as an integral part of the investigation of its meaning. (In effect, these "rules" had been followed by Valla in his unmasking of the "Donation of Constantine"). Flacius was the first thinker to formulate explicitly the hermeneutic insight of the hermeneutic circle, that "the individual parts of a whole everywhere draw their comprehensibility from their relationship to that whole and to the other parts".<sup>(13)</sup>

Supporting the Protestant stand, and at the same time rejecting the institutionalized interpretations of both Catholics and Jews, the Jewish philosopher, Spinoza (1634-1677), expressed his arguments on the interpretation of the scriptures in Chapter 7 of his work *A Theologico - Political Treatise*. Spinoza recognised clearly that meaning is contextual and that there may be what might be termed a "hidden" meaning in a text. He stressed the necessity of the interpreter's linguistic competence and insisted on the importance of using one's own reason, and not trying to explain the meaning of the words of the Scriptures "according to our preconceived opinions, twisting them about..."<sup>(14)</sup> In short, Spinoza's contribution to contemporary hermeneutics is significant, a contribution not recognised in works dealing with the history of that discipline.<sup>(15)</sup>

---

12. Dilthey, op.cit., p.238.

13. Ibid.

14. Benedict de Spinoza, A Theologico-Political Treatise (1951), p.117.

15. See Dilthey, op.cit., Bleicher, Contemporary Hermeneutics: Hermeneutics as Method, Philosophy and Critique (1980), Palmer, Hermeneutics (1969).

According to Spinoza, the institutionalized interpretations of both the Jews and the Catholics were constantly being attacked by each other, and the whole tradition of interpretation should be received with extreme suspicion.<sup>(16)</sup> Because "it is also in every man's power to wield the supreme right and authority of free judgment in this behalf (religion) and to explain and interpret religion for himself",<sup>(17)</sup> Spinoza proposed adherence to his method of interpretation rooted in man's reason as opposed to Luther's emphasis on the guidance of faith.

For as the highest power of Scriptural interpretation belongs to every man, the rule for such interpretation should be nothing but the natural light of reason which is common to all - not any supernatural light nor any external authority: moreover, such a rule ought not to be so difficult that it can only be applied by very skilful philosophers, but should be adapted to the natural and ordinary faculties and capacity of mankind. (18)

This method for interpreting the scriptures, (which Spinoza called the "true" method,<sup>(19)</sup>) is also the true method for interpreting any text because, based on the operation of natural reason, it "consists in deducing and proving the unknown from the known, or in carrying premises to their legitimate conclusions".<sup>(20)</sup>

---

16. Spinoza, op.cit., p.107.

17. op.cit., p.119.

18. Ibid.

Spinoza's "faith" in the ability of ordinary man to interpret the meaning of texts provided he exercises "the natural light of reason" may well be an over-optimistic vision. Insofar as it is argued in this thesis that the interpreter contributes to the historical meaning of a text, he should be skilful, that is thoroughly professional in his approach.

19. op.cit., p.99.

20. op.cit., p.113.

In the case of the scriptures, the goal of the method is to infer "the intention of its authors as a legitimate conclusion from its fundamental principles".<sup>(21)</sup> These fundamental principles (which may be said to contribute to the fore-structure of understanding, to use Heidegger's term),<sup>(22)</sup> form the universal basis and foundation of the scriptures, insofar as they are commended by all the prophets as "external and profitable to all men".<sup>(23)</sup> Spinoza lists these principles as follows:

- (i) God is one
- (ii) God is omnipotent
- (iii) God alone should be worshipped
- (iv) God cares for all men
- (v) God especially loves those who adore Him
- (vi) Love thy neighbour as thyself. (24)

The universal rule to be followed in any interpretation is to accept nothing as authoritative if it is not perceived very clearly when examined in the light of its history.<sup>(25)</sup> Indeed the intention of the author cannot be recovered without a knowledge of this history.<sup>(26)</sup> What therefore does Spinoza mean by "this history?". Firstly the term refers to the language in which the Scriptures were written, and the interpreter must become what contemporary hermeneutics would call "linguistically competent".<sup>(27)</sup> In fact, Spinoza's discussion indicates his recognition that it is our mutual access to a shared linguistic tradition, made possible by the fact that we speak the same language, which makes understanding possible.<sup>(28)</sup> For the meaning of words by and large endures uncorrupted. Spinoza makes it clear how difficult it is to change

---

21. op.cit., p.113.

22. Chapter 3.

23. Spinoza, op.cit., p.104.

24. Ibid.

25. op.cit., p.101.

26. op.cit., p.111.

27. op.cit., p.101.

28. See Chapter 3 for a discussion on this point.



the meaning of a word in ordinary usage - we can, he says, change the meaning of a sentence, but "if anyone wanted to change the meaning of a common word he would not be able to keep up the change among posterity or in common parlance or writing".<sup>(29)</sup>

The phrase "this history" refers secondly to an analysis of each book, arranging the contents under heads so as to collate teachings on various topics.<sup>(30)</sup> And thirdly, it refers to the historical environment, "the life, the conduct and the studies of the author of each book, who he was, what was the occasion and the epoch of his writing, whom did he write for, and in what language...the fate of each book, how it was first received, into whose hands it fell, how many different versions there were of it, by whose advice was it received into the Bible, and, lastly how all the books now universally accepted as sacred, were united into a single whole".<sup>(31)</sup> It is important to note that Spinoza was not concerned with the truth of Biblical passages, but only with their meaning, their "real" meaning,<sup>(32)</sup> that is the intention of the author, and this meaning is elucidated contextually.<sup>(33)</sup>

Spinoza was aware that interpretation presented certain difficulties, with the specific nature of the Hebrew language itself and with the tracing out of the histories of the books and their authors, and hence the true meaning might be "inexplicable".<sup>(34)</sup> But these problems were not due to an imperfection of the method; rather they must be seen as a function of the difficulties of scriptural interpretation.<sup>(35)</sup> (Presumably Spinoza did not feel that contemporary texts presented the same kinds of difficulties?). But for Spinoza

---

29. Spinoza, op.cit., p.107.

30. op.cit., p.101.

31. op.cit., p.103.

32. op.cit., p.106.

33. op.cit., p.101.

34. op.cit., p.112.

35. op.cit., p.113.

these "hidden" meanings ought not to be cause for concern, for after all, "the precepts of true piety are expressed in very ordinary language, and are equally simple and easily understood".<sup>(36)</sup> "Thus", Spinoza goes on to say, "we conclude that we can easily follow the intention of Scripture in moral questions, from the history we possess of it and we can be sure of its true meaning". In short we can be certain about matters of blessedness and salvation which constitute the "kernel" of the scriptures. The rest, Spinoza assures us, we need not be "troubled about".<sup>(37)</sup>

As far as it goes Spinoza's analysis is acceptable to the idea of a hermeneutic interpretation of texts although, as has been pointed out, he was not unduly concerned with "hidden" meanings. The idea of a hermeneutic of history however, taking cognisance of that insight, also argues in favour of the practice of the double hermeneutic in order to elucidate the fuller historical meaning of a text (or text analogue). Spinoza has fleshed out Flacius's two rules in terms of which interpretation is based on an analysis of linguistic usage and on the historical context surrounding the text. However, it will be argued that an analysis in terms of which the interpreter is passive in the hermeneutic circle is an incomplete one.<sup>(38)</sup> As such Spinoza's views, and those of Flacius, are incomplete. A reassessment of the role of the interpreter could only come about with the growing recognition of the historicity of man.

The hermeneutics of Ast, Wolf and Schleiermacher (with that of Dilthey) was influenced by the German Romantic tradition. As

---

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid.

38. Chapter 3.

Bauman puts it, in terms of that tradition, the "nation" was viewed as a collective subject, complete with intuitive longings, emotions, a sense of unique destiny, distinctively individual colourings of word perception.<sup>(39)</sup> An influential spokesman for the tradition, Herder, in his work *Ideas on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind* (1784), spoke of the spirit of each nation, its *volksgeist* which expressed the individuality of the nation and differentiated it from other nations, and in which all members of the nation participated. It was in the creativity of the artist that this reached its highest form of expression. For the Romantics, the aim of interpretation was to recapture the artist's state of mind, in short to reconstruct the artist's intention. Interpretation was construed as the empathic recapturing of intention. Dilthey was to try to extend this notion; he saw it open to sceptical rebuttal.

The Romantics focussed on the historicality of each nation, on its specific situatedness in history. But the implications of this insight for hermeneutics were not fully grasped at this time. Hermeneutics would thereafter have to grapple with the consequences of accepting that the interpreter's understanding and interpretation grew out of and was conditioned by his historical situation, by his own historicality.

For Friedrich Ast (1778-1841) the aim of a hermeneutic interpretation was "the clarification of the work through the development of its meaning internally and the relationship of its inner facts to each other and to the larger Spirit of the Age".<sup>(40)</sup> And it is, according to Ast, our common participation in the *geist* which ensures that we

---

39. Bauman, op.cit., p.23.

40. Palmer, op.cit., p.77.

can understand the meaning of texts. (Ast believed that language is the prime medium through which the Spirit of Age is transmitted). The hermeneutic task involved three parts, the first of which was the historical, that is, understanding in relation to the content of the work. The second part was grammatical, that is understanding the work in relation to the language used. The final part was the spiritual or *geistige* understanding of the work in relation to the total view of the author and the total view of the age.<sup>(41)</sup> In short Ast has not progressed beyond Spinoza although he did specifically enunciate the basic principle of the hermeneutic circle:

One can only rightly grasp the combined unity of the spirit of antiquity if one grasps the individual revelations of it in individual ancient works, and on the other hand the *geist* of an individual author cannot be grasped apart from placing it in its higher relationship to the whole. (42)

Friedrich August Wolf (1759-1824) conceived of hermeneutics as "the Science of the rules by which the meanings of signs is recognised",<sup>(43)</sup> and the aim of a hermeneutic interpretation "to grasp the written or even spoken thoughts of an author as he would have them to be grasped",<sup>(44)</sup> that is, entering into the other's mental world. There were, he argued, three levels of interpretation, the grammatical, which presupposed knowledge of the language being used; the historical, which meant that the interpreter took into account the historical context as well as his knowledge of the author's life; and finally the philosophical in terms of which the arguments given had to be coherent. It is clear therefore that Wolf had not made any new contribution to hermeneutics.

---

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid.

43. op.cit., p.81.

44. Ibid.



On the other hand, Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher (1768-1834) was held by Dilthey, for example, to have played an important role in the development of hermeneutics, extending it from a concern simply with the art of interpreting texts to a concern with understanding itself. Dilthey wrote:

Until then, hermeneutics had been at best a system of rules whose parts, the individual rules themselves, were held together by the aim of giving an interpretation of general validity...Schleiermacher now sought for an analysis of the understanding that lay behind these rules or in other words, for a formulation of the goal of the activity as a whole, and from such a formulation he derived the possibility of a valid interpretation in general. (45)

However, Schleiermacher did not conceive understanding as historical, although he said that understanding had to be "from out of life itself".<sup>(46)</sup> Nevertheless he did not explore the idea of understanding in the context of one's horizon of experience (to use Gadamer's terms). As Dilthey put it, "he was, however, only able to analyse understanding as a re-experiencing or reconstruction in its vital relationship to the process of literary production itself".<sup>(47)</sup> Understanding was held to consist in the attempt to grasp the author's intentions and his mental processes.

But as his analysis of understanding was psychologistic it is therefore open to criticism. It also reflects his conception of understanding as unhistorical. An act of understanding for Schleiermacher consisted of two "interacting movements",<sup>(48)</sup> the

---

45. Dilthey, op.cit., p.240.

46. Palmer, op.cit., p.96.

47. Dilthey, op.cit., p.240.

48. Palmer, op.cit., p.86.

grammatical and the psychological. In short, we have to understand a text "as something drawn out of language and as 'fact' in the thinking of the speaker".<sup>(49)</sup> The grammatical moment used what Schleiermacher called the comparative method and was held to be historical insofar as the work was examined in the context of its language and in relation to other texts of the same type:

Everything that needs a fuller determination in a given text may only be determined in reference to the field of language shared by the author and his original public...The meaning of every word in a given passage has to be determined in reference to its co-existence with the words surrounding it. (50)

The grammatical moment sets boundaries in terms of which the psychological moment operates, the latter using the intuitive or what Schleiermacher called the divinatory method:

The divinatory (method) is that in which one transforms oneself into the other person in order to grasp this individuality directly. (51)

The cooperation between the two moments was described as follows by Dilthey:

Grammatical exegesis works its way up through the text from individual connections to those larger relationships that dominate the whole. Psychological exegesis begins by a projection into the creative inner process, and proceeds outward to the outer and inner forms of the work, and beyond that to an intuition of its unity with other works in the spiritual stance of its author. (52)

---

49. op.cit., p.88.

50. Bleicher, op.cit., p.14.

51. Palmer, op.cit., p.90.

52. Dilthey, op.cit., p.244.

It follows therefore that Schleiermacher has also stressed that understanding always occurs within a circle. For as Palmer has observed, "by dialectical interaction between the whole and the part, each gives the other meaning".<sup>(53)</sup>

This brief examination of Schleiermacher's thought reveals that, despite claims to the contrary, he did not make any substantially new contribution to hermeneutics as the interpretation of texts. However, his thought presaged the development of hermeneutics from primarily a philological discipline towards the concern with epistemological issues.

(ii) Contribution to history

The Scientific Revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries played an extremely significant role in the development and extension of hermeneutics from the interpretation of texts to the interpretation of all works of man, including human actions. The successes enjoyed by the natural sciences in this period prompted thinkers in the following centuries to try to extend the aims and methods of these sciences to the study of man and society. Descartes' scepticism as to the ability of the historian to make true statements stimulated historians to improve their techniques.<sup>(54)</sup> Von Ranke (1795-1886), for example, played an important role in the development of a scientific study of history. Both as historian and teacher he stressed the need to make extensive use of archive material, to examine documents critically in order to try to establish their authenticity and reliability. He is credited with providing what has been called "the manifesto of modern empirical historiography",<sup>(55)</sup> namely "(history) wants to show only what really happened". Von Ranke was not a positivist,

---

53. Palmer, op.cit., p.87.

54. Rene Descartes, Discourse on Method and Other Writings (1968).

55. Hans Meyerhoff (ed), The Philosophy of History in our Time (1959), p.13.

as Meyerhoff has pointed out; rather he identified himself with the historicist Herder.<sup>(56)</sup> Nevertheless in his insistence on the use of scientific techniques he contributed to the view that history would, as it became increasingly more scientific in its method, become a fully-established science in its own right.

Comte (1798-1857), the so-called father of positivism, argued that while history was not yet a science, it could be raised to that level by the discovery of universal laws, in terms of which historical and social phenomena could be explained. On the basis of a study of the past, Comte put forward his so-called "Law of Three Stages" which proposed that human knowledge has passed through three main stages, the theological, the metaphysical and the scientific, the latter being the stage into which the world was entering (and to which Comte himself was contributing).

Mill (1806-1873), while not himself a historian, was influenced by Comte, holding that "the collective series of social phenomena, in other words, the course of history, is subject to general laws which philosophy may detect".<sup>(57)</sup> Mill postulated that these laws were "the universal laws of the formation of character" which would be discovered by a new discipline he called ethology.<sup>(58)</sup> "It is by these laws", he argued, "combined with the facts of each particular case, that the whole phenomena of human action and feeling are produced, it is on these that every rational attempt to construct the science of human nature in the concrete and for practical purposes must proceed".<sup>(59)</sup> Mill also said that once ethology had discovered such laws, it would be possible to derive

---

56. op.cit., p.12. For a definition of historicism see the following chapter.

57. Ronald H. Nash (ed), Ideas of History: Volume II (1969), p.5.

58. John Stuart Mill, 'Ethology - The Science of the Formation of Character' in Nash, op.cit., p.14.

59. Ibid.

from them the succession of states of society.<sup>(60)</sup> Mill's programme was never realized.

Reacting to these trends, there developed a strong movement, insisting on the autonomy of what Dilthey called the *geistwissenschaften*, the human sciences, as opposed to the natural sciences, the *naturwissenschaften*. This distinction rested on the different subject matter in each case, and hence, it was argued, each required a mode of explanation appropriate to that subject matter. Whereas the goal of the natural sciences was seen as the discovery of laws of nature, hermeneutic philosophers rejected efforts by philosophers like Comte and Mill to extend that goal to the human sciences. Rather the aim of the latter was to recover the intention of the protagonist involved in an action, and the method of obtaining that intention was understanding, or *verstehen*, conceived as imaginative rethinking by the interpreter of the action in question. In short, hermeneutic philosophers argued that history is a *sui generis* branch of knowledge with its own specific methodological technique appropriate to its subject matter.

These arguments were anticipated by Vico (1668-1744) whose so-called *New Science*, the "queen of the sciences, dealt with the history of human ideas" accessible to the interpreter who thinks humanly, "that is who imaginatively rethinks himself into the period being investigated".<sup>(61)</sup> Vico's importance to this thesis lies firstly in his attempt to put history in a sound epistemological basis, and secondly, in his emphasis on language as an access into historical ways of life.

One of Vico's concerns was to establish history as a "science" - hence the *New Science*. This task should be seen against the philosophy of Descartes (1596-1650) whose methodic doubt, resulting

---

60. *op.cit.*, pp.18-20.

61. Giambattista Vico, "A New Conception of Historiography" in A. Donagan and B. Donagan, *Philosophy of History* (1965), p.49.



in the so-called certainty of the *cogito*, provided the basis of the scientific reconstruction of the physical world by means of mathematical ideas. According to Descartes, history could never be a science, for it rested on traditional authority, example and custom.<sup>(62)</sup> Vico rejected the Cartesian argument. In fact, as Löwith has pointed out, he reversed Descartes' methodic doubt by arguing that within "the immense ocean of doubt" there is a "single, tiny piece of earth" on which we can gain a firm footing.<sup>(63)</sup> This truth, according to Vico, is the principle that real knowledge is knowledge by causes. We know intimately and thoroughly what we ourselves have caused or made. Only God, who created the physical world, can have perfect knowledge of nature. Man can have perfect knowledge of Geometry, for man has created the world of geometrical fictions. But this knowledge cannot be the basis for "this world of nations".<sup>(64)</sup> Vico made the hermeneutic point that the method used to explicate an object must be appropriate to that object. As Gardiner puts it:

The method we adopt must necessarily vary according to the things with which we are dealing. <sup>(65)</sup>

We *can* know about "this world of matters" because it "has certainly been made by men...and history cannot be more certain than when he who creates the things also describes them".<sup>(66)</sup>

There were, as Donagan and Donagan observe, two parts to the method advocated by the *New Science*.<sup>(67)</sup> Firstly there was the philosoph-

---

62. Karl Löwith, Meaning in History (1949), p.118.

63. op.cit., p.119.

64. Giambattista Vico, 'The New Science', in P. Gardiner (ed), Theories of History (1965), p.20.

65. op.cit., p.10.

66. op.cit., p.21.

67. Vico in Donagan and Donagan, op.cit., p.6.

ical aspect. By this Vico meant that, drawing from his own experiences, the historian could make inferences about the human mind in general. Thus from the experience of our needs, "the human necessities or utilities of social life", which are arranged hierarchically from the demands of necessity, utility, comfort, pleasure and luxury to extravagance, one can establish a parallel between the stages of the development of societies.<sup>(68)</sup> History therefore reflects the different ways men have expressed themselves in different epochs, and the ultimate goal of the *New Science* was "to describe...an ideal, eternal history traversed in time by the history in every nation in its rise, progress, maturity, decline and fall".<sup>(69)</sup>

Secondly, Vico's method has what he called the philological aspect which tested these hypotheses by inspecting the languages, laws and customs of nations. In short, philosophical inferences are verified by philological proofs.<sup>(70)</sup> In accordance with Vico's cyclical view of history, there are three ages through which human nations pass, and three languages proper to each age. What the philologist must do is to read and interpret documents in the light of this pattern. (Vico included under the label "philologist", "all the grammarians, historians, critics who have occupied themselves with the study of the languages and deeds of peoples, both in their domestic affairs such as customs and laws, and in their external affairs, such as wars, peaces, alliances, travels and commerce").<sup>(71)</sup> Language, Vico recognised, is especially important in providing access into ways of life during these periods, for it

---

68. op.cit., p.48.

69. op.cit., p.49.

70. op.cit., p.50.

71. Vico in Gardiner, op.cit., pp.13-14.

is "a great witness to the customs...of the world".<sup>(72)</sup> In short Vico recognised "the part that etymology can play in shedding light upon forms of life and experience previously inaccessible to our knowledge and comprehension".<sup>(73)</sup> The aim of the method was to recover the "public grounds of truth" of ancient times, a truth which had in the passage of the years and through changes in language come to be "enveloped in falsehood".<sup>(74)</sup> This would apply particularly in the case of mythologies and popular traditions. Historical knowledge was found therefore by an effort of "constructive interpretation".<sup>(75)</sup> This was a process of "recovering and recapturing the forms of thought and feeling" which historical evidence and sources embody.<sup>(76)</sup> It involved the use of imaginative rethinking to recreate the character of the age, and required a critical attitude on the part of the historian who was required to sift "truth from falsehood".<sup>(77)</sup>

There is, however, a fundamental problem in this method. Vico held that men have changed over the ages, passing through various stages of development each with its own distinctive character. While he rejected the imposition of contemporary presuppositions on the past, he failed to state the problem as to whether it was possible in principle for the historian living in one age to understand someone living in another. Bleicher has argued that Vico's concept of the *New Science* was still tied to the ideal of knowledge characteristic of the natural science at that time.<sup>(78)</sup> Future hermeneutic thinkers would have to come to grips with the question of how understanding could take place between historical periods, and would be required to analyse the idea of historicity of meaning.<sup>(79)</sup>

---

72. op.cit., p.14.

73. op.cit., p.11.

74. op.cit., p.14.

75. Löwith, op.cit., p.119.

76. Vico in Gardiner, op.cit., p.11.

77. Vico in Donagan and Donagan, op.cit., p.51.

78. Bleicher, op.cit., p.16.

79. op.cit., p.17.

Johann Christoph Gatterer (1727-1799) explicitly raised the question as to whether it was in fact possible to bridge what Gadamer has called "the personal and historical distance between minds".<sup>(80)</sup> Gatterer, while accepting the subjective nature of historical understanding, offered criteria which he felt would guarantee the truth of an interpretation, albeit from a particular historical horizon.

Historians in the seventeenth century tended to view history as the gathering of facts presented in a chronological sequence, within some unifying framework, usually Christianity. Gatterer, however, emphasized the importance of a critical examination of facts in order to present a thematic analysis of the past, rather than conceiving history simply as chronology. History, he held, NB \* was concerned with the posing of questions. This implied that the historian had to choose, select and arrange his material in order to try to throw light on such questions. Hence the historian NB \* could not be conceived of as a Cartesian, ahistorical subject simply reflecting the past; he was an agent actively engaged in interpreting the past. NB \* Insofar as Gatterer was therefore self-reflective, he may be regarded as atypical of the Enlightenment with its "ideal of the autonomous subject who successfully extricates himself from the immediate entanglements of history and the prejudices that come with that enlightenment".<sup>(81)</sup> Kant's answer to the question, What is Enlightenment? made this point forcefully. For Kant had argued that it is the extent to which the knower can free himself from his historical situation and its values

---

80. Gadamer, Philosophical Hermeneutics (1976), p.95.  
(henceforth PH).

81. David E. Linge, 'Introduction' in Gadamer, op.cit., p.XIV.

that determine the fulness of his understanding of the past.<sup>(82)</sup>

Gatterer looked to the Greeks who, he argued, used the concept "system of events"<sup>(83)</sup> in accordance with which aspects of the past were seen in their interconnections. Using these systems, which Gatterer called "analytical constructs", the historian would write a "synthetic history" as an analysis of their causal relationships.<sup>(84)</sup> Bringing the notion of colligation to mind, Gatterer held that historical events must be located in periods characterized by their own interconnections, "their own inherent rhythm and time span".<sup>(85)</sup> Gatterer stressed that understanding a past event involved understanding the larger whole, thus suggesting the idea of a hermeneutic circle. However, Gatterer tended to limit this whole to the event and its antecedents, ignoring the future of the event.<sup>(86)</sup> Whether or not any particular piece of evidence was to be included in the analysis depended, argued Gatterer, on the particular question being asked of the past. This recognition of selection both on the level of questions posed and evidence used is an important aspect of the idea of a hermeneutic NB  
of history.

The subject matter of history, argued Gatterer, was the Spirit or *geist* of a nation,<sup>(87)</sup> the historian's aim being to understand how and why people acted as they did. And in an implicit recognition

---

82. It is, however, worth noting that Kant was correct in a sense, for it is the extent to which the knower can free himself from his own historical situation which will determine the extent to which he is able to reflect critically on his own starting-point. This does not imply, however, that the knower becomes ahistorical, for neither self-reflection nor reflection on the object can ever be exhaustive and final.

83. Peter Hanns Reill, 'History and Hermeneutics in the Aufklärung: The Thought of Johann Christoph Gatterer', Journal of Modern History, Vol. 45, 1973.

84. op.cit., p.31.

85. op.cit., p.32.

86. op.cit., p.33.

87. op.cit., p.35.



of the interaction between individual and society, Gatterer argued that this required a study of the ways society was organised and the relationship between the individual and his social and natural environment (as well as involving the attempt to rethink *geist*); change was to be accounted for by the results of the struggle between the individual and that environment in terms of certain circumscribed possibilities.<sup>(88)</sup>

This conception of history, called "the ideal of universal history" by Gatterer, required a methodology appropriate to it. Gatterer rejected the commonly held view at that time that the paradigmatic form of explanation was that of mathematical demonstration.<sup>(89)</sup>

Descartes, for example, had argued that because history did not qualify for that method, it could never qualify as a discipline guaranteeing knowledge of the past. But Gatterer denied that there was only one method of proof and demonstration for all branches of scholarly investigation. Indeed he too grasped the fundamental hermeneutic point that "the form knowledge took was dictated by the subject matter and the type of knowledge sought",<sup>(90)</sup> as Reill has pointed out. Anticipating the idealist thesis, Gatterer argued that there were two types of knowledge: knowledge of the abstract, and knowledge of the individual.<sup>(91)</sup> The former, the province of the natural sciences, was concerned with abstractions, generalizations and ideal forms, and its method relied solely on the use of reason. The latter, the province of history, was concerned with actual, past, concrete events. The historian had to understand these using "the full range of human experience" including his reason, his senses and his imagination.<sup>(92)</sup>

---

88. op.cit., p.36.

89. op.cit., p.37.

90. op.cit., p.38.

91. Ibid.

92. op.cit., p.39.

Thus while the method of the new history, "universal history", consisted initially in establishing the occurrence of the event and relating it to contiguous events, and thereafter bringing all into the system of events, what was also required was to rethink or imaginatively reexperience those events.<sup>(93)</sup> This, thought Gatterer, was the highest form of historical understanding, providing a form of intuitive knowledge in terms of which the past is made present.<sup>(94)</sup> The combination of reasoning abilities and the so-called powers of the soul make the past immediately evident to the historian. The most important powers of the soul are firstly memory, for it allows the reexperience of something, and secondly, the actual power which "enables us to isolate certain elements of our collective set of memories and form them into new units of experience".<sup>(95)</sup> With the aid of the imagination we reconstruct a picture of the past event(s). Although Gatterer initially conceived of this method as yielding a true picture, he was forced to recognise that it could produce no guarantees for an objective account. Hence as Reill remarks, "to emphasise the unique nature of historical reasoning and understanding was to abandon the shelter of normative scientific thinking".<sup>(96)</sup> And indeed, the more Gatterer tried to establish an "independent and reliable realm for historical understanding", the more he found himself forced to assert the subjective nature of history, abandoning the conception of the historian as an objective mirror of the past.<sup>(97)</sup> Gatterer spelt out some of the relativistic implications of his conceptions of history in an article published in 1768:

---

93. op.cit., p.42.

94. op.cit., pp.42-3.

95. op.cit., p.44.

96. Reill, op.cit., p.46.

97. Ibid.

What influence does the *standort* and point of view of the historian have in the choice of material; that is, what role does nationality, religion, customs and the spirit of the times, along with origins, talent, occupation and social prestige of the writer, play in his determination of the spirit of an event, and his choice of material? (98)

Eventually accepting that there was no absolute starting-point for any history and that no historian approached the past as a pre-suppositionless mirror, Gatterer tried to avoid subjectivism by postulating that providing the historian used sound, critical historical methods and provided the account "reflected the lived truths of the respective epoch",<sup>(99)</sup> it counted as a true account (which is, of course, tautologous). Yet this is contradicted by his conception of each age as a self-enclosed unit. For *this* gives little hope of one age understanding the other. Thus the historian can never be sure that he has reflected the lived truth of an epoch from his perspective. Gatterer was thus forced to postulate something common throughout the ages in which all men shared and which made communication possible. This common thing is the "universal normative operation of the powers of the soul that provides the tie that allows us to understand, reexperience and integrate the individual experiences of former generations with our own".<sup>(100)</sup> This conception is, as Reill has pointed out, similar to Dilthey's idea of historical categories.

Gatterer's contribution to the idea of a hermeneutic of history is fundamental. Reill writes that Gatterer challenged "the traditional paradigm of historical study - the belief in the ability of the historian to reproduce the past objectively with little or no distortion, the emphasis on the directly perceived

NR

---

98. op.cit., p.47.

99. op.cit., p.48.

100. op.cit., p.49.

fact, and the exemplar function of history, the concentration upon *res gestae*, all circumscribed and infused with a certain pattern of universal history".<sup>(101)</sup> He redefined history and tried to face the methodological consequences of that redefinition. But he failed to analyse the dialogue between the historian and the past as it occurs in the hermeneutic circle. Indeed Reill claims that Gatterer's work pointed to a fundamental epistemological circle from which "modern historiography is trying to escape". For "now history is seen as an active interplay between the historian and his subject matter...(and) was dependent upon the subjective experience of the historian and his ability to receive past experiences. This, then, opens the door to the problems of reconciling the objective claims of historical knowledge with the recognition of the subjective nature of historical understanding".<sup>(102)</sup> But the point is that historiography must not try to escape from the circle. For it is only within the circle that the reconciliation Reill speaks of can occur through the mediation of frames of meaning of the past event and the historian's present. This is achieved by the self-reflective historian in his openness to the otherness of the past.

The contribution of the early hermeneutic tradition forms a necessary starting point for the development of the idea of a hermeneutic of history. The parameters within which that idea must be developed and its fundamental issues resolved are becoming clear. The status of history in relation to the natural sciences must be examined, and in particular, a thorough investigation is required of the concept of imaginative rethinking, the mode of explanation regarded as appropriate to the subject matter of history. Recognition has been given to the interpreter/historian's linguistic competence and his familiarity with the historical

---

101. op.cit., p.50.

102. op.cit., p.42.

period in question, as well as to the idea of a hermeneutic circle.

But only Vico and Gatterer caught a glimpse of the problems of whether the intention of the author or historical protagonist is recoverable in principle, and of the possibility of giving objective historical accounts. It was only when Dilthey explicitly raised the question of the historicity of understanding that these problems could be formulated and then resolved in hermeneutic terms.



## CHAPTER TWO

### DILTHEY

In the history of hermeneutics the contributions of Dilthey (1833-1911) are seminal in the way they synthesise the various philosophies examined thus far and pose problems for the future development of that discipline and for the idea of a hermeneutic of history.

It was he who brought together the two hermeneutic traditions, namely the interpretations of texts and actions respectively, in his analysis of all objectification of *geist*. Recalling the distinction made by Vico and Gatterer between the natural and human sciences, Dilthey defined them as the *naturwissenschaften* and *geisteswissenschaften*, delineating their differences and sameness. He extended *verstehen* from a psychologistic conception to include the idea of interpretation of the meaning of objectifications of *geist* in their historical context. Like Gatterer, Dilthey gave expression to the historicity of existence, holding that meaning is historical and that understanding always occurs from what we would call a point of view. Nevertheless he did not explore fully the question of the interpreter's own historicity. He recognised that objectifications of *geist* encompass past, present and future, that is, that past, present and future are part of any moment of lived experience, but he did not show how interpretations by historians also necessarily involve these temporal moments in the mediation of frames of meaning. Dilthey argued that an objectification must be interpreted in its own context, but failed to see that what is also required is to understand such objectifications "in the horizon of one's own temporality and position in history", as Palmer puts it.<sup>(1)</sup> Dilthey's analyses therefore reiterated the

---

1. Palmer, op.cit., p.122.

need for an examination of the temporality of understanding spelling out the necessity for a clarification of the modes of interaction between the horizons of the interpreter and text. This would amount to an overcoming of the subject - object dichotomy of the early positivist tradition rooted in the Scientific Revolution of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the thought of Descartes and the Enlightenment tradition.

(i) Historicality

As pointed out above, Dilthey explicitly identified hermeneutics with the *geisteswissenschaften*. His uncompleted project, *Critique of Historical Reason*, was intended to clarify the epistemological foundations of the *geisteswissenschaften*. Dilthey saw this work as complementing Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. Holding that Kant's approach was ahistorical,<sup>(2)</sup> Dilthey argued that Kant had restricted the realm of science to exclude a scientific investigation of those phenomena concerned with the meaning of man's existence. He did not question the adequacy of Kant's categories for the *naturwissenschaften*, but he did question their adequacy for the historical character of existence, for Kant's categories are atemporal, static and opposite of the historicity and dynamism of life itself.<sup>(3)</sup> His aim was, as Palmer puts it, to "get away from the reductionist and mechanistic perspective of the natural sciences, and to find an approach adequate to the fulness of (historical) phenomena".<sup>(4)</sup> Dilthey, in short, asked in a Kantian spirit, "How is history possible?".<sup>(5)</sup> He therefore consolidated the movement within hermeneutics towards epistemological analysis.

---

2. Bleicher, op.cit., p.19.

3. Palmer, op.cit., p.100.

4. Ibid.

5. H.P. Rickman, 'Dilthey and the Writing of Intellectual History', Journal of World History, Vol. 13, 1971, p.480.

The term "*geist*", as used by Dilthey, included spirit, intellect, mind and idea; the term "*wissenschaften*" refers to any systematic body of knowledge. The *geisteswissenschaften* are clearly differentiated from the *naturwissenschaften* with regard to their respective objects of study and to the mode of investigation in each case. Much in the same way as Vico, Dilthey characterised the former as follows:

Their rank is identical with that of understanding and understanding has the objectification of life consistently as its object. Thus the range of the human studies is determined by the objectification of life in the external world. The human spirit (*geist*) can only understand what it has created. Nature, the object of the natural sciences, embraces reality which has arisen independently of the efficacy of spirit (*geist*). Everything on which man has actively impressed his stamp forms the object of the human studies. (6)

Stressing the unique connection between life and history, Dilthey wrote that "we are, first of all, historical beings, and, after that, contemplators of history; only because we are the one do we become the other".<sup>(7)</sup> It is *geist* which is present to the individual in his experience, and is also that which reflection on past experience aims to grasp. In short, it is *geist* which is "the mental structure...at the basis of the knower's own life as well as the basis of the phenomena he studies".<sup>(8)</sup>

Analysing the structure of lived experience, Dilthey argued that experience is temporal and historical, encompassing past, present and future. Since our experience of the present is always within

---

6. Wilhelm Dilthey, Pattern and Meaning in History: Thoughts on History and Society (1961), (henceforth PM), p.67.

7. op.cit., p.66.

8. David E. Linge, "Dilthey and Gadamer: Two Theories of Historical Understanding", American Academy of Religion Journal, Vol. 41, 1973, p.536.

the horizons of past and future, our understanding of life must be in temporal terms, and we must therefore use categories appropriate to the historical nature of that experience. These categories are ways of interpreting things in terms of some relationship, for life is not experienced as a chaos of disconnected events, but is encountered as organised, as interpreted, and therefore as meaningful:<sup>(9)</sup>

All these categories of life and history are forms not of empirical statements developed from them by additional thought processes, which become generally applicable to human studies. They originate in experience itself. They are not super-added types of formation...all our statements are already within the sphere of experience insofar as they are about the course of life and so... express predicates about it...they achieve universality through having, as their background, the objective mind (*geist*), and as their constant counterpart, insight into other people. (10)

The organisation of life occurs both on a 'pre-theoretical' level (to use a Heideggerean term) and well as on the level of deliberate conscious interpretation, the former constituting the basis of the latter. There are, according to Dilthey, three major classes of expressions of life; firstly what man thinks, that is his concepts, judgments and what Dilthey calls his large thought structures such as the great philosophical systems; secondly, what man does, that is his actions; and thirdly what man creates including works of art and other "emotive expressions".<sup>(11)</sup>

Of the categories meaning is the 'master' one, characterising all human life. The other categories therefore are different ways in which meaning is constituted.<sup>(12)</sup> Hence, for example, to take the

---

9. Dilthey, *op.cit.*, p.86.

10. *op.cit.*, pp.110-111.

11. *op.cit.*, pp.117-121.

12. *op.cit.*, p.96.

case of the category of value, a thing is experienced as meaningful insofar as it is valued, that is, it is loved, or hated, appreciated or resented by some one. In the case of the category of purpose, something is experienced as meaningful insofar as it serves either as a goal for a person, or as a means towards the attainment of that goal. In the parts - whole category, a thing is experienced as meaningful insofar as it is part of a whole, the whole deriving its meaning from the parts.<sup>(13)</sup> Thus meaning is immanent in life; it is "the encompassing fundamental category under which life becomes graspable".<sup>(14)</sup> Meaning is that which is grasped in the essential reciprocal interaction of parts as a whole, grounded in the nature of living experience.<sup>(15)</sup> Thus the structural unity of experience, is not *subsequent* to lived experience, even although it is not the case that "the whole of the self's mental structure is consciously present in the individual experience".<sup>(16)</sup> The whole is immanent in any particular experience and the mind, when reflecting on an experience, is drawn into a process which "uncovers and draws out the manifold of experienceable connections making up the whole".<sup>(17)</sup> Experience is therefore temporal, with the past and present pervading every moment, memory and anticipation spontaneously determining the place of a moment within the context of life as a whole. Thus, understanding of a particular experience may be extended into an attempt to make sense of life as a whole; some events will be remembered, future plans may be reviewed and certain goals revised. Experience is therefore intrinsically historical.

Thus, Dilthey wrote, "To the impenetrable depths within myself I am an historical being", therefore affirming the fundamental historicity of existence. He went on to write, "the fact that

---

13. op.cit., p.86, 96-7, 129, 137-139. Other categories include inner-outer, power, causality, development, formation.

14. Palmer, op.cit., p.120, quoting Dilthey.

15. Ibid.

16. Linge, op.cit., p.541.

17. Ibid.



the investigator of history is the same as the one who makes it is the first condition which makes scientific history possible".<sup>(18)</sup>  
 In so doing he posed the central problem for hermeneutics, namely the relation between the historicity of human existence and historical understanding of the past.<sup>(19)</sup>

As has been shown, by historicity Dilthey meant that the present is always and only understood in the horizon of past and future, that understanding being part of the structure of experience. This insight has methodological consequences, for it means that interpretations of the past cannot be given in nonhistorical terms.

According to Rickman, acceptance of man's fundamental historicity means that "there is no absolute starting point for thought, no body of absolute standards outside experience that can be reached by pure speculation". He goes on to argue that "all reflections on life, all valuations and moral principles, are the product not of a pure knowing mind, but of particular individuals living at a particular time in a particular place, determined by circumstances, influenced by opinions around them and bound by the horizons of their age". In short, acceptance of man's historicity seems to lead to relativism and a denial of the possibility of objective knowledge, for "all...reflections and valuations are...tinged with relativity".<sup>(20)</sup>

The consequence of the ontological historicity of man may be expressed in the concept of historicism. Rickman has formulated what he terms three principles of historicism as follows:

- 
18. Dilthey, op.cit., p.67.
  19. Linge, op.cit., p.536.
  20. Rickman, 'Wilhelm Dilthey', Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, p.404.

- (i) All human manifestations are part of a historical process and should be explained in historical terms. The state, the family, even man himself cannot be adequately defined abstractly because they have different characteristics in different ages.
- (ii) Different ages and differing individuals can only be understood by entering imaginatively into their specific point of view; what the age or the individual thought relevant must be taken into account by the historian.
- (iii) The historian himself is bound by the horizons of his own age. How the past presents itself to him in the perspective of its own concerns becomes a legitimate aspect of the meaning of the past. (21)

These principles therefore imply that historical consciousness is consciousness of the limited perspective of every man and every age. Ebeling writes that "what earlier ages thought of as man and the world has to be understood historically, but for that reason also its validity is historically limited".<sup>(22)</sup> Consequently, "as soon as historicity envelops the knower of history as well as the object of historical interpretation, the foundations for objective knowledge are undermined".<sup>(23)</sup>

The discussion above has raised certain fundamental issues with which both hermeneutics and the idea of a hermeneutic of history have to come to terms. Is it possible in principle to understand the past? How do we understand the past? What is involved in the concept of understanding historically? Are objective accounts of the past possible? Dilthey's attempts to resolve these problems will be discussed prior to an indication of the way they are tackled in this thesis.

---

21. Rickman, op.cit., p.405.

22. quoted by Linge, op.cit., p.538.

23. op.cit., p.539.

(ii) Understanding

According to Dilthey, (and recalling Vico on this point), understanding the past is made possible because the "sameness of the mind in the I and the Thou, and in every subject of a community, in every system of culture, and finally, in the totality of mind and universal history, makes the working together of the different processes in the human studies (*geisteswissenschaften*) possible. In these the knowing subject is one with its object (*geist*) which is the same at all stages of its objectification".<sup>(24)</sup> By virtue of our possession of *geist* we can, therefore, not only organise and experience life as meaningful, giving it outward expression, but we can also understand meaning.

Understanding therefore is the method whereby we make sense of the *geisteswissenschaften*. As Dilthey said, "we explain nature; man we must understand".<sup>(25)</sup> "The *geisteswissenschaften*", he wrote, "are distinct from the natural sciences precisely because their mode of understanding presupposes an inner underived mental structure which is present to the individual in experience or reflection on experience".<sup>(26)</sup> Understanding, or *verstehen*, was the term used by Dilthey as opposed to the Kantian use of *verstand*, for he wished to stress that only through *verstehen* was historical knowledge possible.<sup>(27)</sup>

In his early work, Dilthey characterised *verstehen* as grasping the intention or feeling which informed an objectification, by means of an analogy with our experience. For as human beings we are familiar with the mental processes through which meaning is experienced and conveyed.<sup>(28)</sup> *Verstehen* is "that process by which we intuit behind

---

24. Dilthey, *op.cit.*, pp.67-8.

25. quoted by Palmer, *op.cit.*, p.115.

26. Linge, *op.cit.*, p.540.

27. R.A. Makkreel, *Dilthey: Philosopher of Human Studies* (1977), p.248.

28. Rickman, 'Wilhelm Dilthey', p.405.

the sign given to our senses, that psychic reality of which it is the expression". And the same process is involved whether we understand "the babblings of children" or Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, "same" in the sense that "the process of understanding... must everywhere present the same characteristics".<sup>(29)</sup> Clearly this psychologistic conception of *verstehen* stood as a target for the sceptic's assault. Palmer writes that the methodology of the *geisteswissenschaften* concerned "the possibility of understanding the inner experience of another person through a mysterious process of mental transfer".<sup>(30)</sup> Walsh has argued that *verstehen* in Dilthey's thought is not a process involving inference. Thus, "we pass directly, he appears to think, from awareness of the expression to awareness of that which it expresses; or, rather, though we do not get at the original experience itself, we have in ourselves an experience precisely like it".<sup>(31)</sup> Walsh has two criticisms; firstly, if the process is immediate, why do we sometimes make mistakes? Secondly, Dilthey's argument leads to a

---

29. Dilthey, "The Rise of Hermeneutics", p.232.

30. Palmer, *op.cit.*, p.104.

31. W.H. Walsh, An Introduction to Philosophy of History (1967), p.50.



sceptical position.<sup>(32)</sup> Dilthey was aware of the scepticism of his early psychologistic position. Curiously enough, although he speaks about the organisation of experience on a pre-theoretical level as being immediate (and surely error-free?), he does also write that a person can deceive himself as to his motives, and therefore "knows his motives only in an uncertain way". (An explanation as to why this is possible was not given by Dilthey). He goes on to argue that others have, therefore, even less of an insight into the motives of the historical subject. "What personal interest, ambition, need for power, and vanity contribute to historically decisive deeds can only be established to a limited degree. Even letters and verbal utterances can remain questionable".<sup>(33)</sup> The principal actors in history may well "spread misconceptions about their own motives".<sup>(34)</sup>

---

32. op.cit., p.51. Collingwood put forward the following argument as an attempt to refute the charge of scepticism which was levelled at his idealist philosophy. The thought of the individual in the past or the past act of thought A could, argued, Collingwood, be revived by the historian in the present B. But, he said, in the case of A and B, only one act of thought was involved even if the emotions, feelings and circumstances in each case differed. A and B are not two examples of the same kind of thought; they are not numerically different acts with the same content. Rather, argued Collingwood, when I read Plato, for example, I am reliving through my imagination Plato's act of thought, and am not performing an act like Plato's. I think it, that thought, myself. To do this, the historian must have projected himself into the other's situation, so that historical knowledge is "the act of thought itself, in its survival and revival at different times and in different persons". But as Walsh has pointed out, Collingwood's position does contain certain ambiguities. Firstly, to say that thoughts are my thoughts, where thought means the act of thinking, implies they can never be identical with anyone else's. Secondly, if thought refers to the content of thinking, then while people can think the same thoughts, and know that they are doing so on the basis that they understand each other, their acts of thinking are still not identical.

R. Collingwood, The Idea of History (1946), pp.282-315.

Walsh, op.cit., pp.91-2.

33. quoted in Makkreel, op.cit., pp.309-10.

34. Dilthey, 'The Rise of Hermeneutics', p.233.



Dilthey's later works, therefore, tended to stress *verstehen* as the elucidation of the context of the objectification. Understanding was therefore held to take place within the hermeneutic circle. Rickman, for example, has claimed that Dilthey's early proposals for an "understanding psychology" were abandoned in his mature thought in favour of Hermeneutics, as the interpretation of contextual meaning.<sup>(35)</sup> However, it is clear from an examination of Dilthey's later works, that the psychologistic position was not abandoned. To be sure he gave it less weight, saying that "concrete experience and not speculation must be the only admissible starting point for a theory of the *geisteswissenschaften*".<sup>(36)</sup> But even in the mature work, *The Rise of Hermeneutics* published in 1900, a work in which, according to Rickman, Dilthey had rejected the early psychologism, Dilthey stated unambiguously:

The analysis of understanding takes its place *beside the analysis of inner experience* and *both* demonstrate the possibility and limits of the validity of human studies in general, to the extent that these disciplines are governed by the way psychic facts originally came before us. ((37))

Clearly Dilthey hoped that a hermeneutic interpretation, that is, the "exegesis of written monuments"<sup>(38)</sup> would complement the earlier conception as a means of conferring validity. For while the *geisteswissenschaften* "are able to go on to derive more general laws and more inclusive relationships from this objective apprehension of individual life, nonetheless the preliminary operations of understanding and interpretation form the basis" <sup>(39)</sup>

---

35. Rickman, 'Dilthey and the Writing of Intellectual History', op. cit., p.481.

36. quoted in Palmer, op.cit., p.99.

37. Dilthey, 'The Rise of Hermeneutics', p.234. (my italics).

38. op.cit., p.233.

39. op.cit., p.231.

("preliminary" here referring surely to operations like reexperiencing and recomprehension).<sup>(40)</sup> The "enlarged" conception of *verstehen*, therefore, shows affinities with the early hermeneutic tradition. Far from being solely "a subjective or purely intuitive leap, it implies a whole complex procedure of intellectual reconstruction", a procedure which unifies the grammatical and psychological tendencies which dominated the historical development of hermeneutics.<sup>(41)</sup>

Dilthey distinguished various modes of *verstehen*, some of which are psychologicistic. According to Bauman, *sichhineinversetzen* (putting oneself in someone's place), is fundamental as the foundation for *nachbildung* and *nacherleben*. *Nachbildung* is reconstruction in the sense elucidated by Dilthey as follows:

...the existence of other people is given us only from the outside, in sensory events, gestures, words and actions. Only through a process of reconstruction do we complete sense perception which initially takes the form of isolated signs. (43)

*Nacherleben*, which in his earlier thought meant the "projection" of self into the other, is in Dilthey's later thought, the recreation of contextual meaning, and its success is seen when "the fragments of a historical process are so completed that we think we have a continuous whole before us".<sup>(44)</sup> *Nacherleben* can also "go beyond the original" as Makkreel puts it.<sup>(45)</sup> For it can also include an understanding of what the objectification meant to the contemporaries of the author, and furthermore, it

---

40. See below for an analysis of modes of *verstehen*.

41. Frederic Jameson, 'Introduction' to 'The Rise of Hermeneutics', p.229.

42. Bauman, *op.cit.*, p.39.

43. Dilthey, 'The Rise of Hermeneutics', p.231.

44. Makkreel, *op.cit.*, p.361.

45. *op.cit.*, p.329.

may be that insofar as we understand the text or action in the context of the author's own life, and also in his socio-historical context, we may understand him better than he understood himself. *Nachfühlen* is a psychologistic term referring to the attempt to feel what the other is feeling, trying to reexperience "alien states of mind", as Dilthey himself puts it.<sup>(46)</sup> *Nachverständnis* is characterised as the recomprehension of individual action in the sense of attempting to grasp the motives of an action.<sup>(47)</sup> The distinctions between these modes are not always clearly demarcated, but it seems that *nachfühlen* and *nachverständnis* are part of *nachbildung* and *nacherleben*.

And finally, Dilthey speaks of *empfinden* or empathy.<sup>(48)</sup> Some commentators have interpreted *verstehen* solely in this sense.<sup>(49)</sup> While Dilthey did not actually use *empfinden* often, it is clear that all modes of *verstehen* do presuppose a direct contact with life, and that the psychologistic elements were never eliminated in the enlarged characterisation.

The actual process of understanding is constituted by an elementary and a higher mode.<sup>(50)</sup> The former is concerned with a single life expression in any of the three classes of expression. Firstly in the case of concepts, propositions and larger thought structures, we understand through our mutual access to a shared language. Secondly, we can grasp the meaning of an action, "because of the relation in which it (the action) stands to a purpose, the latter is contained in it. This relation of the action to the mind which it thus expresses is regular and so we can make assumptions about

---

46. Dilthey, 'The Rise of Hermeneutics', p.230.

47. op.cit., p.231.

48. Makkreel, op.cit., p.617.

49. see Walsh, op.cit., Chapter 3.

50. Makkreel, op.cit., pp.322-332.

it".<sup>(51)</sup> What Dilthey is claiming is that, within a context, men's actions are charged with conventional meaning through which practical concerns are revealed. From an observation of certain tools used by a man, for example, we know what he wants to do. (While Dilthey does not appear to anticipate the possibility of error, the introduction of the higher mode may be regarded as providing the means of rectifying such errors). An elementary understanding of an action does not, however, reveal the meaning of an action in the context of his life. The third class of expression, those of lived experience including gestures, reflective writings, artistic creations, and so on, express the fulness of lived experience. These may be sincere or insincere and provide the most difficulties for *verstehen*.

The move to a higher mode of understanding is prompted by the difficulties above and by the fact that the expressions may be ambiguous, contradictory or inconsistent. Furthermore the interpreter may wish to enlarge his understanding by analysing the nature of society, thereby trying to explain, for example, why the author wrote as he did. What is at stake, therefore, is the "grasping (of) the essential reciprocal interaction of the parts and the whole", as Brown puts it. Thus "as meaning is contextual so understanding is a process of clarifying and expanding the contextual relationship of the meaning unit under study".<sup>(52)</sup>

The higher mode of understanding is further enlarged by Dilthey through incorporating "both the inductive application of general truths to particular cases and a process of comparison or analogy".<sup>(53)</sup> Makkreel has argued that Dilthey's enlarged conception

---

51. *op.cit.*, p.323.

52. Richard Harvey Brown, 'History and Hermeneutics: Wilhelm Dilthey and the Dialectics of Interpretative Method', in Richard Harvey Brown and Stanford M. Lyman (eds), Structure, Consciousness and History (1978), p.43.

53. Dilthey, 'The Rise of Hermeneutics', p.243.

of *verstehen* must be seen in the light of Dilthey's clarification of his conception of the subject matter of *geisteswissenschaften*.<sup>(54)</sup> Initially Dilthey focussed on the individual as the goal of understanding, for the individual was held to be the carrier of historical life, and the focal point of intersecting cultural systems. But he widened his focus to include communities and cultural systems as the carriers of historical life. Thus Dilthey spoke of the subject matter of history as being the dynamic system and its creations, for example, the Renaissance. A dynamic system differs from a causal system of nature in that it produces values and realises ends according to the structure of psychic life. "This", Dilthey said, "I call the immanent teleological character of spiritual dynamic systems by which is meant the nexus of functions grounded in their structure".<sup>(55)</sup> The meaning of history is determined by an analysis of these systems. While holding that there are no laws which explain the development of dynamic systems and their changes, Dilthey argued that analysis of such systems "opens up the vista of sequences of states, innerly determined, presupposing each other, so that higher levels are built on lower levels, as it were, and in such a way as to lead to an increasing differentiation and integration".<sup>(56)</sup> But such interpretations cannot be in terms of "natural causality" which entails the production of effects in accordance with the necessity of laws. For history, according to Dilthey, is concerned with relations of doing, suffering, action and reaction.<sup>(57)</sup>

How does the enlarged characterisation of *verstehen* affect the dichotomy between the *naturwissenschaften* and the *geisteswissenschaften*? Dilthey certainly accepted that procedures such as

---

54. Makkreel, *op.cit.*, p.312.

55. *op.cit.*, p.315.

56. *op.cit.*, p.314.

57. *op.cit.*, p.315.



observation, classification, quantification, generalisation, comparison, induction and deduction, the use of models, the framing and testing of hypotheses could be a legitimate part of the latter.<sup>(58)</sup> He also insisted that understanding must "be constrained by theoretical knowledge of the natural sciences".<sup>(59)</sup> Nor did he deny that "human beings can be considered as part of nature and to that extent subject to the explanative methods of the natural sciences".<sup>(60)</sup> Dilthey himself gave an example of an historian postulating certain causes to try to explain why German literature had moved away from its Enlightened phase.<sup>(61)</sup> But the dichotomy between the *naturwissenschaften* and *geisteswissenschaften* remains because causal explanations cannot provide a historical understanding of an event in its historical totality.<sup>(62)</sup> As Dilthey wrote:

History is a realm...where freedom appears at innumerable points in the midst of the total continuum of objective necessity characteristic of nature. (63)

In other words, to the extent that the individual can initiate changes, human life cannot be viewed as being totally determined by nature. Hence the *geisteswissenschaften* cannot achieve the knowledge sought without the use of *verstehen*. Objectifications of *geist* must also always be understood in order to grasp their meaning.

Referring to the issues raised earlier,<sup>(64)</sup> it is clear that Dilthey's conceptions of *verstehen* constitute his answer to the

---

58. Rickman, 'Wilhelm Dilthey', p.405.

59. Brown, *op.cit.*, p.46.

60. Makkreel, *op.cit.*, p.60.

61. *op.cit.*, pp.316-7.

62. *op.cit.*, p.321.

63. *op.cit.*, p.61.

64. *op.cit.*, p.53.

question as to how we understand the past. The idea of a hermeneutic of history developed in this thesis acknowledges the contributions of Dilthey in this sphere. It accepts both senses of *verstehen* as integral aspects of making sense of the past. *Verstehen* as imaginative rethinking is, however, held to provide singular hypotheses which are expressed formally in hypothetico-deductive form. Indeed it is held that causal explanations are a necessary part of historical explanations, but the model used in this thesis draws on the contributions made to the philosophy of science by Popper and Kuhn. The 'hermeneutic turn' taken by science has undercut the distinction made by Vico and Dilthey between the *naturwissenschaften* and the *geisteswissenschaften*, and that dichotomy must now be reassessed. Indeed, Dilthey's own recognition of the historicity of all understanding meant, as Brown has noted, that it was the subsoil in which *all* predicative thought must take root, including the natural sciences.<sup>(65)</sup>

### (iii) Objectivity

Makkreel has pointed out that one task of Dilthey's intended work, *Critique of Historical Reason*, was to explore the possibility of postulating critical standards for the *geisteswissenschaften*. For Dilthey recognised that historicism needed a sound epistemological grounding if it was not to disintegrate into relativity.<sup>(66)</sup> Dilthey intended that his analysis of *verstehen* would "preserve the general validity of interpretation against the inroads of romantic caprice and sceptical subjectivity, and to give a theoretical justification for such validity, upon which the certainty of all historical knowledge is founded".<sup>(67)</sup> He was certain that "recomprehension of individual existence (could) be

---

65. Brown, *op.cit.*, p.42.

66. Makkreel, *op.cit.*, p.4.

67. Dilthey, 'The Rise of Hermeneutics', p.244.

raised to objective validity" through hermeneutics, that science which provides the theoretical basis for the interpretation of objectification of *geist*. Dilthey stated unequivocally that the work of any great artist or genius "can never be anything but the true expression of his spiritual life" and is "susceptible of complete and objective interpretation".<sup>(68)</sup>

However, referring back to the discussion on historicity and hence to the concept of understanding historically, it is clear that Dilthey failed to provide a hermeneutic account grounded in historicism. Indeed, in order to put forward an objective account, Dilthey insisted that the interpreter "efface the self".<sup>(69)</sup>

As Linge has pointed out, Dilthey's analysis of *verstehen* required that the interpreter refrain from imposing any external perspective; nor might he make judgments on the past from his own point of view.<sup>(70)</sup> The task of the interpreter was rather to recapture the past in its own terms.

Every expression of life has a meaning insofar as it is a sign which expresses something that is part of life. Life does not mean anything other than itself. There is nothing that points to a meaning beyond it. (71)

Success, therefore, depends on "the knower's *negating and overcoming* the temporal distance which separates him from his object".<sup>(72)</sup>

As Lawrence remarks, Dilthey attempted to ground the *geisteswissenschaften* by "instituting an ideal of historical consciousness which methodologically raises itself above the subjective contingency of

---

68. op.cit., p.233.

69. Makkreel, op.cit., p.54.

70. Linge, op.cit., p.543.

71. Ibid.

72. op.cit., p.544.

its own standpoint and above the tradition accessible to it and thereby arrives at the objectivity of historical knowledge".<sup>(73)</sup> Dilthey believed that in so doing, the interpreter would be liberated from the dogmatism found in those who seek to impose their own views on the past. He saw this philosophy as "an enlightened pilgrimage to an ever-increasingly heightened historical self-awareness".<sup>(74)</sup> Recapturing the past in its own terms was therefore not merely an epistemological necessity, but a moral task. Thus Dilthey wrote:

The historical consciousness of the finitude of every historical phenomenon of every human or social condition, and of the relativity of every kind of faith, is the last step towards the liberation of man. With it man achieves the sovereignty to enjoy every experience to the full and surrender himself to it unencumbered, as if there were no system of philosophy or faith to tie him down. Life is freed from knowledge through concepts; the mind becomes sovereign over the cobwebs of dogmatic thought...<sup>(75)</sup>

Despite these noble sentiments, Dilthey did not analyse the consequences of the historicity of the interpreter who, like his subject matter, is immersed in history. Dilthey himself argued that past, present and future are all moments in understanding. Hence understanding the past is not simply a personal process; it is also at the same time an historical process.<sup>(76)</sup> The changing shape of history is traceable to our preoccupations and concerns, which are also influenced by events in the past. What Dilthey failed to do was to explore his insight

---

73. Fred Lawrence, 'Self Knowledge in History in Gadamer and Lonergan', in P. McShane (ed), Language, Truth and Meaning, (1972), pp.171-2.

74. op.cit., p.172.

75. Dilthey, PM, pp.167-8.

76. Brown, op.cit., p.40.

that meaning is always from a perspective. As he stated, "interpretation always stands in the situation in which the interpreter himself stands; meaning hinges on this".<sup>(77)</sup> Makkreel has argued that Dilthey proposed that the historian expand his notion of self "in order to uncover the transcendental conditions of inter-subjective understanding". Through reflection, the historian makes his perspective explicit, rendering it "less restrictive and more amenable to refinement", Makkreel goes on to say.<sup>(78)</sup> Palmer has also claimed that Dilthey regarded self-understanding as part of understanding. He quotes Dilthey as saying that "what man is only history can tell him".<sup>(79)</sup> Thus according to Palmer, self-understanding in Dilthey's thought involves taking a "hermeneutic detour through fixed expressions dating back over the past".<sup>(80)</sup> But these claims cannot be upheld. It is true that Dilthey argued that "understanding is the rediscovery of the I in the Thou; the mind rediscovers itself at even higher levels of connectedness".<sup>(81)</sup> But he was referring to the point that it is the sameness of mind (*geist*) in the I and Thou, the oneness of knowing subject and its object, which makes an understanding of the past possible.

Brown argues that Dilthey was influenced by positivist ideals, and that his search for objective knowledge must be seen as "clinging to scientific ideals that were antithetical to the openness that he himself said historical understanding involved".<sup>(82)</sup> Bleicher has made the same point. He writes:

---

77. quoted in Palmer, op.cit., p.119.

78. Makkreel, op.cit., pp.54-5.

79. Palmer, op.cit., p.116.

80. Ibid.

81. Dilthey, PM, p.67.

82. Brown, op.cit., pp.45-7.



...Dilthey was too concerned with emphasising the need and value of taking a critical stance towards the past, and also trying to secure an objective status for this understanding. This posture shows Dilthey as a child of the Enlightenment and as following in the Cartesian tradition; but it leads him to overlook the challenge an historical 'object' may make on the interpreter's conceptions and values and to remain blind to the need for self-reflection in which the subject realises his indebtedness to tradition and language as the bases and media of his thinking... (83)

Linge has proposed that towards the end of his life, Dilthey did appear to become aware of the need to make his historicity consistent by including the contribution by the knower. However, he was unable to see how to save historical knowledge from relativity. Dilthey wrote, "Yet where are the means for overcoming the anarchy of convictions that threaten to break in?"<sup>(84)</sup> Bauman also suggests that the following passage may reflect Dilthey's search for a way out of historical relativity:<sup>(85)</sup>

The comprehension of the system of interactions of history grows first of all from individual points at which remnants of the past belonging together are linked in understanding by their relation to experience; what is near and around us becomes a means for understanding what is distant and past. The condition for this interpretation of historical remnants is that what we *put into them must be constant and universally valid.* (86)

Bauman holds that Dilthey may be advocating that the historian purify his starting point. But Dilthey did not elaborate on what counted as "constant and universally valid".

---

83. Bleicher, op.cit., p.24. In fairness to Dilthey, it must be remembered that he argued that understanding occurs through language. But this does not affect the thrust of Bleicher's criticism.

84. quoted by Linge, op.cit., p.545.

85. Bauman, op.cit., p.45.

86. Dilthey, PM, pp.139-40. (my italics).

Bauman has also argued that "the whole history of the problem of understanding can be presented as a series of recurrent attempts to escape from the relativism of understanding which Dilthey revealed, perhaps contrary to his intentions".<sup>(87)</sup>

The idea of a hermeneutic of history put forward in this thesis attempts to resolve the problem through an analysis of the operation of the hermeneutic circle through which understanding takes place. Understanding is historical; past, present and future are moments in an interpretation of the past just as they are moments in the creation of the object of that interpretation. Understanding the past is always self-understanding in the hermeneutic thesis. Therefore understanding is not a question of "escaping" from a particular point of view as has already been mentioned. Nor does it involve, as Dilthey thought, seeking a "constantly and universally valid" starting point. However, while there is no absolute starting point, the idea of a hermeneutic of history rejects the implication that "anything goes". The appropriateness of any interpretative perspective is worked out through the operation of the hermeneutic circle of understanding by the self-reflective historian in a dialogue with the past. Furthermore, the acceptance of the idea of different points of view does not exclude the idea that accounts written within such perspectives may, under certain specified conditions, be judged objective. There are intellectual values and professional standards to which all scholars subscribe, and to which they must adhere as a necessary condition for the possibility of such histories counting as objective.

---

87. Bauman, op.cit., p.46.

The contribution of Dilthey to the development of hermeneutics cannot be underestimated, even though he never succeeded in achieving "ultimate philosophical coherence".<sup>(88)</sup> For Dilthey's thought is ultimately ambiguous because he tried to retain two positions simultaneously, namely, to have the facts speak for themselves, as well as the recognition of the historicity of existence. Nevertheless, as Jameson says, "Dilthey's false start remains indispensable to any adequate statement of the (hermeneutic) problem".<sup>(89)</sup> The way was open to future hermeneutic thinkers to try to resolve that problem. Those contributions will be discussed in conjunction with the development of the idea of a hermeneutic of history.

---

88. Jameson, op.cit., p.229.

89. op.cit., p.230.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### UNDERSTANDING AND MEANING

##### (i) Understanding

Having posed the problem of the relation between the historicity of human existence and historical understanding, Dilthey suggested that earlier hermeneutic thinkers had begged the question as to whether it was possible to recover the author's intentional meaning. The need for an examination of the transcendental question, how is understanding of the past possible? was also revealed. And this in turn presupposed an even more fundamental question, how is understanding possible? Heidegger and Gadamer have been concerned with these questions, and the word "hermeneutics" is sometimes used to describe their analyses of understanding as a mode of being-in-the-world (in Heideggerean terminology).

Heidegger's analysis may be regarded as hermeneutic phenomenology since, as a phenomenology, it is an attempt to show or to reveal the being of *Dasein* as it is in its temporality.<sup>(1)</sup> This phenomenology may be regarded as "hermeneutic" in that it reveals the meaning of being given in the understanding of being. It is an analysis which is concerned with the ontology of understanding and interpretation which renders possible the disclosure of being of things. Heidegger's analysis of *Dasein's* being-in-the-world was not intended to provide rules of interpretation, nor a formal methodology for a hermeneutic exposition. His contribution to the idea of a hermeneutic of history lies in his elucidation of the circle of understanding, that is in his description of understanding and interpretation as fundamental modes of being-in-the-world. As Bauman has pointed out, to know how understanding is achieved is

---

1. *Dasein*, which in German means Being-there, is the term Heidegger uses for man.

to know how understanding is possible.<sup>(2)</sup> Heidegger may therefore be said to have interpreted the transcendental question as a description of understanding's existential structure.

Understanding, together with state-of-mind, discourse and (most of the time) fallenness, constitute the fundamental ontological structures which characterise *Dasein's* being-in-the-world. This, in turn, includes both man's relationship to things, that is concern, as well as his relationship to others, that is solicitude. Understanding, as a mode of being-in-the-world, discloses possibilities for being within the horizon of *Dasein's* historical situation in the world both with regard to concern and solicitude.

Understanding projects meaning on the world. Heidegger is not a Berkelean idealist, for the world is given whether or not it is understood. But without the projecting activity of understanding the world is meaningless. The meaning of objects lies in their relation to a structural whole of inter-related meanings. It is in the assigning of meanings to the world that understanding projects *Dasein's* possibilities.

The practical understanding of things as ready-to-hand is, according to Heidegger, that fundamental form of understanding which makes possible the exercise of theoretical understanding. But practical and theoretical understanding are not antithetical to each other. Rather each arises from different ways of projecting the possibilities of man's being.

Understanding is the basis for all interpretation; understanding sees things and interpretation makes the "as" explicit.<sup>(3)</sup>

---

2. Bauman, op.cit., p.176.

3. Martin Heidegger, Being and Time (1967), p.189.



Heidegger also characterises interpretation as part of any understanding.<sup>(4)</sup> Hence it may be suggested, that a distinction be made between, on the one hand, implicit interpretation of the "as", this being the case in understanding as it takes place in circumspective concern, and, on the other hand, explicit interpretation during which the "as" is made explicit as part of a process of objectification.

Interpretation always occurs within a set of already interpreted relationships. It can never therefore be a presuppositionless grasping of things given in advance.<sup>(5)</sup> It presupposes an understanding of what is to be interpreted because of the fore-structure of understanding. NB.

This fore-structure is constituted firstly by a fore-having, that is we always already understand something in terms of a totality, some whole or particular context. Interpretation is grounded in something we have in advance, but this understanding has the character of being veiled.<sup>(6)</sup> It is unveiled in the appropriation of the things under the guidance of a point of view. Thus interpretation is also grounded in a fore-sight in terms of which we see something from a particular point of view. Insofar as we have this fore-having and fore-sight, having "set our sights" in a certain direction, we do also conceive of the thing in a definitive way. Interpretation is therefore grounded in a fore-conception, in something we grasp in advance. Thus as Heidegger puts it:

Whenever something is interpreted as something the interpretation will be founded essentially upon fore-having, fore-sight and fore-conception. An interpretation is never a presuppositionless apprehending of something presented to us... (7) NB

---

4. op.cit., p.190.

5. op.cit., p.191.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

And further on in the discussion he puts the point succinctly in the claim that "any interpretation which is to contribute understanding, must already have understood what is to be interpreted".<sup>(8)</sup>

All understanding and interpretation therefore operates within a circle - the hermeneutic circle of understanding. It is clear that this circle is the "expression of the existential fore-structure of *Dasein* itself" and it is the condition for the possibility of understanding anything at all.<sup>(9)</sup> It is not a vicious circle and we must not therefore think of looking for ways to avoid it. As Heidegger explains, we will only see it as a vicious circle if we accept the ideal of an ahistorical knowing subject which, as Descartes would argue, needs an indubitable, presuppositionless starting point in order that through the rigorous use of the correct rules of reasoning, universally true conclusions will be reached. What is decisive therefore, is to come into the circle in the right way, and not to try to get out of it (the latter alternative being impossible anyway). This means that we must not allow our fore-structure to prejudice us in our appropriation of an object so that we will understand in terms of ways we want to understand, or feel we ought to understand, without taking cognisance of the object being investigated.

The constant task is never to allow our fore-having, fore-sight and fore-conception to be presented to us by fancies and popular conceptions, but rather to make the scientific theme secure by working out these fore-structures in terms of the things themselves.<sup>(10)</sup>

What this means in practical terms is that we must, in the act of understanding, also be engaged in self-understanding (this is a point with which Gadamer deals in detail). By being aware of our

---

8. op.cit., p.194.

9. op.cit., p.195.

10. Ibid.

fore-structure, that is our pre-suppositions, we must be prepared to amend these in the light of what the object being appropriated presents to us. In the case of the historian he must, as it were, allow the text to "speak" to him.

This amending of the fore-structure also involves the operation of a circle within the hermeneutic circle of understanding. This other circle, to which previous hermeneutic thinkers referred, is implicit in Heidegger's characterisation of understanding, and it may be called the parts/whole hermeneutic circle. Gadamer has spelled out the parts/whole relationship as follows:

The anticipation of meaning in which the whole is envisaged becomes explicit understanding in that the parts, that are determined by the whole, themselves also determine the whole. (11)

The two circles mutually reinforce each other. For every act of historical understanding is at once a movement between present and past, that is between fore-structure and that being investigated, as well as a movement between parts and whole.

In an implicit recognition of the operation of the hermeneutic circle, Janeway quotes with approval Erikson's advice that "whenever you begin, you will have to begin again twice over".<sup>(12)</sup>

Erikson is here referring to the way "an analyst works his way into a case of psychopathology", for the relevance of a given item in a case history is derived from the relevance of other items to which it contributed relevance and from which, by the very fact of this contribution, it derives additional meaning.<sup>(13)</sup> Insofar as the analyst is "unable to arrive at any simple sequence and causal chain with a clear location and circumscribed beginning

---

11. Gadamer, Truth and Method (1975), p.259. (henceforth TM).

12. Elizabeth Janeway, Man's World, Woman's Place: A Study in Social Mythology (1971), p.31.

13. Ibid.

he proceeds by a kind of triple book-keeping, if you wish, a systematic going around in circles".<sup>(14)</sup> Janeway concurs, concluding her discussion on this point by stating that "with our explanation of that commonplace, persistent tag which declares that woman's place is in the home, let us begin knowing that we must expect to come around and begin again".<sup>(15)</sup>

Gadamer's work *Truth and Method* is a critique of that "methodological alienation of the knower from his own historicity"<sup>(16)</sup> as evidenced in the early hermeneutic tradition, including Dilthey, which accepted the possibility of the interpreter being able to transcend his historical situation. In the foreword to the work, Gadamer makes it clear that he is not proposing a hermeneutic method for the *geisteswissenschaften* but is trying, like Heidegger, to describe the ontology of understanding. Specifically his concern is to show how tradition enters into and shapes the act of understanding a text. Nevertheless his analysis has implications for such a method; for example, his description calls into question the possibility of an objectively valid interpretation, a consequence which he recognises, hence the ironic title of the book.<sup>(17)</sup>

---

14. op.cit., p.39.

15. op.cit., p.41.

16. David E. Linge, 'Introduction' to Gadamer, PH, p.XiV.

17. Gadamer has, however, also pointed out that, the Greek word 'method' meant investigation, and did not have the Cartesian connotation of a unity of method and absolute certainty. Gadamer, 'Aristotle's Practical Philosophy as an Example of the Humanities'. Paper delivered on 16 September 1980, at a Symposium entitled Philosophical Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences held at the University of Zululand.



A brief discussion of Gadamer's conception of understanding will be given in order to pose central issues relating to a hermeneutic interpretation of texts, and specifically historical texts. These issues include the role played by the author's intention in a hermeneutic interpretation, the notion of incommensurability and what Gadamer has called "hermeneutic nihilism".<sup>(18)</sup>

Understanding, argues Gadamer, is not psychological re-enactment; it is "not a mysterious communion of souls".<sup>(19)</sup> For "understanding is not merely reproductive, but always a productive attitude as well".<sup>(20)</sup> The sense in which understanding the meaning of a text is reproductive is illustrated in the following passage:

What is identical in reproduction is only that which was formulated. This indicates that 'reproduction' cannot be meant here in its strict sense. It does not mean referring back to some original source in which something is said or written (21)

Thus what is reproduced by understanding is not the author's intention but "the hermeneutic horizon within which the meaning of a text is realized",<sup>(22)</sup> that is "we understand how certain questions come to be asked in particular historical circumstances".<sup>(23)</sup> And when we understand the question to which the text is an answer, then "what is understood in this way does not remain detached in its meaning from our own meaning".<sup>(24)</sup> Asking the question "opens up possibilities of meaning and thus what is meaningful passes into one's own thinking on the subject".<sup>(25)</sup> Hence "the interpreter's own thoughts have also

---

18. Gadamer, TM, p.85.

19. op.cit., p.260.

20. op.cit., p.264.

21. op.cit., p.354.

22. op.cit., p.357.

23. op.cit., p.338.

24. op.cit., p.337.

25. op.cit., p.338.



gone into the re-awakening of the meaning of the text".<sup>(26)</sup> The "hermeneutic conversation" involving question and answer, conducted between interpreter and text, is therefore both reproductive and productive simultaneously. Gadamer goes on to argue that because "a reconstructed question can never stand within its original horizon: for the historical horizon that is outlined in the reconstruction is not a truly comprehensive one", that question is "included within the horizon that embraces us the questioners who have responded to the word that has been handed down".<sup>(27)</sup> To understand is therefore to enter a tradition in such a way that the historian's present and the past he is investigating constantly mediate one another. Thus Gadamer writes:

Understanding is not to be thought of so much as an action of one's subjectivity but as the placing of oneself within a process of tradition in which past and present are constantly fused. (28)

Understanding, as the fusion of horizons, entails that "not occasionally only, but always the meaning of a text goes beyond its author...It is enough to say that we understand in a different way, if we understand at all".<sup>(29)</sup> New meanings will therefore always be found in any text, and understanding can never be final.

Furthermore, Gadamer argues that understanding the past must always involve self-understanding. For "understanding includes a reflective dimension from the very beginning".<sup>(30)</sup> Hermeneutic self-reflection makes clear the preunderstanding the interpreter

---

26. op.cit., p.350.

27. op.cit., p.337.

28. op.cit., p.258.

29. op.cit., p.264.

30. Gadamer, PH, p.45.

has of the text, and helps to open up new directions of questioning.<sup>(31)</sup> Hence "the prejudgments that lead my preunderstanding are constantly at stake right up to the moment of their surrender - which surrender could also be called a transformation".<sup>(32)</sup> In short, this is a restatement of the Heideggerean idea of the hermeneutic circle of understanding.

One of Gadamer's most vociferous critics is Hirsch who argues firstly, that Gadamer's thought has serious implications for the possibility of providing criteria for valid interpretations. Bringing to mind Rickman's three principles of historicism, Hirsch writes, "How can it be affirmed that the original sense of a text is beyond our reach, and at the same time, that a valid interpretation is possible?"<sup>(33)</sup> An even more fundamental criticism is that Gadamer's position raises the issue of incommensurability.

The being of a past meaning cannot become the being of a present meaning for being is temporal, and differences in time are consequently differences in being...it is ultimately an argument against written communication in general and not just against communication between historical eras. For it is merely arbitrary, on this argument, to hold that a meaning fifty years old is ontologically alien while one three years or three minutes is not... (34)

Moreover, Hirsch's argument continues, in a so-called single society, where members speak the same language, it is an illusion in terms of Gadamer's position for them to think that they understand each other. For no society is completely homogeneous

---

31. op.cit., p.39.

32. op.cit., p.38.

33. Eric D. Hirsch (Jr.), 'Truth and Method in Interpretation'. The Review of Metaphysics, Vol. 18, 1965, p.497.

34. op.cit., pp 499-500.

with all its members sharing the same world views.

To say that men of different eras cannot understand each other is really to say that men who exist in significantly different situations and have different perspectives on life cannot understand each other. But if it is right to think that all men exist in situations that are significantly different one from another and that all have different perspectives, then the historicist dogma reduces to simple psychologism: men in general, being different from one another, cannot understand the meaning of one another. (35)

Furthermore if we accept Gadamer's argument that a text "if it is to be understood properly, that is according to the claim it makes, must be understood at every moment, in every particular situation, in a new and different way" (36) then, according to Hirsch, a text has an infinite and inexhaustible number of possible meanings and therefore no particular meaning at all.

Quite clearly, to view the text as an autonomous piece of language and interpretation as an infinite process is really to deny that the text has *any* determinate meaning. (37)

Gadamer's resolution of these problems is not helpful, according to Hirsch. For while Gadamer argues that the fact that the interpreter belongs to the same tradition as the text is a factor which prevents error in interpretation, Hirsch holds that tradition is itself a changing concept being the sum of previous interpretations of earlier traditions.

---

35. op.cit., pp.500-1.

36. Gadamer, TM, p.275.

37. Hirsch, op.cit., p.492.

Every new interpretation by its existence belongs to the tradition and alters the tradition. Consequently "tradition" cannot really function as a stable, normative concept since it is in fact a changing, descriptive concept. (38)

How therefore could one arbitrate between disparate interpretations which were given by two members belonging to the same tradition? Hirsch's criticism will be examined by unpacking the concept of tradition which Hirsch has taken in the "narrow" sense of the literary tradition surrounding interpretations of any text. It will be argued that to claim that understanding occurs within the framework of tradition is to make a larger claim than is implied in Hirsch's sense of the word. And while it may be agreed that no tradition is ever homogeneous, nevertheless to use the word "tradition" is to imply a continuity with the past of specific ways of behaviour and patterns of belief. Even where there are innovations within a tradition these may still be seen as standing within the stream of the tradition, becoming "points of redirection" so that while retaining some elements of the old, they do also introduce novelty. (39)

Certainly, with reference to the idea of valid interpretations, Gadamer himself rejects the idea that any interpretation is acceptable, calling this "an untenable hermeneutic nihilism". (40) (the phrase "hermeneutic anarchy" is held to be more apt). He says clearly that "it is still not the case that within this variety of what can be thought, that is of what the reader can find meaningful and hence expect to find, everything is possible". (41)

---

38. op.cit., p.494.

39. Edward Shils, 'Tradition', Comparative Studies in Sociology and History, Vol. 13, 1971.

40. Gadamer, TM, p.85.

41. op.cit., p.238.

And again, "neither jurist nor theologian regards the work of application as making free with the text".<sup>(42)</sup> As will be elaborated upon later,<sup>(43)</sup> there are two constraints which mitigate against the nihilist or anarchic conclusion, namely what Gadamer calls the "hermeneutically trained mind"<sup>(44)</sup> and what the text has to say to such a mind. (Heidegger made the same points).

Hirsch's own solution is to make a clear distinction between, firstly, the original meaning of the text, that is the author's intention, and secondly, the significance of the text, that is its relevance to contemporary situations.

*Meaning* is that which is represented by a text; it is what the author meant by his use of a particular sign sequence; it is what the signs represent. *Significance*, on the other hand, names a relationship between that meaning and a person, or a conception, or a situation, or indeed anything imaginable. (45)

The former is linguistic, determinate and reproducible; the latter is changeable.<sup>(46)</sup> But no interpreter can assess the significance of the text unless he has first understood the text on its own terms. Only then can he recast it in his own idiom or explicate it in the idiom of the present day.<sup>(47)</sup> For Hirsch the hermeneutic task is limited to the recovery of intention alone. It is, however, not possible to be absolutely sure that this has been achieved, even although the author's language has a shape and scope that is governed by conventions in which the interpreter

---

42. op.cit., p.297.

43. Chapter 5.

44. Gadamer, TM, p.238.

45. Eric D. Hirsch (Jr), Validity in Interpretation (1967), p.8.

46. op.cit., Chapter 2.

47. Hirsch, 'Truth and Method in Interpretation', p.496, p.499.



can share when he is familiar with them. Hirsch holds that an interpretation of the author's intention, the original meaning of the text, is a guess and needs to be tested using the hypothetico-deductive model against relevant data.<sup>(48)</sup>

Hirsch's arguments depend on his insistence that a clear distinction be made between the *subtilatis intelligendi* and the *subtilitas explicandi*.<sup>(49)</sup> The former, which he characterises as understanding, is the reconstruction of intended meaning, that is grasping the meaning of the text on its own terms. The latter Hirsch refers to as interpretation, and is concerned with an explanation of that meaning. The significance of the text, that is its evaluation, is achieved by acts of judgment and criticism. Hirsch therefore maintains that there is a single correct understanding of a text on its own terms but its significance can be assessed differently.<sup>(50)</sup> Gadamer's error, according to Hirsch is to have failed to make that distinction.

In this thesis, which has a central theme the possibility of a historical method within a hermeneutic framework, it is argued that the historian's concern may include the attempt to recover the intention of the author or historical agent, a concern reflected in the kind of question asked and in the giving of a rational explanation.<sup>(51)</sup> However, as Giddens has pointed out, Gadamer's analysis has methodological consequences insofar as it points to the concept of "the mediation of frames of meaning",<sup>(52)</sup> a concept which enlarges the scope of the historical meaning of a text or event beyond its mere identification with intention. For recognition is also given to the contribution of the historian to that meaning from his point of view in the form of explicitly formulated

---

48. *op.cit.*, p.507. It is also argued in this thesis that the hypothetico-deductive model of explanation is used, but that model is conceived in Popperian terms.

49. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation*, p.129.

50. Hirsch, *op.cit.*, p.136, p.143.

51. Chapter 7, iii(b).

52. Giddens, *New Rules of Sociological Method* (1976), p.64.

theories imposed on texts or events in accordance with the idea of a double hermeneutic. The role that intention plays within what is held to be the fuller historical meaning of an event, is a matter of historical assessment. Nevertheless *that* judgment presupposes that intention has been recovered. Thus agreement is expressed with Betti insofar as he includes amongst his criteria and guidelines (hermeneutic canons) for hermeneutic interpretation the idea of the hermeneutical correspondence of meaning, or meaning-adequacy in understanding.<sup>(53)</sup> What this canon amounts to is that the interpretation of a text be "adequate" or in "the closest harmony" with the intention of the text's author, so that the interpreter's contribution and what is received from the text "resonate in a harmonious way".<sup>(54)</sup>

(ii) Meaning

In order to assess the role the recovery of intention plays in the idea of a hermeneutic of history it is necessary to examine the question of meaning. An analysis of the speech act theory of meaning also allows us to deal with the issues of incommensurability and hermeneutic anarchy raised by Hirsch.

Hermeneutic thinkers have recognised that understanding occurs through the medium of language. Gadamer argues:

- 
53. Betti's other canons which he argues to be necessary for the possibility of an objective interpretation are as follows:
- (i) The canon of the hermeneutical autonomy of the object, that is the text must be understood on its own terms.
  - (ii) The canon of the coherence of meaning (the principle of totality), that is the text must be understood in the context of a whole/parts relationship.
  - (iii) The canon of the actuality of understanding, that is it must be integrated into the interpreters framework of his own experience.

Emilio Betti, "Hermeneutics as the General Methodology of the *Geisteswissenschaften*" in Bleicher, Contemporary Hermeneutics: Hermeneutics as Method, Philosophy and Critique, p.58, p.59. p.62. p.84.

54. Betti, op.cit., p.85. (The possibility of unconscious motivation also mitigates against the early hermeneutic view which identified meaning with intention. This is discussed below, Chapter 7, iii(c)).

Every interpretation of the intelligible that helps others to understanding has the character of language. To that extent, the entire experience of the world is linguistically mediated and the broadest concept of tradition is thus defined - one that includes what is not itself linguistic, but is capable of linguistic interpretation. (55)

As the medium of intersubjectivity, language provides the possibility for understanding our world and the past.<sup>(56)</sup> This claim will be fleshed out through a consideration of the speech act theory.

The positivist view that meaningful statements must refer to facts, and that the meaning of a sentence is determined by its method of verification, was challenged by a number of philosophers, the original thrust of that challenge coming from Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. In this work Wittgenstein argued that in order to understand the meaning of any proposition one must examine how it is used in specific language games. Thus an analysis of the concept of meaning required an approach in which language was seen in terms of its communicatory purpose. One such approach, the theory of speech acts, first proposed by Austin,<sup>(57)</sup> focusses on the act of performing a particular utterance in which, as Skinner writes:

Any agent, in issuing any utterance, will always be doing something as well as merely saying something, so that an understanding of what the agent is saying presupposes a grasp not merely of the ordinary sense and reference of his utterance, but also of what Austin dubbed its illocutionary force, corresponding to what the agent saw himself as doing in issuing that particular utterance. (58)

---

55. Gadamer, PH, p.99, TM, pp.336-405.

56. Gadamer, TM, p.367, PH, pp.59-68.

See also Hans Jonas, 'Change and Permanence: On the Possibility of Understanding History', in D. Carr and E.S. Casey (eds), *Explorations in Phenomenology* (1973), p.129.

57. J.L. Austin, *How to do Things with Words* (1962).

58. Skinner, *op.cit.*, pp.211-2.

In this thesis, the speech act theory of meaning in which the hearer is a passive member of the speech situation is challenged and held to be incomplete. For it is argued that part of the meaning of an utterance is what it means to the hearer, that is the way he interprets it, and this depends on his point of view.

An analysis of spoken discourse precedes a discussion on the meaning of texts, for it is in the ordinary speech situation that pre-reflective understanding occurs which makes theoretical understanding possible. As Dilthey wrote:

Understanding arises, first of all, from the interests of practical life where people are dependent on communicating with each other. They must make themselves mutually understood. The one must know what the other wants. Thus first of all elementary forms of understanding arise. (59)

Indeed the ontological priority of speech over the written text is traditionally accepted. Hoy for example, has suggested that one reason for this is because of the possibility of using ostensive definitions.<sup>(60)</sup> But, as will be argued, it is also the case that in the face to face situation there exists the possibility of direct questions and answers in order to clarify what is obscure as a means towards achieving communication.<sup>(61)</sup>

---

59. Dilthey, PM, p.119.

60. Hoy, op.cit., p.80.

61. A further justification for an analysis of spoken discourse within the context of this thesis is provided by the growing recognition of the legitimacy of oral evidence as historical material. This is reflected, for example, in the existence of various journals such as Oral History, Journal of the Oral History Society (University of Essex); Oral History Review, Journal of the Oral History Association (North Texas State University); Canadian Oral History Journal (Ottawa).

In the face to face situation, a speaker says something to the hearer. He says it in a specific way using various semantic and syntactic rules such as verb tense, word order, gestures, tone of voice, in order to produce a certain effect on the hearer. In short, the speaker has an intention he wishes to communicate. If the communication has been successful, the hearer has understood both the content of what was said and the way it was said. Thus he has grasped the intended meaning of the utterance.

The possibility of the hearer understanding the speaker is ensured by their both using the same language. This seemingly trivial and taken-for-granted point ensures that both know firstly what is being spoken about, and secondly the way the rules of language are used to bring about the required effects. In elucidating these points it will be shown that in a fundamental sense meaning is tradition-bound. For every act of understanding what things are in any present, is an historical act insofar as we interpret in terms of inherited concepts, that is in terms of a tradition of meaning. One condition for understanding spoken discourse is that there should be general agreement as to what counts as a fact. This agreement presupposes that we share the relevant concepts in terms of which we know what it is for something to be an X, that is we can pick out X's and describe them. In short, there are public criteria for the applicability of any concept. The classification of things (which is implicit in the possession of concepts) is arbitrary in that we classify not simply on the basis of the similarities between things, but also in terms of our interests and needs. But we are born into a certain conceptual framework, into a linguistic tradition, through which we learn to "see" the world. We therefore necessarily interpret things as things in terms of our inherited concepts. Thus Gadamer writes that "language maintains a kind of independent life over and against the individual member of a linguistic community and introduces him, as he grows into it, to a particular attitude, and



relationship to the world as well".<sup>(62)</sup> Furthermore, while words themselves are arbitrary signs, we do not sit down on every occasion we wish to communicate and work towards intersubjective agreement as to what signs will stand for what things in the world and so on. Indeed, even to do so, we would already have to make use of a shared conceptual framework in terms of which we could communicate our agreement about such a contingent applicability of signs. As Gadamer has said, we cannot arbitrarily change the meaning of words if there is to be language. Hence "we do not first decide to agree but are already in agreement".<sup>(63)</sup>

It is, of course, true that the meanings of words can and do change, that man does have a certain freedom over and against language. But this freedom is, as Gadamer points out "a limited one...inasmuch as every language has a life of its own and against what is said at any given time, so that one senses from it with great vividness the way which the distant past is still connected with the feeling of the present".<sup>(64)</sup> Besides our inherited concepts there are also various linguistic rules, such as tense, word order, punctuation and the like, which have acquired an independent existence and are prior to our successful use of language, for we must learn to use them in order to communicate. Hence the idea of public rules, both semantic and syntactic, depends on the mutual access by the linguistic community to a shared tradition, because language precedes individual experience. In short, meaning is prior to any individual, and language may be said to have a monolithic status for each member of a speech community.

---

62. Gadamer, TM, p.401.

63. op.cit., p.405.

64. op.cit., p.399. This point is implicit in Spinoza's thought.

It is, therefore, insofar as the speaker and hearer speak the same language that there exists the possibility of the latter understanding the meaning of the utterance, and hence of communication having occurred successfully. But in practice, understanding may not be immediate; the hearer may misunderstand or his understanding may be incomplete; or the speaker may not intend that the hearer understands him.

Consider firstly the hearer. It has already been argued that understanding is never presuppositionless, and hence the hearer may bring certain prejudices to bear on the speech situation which could prevent him from grasping the speaker's intention. There are indeed two fundamental kinds of presupposition. There are firstly those ensuring the possibility of communication, those which constitute our mutual access to our shared linguistic tradition, that is the semantic and syntactic rules of language which are possessed by the linguistically competent in that particular language. And secondly, there are various and wide-ranging presuppositions, for example, the hearer's religious views, his political beliefs as well as, for example, presuppositions about the character of the speaker and the context in which the speech act has occurred. These latter presuppositions may result in the hearer misunderstanding the speaker. (These brief remarks on presuppositions will be amplified in the discussion on the interpretation of texts. But they suffice to make the points below). In the speech situation it does seem possible to overcome such misunderstandings, for in the face to face context of spoken discourse, ostensive definitions and cues such as facial and bodily expressions serve as useful checks, and perhaps most importantly, through the use of questions such as "what do you mean?". Hence the hearer can be brought to an awareness of presuppositions which might prevent him from understanding; these may be put aside in his effort to grasp the other's meaning. Clearly, this involves the operation of the hermeneutic circle.

Let us turn to the speaker. As Speier has pointed out, the speaker may not necessarily want to spread knowledge, profess his feelings, guide the perplexed, give the best advice, enlighten or explain adequately. His intention may be to perpetuate ignorance, to lead astray, obscure, oversimplify, propagandise.<sup>(65)</sup> There is clearly a whole spectrum of possibilities bounded by the two extremes of full disclosure and total withholding by the speaker of his intention.

Thus full and unambiguous communication can be said to occur only in what would be an ideal speech situation where the speaker withheld nothing, and the hearer self-consciously bracketed presuppositions which might prevent him from grasping the speaker's intention. It would be characterised by the mutual recognition of the authentic right of both partners to take their respective roles in the dialogue in order to ensure that understanding takes place.<sup>(66)</sup> While, therefore, there *is* an intended meaning of an instance of spoken discourse, it may not be easy to grasp that meaning.

The hearer can also interpret what has been said in different ways depending on the fore-structure he has brought to bear on the speech situation. Thus an utterance's meaning can transcend the speaker's intention. For example consider a situation in which a speaker A says to the hearer B, "My wife is ill". B and the wife in question are in the throes of a passionate love affair and B may find it difficult under such circumstances to decide whether A is simply communicating a fact, probing for information, or making a veiled accusation. But even if B feels sure that A is unsuspectingly conveying information, he may interpret the remark

---

65. Hans Speier, 'The Communication of Hidden Meaning', *Social Research*, Vol. 44, 1977, p.471.

66. Habermas' model of idealized dialogue makes these kinds of points. (See p.107).

as an indication of the intensity of the wife's feelings for him, or perhaps proof of her pregnancy. And furthermore, when in the future B remembers the remark, he may, with new knowledge available to him or on the basis of the consequences of the remark, read a different meaning into it. Hence the fuller meaning of an apparently simple remark may transcend the intention of the speaker, for its meaning includes what it means to the hearer. It is therefore argued that a Searlean-type analysis in terms of which the hearer is conceived of as a passive member of the speech situation is incomplete. Interpretations of meaning are contingent upon the particular "historical" situations of the speaker and hearer both at the time of utterance and during possible retrospective considerations.

The difficulties of achieving transparently clear communication in speech situations become compounded and complicated on the level of the written text. For the immediacy of the face to face situation has been lost and hence there no longer is the possibility of using cues such as gestures, facial and bodily expressions; nor can ostensive definitions or face to face questioning take place. As Rock says, "there is no participation in joint experience or joint schemes of interpretation. There can be no reciprocal monitoring or questioning".<sup>(67)</sup>

The reader has to try to recreate the context in which the text was written, since he cannot participate in it directly. The writer may have written a text with an overt as well as a covert meaning. While these may be "playful" exercises in certain instances, in political circumstances, where freedom of expression has been threatened, a writer's use of allusion may be considerable. Speier

---

67. Paul Rock, 'Some Problems of Interpretative Historiography', British Journal of Sociology, Vol. 27, no. 3, 1976, p.296.

gives as an example, a book by Ernst Jürgen, *On the Marble Cliffs*, which makes use of "fantastic imagery" to depict aspects of the tyranny of Nazi Germany. The chief character in the book, the "Chief Forester" was interpreted as being Hitler, Göring (and even Stalin). Jürgen noted that readers tended to co-operate in their attribution of meaning far more "powerfully" in times of censorship than the author himself intended.<sup>(68)</sup>

In view of such difficulties, is it possible to recover the intended meaning of a text?

As was the case in the speech situation, the bare possibility is ensured insofar as author and reader share the same language, that is in terms of the linguistic competence of both protagonists in the particular language of the text. For it is through language that the reader attempts to recreate the context in which the text was written and within which it was originally meaningful. But the idea of a hermeneutic interpretation of historical texts recognises that the text cannot be understood unless the interpreter is self-conscious about his starting point, about the horizon within which he approaches the past (which, of course, has its own horizon). Gadamer writes:

The task of historical understanding involves acquiring the particular historical horizon so that what we are seeking to understand can be seen in its true dimensions. If we fail to place ourselves in this way within the historical horizon out of which the tradition speaks, we shall misunderstand the significance of what it has to say to us. (69)

---

68. Speier, op.cit., p.479, 480, 491.

69. Gadamer, TM, p.270.



Thus the historian will familiarise himself, not only with other primary sources which bear on the text in question, but also with the secondary sources which constitute the historical tradition surrounding its interpretation. This ensures his familiarity with the text and its historical context, and the history of its interpretations. For as Gadamer has pointed out:

Hermeneutics must start from the position that a person seeking to understand something has a relation to the object that comes into language in the transmitted text, or has, or acquires a connection within the tradition out of which the text speaks. (70)

However, hermeneutics is primarily concerned with rendering what is unfamiliar, familiar, what is obscure clear, and what is unintelligible, intelligible. And there are, for the hermeneutic historian, both elements of familiarity and strangeness in his encounters with the horizons of the text. One element of this strangeness is explained by Gadamer as follows:

The lack of immediate understanding of texts handed down to us historically or their proneness to be misunderstood is really only a special case of what is to be met in all human orientation to the world as the *atopon* (the strange), that which does not "fit" into the customary order of our expectation based on experience. (71)

But as Heidegger has pointed out it is precisely the feeling of strangeness, unfamiliarity and unexpectedness which reveals things as objects of contemplation.<sup>(72)</sup> Strangeness is a necessary

---

70. op.cit., p.262.

71. Gadamer, PH, p.25.

72. Heidegger, op.cit., p.154.

prerequisite for the possibility of coming to understand something. An example of this strangeness was shown in the discussion on the speech situation where, for example, hidden meanings in an utterance which may have been intended by the speaker, or which may be unintentional, hinder the possibility of perfectly transparent communications. In the case of the written text, the strangeness is compounded by the historical distance of the historian from the object of his inquiry. Recreating the forms of life in which the text was written rather than direct participation in them may prove difficult because the historian feels alienated from that particular society. Historical distance also entails that some semantic and syntactic rules may change in time. In short, the "hermeneutical consciousness" is aware that it cannot be connected with the text in a "self-evident" way, as Gadamer puts it.<sup>(73)</sup>

The polarity of familiarity and strangeness on which hermeneutic work is based does result in a feeling of tension between the text and the present. But, as Gadamer argues, this tension arising from the encounter with the past, must be brought forward consciously in order to reveal the otherness, the strangeness of that past.<sup>(74)</sup>

Hence a further condition for the possibility of understanding the meaning of a past text is that the historian must self-consciously operate within the hermeneutic circle of understanding. The non-reflective historian may impose his prejudgment on the text, possibly thereby contributing to what Heidegger has called a crust of misinterpretation. What is therefore required in order to allow the text to speak in its own terms, is that "the hermeneutically trained mind"<sup>(75)</sup> amend, eliminate or enlarge those presuppositions in the fore-structure of his understanding which may obscure or distort his understanding of the text's meaning in his dialogue

---

73. Gadamer, *TM*, p.262.

74. *op.cit.*, p.273.

75. *op.cit.*, p.266.

with the text. It is suggested in this thesis that this involves an attempt to recreate, as far as this is possible, the speech situation through the interpreter's questioning of the text and his openness in listening to its answer during the operation of the hermeneutic circle.

Of course the possibility of recovering intention is complicated where the sincerity of the author or agent is in doubt. No historian would be content, for example, simply to accept at face value Napoleon's writings made at St. Helena when the French General was at pains to create the so-called Napoleonic legend. The speeches and writings of Hitler also pose the same kind of problem. Hitler, an acknowledged master in the use of propaganda, held that when one lies, one must tell big lies. While these may be extreme cases, they are a warning to historians to go beyond texts on their own, examining them in the context of the character and history of the individuals, as well as in the context of the period as a whole, in order to understand the fuller historical meaning of writings and actions.

The following extract from Napoleon's dictation to Las Cases at St. Helena, 1 May, 1816, may be taken as representative of the efforts of the ex-Emperor to justify his career for posterity:

I closed the gulf of anarchy and cleared (away) the chaos, I purified the Revolution, dignified Nations and established Kings. I excited every kind of emulation, rewarded every kind of merit, and extended the limits of glory! This is at least something! And on what point can I be assailed on which an historian could not defend me? Can it be for my intentions? But even here I can find absolution. Can it be for my despotism? It may be demonstrated that the Dictatorship was absolutely necessary. Will it be said that I restrained liberty? It can be proved that licentiousness, anarchy, and the greatest irregularities still haunted the threshold of freedom. Shall I be accused of having been too fond of war? It can be shown that I always received the first attack. Will it be said that I aimed at universal monarchy? It can be proved that this was merely the

result of fortuitous circumstances, and that our enemies themselves led me step by step to this determination. Lastly, shall I be blamed for my ambition? This passion I must doubtless be allowed to have possessed, and that in no small degree, but, at the same time, my ambition was of the highest and noblest kind that ever, perhaps existed!...That of establishing and of consecrating the Empire of reason, and the full exercise and complete enjoyment of all the human facilities. And here the historian will probably feel compelled to regret that such ambition should not have been fulfilled and gratified!...Then after a few moments of silent reflection, "This", said the Emperor, "is my whole history in a few words". (76)

Historians would be hard pressed to "defend" Napoleon unconditionally on the grounds he himself suggests. For example, Napoleon's "police" measures against political opponents, including the banning of all except thirteen Parisian newspapers, were accompanied by letters to Fouché, his Minister of Police, letters which revealed that these laws were not directed against those convenient scape-goats, "licentiousness", "anarchy" and the superbly vague "greatest irregularities". The following extract from a letter to Fouché dated 22 April, 1805, is, it is suggested, the expression of a dictator who will brook no personal opposition:

...I want to write to the editors of the... newspapers that are most widely read in order to let them know that the time is not far away when, seeing that they are no longer of service to me, I shall suppress them along with all the others, and I shall retain a single organ. Tell them that the...Revolution is over, and that there is now only one party in France; that I shall never allow the newspapers to say anything contrary to my interests; that they may publish a few little articles with just a bit of poison in them, but that one fine day somebody will shut their mouths. (77)

---

76. David L. Dowd (ed), Napoleon: Was he the Heir of the Revolution? (1964), pp.17-18.

77. op.cit., p.41.



In terms of the analysis of speech acts above, it is clear that the attempt to recover the intended meaning of the author, by no means exhausts the historical meaning of the text, as was proposed earlier. Before continuing with the discussion, however, it is necessary to point out that, following Ricoeur, meaningful acts may be considered as texts. As Ricoeur has elucidated, such actions have "a propositional content which can be identified and re-identified". Using the relevant Searlean terminology, they have the structure of a locutionary act.<sup>(78)</sup> Secondly, any such act, insofar as a "typology of action" is possible, may be identified according to its illocutionary force.<sup>(79)</sup> Thirdly, like a text, "a meaningful action is an action whose *importance* goes 'beyond' its *relevance* to its initial situation".<sup>(80)</sup> Thus the following discussion on intended meaning in the idea of a hermeneutic of history applies both to texts and actions.

A text or action may express or betray meanings which were not specifically intended by the author or agent. For example, Luther's account of his profoundly revelatory religious experience has been expressed in terms which have invited an evaluation in Freudian terms.<sup>(81)</sup> As Gadamer points out, texts therefore need to be understood "not only in terms of what they say but of what they bear witness to".<sup>(82)</sup>

The significance of the intended meaning of a text or action has to be judged within the historical context of the text or action, as well as in terms of the historian's own present which is, of course, future to that text or action. Let us consider Luther's

---

78. Paul Ricoeur, 'Human Sciences and Hermeneutical Method: Meaningful Action Considered as a Text', Social Research, Vol. 38, no. 3, 1971. Reprinted in Carr and Casey, op.cit., p.22.

79. op.cit., p.24.

80. op.cit., p.27.

81. He was in the stage of anal fixation.

82. Gadamer, TM, p.263.



action in writing and posting the "Ninety Five Theses". He wrote that Tetzel (a purveyor of indulgence) has "spurred me on against the Pope".<sup>(83)</sup> Luther also made it clear in an *Autobiographical Fragment* dated March 1545, that he identified himself with St. Augustine and hence Catholicism, and that he was, at that stage, "a most vehement Papist".<sup>(84)</sup> Luther's intention in the protest against the sale of indulgences was to present for scholarly debate certain theological points, and the posting of theses for such debate was in accordance with common practice at that time. Luther was concerned as to whether the Pope had the right to grant indulgences, with how Papal love could be reconciled with the greed of a man like Tetzel. But the printing press helped to change the theses into "watchwords of mass propaganda".<sup>(85)</sup> The challenge to the Church, implicit in Luther's writing, was interpreted differently by various groups in Germany, providing justifications for their own ideals and aspirations. Luther's later writings served to crystallize these aims, the princes challenging the Church's authority for material gain in the form of Church lands hence providing themselves with increased power bases; the peasant using Luther's writings to support their protests against the intrusion of rural capitalism. The fuller meaning of the "Ninety Five Theses" therefore includes seeing that they marked the beginning of the Reformation. The fact that at that stage Luther did not intend to break with the Church is noted by the historian, but it tends "to get left behind" when the historical meaning of the theses is interpreted.<sup>(86)</sup> In short, the consequences of an action may go beyond the wishes of the individual concerned, and beyond his process of control.

---

83. V.H.H. Green, *Luther and the Reformation* (1964), p.63.

84. E.G. Rupp and Benjamin Drewery, *Martin Luther* (1970), p.6, p.173, p.174.

85. Peter J. Klassen, *Europe in the Reformation* (1979), p.35.

86. This is, however, not always the case. Hitler's intention in sanctioning the holocaust, for example, was to eliminate European jewry as far as this was possible, reflecting his virulent anti-Semitism. That intention is surely part of the fuller historical meaning of that event.

What is future to an event is thus an integral part of its historical meaning. Pachter writes:

That a monk nailed ninety five theses on the Church door in Wittenberg is hardly worth reading; for a century this has been the correct way of inviting colleagues to one of their frequent disputations, an intellectual past-time before the invention of coffee houses. The fact becomes an event because we now call "Reformation" the entire sequence of events that follows. (87)

Melden makes the same kind of point when he states that "the historical importance of Caesar's crossing the Rubicon...cannot be grasped by the sort of perception of that public event which Caesar's own men enjoyed; nor could it be settled definitely even if the historian could interview the ghost of Caesar". (88)

Thus, as Hübner writes:

...things happening *now* very often look different when seen by him (the historian) and very often actually *are* something quite different when seen by him later in the light of the knowledge of everything which happened later on. And this would be true even if he knew each detail available to the witness. Some things which seem very important to the witness, may look even negligible in the light of later events and vice versa; some things may seem to him closely connected which later turned out to be far apart; he may describe something as a great evil which we see was something very good; he may interpret some facts in the frame of some historical systems which we may later be forced to construct completely otherwise...The reason is that with the growing distance in time these events will be seen in different relations to others, to more and later events...things simply look different if we know what resulted from them and what happened later. (89)

- 
- 87. Henry M. Pachter, 'Defining an Event: Prolegomenon to Any Future Philosophy of History', Social Research, Vol. 41. 1974, p.463.
  - 88. A.I. Melden, 'Historical Objectivity: A Noble Dream?' in Nash, op.cit., p.193.
  - 89. Kurt Hübner, 'On Theories in the Historical Sciences', Man and World, Vol. 8, 1975, p.378.

Quite simply therefore, "the historical context of meaning is larger than the contexts of meaning that may have been subjectively intended by the original actors", as Brown puts it.<sup>(90)</sup>

Because a text addresses a wide range of interpreters,<sup>(91)</sup> the historian, with his particular point of view, contributes to the fuller historical meaning of that text. As Hoy says:

The meaning of a text is in one sense the meaning given by the interpreter, since the text poses a question to him in his particular historical situation and he approaches the text with given expectations. But the text also has a meaning that claims our attention by addressing us in a manner relevant to our concern with our particular situation. <sup>(92)</sup>

Agreement is therefore expressed with Gadamer that "every age understands a text in its own way, for the text is part of the whole tradition in which the age takes an objective interest or in which it seeks to understand itself".<sup>(93)</sup> Allardyce's survey of theories of fascism illustrates this point clearly:

...The study of fascism has never been an exercise in bringing together opposing opinions, and even companionable views rest uneasily side by side. Conflicting interpretations have existed from the outset, shifting in emphasis as new evidence becomes available, and undergoing modification as the changing features of the present cast new light upon the past. If the earliest interpretations, written in the teeth of the emerging fascist movements, now appear inadequate and defective, it is in part because the movements themselves were transformed in the course of their existence. As they passed through changing experiences, they themselves underwent change. In the same way Europe - and Europe's position in the world - has changed since

---

90. Brown, op.cit., p.50.

91. Ricoeur, op.cit., pp.20-1.

92. Hoy, op.cit., p.67.

93. Gadamer, TM, p.263.

1945, giving contemporary historians a different perspective on the fascist years. The result has been a continuing reassessment of fascism and its significance in European history. New efforts toward understanding have sought not only to correct past inaccuracies but to investigate unexplored dimensions, bringing new intellectual methods and the advantage of greater hindsight to the task of creating a more complete vision of the fascist experience. Thus our existing conceptions of fascism have evolved from a continuing study of our times. They are historical images that have not yet fully emerged from the historical process itself, and therefore carry the impressions of the period that produced them. In this sense the historiography of fascism should itself be understood historically. (94)

Nevertheless it is argued that the particular point of view taken by the historian does have to be justified. An "anything-goes" attitude is anathema. Gadamer himself has written:

The general requirement of hermeneutics is...that every text must be understood from the point of view which is appropriate to it. (95)

For Gadamer "appropriate" means that "the interpreter's own context is itself conditioned by the tradition in which he stands, and the text is part of this tradition".<sup>(96)</sup> This context provides him with his preunderstanding and a preliminary grasp of the problem. However, the appropriateness of this stance depends also on the working out of two inter-related factors during the process of coming to grasp the meaning of the text within the hermeneutic circle of understanding. Firstly, that appropriateness depends on the content of the text. As Hoy puts this point:

---

94. Gilbert Allardyce, "The Place of Fascism in European History" in Allardyce (ed), The Place of Fascism in European History (1971), pp.7-8.

95. Gadamer, TM, p.299.

96. Hoy, op.cit., p.95.

The hermeneutic position insists that every reading of a text contains an underlying subject matter (*sache*) to which the text refers and which guides the comprehension of the reader to an understanding that can be said to be true. (97)

Heidegger, when describing the circle of understanding, also insisted that our preunderstanding must be worked out in terms of the things themselves, as has already been pointed out.

Hence the second factor, which is a corollary of the first, is the openness of the interpreter to what the past has to say, and to the validity of his pre-understanding in that light. Self-reflection is therefore a necessary moment in understanding. In short, then, a pragmatic criterion is involved - does the point of view work? does it have a productive value in opening up the past? For no point of view can be justified by extra-historical standards.<sup>(98)</sup> While the tradition in which the interpreter stands may be the first word with regard to his interpretation, it can never be accepted unconditionally in the idea of a hermeneutic interpretation. But no amount of self-reflection can bring about an unconditioned standpoint. All interpretation is always from a point of view.

---

97. op.cit., p.146.

98. Hoy, op.cit., p.50, p.70.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### RAPPROCHEMENTS

Increasing interest in and contributions to hermeneutics have been witnessed in the past decades. What is of particular importance has been the confluence of analytic philosophy, the philosophy of science and hermeneutics. Apel points out that while analytic philosophy was hostile towards studies in the *geisteswissenschaften*, and especially hermeneutics, "the emergence of ordinary language philosophy encouraged a progressive rapprochement between the two perspectives".<sup>(1)</sup> Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* may be regarded as a seminal work in this regard. Influenced by Wittgenstein's thought, Winch's *The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy* is an important contribution to that rapprochement. But whereas Winch's thought may be regarded as ambiguous on the historicity of understanding, so that he did not fully acknowledge what Gadamer calls the fusion of horizons, his critics have done so: Taylor, for example, in his idea of a language of perspicuous contrast, and Giddens' notion of the double hermeneutic. On the continent, critical hermeneutics has taken a stand against both Winch and Gadamer, and Apel and Habermas have, amongst other things, analysed the role of the interpreter as critic in the hermeneutical task. On the other hand, the work of Popper and Kuhn in particular, has been instrumental in the changed conception of science, a conception which is a hermeneutic one. While there are differences between the natural sciences and the human studies, including history, (and bearing in mind that early hermeneutic thinkers defined their field in relation to a positivist idea of science), that relationship must be redefined.

---

1. Fred R. Dallmayr, 'Hermeneutics and Historicism: Reflections on Winch, Apel and Vico', Review of Politics, Vol. 39, no. 1, 1977, p.73.

(i) Winch

Adopting an approach which is reminiscent of thinkers such as Vico, Gatterer and Dilthey, Winch rejects the view that if the social sciences are to make progress, they must follow the methods of natural science (and Winch has in mind a positivist conception of science). Winch argues that the goal of cognition in general and of philosophy in particular, is to render reality intelligible. And "to ask whether reality is intelligible is to ask about the relation between thought and reality".<sup>(2)</sup> Winch goes on to say that "in considering the nature of thought one is led to consider the nature of language".<sup>(3)</sup> Rather than holding as analytic philosophy did that language is simply a tool of analysis, Winch says that "in discussing language philosophically we are in fact discussing *what counts as belonging to the world*. Our idea of what belongs to the realm of reality is given for us in the language that we use. The concepts we have settle for us the form of the experience we have of the world".<sup>(4)</sup> Since his argument is based on the assumption that what is fundamental to cognition is the question of the nature and intelligibility of reality, it is necessary for him to ask what "intelligibility" means, and in the tradition of hermeneutics, Winch poses the transcendental question: What is it to understand something, to grasp the meaning of something?<sup>(5)</sup> Furthermore, what does it mean to call reality intelligible?<sup>(6)</sup> In order to answer these questions Winch says that "it is necessary to show the central role which the concept of understanding plays in the activities which are characteristic of human societies", and this leads him to an analysis of "the concept of human society".<sup>(7)</sup> This is to be achieved through an

---

2. Peter Winch, The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy (1963), p.11.

3. Ibid.

4. op.cit., p.15.

5. op.cit., p.18.

6. op.cit., p.20.

7. op.cit., pp.22-3.

examination of the everyday discourse used in that society, for "with it (discourse) one is face to face with the whole question of the characteristic way in which human beings interact with each other in society".<sup>(8)</sup> Following Wittgenstein, Winch argues that meaningful discourse entails the notion of following a rule,<sup>(9)</sup> and that "it is only in a situation in which it makes sense to suppose that somebody else could in principle discover the rule which I am following that I can intelligibly be said to follow a rule at all".<sup>(10)</sup>

The idea that all human behaviour is rule-governed<sup>(11)</sup> has implications for the methodology of the social sciences in radical opposition to that of the natural sciences. For while the latter proceed according to rules, these concern the procedures of the scientists who investigate an independently-given subject matter. But in the social sciences, not only are methodological procedures characterised by rules, but the phenomena being investigated are themselves carried out in accordance with certain rules. The task of the social sciences is to make sense of actions, and this can only be done by understanding the rules to which such actions relate.<sup>(12)</sup>

Winch does not claim that social science must stop at what he calls this "unreflective kind of understanding", for as he goes on to say, "the reflective student of society...may find it necessary to use concepts which are not taken from the forms of activity which he is investigating, but which are taken from the context of his own investigation".<sup>(13)</sup> But the use of such concepts presupposes

---

8. op.cit., p.43.

9. op.cit., p.43.

10. op.cit., p.30.

11. op.cit., p.52.

12. op.cit., p.87.

13. op.cit., p.89.

a prior understanding of the activity in its own terms.<sup>(14)</sup> Yet Winch also says that "it is not open to him (the sociological investigator) arbitrarily to impose his standards from without. Insofar as he does so, the events he is studying lose altogether their character as *social* events".<sup>(15)</sup>

Giddens argues that Winch's stress that different language games must be understood in their own terms, that is in their own contexts, belies Winch's claim that his analysis describes what social scientists actually do. For "one of the things which sociologists and anthropologists already do is to try to establish generalizations about different societies that depend on similarities which are not, and perhaps cannot be, formulated in terms employed by members of those societies, because they are either directed towards making comparisons that cannot be expressed in those terms or towards explaining why they exist in the first place".<sup>(16)</sup>

Dallmayr has pointed out that even in his later essay,<sup>(17)</sup> Winch's positions is ambiguous.<sup>(18)</sup> For Winch warns against the tendency to treat life forms as isolated language games with mutually exclusive systems of rules: nevertheless he regards it as illegitimate to interpret witchcraft in the Azande tribe in terms of the canons of modern science. Thus Winch held that "Azande magic belonged to a realm of discourse distinct from the scientific analysis of external reality, a realm reserved to religion and mythology and ultimately rooted in the nature of

---

14. op.cit., p.89, p.110.

15. op.cit., p.108.

16. Anthony Giddens, New Rules of Sociological Method (1976), p.49.

17. Peter Winch, 'Understanding a Primitive Society', in Bryan R. Wilson (ed), Rationality (1974), pp.78-111.

18. Dallmayr, op.cit., pp.69-71.

practical existential experience".<sup>(19)</sup> Nor does Winch appear to sanction the comparison of modern conceptions of magic with those of primitive societies.

Winch's lack of clarity on the active role of the investigator is seen again in his discussion on history. Winch draws attention to Collingwood's concept of history, as the history of thought, as containing the important insight that "the way to understand events in human history...is more closely analogous to the way in which we understand expressions of ideas than it is to the way we understand physical processes".<sup>(20)</sup> But Winch rejects the Collingwoodian idea that the task of the historian is to rethink the thoughts of historical agents as "an intellectualistic distortion".<sup>(21)</sup> Winch goes on to say that while the historian is concerned with the recapture of historical ways of thinking (through an understanding of the way language is used in the particular society), this activity "will be coloured by the fact that he has had to employ historiographical methods to recapture them".<sup>(22)</sup> Thus for example, if the historian is attempting to understand the medieval concept of courtly love, he would not be thinking of the lady in question in the same terms as did the medieval knight. But Winch does not say, for example, what implications this has for historical objectivity.

Speaking of history in general, Winch asserts that each system of ideas, with its component elements being inter-related internally, has to be understood in and for itself. Insofar as "social relations really exist only in and through ideas which are current in society...it follows that social relations must be an...unsuitable subject for generalizations and theories of the scientific sort to be formulated about them".<sup>(23)</sup>

---

19. op.cit., p.69.

20. Winch, The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy, pp.131-2.

21. op.cit., p.131.

22. op.cit., p.132.

23. op.cit., p.133.



But Winch suggests that a historian might apply a sociological law of the kind used by Simmel (in order to try to understand the relationship between Roman and old Catholicism).<sup>(24)</sup> This may be useful in directing attention to features of historical societies which may have been overlooked, as well as perhaps suggesting useful analogies; nevertheless he cannot simply understand an event through applying these laws alone. Indeed it is only insofar as the historian has understood the situation in its own terms (in Winch's words, he "has an *independent* historical grasp of situations"),<sup>(25)</sup> that he appreciates the relevance of the law. But he could understand that particular form of life without ever having heard of that law.

But it may be asked, what criteria does the historian employ to decide the suitability of a law? What makes Simmel's "law" acceptable and not arbitrary? The idea of a hermeneutic of history, as has already been argued, holds that understanding the past on its own terms does not exhaust the fuller meaning of the past, for that meaning is also contingent on the future and on the historian's own horizon in terms of which he appropriates the past. For understanding is always also interpretation and application. In attempting to grasp the meaning of an event, a historian may use any theory provided that it succeeds in rendering an event intelligible, and this he discovers by testing the theory against the evidence he has available through the operation of the hermeneutic circle.

- 
24. op.cit., p.135. The generalization reads as follows:  
The degeneration of a difference in convictions into hatred and fight occurs only when there were essential, original similarities between the parties. The (sociologically very significant) 'respect for the enemy' is usually absent where the hostility has arisen on the basis of previous solidarity. And where enough similarities continue to make confusions and blurred outlines possible, points of difference need an emphasis not justified by the issue but only by that danger of confusion.
25. op.cit., p.136.

Finally Winch's claim that "historical explanation is not the application of generalizations and theories to particular instances: it is the tracing of internal relations",<sup>(26)</sup> clearly requires comment. Firstly, he states the hermeneutic thesis that meaning is contextual, or what Walsh has referred to as the idea of colligation.<sup>(27)</sup> But secondly, as Winch himself has acknowledged, historians apply generalizations and theories to particular instances. While it is argued in this thesis that the activity of giving causal explanations of the covering-law kind does not exhaust the historian's task, nevertheless this is a legitimate form of explanation in history, where these generalizations and theories are conceived of in the Popperean way as hypotheses or conjectures or trends.

Although therefore not agreeing fully with Winch, Giddens' comment that Winch has not much to offer history, cannot be accepted unreservedly.<sup>(28)</sup>

(ii) Giddens and Taylor

In his attempt to answer the question of whether the sciences of man are hermeneutical, Taylor lists the characteristics and shortcomings of "a social science which wishes to fulfil the requirements of the empiricist tradition".<sup>(29)</sup> That tradition, according to Taylor, "tries to reconstruct social reality as consisting of brute data alone". Such data includes firstly the behaviour of people identified by physical descriptions or by descriptions which are defined by institutions and practices; and secondly,

---

26. op.cit., p.136.

27. Walsh, op.cit., pp.59-63.

28. Giddens, op.cit., p.53.

29. Charles Taylor, 'Interpretation and the Science of Man', Review of Metaphysics, Vol. 25, 1971, p.80.

verbal response or overt non-verbal behaviour which is said to attest to the subjective reality of the beliefs, attitudes and values of individuals.<sup>(30)</sup> However, as Taylor goes on to say, what such a social science excludes is "a consideration of social reality as characterised by intersubjective and common meanings".<sup>(31)</sup> For this level of meaning is not exhausted in what Taylor calls brute data descriptions, and moreover it is crucial if we wish to understand why the actions were done.<sup>(32)</sup> A hermeneutical science of man is concerned with a study of such meaning and it has, says Taylor, "an essential place in the characterisation of human behaviour".<sup>(33)</sup>

There are philosophers who would restrict the term "meaning" to linguistic meaning. But, referring to the discussion of meaning above, Taylor points out that "it would be hard to argue that it is an illegitimate use of the term".<sup>(34)</sup> Elucidating the term as used in this experiential sense, and restating the hermeneutic thesis, Taylor writes that meaning is for a subject or group of subjects; it is of something which only has meaning in a field, that is in relation to other things. For "there is no such thing as a single, unrelated meaningful element".<sup>(35)</sup> Thus concepts contribute to and derive their sense from "the ambit of common meanings" and these are grasped by those who are participants in the practical way of life, or who imaginatively "get into" that life world. Hence understanding meaning necessarily involves moving in a hermeneutic circle and "we make sense of an action when there is a coherence between the actions of the agent and the meaning of his situation for him".<sup>(36)</sup> While Taylor (like the

---

30. Ibid.

31. Ibid.

32. op.cit., p.65.

33. op.cit., p.55.

34. op.cit., p.56.

35. Ibid.

36. op.cit., pp.58-9.

early hermeneutic philosophers) does not give a formal elucidation of such a mode of explanation, it is held that Donagan's characterisation of individual actions, discussed in a following chapter, does so.<sup>(37)</sup>

In a later paper, Taylor has enlarged on the scope of a hermeneutical science of man.<sup>(38)</sup> Introducing the concept, the language of perspicuous contrast, Taylor is in effect restating the idea of the mediation of frames of meaning, arguing that we necessarily approach the past from our point of view, but that, while we do not accept that another way of life must be understood solely on its own terms, we must understand it in comparison with our own so that we can assess both our own and the other. In short, in Gadamerian terms, understanding also necessarily involves self-understanding.

Presenting his views after a survey and analysis of leading social theorists as well as a consideration of recent developments in the philosophy of science, Giddens summarises his attempt to make some essential contributions to the clarification of the logic and method of the social sciences as follows:

...the social world, unlike the world of nature, has to be grasped as a skilled accomplishment of active human subjects; the constitution of this world as 'meaningful', 'accountable' or 'intelligible' depends upon language, regarded not simply as a system of signs or symbols but as a medium of practical activity; the social scientist of necessity draws upon the same sort of skills as those whose conduct he seeks to analyse in order to describe it; generating descriptions of social conduct depend upon the hermeneutic task of penetrating the frames of meaning which lay actors themselves draw upon in constituting and re-constituting the social world. (39)

---

37. Chapter 7.

38. Charles Taylor, 'Explanation in the Social Sciences', read at an open seminar, University of Natal, October 1980.

39. Giddens, op.cit., p.155.

Giddens is, of course, making the same kind of point as Vico, Gatterer and Dilthey, namely that method must be appropriate to the object. Giddens' hermeneutics, however, does not stop with an attempt to grasp the past in its own terms, as is the case in early hermeneutic thought. The idea of a hermeneutic of history endorses what Giddens calls the double hermeneutic involving the mediation of frames of meaning.<sup>(40)</sup> The historian must immerse himself in the form of life, he must know how to find his way about in order to grasp its meaning. This constitutes the first hermeneutic. Paraphrasing Giddens, it is further agreed that the historian, while dealing with a life world which is already constituted within frames of meaning by the participants, reinterprets or explains this fuller meaning in terms of theories, thereby completing the double hermeneutic.

Apel has also focussed on the difficulties in Winch (already discussed) with regard to the use of theories as well as cross-cultural studies, in an attempt to understand society. He writes:

Winch rejects any theory which does not take the human behaviour under study in the way it is understood by the people being observed. (41)

Apel agrees that we cannot, for example, understand the behaviour of a medieval knight without knowing the rules of his behaviour, these rules stemming from his religious conceptions. But this does not render his behaviour completely understandable. For once "one admits that there is no total congruence between a person's 'self-understanding' in terms of his institutionalized ideology and the motivations of his behaviour, then one will have to admit

---

40. op.cit., p.162.

41. Karl-Otto Apel, Analytic Philosophy of Language and the geisteswissenschaften (1967), p.55.



that the sociologist interprets a given behaviour with the help of concepts which go beyond the conscious horizon of the epoch or culture to which it belongs".<sup>(42)</sup> Hence the social scientist cannot refuse the help of statistics, psycho-analysis and the critique of ideology, because the goal of the social sciences is "to understand men better than they understand themselves".<sup>(43)</sup> In this way, says Apel, "disobjectification" is achieved, "that condition in which man is freed by knowledge to act responsibly".<sup>(44)</sup>

The specific way Apel formulates what Giddens calls the double hermeneutic reveals clearly that his thought falls under the label of "critical hermeneutics".

### (iii) Critical hermeneutics

Critical hermeneutics specifically questions an uncritical acceptance of what something meant to those involved in an action. For, as Bleicher says, the existence of propaganda, lies, censorship, oppression of thought, "provide a *prima facie* case against the unquestioning acceptance of claims to knowledge or truth".<sup>(45)</sup> Thus it calls for an investigation of those causes which operate under seemingly normal interaction.<sup>(46)</sup>

The introduction by Habermas, also a critical theorist (or critical hermeneutic thinker), of hermeneutics into the methodology of the social sciences was intended to "combat the objectivism in scientific approaches to the social world".<sup>(47)</sup> Nevertheless he recognised that scientific approaches have had some success, and

---

42. op.cit., p.56.

43. op.cit., p.57.

44. Ibid.

45. Bleicher, op.cit., p.143.

46. op.cit., p.144.

47. op.cit., p.158.

this indicates that hermeneutics as the concern with intended meaning does not exhaust understanding of social existence. But Habermas also holds that socio-political interests and forces sedimented in social institutions preclude the unrestricted self-clarification of subjectively intended meaning.<sup>(48)</sup>

Thus for Habermas the social sciences are hermeneutic insofar as their subject matter has to be understood; they are nomological or quasi-naturalistic in that the logical form of the natural sciences applies to the social sciences; and furthermore they are critical.<sup>(49)</sup> The task of critical hermeneutics is to "confront" the exposition of meaning for the subject with an identification of the underlying causes explaining why the subject thought and acted as he did, and in so doing it aims to provide an objective understanding of subjectively intended meaning.<sup>(50)</sup>

Ideology in the capitalist system, according to Habermas, in fact gives us an illusory account of social existence which is characterised by the domination over and exploitation of one class with respect to another. False consciousness hides the contradictions of a society behind scientific and emotive explanations. Hence Habermas criticises Gadamer for what the former feels is a too-ready acceptance of the authority of tradition, that body of shared assumptions of the society in question. (This debate will be discussed shortly). Habermas argues that once the origins of the tradition from which specific social practices emerged are grasped, then that tradition is opened to reasoned acceptance, to criticism or to pressure for reconstitution.<sup>(51)</sup> Psycho-analysis is held to provide the model for a theoretical framework for the

---

48. Ibid.

49. Giddens, op.cit., pp.58-9.

50. Bleicher, op.cit., p.159.

51. William E. Connolly, 'Review Essay on Habermas', History and Theory, Vol. 18, no. 3, 1979, pp.406-7.

clarification of the distortion by an individual of his self-understanding. Why has that model been chosen? Habermas writes that it is "the only tangible example of a science incorporating methodological self-reflection".<sup>(52)</sup> To put it briefly, critical theory concerns "social criticism of ideologies modelled on the paradigm of psycho-analysis".<sup>(53)</sup> In psycho-analysis the aim is to understand utterances by revealing their hidden meaning through a causal explanation of why these utterances are distorted. The dialogue between analyst and analysand is intended to liberate the latter from those unconscious forces which cause him to behave in a certain way.

Habermas' characterisation of the social sciences as hermeneutic, nomological and critical, corresponds to the kinds of cognitive interests men have in relation to their social and natural world. Hermeneutics aims to understand the meaning of 'forms of life' and its interest is in the improvement of human communication and in self-understanding. Nomological knowledge is concerned with control or technical mastery of causal relations. Critical theory is tied to an emancipatory interest in that it attempts to liberate men from forces they do not understand or control, and from the domination of others.<sup>(54)</sup>

Commentators on critical theory have argued that the use of the model of psycho-analysis is a problematic one. Firstly, Connolly has suggested that Freud himself doubted whether the subject would always be able in principle to bring all the repressed ingredients of his unconscious to consciousness, in order to understand and

---

52. Jürgen Habermas, Knowledge and Human Interests (1972), p.214.

53. Hoy, op.cit., p.117.

54. Habermas, op.cit., pp.301-307.

control those elements. Habermas has not given any necessary set of limits with respect to the ability of the subject to make his unconscious transparent to himself.<sup>(55)</sup>

Secondly, the relationship between analyst and analysand is what Giddens calls "a markedly skewed and even authoritarian one" in Freud.<sup>(56)</sup> Gadamer says that whereas in psycho-analysis the patient is to be cured of his deviation and therefore submits to the analyst's authority, in social interaction, deviation from a norm is not necessarily a sickness because the norm itself may be what is in question.<sup>(57)</sup> And as Connolly points out, the aim of the therapist on the whole is "to reconcile patients to the established system".<sup>(58)</sup>

Habermas has tried to clarify the sense in which the psycho-analytic model, as well as Marx's critique of ideology, can be used. He writes:

Theories of the type of psycho-analysis and Marx's critique of ideology can be used to initiate processes of reflection and to dissolve barriers to communication. (59)

Furthermore,

They can also be used in order to deduce explanatory hypotheses without having (or taking) the opportunity to initiate communication with the people concerned and having one's interpretation confirmed by their process of reflection. (60)

- 
- 55. Connolly, op.cit., p.401
  - 56. Giddens, op.cit., p.69.
  - 57. Hoy, op.cit., p.126.
  - 58. Connolly, op.cit., p.401.
  - 59. quoted by Bleicher, op.cit., p.161.
  - 60. Ibid.

As was mentioned earlier, Habermas' philosophy stands as a critique of Gadamer's conception of tradition and the role it plays in understanding. Critical hermeneutics argues that Gadamerian hermeneutics produces an attitude which is "more receptive than critical", as Bübner puts it. Bübner goes on to characterise this attitude as making tradition into a cult, and that "a complete lack of critical evaluation and prospects for change" must be the consequence.<sup>(61)</sup> To overcome this uncritical attitude to tradition, hermeneutic reflection must be combined with critical reflection. For while the former means becoming aware of "dominant prejudices", the latter's task is to look critically at them, to test their validity.<sup>(62)</sup>

However, it is held that these criticisms tend to misrepresent Gadamer's conception of tradition. Giddens argues that if conformity to tradition is the standard Gadamer uses for judging interpretations, how then can Gadamer account for a comparison of readings from different traditions, or for different versions within the same tradition?<sup>(63)</sup> But Gadamer says unequivocally:

Changing the established forms is no less a kind of connection with tradition than defending the established forms. *Tradition exists only in constant alteration.* (64)

Any interpretation must always be critical of the way it relates to a tradition, to traditional presuppositions as they work themselves out in the process of interpretation. Thus, in replying to Habermas on the point that hermeneutical reflection should and could be developed into critical reflection, Gadamer has said that this sort of critical reflection is *implied* in hermeneutical reflection,

---

61. Rudiger Bübner, 'Theory and Practice in the Light of the Hermeneutic - Criticist Controversy', Cultural Hermeneutics, Vol. 2, 1975, pp.388-9. (See also Giddens who writes that Gadamerian hermeneutics produces a "paralysis of the critical impulse", p.65).

62. op.cit., p.339.

63. op.cit., p.63.

64. quoted by Hoy, op.cit., p.127. (my italics).



and "that it was a misunderstanding of hermeneutics which made it appear traditionally biased and in need of critical standards".<sup>(65)</sup> Thus Gadamer states simply that "no real incompatibility between our respective positions is present insofar as methodology is concerned".<sup>(66)</sup> But Gadamer's interpretative self-awareness and Habermas' emancipatory reflection cannot easily be equated. For Gadamer, hermeneutics is transcendental inquiry - it does not supply specific socio-historical norms, values and ideas as necessary. As Hoy says, expressing this Gadamerian point, "hermeneutics should not...legislate a priori the range of assumptions that actually work, or the kinds of context into which a text can be introduced, but must investigate each development as it comes along".<sup>(67)</sup> Thus Gadamer writes:

Inasmuch as it (the critique of ideology) seeks to penetrate the masked interests that infect public opinion, it implies its own freedom from any ideology; and that means in turn that it enthrones its own norms and ideals as self-evident and absolute. <sup>(68)</sup>

Part of the concern of hermeneutics is with the need for greater methodological self-awareness of the interpreter's starting point, demanding too a clarification of his assumptions regarding the scope of his enquiry, and that he remain consistent within that mandate. Acceptance of a Marxist point of view, is simply that of a point of view; there are no ontological criteria for adopting that particular one. Rather the justification is pragmatic - does it throw light on the past, rendering it intelligible? The idea of a hermeneutic of history does not locate itself within a single ideological viewpoint.

---

65. Bübner, op.cit., p.340.

66. Hans-Georg Gadamer, 'Response to "Theory and Practice"', Cultural Hermeneutics, Vol. 2, 1975, p.357.

67. Hoy, op.cit., p.130.

68. Hans-Georg Gadamer, 'Hermeneutics and Social Science', Cultural Hermeneutics, Vol. 2, 1975, p.315.

On the question of hermeneutic self-awareness, Habermas' point is that "hermeneutic consciousness remains incomplete as long as it does not include a reflection upon the limits of hermeneutic understanding".<sup>(69)</sup> It follows therefore that "tradition as an on-going process, can never be completely objectified while at the same time providing the basis for all methodological activity",<sup>(70)</sup> as Bleicher comments. Habermas is specifically concerned with the case of "systematically distorted communication" in which speakers cannot recognise that there is a breakdown in their communication.<sup>(71)</sup> Thus hermeneutics must be enlarged by a critique of ideology in terms of which meaning can be explained and distortions uncovered. But critical hermeneutics is faced with a fundamental problem, for if it points to systematically distorted communication, to what standard does it appeal in order to uncover those distortions? A suggested solution put forward by critical hermeneutics is the introduction of the concept of "an idealized dialogue", to use Habermas' phrase.<sup>(72)</sup> He argues that truth can "only be guaranteed by *that* kind of consensus which was achieved under the idealized conditions of unlimited communication free from domination and could be maintained over time".<sup>(73)</sup> Thus the possibility of understanding without deception depends ultimately also on political considerations; as Habermas writes, "the enlightenment which results from radical understanding is always political".<sup>(74)</sup> And, as such, it is a goal, "the form of life to be realized in the future".<sup>(75)</sup> Nevertheless:

- 
- 69. Jürgen Habermas, "The Hermeneutic Claim to Universality" in Bleicher, op.cit., p.190.
  - 70. Bleicher, op.cit., p.155.
  - 71. Habermas, "The Hermeneutic Claim to Universality", p.191.
  - 72. Habermas, op.cit., p.206.
  - 73. op.cit., p.205.
  - 74. op.cit., p.209.
  - 75. op.cit., p.206.

It is, however, only when we can show that the anticipation of possible truth and a true life is constitutive for every linguistic communication which is not monological that we are in a position not merely to demand but to justify that regulative principle of understanding. (76)

Elaborating on the activity of idealized dialogue conducted by sincere members whose participation embodies "the principle of rational discourse"<sup>(77)</sup> within a free society, Habermas writes:

...participants, themes and contributions are not restricted except with reference to the goal of testing the validity of claims in question, that no force except that of the better argument is exercised; and that, as a result, all motives except that of the cooperative search for truth are excluded. (78)

Within such a community, each individual has the opportunity in principle to participate in discussions. Agreements, therefore, may be taken to express a common interest which has been attained without deception in a society free of political constraints. Thus Habermas' concept of an idealized dialogue attempts to circumscribe conditions necessary for the emergence of a true consensus, for truth, he argues, can only be arrived at within such conditions.

The idea of a rational community acting as a regulative principle is also held by Apel, whom Habermas quotes with approval.<sup>(79)</sup> Like Habermas, Apel has postulated the concept of an "ideal language game" which is "presupposed in every actual discourse and social life-form".<sup>(80)</sup> In other words, Apel holds that a true statement

---

76. Ibid.

77. op.cit., p.205.

78. Habermas, Legitimation Crisis (1976), pp.107-8.

79. Habermas, "The Hermeneutic Claim to Universality", p.205.

80. Dallmayr, op.cit., p.76. This point was made in the previous discussion on meaning (p.78).

is one which approximates to the consensus of an ideal community of investigators.<sup>(81)</sup> Quoting Pierce, with whom he is in agreement, Apel writes that Pierce "grounds the possible objectivity of natural sciences in the historical process of understanding by the community of scientists". Apel goes on to say that "he also starts from the principle that it is precisely this process of understanding, if it is not interrupted, that will produce *in the long run* the *consensus omnium* that the 'transcendental consciousness in general' semiotically entails and that guarantees objectivity".<sup>(82)</sup>

The significance of the concept of an idealized dialogue for the idea of a hermeneutic of history is discussed in a later chapter.<sup>(83)</sup>

(iv) Science's hermeneutic turn

Referring to "the hermeneutic turn of the late Popper",<sup>(84)</sup> a turn which may be regarded as a further rapprochement, Bübner makes the point that there is a "certain irony in the fact that it is Popper himself who pleads for a combination of hermeneutical and critical attitudes, because both parties - the hermeneuticians and the critical theorists - used to consider Popper as the most stubborn positivist".<sup>(85)</sup> Gadamer has admitted that there has occurred "the development of the hermeneutical side of science".<sup>(86)</sup> He writes that he was pleased when Kuhn published *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* because it supported his (Gadamer's) views.

---

81. Hoy, op.cit., p.108.

82. op.cit., pp.108-9.

83. Chapter 6.

84. Bübner, op.cit., ("late" is used here in the sense of Popper's later works).

85. op.cit., p.339.

86. Gadamer, 'Discussion' p.336.

The framework of theoretical assumptions which guide scientific investigation has a communicative side which in the final analysis is connected with language. That argument supports the universality of the hermeneutical approach. (87)

But science's hermeneutic turn does not consist solely of this. It refers also to the recognition that there are no theory-free observations or data, that is that there is no absolute starting point for any investigation - investigations are always within a context, or in terms of what Kuhn has called a particular paradigm. Certainly in his early work Gadamer has posed his hermeneutics as antithetical to natural science, and it is arguable that this was because he conceived of science in positivist terms. He writes of the book *Truth and Method* that "it is concerned to seek that experience of truth that transcends the sphere of the control of scientific method wherever it is to be found, and to inquire into its legitimacy".<sup>(88)</sup> In the foreword to the second edition of that work, Gadamer does not deny that the methods of the natural sciences have application in the social world, but says he is concerned with different objectives.<sup>(89)</sup> But he does not say that science is hermeneutic and that therefore the consequences of this recognition must be explored in relation to the *geisteswissenschaften*. And perhaps this is surprising in view of his own (and Heidegger's) analysis of understanding which showed that *all* understanding is hermeneutic.

Popper's philosophy of science made a radical break with the positivist conception. Summing up the positivist conception of the methodology of science, Fletcher writes that the scientist begins with observations in order to obtain a number of facts. Then he formulate hypotheses to try to interpret these facts, and thereafter proceeds to test these hypotheses by carefully controlled experiments which are also ways of obtaining more facts. The scientist

---

87. *Ibid.*

88. Gadamer, *TM*, p.xiii.

89. *op.cit.*, p.xvii.



publishes his results. More facts accumulate through cooperative efforts of scientists and eventually an order is discerned within the facts, and the formulation of general theory begins. At this stage induction plays the major role. Upon the formulation of such a theory attempts are made to confirm or verify it and this involves further experiments to test predictions made by the theory. If predictions are confirmed then a new natural law is said to have been discovered. <sup>(90)</sup>

Popper has rejected this conception. The idea that scientists simply observe he regarded as incoherent. He illustrates this with the story of his lecture to a group of physics students in Vienna. He told them to observe carefully and to write down what they had observed. The students asked him what he wanted them to observe. It was therefore clear that the instruction to observe was absurd, and this led Popper to suggest that that instruction was in accordance with what he called the "bucket theory of the mind". <sup>(91)</sup>

In short, the mind is compared to a bucket into which facts are "poured". Popper replaced that image with what he called the "searchlight theory of science" <sup>(92)</sup> in accordance with his argument that "all scientific description of facts are highly selective...they always depend on theories". <sup>(93)</sup> He writes:

If we wish to study a thing we are bound to select certain aspects of it. It is not possible for us to observe or to describe a whole piece of the whole, or a whole piece of nature; in fact, not even the smallest whole piece may be so described. <sup>(94)</sup>

- 
90. D.J.C. Fletcher, 'Karl Popper's Scientific and Social Philosophy', Unpublished paper, p.11.  
 91. Popper, The Open Society and Its Enemies, (henceforth OS) Vol. 2, p.260.  
 92. Ibid.  
 93. Ibid.  
 94. Popper, The Poverty of Historicism, (henceforth POH), p.77.

As an illustration of this, Popper cites Gomperz's example of a sparrow nervously fluttering about. It may be described by different propositions, for example, This bird is flying; Look here is an animal; Energy is being transformed here; The poor thing is frightened; each proposition corresponding to a different aspect of it.<sup>(95)</sup> As Popper points out, it can never be the task of science to try to complete a list which is "necessarily infinite".<sup>(96)</sup>

Popper's own idea of a searchlight suggests that the scientist always operates from a certain point of view, or in terms of certain interests which, as Popper points out, are connected with a theory which the scientist wishes to test:

What the searchlight makes visible will depend on its position, upon our way of directing it, and upon its intensity, colour etc.; although it will, of course, also depend very largely upon the things illuminated by it. (97)

The theory or hypothesis which we wish to test is "the crystallisation of a point of view"; it is "a provisional assumption whose function is to help us to select, and to order the facts".<sup>(98)</sup>

In short, Popper showed that the search for ultimate certain scientific theories must be abandoned.

As to the method of testing a theory or hypothesis, Popper put forward the idea of falsifiability as his response to his critique of induction. For, as he argued, the idea of the verification of laws cannot be achieved, because there is always the possibility

---

95. Ibid.

96. Ibid.

97. Popper, OS, p.260.

98. Ibid.

that an observation will be inconsistent with a law. Thus the scientist looks for facts to refute the theory, which can never *refute it* therefore be final - every theory remains a working hypothesis unless it has been shown to be false.<sup>(99)</sup> The best status an hypothesis can have is that it has not yet been refuted. Science therefore proceeds by the elimination of error rather than by the discovery of truth.

The idea of falsifiability provides Popper with a criterion of demarcation separating science from other forms of inquiry. For the criterion of the scientific status of a theory lies in its falsifiability. The idea also has important ethical implications because it asserts that scientists must always have a sceptical attitude towards scientific theories, and as such, it may be regarded as an antidote to dogmatism.

It is, moreover, an integral part of Popper's characterisation of the public nature of science. It implies the idea of rational discussion among scientists for, instead of treating scientific discovery as involving only the individual scientist confronting his subject matter, Popper sees science as "a collective enterprise, an institutionalization of critical reason", to quote Giddens.<sup>(100)</sup> Critical discussions are important for they provide the forums for adjudicating amongst rival hypotheses or conjectures. Popper suggests criteria to which competing hypotheses might be rejected. A theory is preferable if it is the best-tested, or if it is the most testable. He admits that "there is no 'absolute reliance'; but since we *have* to choose, it will be 'rational' to choose the best-tested theory. This will be 'rational' in the most obvious sense of the word known to me: the best-tested theory is one which, in the light of our *critical discussion* appears to be the best so far, and I do not know of anything more 'rational' than a well-conducted critical discussion".<sup>(101)</sup>

---

99. Popper, OS, p.260.

100. Giddens, op.cit., p.136.

101. quoted by Fletcher, op.cit., p.9.

From this it follows that scientific objectivity is "a matter of scientific method"; it depends on the "social aspect of scientific method".<sup>(102)</sup>

Like Gadamer, Popper acknowledged the need for scientists to be self-reflective about their presuppositions. As he pointed out, the history of science "shows that scientific theories are often overthrown by experiments, and that the overthrow of theories is indeed the vehicle of scientific progress".<sup>(103)</sup> He quotes Einstein who, in the face of a problem in physics, found that if the theory of the time was altered "in a point which had so far been held by everybody to be self-evident and which had therefore escaped notice, then the difficulty could be removed".<sup>(104)</sup> But what *are* prejudices can only be known when they are discovered to be so and have been dealt with (Gadamer would concur). Popper makes the important point that while scientists ought to reflect critically on their presuppositions, for any assumption can in principle be criticised, self-reflection *alone* without the public character of science cannot be an effective way of ridding oneself of prejudices - for how would the scientist know he is free?<sup>(105)</sup> Thus Popper argues that if scientific objectivity is defined in terms of the impartiality of the individual scientist, "then we should have to say goodbye to it".<sup>(106)</sup> Rather it results from "the friendly - hostile co-operation of many scientists...(it) can be described as the inter-subjectivity of scientific method".<sup>(107)</sup>

---

102. Popper, OS, p.217.

103. op.cit., p.260.

104. op.cit., pp.220-1.

105. op.cit., p.223.

106. op.cit., p.217.

107. Ibid. Presumably Popper assumed that within such an atmosphere, the personal ambitions and vested interests of scientists will (in the long run) be eliminated. Kuhn's recognition of the resistance to new paradigms picks up this point.



Objectivity, insofar as it depends on the social aspect of scientific method, also presupposes a political factor, namely the toleration by the state of free discussion.<sup>(108)</sup> Thus to sum up:

...what we call 'scientific objectivity' is not a product of the individual scientist's impartiality, but a product of the social or public character of scientific method, and the individual scientist's impartiality, insofar as it exists, is not the source but rather the result of this socially or institutionally organised objectivity of science. (109)

As Giddens has suggested, Popper's thought prepared the way for Kuhn's philosophy of science as expressed in *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*.<sup>(110)</sup> In this work Kuhn introduced the notion of scientific paradigms, those shared beliefs and rules held by members of a scientific community, beliefs and rules which have both a cognitive and normative function insofar as they inform scientists what the world is like and how to go about solving problems within this world view. In short, a paradigm refers to the taken-for-granted unexamined assumptions which form the framework for conducting science, assumptions shared by a particular scientific community:

Men whose research is based on shared paradigms are committed to the same rules and standards for scientific practice. That commitment and the apparent consensus it produces are pre-requisites for normal science i.e. for the genesis and continuation of a particular research tradition. (111)

- 
108. Popper, "The Logic of the Social Sciences" in G. Adey and D. Frisby (eds), The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology, pp.95-6.  
 109. Popper, OS, p.220.  
 110. Giddens, op.cit., p.136.  
 111. T. S. Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (1970), p.11. The term "paradigm" is used in this sense in this thesis. For a discussion on the multiple uses of the term by Kuhn see Margaret Masterman's paper, "The Nature of a Paradigm", in Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave (eds), Criticism and Growth of Knowledge (1970).



Kuhn's idea of a paradigm (like Popper's insistence that all scientific knowledge is always from a point of view) may, as Giddens has suggested, be seen as reformulation of the hermeneutic thesis, that is the meaning of terms and expressions must be grasped within specific meaning contexts.<sup>(112)</sup>

Kuhn himself has drawn attention to those aspects of his thought which he regards as being "very nearly identical" with that of Popper's. Firstly, he writes that they are both concerned with the dynamic process by which scientific knowledge is acquired, rather than with the logical structure of the product of scientific research. Furthermore, as has been pointed out, both reject the idea that scientific progress is achieved by accretion, emphasising instead the revolutionary process by which older theories are replaced by new ones. And finally both stress the "intimate and inevitable entanglement of scientific observation with scientific theory".<sup>(113)</sup> However, Kuhn holds that the main difference in their thought lies in his clear distinction between what he calls "normal" and "exceptional" science, a distinction not clearly evident in Popper's philosophy of science.<sup>(114)</sup>

Normal science is the research which is conducted within a particular framework or paradigm. It is concerned with the solving of puzzles which challenge the ingenuity of the individual scientist. Outlining the kind of research taken Kuhn writes that one objective is "to extend the range and precision of existing experiment and theory as well as to improve the match between them".<sup>(115)</sup> A further objective is "to eliminate conflicts both between the different theories employed in their work and between ways in which a single theory is used in different applications".<sup>(116)</sup>

---

112. Giddens, *op.cit.*, p.142.

113. Kuhn, "Logic of Discovery or Psychology of Research?" in Lakatos and Musgrave (eds), *op.cit.*, pp.1-2.

114. *Ibid.*

115. Kuhn, "Reflections on my Critics" in Lakatos and Musgrave (eds), *op.cit.*, p.246.

116. *Ibid.*

Insofar then as certain theories are taken for granted, normal scientific research is free to "exploit" those theories, free to "explore nature to an esoteric depth and detail otherwise unimaginable".<sup>(117)</sup> The practice of normal science by the relevant community of professional scientists is bound by the acceptance of the value system of their discipline, a system imbued through training.<sup>(118)</sup> Thus, scientific knowledge is "intrinsically a product of congeries of specialists' communities", that is men who are "bound together by common elements in their education and apprenticeship, aware of each other's work, and characterised by the relative fulness of their professional communication and the relative unanimity of their professional judgment".<sup>(119)</sup> (Kuhn does not, however, add the qualification that a free society is a precondition for the possibility of full communication).

Failure to solve a problem within normal science is, according to Kuhn, normally interpreted as a reflection of the shortcomings of the individual scientist rather than as a criticism of the whole corpus of theory uniting a particular scientific community.<sup>(120)</sup> However where, for example, there is what Kuhn calls "gross failure" or "repeated failure by the most brilliant professionals", a crisis situation occurs which produces the necessary conditions for the possibility of a scientific revolution.<sup>(121)</sup> Thus when "the profession can no longer evade anomalies that subvert the existing tradition of scientific practice", they "begin the extraordinary investigations that lead the profession at last to a new set of commitments, a new basis for the practice of science".<sup>(122)</sup>

---

117. op.cit., p.247.

118. op.cit., p.238.

119. op.cit., p.253.

120. Kuhn, "Logic of Discovery or Psychology of Research", p.7.

121. Ibid. See also Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, Chapter 8.

122. Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, p.6.

In short, there is a change to a new paradigm, this change constituting a scientific revolution. It "implies a change in the rules governing the prior practice of normal science", and insofar as scientists in the new paradigm have reconstructed prior theory and have re-evaluated prior fact, the new paradigm is "never just an increment to what is already known".<sup>(123)</sup> Therefore, the conception of a paradigm may be taken to express the idea that science is historical; that there is no absolute starting point for scientific investigations, and that scientific laws are valid within certain contexts.

Kuhn has pointed out that it is difficult to specify the criteria which ensure commitment to a paradigm change. As a concomitant to the idea of resistance to paradigm changes by those with vested interests in the older paradigm, Kuhn observes that the logic of an argument does not make it compelling.<sup>(124)</sup> Persuasion may therefore be required, but this must be on the basis of epistemological criteria such as the accuracy, scope, simplicity and fruitfulness of the new theory.<sup>(125)</sup> In the end, though, the explanation for the choice of paradigm will be "psychological or sociological", describing a particular value system as well as those institutions through which those values are transmitted and enforced.<sup>(126)</sup>

Kuhn holds that Popper's descriptions of the workings of science are concerned with the practice of exceptional science alone, that is with the critical testing of basic commitments and the need to choose between competing theories.<sup>(127)</sup> The heart of their dispute

---

123. op.cit., p.7.

124. Kuhn, "Reflections on my Critics", p.261.

125. Ibid.

126. Kuhn, "Logic of Discovery or Psychology of Research", pp.20-1.

127. op.cit., p.11.

therefore turns on the following: Popper argues that the "scientist should try at all times to be a critic and a proliferator of alternate theories". Kuhn argues "the desirability of an alternate strategy which reserves such behaviour for special occasions", that is a crisis situation.<sup>(128)</sup>

Popper has criticized the concept of "a normal scientist" as someone for whom one ought to be sorry, for such a scientist has been "badly taught", in "a dogmatic spirit", and is thus "a victim of indoctrination".<sup>(129)</sup> Science, as Popper conceives of it, is "essentially critical", and insofar as it consists of "bold conjectures" and is "controlled by criticism", it may be described as immanently revolutionary.<sup>(130)</sup> Popper is not denying the existence of normal science, but holds that it inhibits scientific progress. Kuhn, on the other hand, holds that success in problem-solving depends on the suspension of fundamental criticisms, a stance implied in the idea of a paradigm.

It is not directly within the scope of this thesis to attempt to adjudicate on this debate with respect to science. However, having argued that science has taken "a hermeneutic turn", it is necessary to reassess the differences between the *naturwissenschaften* and the *geisteswissenschaften*. Furthermore the contributions of Popper and Kuhn to the development of the idea of a hermeneutic of history must be elucidated.

---

128. Kuhn, "Reflections on my Critics", p.243.

129. Popper, "Normal Science and its Dangers" in Lakatos and Musgrave (eds), op.cit., p.53.

130. op.cit., p.55.

(v) Reassessing the relationship between the naturwissenschaften and the geisteswissenschaften

It will be remembered that Dilthey made a clear distinction between the *naturwissenschaften* and the *geisteswissenschaften* with regard to their respective objects of study and to the mode of investigation in each case. History, as one of the latter types of science, has as its task the attempt to understand particular, unique and non-repeatable events, and not the formulation of general laws, as is the case within the natural sciences. Historians deal with a world which has already been interpreted as meaningful, and these meanings, which enter into the constitution or production of that world, must be part of any attempt to understand it. That attempt may involve the use of general statements, a point recognised by Dilthey. However, the hermeneutic mandate, as conceived by Dilthey, has been extended. It has been argued that the task of making that event intelligible, does not end with that reconstitution, for the meaning of an event is held to transcend its originary genesis. A historian may explain an event using theories which may have been unknown or unfamiliar to the original protagonists, but which are justified insofar as they succeed in making sense of the event in accordance with the idea of a fuller historical meaning embodied in the concept of the mediation of frames of meaning. As Giddens has observed, the theoretical generalizations used within a discipline like history, express causal relationships which refer to the outcomes of human doings, and not to the mechanical connections established in nature.<sup>(131)</sup> The question, however, arises whether there is a radical difference in the logical structure of explanations employing theoretical generalizations in both the natural sciences and in history respectively.

It has been pointed out that according to Popper, falsifiability is the criterion of demarcation between science and non-science.

---

131. Giddens, *op.cit.*, pp.153-4. (Historians may, of course, also employ these latter kinds of generalization where relevant).



So it is, I hold, the possibility of overthrowing it, on its falsifiability, that constitutes the possibility of testing it, and therefore the scientific character of a theory, and the fact that all tests of a theory are attempted falsifications of predictions derived with its help, furnishes the clue to scientific method. (132)

Thus the scientific method is to look out for facts which may refute the theory. As for scientific laws, they "retain forever a hypothetical character; they are assumptions...we can never rationally establish the truth of scientific laws, all we can do is to test them severely, and to eliminate the false ones". (133)

In history, various kinds of general statements may be used in the hypothetico-deductive model of explanation. These include assumptions from common experience; others may be ad hoc theories postulated to try to account for a specific event; others may have been "imported" from the social sciences. But in each case, like scientific laws, these generalizations retain their character of being assumptions, which the self-reflective historian attempts to refute against the available evidence, that operation occurring within the hermeneutic circle. Thus, in agreement with Nagel, it is held that there is no radical difference in the logical structure of the hypothetico-deductive model used in each case. (134)

There are, however, differences with regard to the evidence used by the historian and scientist respectively. The evidence available to the historian is often fragmentary and incomplete, and, moreover, relates to a non-repeatable past. Furthermore primary (and indeed secondary sources) are themselves interpretations from a point

---

132. Popper, OS, p.260.

133. op.cit., p.363.

134. Ernest Nagel, "The Logic of Historical Analysis", in Meyerhoff, op.cit., p.206.

of view.<sup>(135)</sup> However, the contributions of the early hermeneutic tradition which attempted to devise rules for the interpretation of texts, that is for the placement of texts within various contexts, constitute the means of assessing reliability (provided that those texts have been proved authentic through various scientific tests).

Drawing an analogy with Popper's characterisation of science as being in a state of immanent revolution, history is held to be essentially self-critical. Translated into hermeneutic terms, this means that the presuppositions the historian holds with respect to a particular event are constantly at stake within the hermeneutic circle. The content of these presuppositions, which is derived from the historian's immersion in the historical tradition surrounding the event and from relevant social sciences, depends on the historian's point of view constituted partly by the presuppositions as to the nature of the discipline. Thus these latter presuppositions are also ultimately at stake in the process of coming to understand the past. This inherently critical attitude is clearly expressed by Gadamer:

...what is reasonable is to know the limits of one's understanding and just through this fact to be capable of better understanding wherever it may come from. Indeed, that is such a universal requirement that it counts likewise for the reason of science, insofar as each investigator is constantly aware of his own surpassability. But it is just this way that science maintains itself...Reason always consists in not blindly insisting upon what is held to be true but in critically occupying oneself with it. Its activity

- 
135. It is true that the meaning of a text or text-analogue is not self-evident, and that historical facts are established by historians in accordance with the particular point of view they adopt. However, an analogous situation occurs in science, as Popper has pointed out. The meaning of an object falling to earth is interpreted differently depending on whether one operates within a medieval paradigm or its successor. In the first case, the object's fall is explained in terms of the attraction of like for like, (hence air rises), while in the second, the force of gravity provides the explanatory principle.

remains rational explanation, but not the dogmatic certainty of a new rationality absolutely laid down, which knows everything better - reason is conceived as engaged in a continuous process of self-enlightenment concerning itself and its own conditions. (136)

Drawing on Popper's and Kuhn's analyses of objectivity, it is argued in this thesis that if one wants to know what counts as an objective historical account, one must examine the intellectual values held by professional historians, thereby discovering what is tolerated and what disdained.

The differences between the natural and social sciences, including history, ought not to be over-emphasised. The altered conception of science has undercut the dichotomy postulated between the *naturwissenschaften* and the *geisteswissenschaften*, a dichotomy which gave impetus to the development of hermeneutics as an attempt to understand the meaning of objectifications of *geist*. To put the point epigrammatically: while science has taken a hermeneutic turn, hermeneutics, in turn, is scientific.

---

136. Gadamer, 'The Power of Reason', Man and World, 1970, pp.14-15.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE HERMENEUTIC CIRCLE OF UNDERSTANDING

The two central and inter-related tasks which constitute the idea of a hermeneutic of history are firstly, to elucidate the process whereby the historian grasps the fuller historical meaning of historical texts or actions within the hermeneutic circle of understanding, and secondly, an analysis of the criteria in terms of which both the relevance and objectivity of historical accounts are judged.

As has been suggested, the first task demands an examination of the presuppositions an historian holds with respect to the particular event he is investigating.<sup>(1)</sup> Apart from his stock of common sense knowledge, the historian is also armed with presuppositions acquired from his reading of various secondary sources. These are tested in the movement towards understanding by the self-reflecting historian. These presuppositions reflect a commitment to a particular point of view from which the past is approached. No such point of view can, however, be held uncritically; the idea of hermeneutic anarchy is thus rejected. A point of view must be justified pragmatically - do the questions it generates succeed in opening the past to the historian's understanding? These issues form the subject of this chapter. The second issue is discussed in the following chapter.

- 
1. Historical explanation, which is also part of the first task, may be treated as a self-contained topic, and is dealt with in Chapter Seven.



(i) Points of view(a) Kinds of history

Hollinger has observed that historians "grant professional status to work controlled by a number of different ideologies and commitments".<sup>(2)</sup> Thus there are many "kinds" of history, for example, political history, economic history, social history, intellectual history, local history and so on. Much has been written on the merits of one particular history over others. For example, Perkin in advancing the claims of social history, writes that social history is "the queen of the historical studies".<sup>(3)</sup> Bindoff, on the other hand, writes that "how men acquired, kept, or lost power in the past, what they attempted with it once gained, and above all how they met the problems inseparable from its possession, these matters are the core of political history. It is the only form of history in which we can at once diagnose a problem, observe its attempted solution, and weigh reasons for success or failure. Man, said Aristotle, is by nature a political animal. By the same token man's history is, in the last analysis, political".<sup>(4)</sup>

History in the nineteenth century was primarily written as political history. Expressing this succinctly, Seeley called history "past politics". Historians devoted their attention towards an attempt to understand the origins and nature of particular forms of government. In this century there has been a reaction against this kind of history which has been criticised as limited and narrow, and hence we have seen the proliferation of other histories. But Elton, for example, still characterises history as political, writing that it is concerned with "...the condition,

- 
2. David A. Hollinger, "T.S. Kuhn's Theory of Science and its Implications for History", American Historical Review, Vol. 78, 1973, p.382.
  3. H.J. Perkin, 'Social History' in H.P.R. Finberg (ed), Approaches to History (1962), pp.81-2.
  4. S.T. Bindoff, 'Political History' in Finberg, op.cit., p.15.



reconstruction, and gradual moulding of a state - the history of a nation and its leaders in political action, and therefore the history of government in its widest sense".<sup>(5)</sup> Obviously, therefore, a political historian dealing with power struggles in seventeenth century Germany, for example, would not deal with the witch-craze there unless that phenomenon had a bearing on the theme. (The development of social history in this century helps to account for the growing scholarship in the field of the European witch-craze).

Social history has been characterised in a negative way by Trevelyan as "the history of a people with the politics left out".<sup>(6)</sup> Other writers have restricted social history to domestic and communal institutions, to popular attitudes, customs and past-times.<sup>(7)</sup> Social historians would ask questions dealing with domestic service, the role of women in a society, with attitudes to sex and so on.

"Economic history", according to Court, "is the study of a particular class of historical events. These are the events which arise out of economic choice, where men find themselves faced, as they daily do, with the need to make their resources go round among the ends which they set themselves".<sup>(8)</sup> North describes the economic historian's concern as dealing with "the overall growth of the economy and the determinants of that growth (or stagnation or decline) and the distribution of income within that economy in the course of its growth or decline".<sup>(9)</sup> An interesting development in economic history has been the use of counterfactuals in terms of which historians start with the premise that "we can understand the significance of what did happen only if we contrast it with

---

5. op.cit., p.2.

6. Perkin, op.cit., p.51.

7. J. Jean Hecht, 'Social History', International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences (1968), Vol. 6, p.455.

8. W.H.B. Court, 'Economic History', in Finberg, op.cit., pp.44-5.

9. Douglass C. North, 'Economic History', International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences (1968), Vol. 6, p.468.

what might have happened, and going on to quantify 'what might have happened'" (10) Thus an economic historian might pose the question whether in the absence of certain governmental policies the income of the state would have been higher.

According to Brinton, intellectual history in its widest sense, "may be said to have as its subject matter whatever record is left by the activities of the human mind".<sup>(11)</sup> It concentrates on past concepts and beliefs. The intellectual historian might question the origin of ideas and the role that they play in a society or in our era.<sup>(12)</sup> Within this broad field, the important role science plays in our society has stimulated a growing interest in the history of science. The subject matter of this discipline includes "the study of the actual contents of the scientific record as revealed in publications, records of conversations, correspondence, laboratory or reading notebooks, journals, lecture notes...annotated books, any manuscript materials...and finally - where available - the actual artefacts of scientific work...".<sup>(13)</sup> One possible kind of question a historian can ask is how the science of a society has influenced daily life and the environment.<sup>(14)</sup>

It is clear that no rigid lines can be drawn between various histories. For example, as Bindoff points out, an economic historian investigating foreign trade must "master the nature and purpose of those records (relating to foreign trade) which the state did produce, before trying to write economic history from them.

- 
10. Arthur Marwick, The Nature of History (1970), quoting E.H. Hunt, p.118.
  11. Crane Brinton, 'Intellectual History', International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences (1968), Vol.6, p.462.
  12. Paul K. Conkin, 'Intellectual History', in Charles F. Delzell, The Future of History (1977).
  13. Bernard Cohen, 'The History of Science', in Delzell, op.cit., p.69.
  14. op.cit., p.75.

For such indispensable knowledge he must turn to political, constitutional, and administrative history".<sup>(15)</sup> Röss writes that "there is now a virtual consensus of opinion on the scope of economic history. It includes a study of the state of agriculture, industry, commerce and transport, together with an elucidation of the more technical problem of currency, credit, and taxation. These subjects necessarily also involve an examination and description of social conditions. In fact the line between the economic and the social cannot be strictly drawn".<sup>(16)</sup> (We could add that political and intellectual conditions must also similarly be taken into account). However, there is room for specialization because historians have different interests, they ask different kinds of questions, and in some cases as, for example, economic history, also use specific techniques such as algebraic equations.<sup>(17)</sup> Historians must, however, be aware of their bias with respect to their characterisation of the scope of their discipline, for theirs is simply a point of view, one way of directing a searchlight on the past.

As an alternative to the proliferation of histories, Bloch and Febvre turned away from the traditional preoccupation with administrative institutions towards a broader history. The so-called *Annales* school of history had as its ideal the idea of a "total" history, holding that socio-cultural contexts should be studied as totalities, including physical, ideational and normative milieus. "Total" history would both dominate and embrace all other studies of the human condition.<sup>(18)</sup> As Ladurie, who

---

15. Bindoff, *op.cit.*, p.14.

16. Perkin, *op.cit.*, p.51.

17. Robert William Fogel, 'The Limits of Quantitative Methods in History', *American Historical Review*, Vol. 80, 1975, pp.338-341.

18. Michael Harsgor, 'Total History: The *Annales* School', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol.13, 1978, p.2.



identifies with the school, writes, "history is the synthesis of all sciences of man turned towards the past".<sup>(19)</sup>

Another example of a "total" history is provided by the historical materialist point of view. One impulse for the adoption of a Marxist historiography stems from its reaction against positivism, against what Jones, for example, terms "the poverty of empiricism".<sup>(20)</sup> According to the positivist thesis, historical facts, conceived of as being analogous to facts in the natural sciences, are "discrete, atomic and supremely indifferent to the position of the observer".<sup>(21)</sup> The task of the historian is to collect these facts, the framing of hypotheses through induction following automatically, the successful completion of the task resulting in a universal history embodying "definitive truth".<sup>(22)</sup> Jones suggests that this is one reason why positivist-inspired history has tended to concentrate on great men, and on constitutional issues, "facts" which are empirically verifiable unlike "non-sensible realities" like class or mode of production which cannot be uncovered simply through the study of documents. It is precisely these latter realities which provide the impetus for a Marxist radical perspective. Thus Engels wrote to Bloch:

...according to the materialist conception of history, the *ultimately* determining element in history is the production and reproduction of real life...<sup>(24)</sup>

Engels went on to argue:

---

19. Ibid.

20. Gareth Stedman Jones, "History: The Poverty of Empiricism" in R. Blackburn, (ed), Ideology in the Social Sciences (1972).

21. op.cit., p.97.

22. E.J. Hobsbawm, "Karl Marx's Contribution to Historiography" in Blackburn, op.cit., p.266.

23. Jones, op.cit., p.98.

24. Friedrich Engels, "Letter to Joseph Bloch" in Lewis S. Feuer Marx and Engels: Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy (1959), p.397.

...more than this neither Marx nor I has ever asserted. Hence if somebody twists this into saying that the economic element is the *only* determining one, he transforms that proposition into a meaningless, abstract, senseless phrase. The economic situation is the basis but the various elements of the super-structure - political forms of the class structure, juridical forms,...philosophical theories, religious views - also exercise their influence on the course of the historical struggles. Otherwise the application of the theory to any period of history would be easier than the solution of a simple equation of the first degree. (25)

However, neither Marx nor Engels explained in what sense the mode of production is the ultimately determining element in history. This has complicated the possibility of formulating clearly a Marxist point of view, especially when the above is contrasted with statements by Marx such as the following:

It is a question of these laws themselves, of these tendencies winning their way through and working themselves out with iron necessity. (26)

Indeed, as Gouldner has pointed out, there is a fundamental contradiction inherent in Marxist thought.<sup>(27)</sup> For, while on the one hand, Marxism may be regarded as a science insofar as its concern is "the political economy of the laws of capitalism", it is also a philosophy of praxis, as suggested in Marx's dictum that "the philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it".<sup>(28)</sup> Gouldner has therefore suggested a distinction between two "systems" of Marxism, namely

---

25. Ibid.

26. Karl Marx, Capital, Volume I, Preface to the First Edition (tr. by Ben Fowkes) (1976), p.91.

27. Alvin W. Gouldner, The Two Marxisms: Contradictions and Anomalies in the Development of Theory (1980).

28. Marx, "Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach" in Feuer, op.cit., p.245.



"Scientific" Marxism which stresses lawful regularities, setting limits on human will, and "Critical" Marxism which is directed towards a "policy of active interventionism".<sup>(29)</sup>

It is not within the scope of this thesis to examine this debate. It is, however, clear that no resolution can be found simply through a close study of Marx's texts. The inherent contradictions within the corpus of Marx's work seem to preclude the possibility of universal agreement. Moreover, Gouldner himself, referring to these texts, has made the hermeneutic point that "to critique a theory is a very active act; engaging the theory in dialogue, it inevitably interweaves commentary with exegesis, paying scrupulous attention to what the theorist's text says, while at the same time recognising that the meaning of any text (as of life) is never limited to its author's self-understanding. It must be interpreted, never merely recited".<sup>(30)</sup>

Within the framework of a historical materialist point of view, the idea of a hermeneutic of history endorses Thompson's defence of historical materialist *practice* against Althusser's a-historical theoreticism. *The Poverty of Theory* (1978), written in response to what Thompson has referred to as Althusser's "grand theory", is a critique of the latter's idealism as radical anti-empiricism. Thompson argues that "Althusser's schema either show us how ideological illusions can reproduce themselves endlessly (or may

- 
29. Gouldner, op.cit., p.59. "Scientific" Marxists include Althusser, Poulantzas, Godelier. "Critical" Marxists (called "Humanist" Marxists by Bottomore), include Lukács, Gramsci, Sartre. These rigid distinctions however are sometimes difficult to sustain. For a summary of the differences between these systems see Gouldner. op.cit., pp.58-60, and Bottomore Tom (ed), Modern Interpretations of Marx (1981), pp.1-21.
30. Gouldner, op.cit., p.9.

evolve in aberrant or fortuitous ways); or it proposes (with Spinoza) that given theoretical procedures *in themselves* can refine ideological impurities out of their given materials by no other means than the scientific discourse of the proof; or finally, it proposes some ever-pre-given immanent Marxist idea outside the material and social world (of which idea this world is an 'effect')".<sup>(31)</sup> In short, Althusser is accused of constructing a theory of history within theory without any reference to existing historical problematics, and without taking cognisance of empirical evidence. Althusser's concepts are therefore de-historicized, static and inter-related within a closed system. At the same time, Thompson has made the telling point that there is a confusion within Althusser's thought between "empiricism", (philosophical positivisms), and "the empirical mode of intellectual practice".<sup>(32)</sup> "Grand theory" has replaced the open-ended and dialectical study during which concepts and theories used by historians are refined and redefined through concrete analysis of empirical evidence. Indeed, Thompson's elucidation of "historical logic", that is "a logical method of enquiry appropriate to historical materials, designed as far as possible to test hypotheses as to structure causation, etc., and to eliminate self-confirming procedures ('instances', 'illustrations')", is in accord with the hermeneutic thesis.<sup>(33)</sup> (The fact that historical materialist historians use specific categories and concepts - Thompson refers to them as "historical" categories - in no way affects the fundamental tenets of "historical logic" which characterises the practice of *all* written history.<sup>(34)</sup>

---

31. E.P. Thompson, The Poverty of Theory (1978), p.203.

32. op.cit., p.202.

33. op.cit., pp.231-242.

34. op.cit., p.236.

Bernstein has argued that despite the tremendous variations of interpretation and application of historical materialism, "a single but *somewhat fluid* core can indeed be identified", a core which constitutes the minimal conceptual foundation of any Marxist programme.<sup>(35)</sup>

(This core may be taken as an illustration of Thompson's "historical" categories). Firstly, the "direction" and "velocity" of historical development is held to be determined by material factors, that is, economic and social forces.<sup>(36)</sup>

Thus history is "the record of the advance of material life; its proper subject is productive activity analysed in terms of the productive forces and the social relations of production which correspond to those burgeoning forces".<sup>(37)</sup> Whether or not the base-superstructure model of historical change and Marx's economic determinism constitute a mechanical economic determinism is the subject of much controversy amongst Marxists (and non-Marxists).<sup>(38)</sup> The

---

35. Howard R. Bernstein, "Marxist Historiography and the Methodology of Research Programmes", in Studies in Marxist Historical Theory (1981), p.435. (Bernstein's first four concepts are accepted) (my italics).

36. op.cit., p.445.

37. op.cit., p.436.

38. Althusser's concept of over-determination according to Geras, "is an attempt to elucidate the sense in which the mode of production is ultimately determining. By describing the multiple and complex relations between the mode of production and superstructure, the concept is intended to enable the historical materialists to account for variety on the level of superstructure while at the same time holding that this variety is ultimately determined by the mode of production". Posel argues that Althusser has, however, failed to elucidate what "ultimate determinacy" consists in, and suggests that the mode of production ultimately determines any instance in the social formation by *constituting its necessary conditions* - that is, that structure without which that particular instance could not have become what it is. The superstructure is relatively autonomous within the field of possibilities set by the mode of production. Norman Geras, "Althusser's Marxism: An Assessment" in Western Marxism: A Critical Reader edited by New Left Review (1977). D. Posel, 'Radical Science - In the Last Analysis'. Unpublished Paper delivered in Durban 20 August 1979.



historians Thompson, Cohen and Hobsbawm reject what the latter refers to as "vulgar-Marxism".<sup>(39)</sup> Hobsbawm himself has attempted to delineate the reciprocal and dialectical interaction between the mode of production and superstructure. He writes that "the immense strength of Marx has always lain in his insistence on both the existence of social structure and its historicity, or in other words its internal dynamic of change".<sup>(40)</sup> Marx's characterisation of societies "as systems of relations between human beings", those relations entered into for the purpose of production and reproduction being considered as primary, implies an "analysis of the structure and functioning of these systems as entities maintaining themselves in their relations both with the outside environment - non-human and human - and in their internal relationship".<sup>(41)</sup> Marxism therefore provides a theoretical framework within which the historian can explain why and how societies change and transform themselves.<sup>(42)</sup> Admitting that this model needs to be made more explicit than it is in Marx's own writings, Hobsbawm regards it as the more fruitful perspective within which "the entire span of human history" may be explained.<sup>(45)</sup>

These remarks lead to an elucidation of the other core concepts of Marxist historiography as proposed by Bernstein. A Marxist historian is committed to the idea of "a specific epochal succession of social formations", the "emergence" and "replacement" of which are held to be dialectical in nature, the dialectical process being exemplified in the notion of class struggle.<sup>(44)</sup> Furthermore, Bernstein argues that, while it is not clear whether Marx and Engels committed themselves to a "simple strand of development in

---

39. see Bernstein, op.cit., p.438; Jon S. Cohen, "The Achievements of Economic History: The Marxist School", Journal of Economic History, Vol. 38, 1978, Hobsbawm, op.cit., p.270.

40. Hobsbawm, op.cit., p.274.

41. op.cit., p.273.

42. op.cit., p.274.

43. op.cit., p.282.

44. Bernstein, op.cit., p.445.

history", that is to the succession of social formations having a "unilinear, uniform velocity", nevertheless their periodization characterised by "a sense of inner necessity", constitutes a necessary aspect of a Marxist point of view.<sup>(45)</sup> It is the "dialectic" which acts as the driving force of history through the resolution of contradictions and inconsistencies between productive forces and relations of production.<sup>(46)</sup> Thus for a Marxist historiography class struggle is also a core concept. Social classes must therefore be analysed as well as revolutions, the impetus for the latter coming from those exploited classes who wish to control the means of production with the acquisition of concomitant political power.<sup>(47)</sup>

In accordance with historical materialist concepts, it is clear that historians who adopt a Marxist point of view will see the past in a qualitatively different way to those taking a non-Marxist stance. For example, let us consider two analyses of the popular revolts in France in the seventeenth century. The Marxist historian, Porchnev,<sup>(48)</sup> characterises these revolts as spontaneous, arguing that while they began as a protest against specific royal taxes and/or methods of collection, the popular elements generalized the revolt to one against the taxation system as a whole. Logically it should have become a struggle against feudalism and absolutism.<sup>(49)</sup> But leadership of these revolts was taken over by those members of the aristocracy who supported the uprisings only because royal taxation eroded the capacity of the peasants to fulfil feudal rents and dues.<sup>(50)</sup>

---

45. op.cit., p.441.

46. op.cit., pp.441-2.

47. op.cit., pp.443-4.

48. Boris Porchnev, "Popular Uprising as Class War: The Revolt of the Nu-Pieds" in Isser Woloch, The Peasantry in the Old Regime: Conditions and Protests (1977).

49. Porchnev, op.cit., p.48.

50. op.cit., p.45.



Unlike 1789, the bourgeoisie failed to support the popular classes, thereby betraying them in their struggle against the nobles. Porchnev argues that the abrogation by the bourgeoisie of its revolutionary role was effected in what he calls the "feudalization" of the bourgeoisie, that is effected politically through venal offices, socially through the aspirations of venal officers to live a noble life-style, and economically through the diversion of bourgeois capital from trade, commerce and industry into the finances of the feudal state.<sup>(51)</sup> Thus the absolutist state was, in the final analysis, a feudal state "in the Marxist sense that it was the tool of the dominating class, the nobility".<sup>(52)</sup>

Mousnier's analysis presents a qualitatively different picture of the revolts. He argues that even if these uprisings may have appeared spontaneous, the nobles took the initiative and provided the leadership. The idea of a class struggle in Porchnev's sense is not a tenable one, Mousnier maintains. Rather "gentlemen, officials, bourgeois, artisans and peasants" presented a united front against a common enemy, the royal government.<sup>(53)</sup> Agreeing with Porchnev, Mousnier recognises that excess royal taxation restricted the ability of the peasants to fulfil their feudal obligations. However, Mousnier's position differs diametrically from that of Porchnev on the question of venality. Mousnier's argument is that venal offices led to the *embourgeoisement* of power at the expense of the nobles. The Bourbon kings are therefore seen as "revolutionary" and alienated from the noble class. Evidence of the growing obstructiveness of the bourgeoisie filling venal offices is shown in the need for *intendants*, used so

---

51. Robert Mandrou, "Porchnev, Mousnier and the Significance of Popular Uprising", in Woloch, *op.cit.*, p.72; J.H.M. Salmon, "Venal Office and Popular Sedition in Seventeenth-Century France", *Past and Present*, No. 37, 1967, p.24.

52. Salmon, *op.cit.*, p.24.

53. Roland Mousnier, "Conjuncture and Circumstance in Popular Uprising", in Woloch, *op.cit.*

extensively by Louis XIV in order to re-establish royal authority over the realm. Thus Mousnier refuses to characterise the monarchy as an instrument of the landed, traditional feudal aristocracy.

(b) Presuppositions about a particular event

Within each point of view, the historian approaches a particular event with those presuppositions he possesses by virtue of his being a member of a particular historio-social world, as well as with presuppositions reflecting his professional commitment. All these presuppositions are therefore constitutive of that point of view.

It has already been argued that transcendental presuppositions ensure the possibility of understanding; they are the transcendental conditions of a meaningful world. These presuppositions are involved in our ordinary experience of the world and make it possible for us to speak and write about the world, ourselves and others, including those who lived in the past. They include the presuppositions that we can use language to speak about the world and to communicate, and that language is therefore meaningful; that there are particulars which we can pick out and describe; that other people behave as we do insofar as they can set purposes, intend to do or express something, work out means of achieving these goals, react emotionally and hence that people are "potential partners in communication".<sup>(54)</sup>

It is these kinds of presuppositions which make tradition in the broad sense possible, and it is tradition which ensure the transmission of knowledge, beliefs, values, customs, roles and institutions from generation to generation. Shils defines a tradition

---

54. Baumann, op.cit., p.181, p.211.

as "the recurrence in approximately identical form of structures of conduct and patterns of belief over several generations of membership or over a long time within single societies...and within corporate bodies as well as over regions which extend across several bounded territorial discrete societies which are unified to the extent of sharing in some measure a common culture".<sup>(55)</sup> The historian possesses what may be termed a stock of common sense knowledge derived from his historico-existential confrontation within his world, a knowledge which includes generalizations and typifications, and which is brought to bear on an interpretation of the past.<sup>(56)</sup> Common sense knowledge is not static, however, for new theories and discoveries within various disciplines gradually percolate into its canons with the aid of the various media, until these become part of what is taken for granted by members of that particular world.

Apart from these presuppositions, there are also presuppositions which pertain to the particular event of which he is trying to make sense. It is clear that his conception of his discipline will affect the kind of topic chosen and the evidence selected. For historical evidence is not given a priori - it depends, as Goldstein says, on an historical attitude, a historical mode of inquiry, the recognition that something is relevant.<sup>(57)</sup> The historian's first task is, as has already been pointed out, to familiarise himself with the historical interpretative tradition found in relevant secondary material. This provides him with his pre-understanding of the event and its context. The presuppositions may well have to be amended if, in the process towards clarification, the historian discovers inaccuracies or misjudgments by other historians on the basis of his having "listened" to the past, being

---

55. Edward Shils, 'Tradition', Comparative Studies in Sociology and History, Vol. 13, 1971, p.123.

56. The burden of proof that there is such a stock must lie with those who deny rather than those who accept it.

57. Leon J. Goldstein, 'Epistemic Attitudes and History', Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, Vol. 37, 1976/7, p.192.



open to its otherness. Let us consider, for example, the problem of the interpretation of the Renaissance, and show how through a dialogue with the past, a historian can come to look at that phenomenon in a qualitatively different way.

The idea of the Renaissance of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as the rebirth of art and letters after the "darkness" of the medieval period was first expressed by the Italian humanists themselves, by men like Boccaccio, Bruni, Ficino and Vasari. Typical of their attitude is Ficino's eulogising description:

If we are to call any age golden, it is beyond doubt that age which brings forth golden talents in different places. That such is true of this our age he who wishes to consider the illustrious discoveries of this century will hardly doubt. For this century, like a golden age, has restored to light the liberal arts, which were almost extinct: grammar, poetry, rhetoric, painting, sculpture, architecture, music, the ancient singing of songs to the orphic lyre, and all this in Florence. (58)

Undoubtedly the most influential historian in the subsequent historiography of the Renaissance was Burckhardt. His stress on the Renaissance sense of individualism, its concern with secular matters, its preoccupation with politics and diplomacy, characteristics both inspired by the classical period and in dramatic contrast to the preceding Dark Ages, led Burckhardt to go on to claim that Renaissance Italy constituted the birthplace of the modern world. For in time, the ideas of the Renaissance were to spread beyond the Alps transforming medieval into modern Europe. (59)

- 
58. Marsilio Ficino, 'The Golden Age in Florence', in James Bruce Ross and Mary Martin McLaughlin (eds), The Portable Renaissance Reader (1978), p.79.
59. Jacob Burckhardt, The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy (1860).

The idea of the Renaissance as a rebirth has been challenged by medievalists who argue, for example, that there were earlier Renaissances, the Carolingian in the eighth century, the Ottonian in the tenth century, and the Renaissance of the twelfth century. That the Renaissance was the birth place of the modern world has been denied by Ritter, amongst others, who writes:

The cradle of the great modern powers of the modern national power-state, is not Italy but Western Europe. There, in contrast to Italy, it grew quite naturally out of the soil of late feudalism. (60)

Clearly Ritter has chosen one element of our modern world in order to make his point, namely the existence today of power-states. Of course, one could argue that Machiavelli's analysis of power set him apart from the idealised conceptions of the state as seen in Greek and medieval thought. Indeed the Machiavellian idea of *raison d'etat*, the view that the goal of the state is its political power, and that any means which further that goal are acceptable and even necessary, irrespective of the morality of such means, is one which is "modern". Thus, judgments by a historian as to the "modernity" of a period like the Renaissance, depend firstly on characteristics of his own and therefore modern society, and secondly, on what characteristics he singles out as being especially representative of that modernity. In this way the historian's own horizon contributes to the way he appropriates the past. But the Renaissance has also been chosen to illustrate how an openness to the past can lead the historian to adopt a view which will give him a qualitatively different picture of the past.

Apart from the European renaissances mentioned above, was what occurred in Italy itself a rebirth? Can a historian accept the

---

60. G. Ritter, 'Origins of the Modern State', in H. Lubasz (ed), The Development of the Modern State (1964), p.20.



judgments of the Italian humanists themselves and the subsequent tradition uncritically? An investigation of Italy's history from the fall of the Roman Empire until the dawn of the Renaissance by J.K. Hyde makes the following points, which are summarised below. Firstly, feudal tenure in Italy during the period "never came to dominate all other types of land-holding in the way it did in parts of north-west Europe".<sup>(61)</sup> Secondly, as it was during antiquity, Italian society was "highly urbanised", members of the merchant classes filling a wide range of occupations such as commerce, banking, learning, the law, professional or part-time administration or soldiering.<sup>(62)</sup> Thirdly, a close relationship was maintained with her classical past. Not only were Italians surrounded by concrete reminders of antiquity, but the revival of classical Roman law through the study of Justinian's codification which began in the eleventh century was to continue "at a high level" for the next three centuries.<sup>(63)</sup> Thus as Hyde remarks, "the relics of antiquity were so imposing that they could arouse both admiration and antipathy but they could never be ignored".<sup>(64)</sup>

In any society there are various ideas and values, (which we may call its ideology), which are used both to explain and to justify the institutions of that society - the customs, the roles played by various people, the norms of behaviour and the like. The society of the northern and central Italian city states, which formed the nucleus of the Renaissance, was characterised by a predominantly secular ideology, which was appropriate to the competitive nature of its commercial and trading interests. What counted in a competitive society was being resourceful, individualism being both necessary and encouraged. There was much evidence

---

61. J.K. Hyde, Society and Politics in Medieval Italy (1973), p.5.

62. op.cit., pp.6-7.

63. op.cit., p.6.

64. Ibid.

of social mobility, of intermarriage between nobles and merchants, and status was measured in terms of personal achievement rather than birth. Clearly an ideology appropriate to a feudal, hierarchical society based on manoralism would have been inappropriate in Italy. But there was, as it were, a "ready made" framework of ideas and values for Italy contained in classical texts available, for example, in works by Aristotle and Cicero. For it must be remembered that classical civilization was itself a secular one. Thus as Hyde says, "all Italian culture in the Middle Ages was conditioned by the dialogue with antiquity".<sup>(65)</sup> The Renaissance may therefore be redefined as "a new phase in a conversation which had been going on for centuries".<sup>(66)</sup> Having reconstructed his point of view on that event, the historian will therefore pose different kinds of questions such as why did this dialogue intensify at that particular time?<sup>(67)</sup> Were there any

---

65. Ibid. For example, Aristotle's Politics (in Latin) had been available since 1260.

66. Ibid.

67. Maland has argued that while the break with her past was 'nowhere made with dramatic suddenness', the Renaissance was nevertheless a period of greater vigour and novelty. In attempting to explain why this explosion occurred, Maland isolates the 'urban environment of Northern Italy', in which 'the feudal and ecclesiastical elements which had been so powerful in formulating the standards of Europe in the Middle Ages were now superseded by the urban and secular forces developed in the city states'(p.116). But I have argued that Italian society in the northern and central areas had always been urbanised, and that it was not the case that only during the Renaissance did the merchant, recognising that the city state lay outside the world of feudal and ecclesiastical hierarchy, 'decide to adopt a scale of values which the medieval world as yet refused to acknowledge',(p.119). D. Maland, 'The Italian Renaissance - A Problem of Interpretation', History, Vol. 44, 1959.

novel features during that intensification and if so, why? It is therefore also clear that we understand the Renaissance differently to the way it was characterised by the humanists; indeed perhaps we understand the period better.

Amongst other presuppositions which are brought to bear on a particular event are definitions which, as Weber has suggested, may be said to contribute ideal types. These are not representative of reality, but rather each ideal type represents an idealisation, a "utopia" which is useful for research. One of the historian's tasks, for exaple, is to discover the gap between an ideal type and the actual instance, in order to enhance his understanding of that particular, concrete instance.<sup>(68)</sup> This may be illustrated by a consideration of the absolutism of Louis XIV.

An absolute monarchy has been defined as a system of government in which monarchs tried to centralise authority in their own person, and hence free themselves from the restraints on their power provided by groups and institutions such as the nobles, the church and popular assemblies. Louis XIV's reign is generally characterised as absolute because firstly, during his rule the Estates-General did not meet; secondly, the Parlements were ordered in 1673 to restrict their functions to judicial matters and the automatic registration of edicts. They were allowed to present remonstrances thereafter, but once only. In practice none were offered. Thirdly, the Declaration of Four Articles (1682), proclaimed that the Pope's authority in France was limited by the Councils and by custom. (The Pope, Innocent XI, had threatened to excommunicate Louis when in 1673, faced by the exigencies of war, the king extended the Crown's right to collect revenue from all sees in France. Had that excommunication taken place, Louis' subjects would have been absolved from their oath of allegiance, and the way would have been prepared for the king to be deposed by the Estates-General).

---

68. Stern, op.cit., pp.74-5.

Papal infallibility was rejected, and the Pope's decisions, even with respect to religious issues, were subject to the approval of the French Church.

However a close examination of Louis' reign reveals that there were both theoretical and practical limitations on his power. The current ideology of the period justifying absolutism was that of Divine Right in accordance with which a king was bound to obey the laws of God and nature, and was expected to obey the laws of the land. Louis' respect for the principles of Divine Right is shown by the fact that he asked the Law Faculty of the Sorbonne University in 1710 if he might legally impose a new tax, the *dixième* in wartime. The tax was repealed after the war ended. That respect may explain why Louis did not feel free to reform the tax system in toto although advised to do so by his more radical ministers like Boisguilbert and Vauban. The sales of offices, with their attendant privileges, was also widely interpreted by contemporaries as a guarantee against the possibility of royal despotism. But the French monarchy was becoming a prisoner of the system of privilege it had created - by the end of the seventeenth century, it is estimated that there were nearly 46,000 office holders in France.<sup>(69)</sup> Furthermore, while the Parlements were unable to impose any constitutional checks on the crown, Louis "could not compel them to enforce his laws. He could not overcome their numbing bureaucratic inertia".<sup>(70)</sup> In order to have his laws enforced by the privileged, Louis had often to resort to bribes. And finally the poor communications in France at the time also counted against the king exercising unrestrained power at all times. Thus an uncritical application of "absolute" in the sense of unrestrained power to the reign of Louis

---

69. J.S. Morrill, 'French Absolutism as Limited Monarchy'.  
(Review Article) The Historical Journal, Vol. 21, no. 4,  
1978, p.972.

70. op.cit., p.966.



XIV will lead a historian to misunderstand the nature of the Sun King's power.

Theories provide the historian with further presuppositions. But these too may have to be amended or rejected insofar as they are put forward as hypotheses to be tested (refuted) against evidence available. Burke, for example, has advocated a close rapprochement between history and sociology, arguing that sociological theories will give historians an acute sense of structure, while sociologists are provided with a sharp sense of change.<sup>(71)</sup> However, there are historians who refuse to use theories "borrowed" from outside the period being studied. Elton, for example, calls history a craft with its own unique disciplines and skills. The historian must therefore use his own intuitive perception which has been historically trained and bring this to bear on his sources, aiming at an "intuitive understanding of an age from the outside". Elton goes on to claim that "all the possible positions were worked out quite early, to be repeated in resounding counter-part through ages of controversy", and hence no answers can ever be really new.<sup>(72)</sup> He therefore rejects any contemporary theories of development, of social change, or urbanization and the like as being relevant for history, and is against a comparative approach. Barzun, too, argues that historians may not use technical terms (for example, terms from psycho-analysis) to explain the past until these terms have become part of ordinary language.<sup>(73)</sup> In terms of the idea of a mediation of frames of meaning, it is held that the views of Elton and Barzun are hermeneutically unacceptable. If contemporary theories and technical terms do give enhanced explanatory power there

---

71. Peter Burke, Sociology and History (1980).

72. S.G. Checkland, 'The Historian as Model Builder', The Philosophical Journal, Vol. 6, 1969, pp.38-40.

73. Jacques Barzun, 'History: The Muse and her Doctors', American Historical Review, Vol. 77, no. 1, 1972.



can be no objection to their use.

The usefulness of social theory in historical scholarship, is, for example, explicitly recognised by Barber. Drawing on the theory of social stratification (as expressed by Talcott Parsons and Robert K. Merton) she argues that that theory "gives us...new insights into familiar materials and familiar problems".<sup>(74)</sup> Barber uses that theory to throw light on an aspect of the French Revolution of 1789, namely why it was that the bourgeoisie became self-consciously revolutionary at that time. The need for such an explanation is particularly relevant if one accepts the kind of analysis given by Porchnev in terms of which the bourgeoisie in the period of the *Ancien Régime* are interpreted as being "feudalized".

According to theory, social classes, that is groups of families who treat each other as equals, operate as a system of stratification.<sup>(75)</sup> The system has as its function the integration of the evaluations made by people in a society, and therefore "it provides the regularity and stability of expectation that is essential to all social action".<sup>(76)</sup> For there must be widespread consensus about the standards according to which people are evaluated, and the categories used in these evaluations are related to the functional needs of the society. Societies do, however, vary in the emphasis given to functional needs as criteria of evaluation, and therefore, in the extent to which class lines are rigidly enforced. In a continuum which expresses attitudes to social mobility, the extremes are the caste and the open class system respectively. In the former, the status of the individual remains fixed throughout his life, and there exists too a strong moral disapproval of social mobility. The opposite is the case in the open class system where social mobility is institutionalised and is subject to moral approbation.<sup>(77)</sup>

---

74. Elinor G. Barber, The Bourgeoisie in Eighteenth Century France (1955), pp.vii-viii.

75. op.cit., p.4.

76. op.cit., p.3.

77. op.cit., pp.4-5.

Barber argues that during the eighteenth century, prior to about 1780, French society represents a mixture of both systems.<sup>(78)</sup>

In short there were therefore two contradictory sets of norms, namely one which approved of, and one which disapproved of, social mobility. The latter was a heritage of the medieval feudal tradition which institutionalised a caste system in terms of which the status of an individual depended on his birth. On the other hand, there were two ways for the bourgeoisie to enter into the noble class and achieve enhanced social prestige. Marriage, evidence of having attained a noble lifestyle, and gaining social recognition on the basis of one's intellectual abilities constituted the informal path. The formal way was through the purchase of offices which either conferred nobility or enhanced social prestige, or both. The social mobility of the *roturiers* and especially the wealthy bourgeoisie, was sanctioned because it was felt that the financial success of the bourgeoisie should be justly rewarded by society. This was thought essential because commerce was not held in high esteem in eighteenth century France.<sup>(79)</sup> Members of the bourgeoisie therefore tended not to reinvest money in commerce and industry, rather using their profits to buy offices or provide themselves with a lifestyle appropriately noble.<sup>(80)</sup>

Barber goes on to argue that as the monarchy grew weaker after Louis XIV, and the power of the nobles grew correspondingly stronger, the latter were able to close the gates to ennoblement and enhanced social prestige. This was manifested in the so-called Aristocratic Reaction. Thus by 1788 there was not a single *roturier* in the government (apart from Necker), nor amongst the high ranking officers of the army, nor at the head of any of the dioceses.<sup>(81)</sup>

---

78. op.cit., p.5. Of course social mobility was restricted to the wealthier bourgeoisie, and excluded peasants, artisans and labourers.

79. op.cit., p.61.

80. This attacks the notion of the bourgeoisie as a self-conscious capitalist prior to 1780.

81. op.cit., p.143.

The large discrepancy between bourgeois expectations of social mobility and the actuality of the Aristocratic Reaction initially provoked moral indignation. As the financial situation of the crown worsened, the bourgeoisie translated its discontent into a criticism of the political, economic and social bases of the *Ancien Régime*, and there was a growing call for the bourgeoisie to have political power commensurate with its economic power and the ability of members of its class. Thus the rigidification of the class system of the *Ancien Régime* precipitated the alienation from that system of those bourgeoisie affected by the closure of opportunity for acquiring social prestige and for ennoblement.<sup>(82)</sup> The use of a sociological theory, applied in accordance with the notion of the double hermeneutic, has thus provided an explanation for the revolutionizing by 1789 of those wealthier bourgeoisie who had previously been prepared and able to fulfil their ambitions within the structures of the *Ancien Régime*.

Enlarging on this argument, Lucas has suggested that the decision by the Parlement of Paris that the Estates-General be constituted as it was in 1614, and demanding far more stringent conditions for entry into the second estate than previously, suddenly and artificially reimposed the frontier between noble and non-noble in a dramatic way.<sup>(83)</sup> For these bourgeoisie, many whom had been recently ennobled and whose life-style duplicated that of nobles, now found themselves identified "not merely with the trading classes but also with the manual labourers and the vile and abject poor".<sup>(84)</sup> Lucas proposes that Le Chapelier for example, "discovered his revolutionary vocation when he was excluded, despite his bitter protests, from

---

82. *op.cit.*, pp.142-5.

83. Colin Lucas, 'Nobles, Bourgeois and the Origins of the French Revolution', *Past and Present*, no. 60, 1973, p.120.

84. *op.cit.*, p.121.

the electoral assembly of the Breton nobility".<sup>(85)</sup>

Returning to the notion of a point of view, it is clear that the selection of any such point of view from which certain kinds of questions are directed at the past does, in one sense, limit the historian's vision. Yet, in another sense, it provides the opportunity to view the past from that point of view with a breadth of vision. Indeed historians need not feel apologetic in that they necessarily adopt a relative point of view, for that relativity is a necessary condition for opening up the past in different ways to the historian's understanding. To illustrate these points two approaches to the Reformation will be dealt with briefly, namely the historical materialist and psycho-historical points of view.

According to the historical materialist view the Reformation and the Peasant War together constitute "an early, still immature form of bourgeois revolution...the early bourgeois revolution in Germany".<sup>(86)</sup> As such they form part of the "bourgeois-revolutionary transition from feudalism to capitalism".<sup>(87)</sup> In the final analysis the origins and nature of the Reformation and Peasant War were not religious but were rooted in a revolutionary opposition to feudalism. But because of the dominant role played by the Catholic Church in feudal society, all revolutionary political and social doctrines were always also heretical doctrines.<sup>(88)</sup>

---

85. Ibid.

86. Rainier Wohlfeil, "The Peasant War in Germany" by Friedrich Engels - 125 years after', Journal of Peasant Studies, Vol. 3, no. 1, 1975, p.98.

87. Ibid.

88. Friedrich Engels, 'The Marxist Interpretation of Luther', in The Peasant War in Germany, in H.G. Koenigsberger (ed). Luther: A Profile (1973), pp.98-99.



Critics have questioned the sense in which the Reformation and Peasant War can be justified as an early *bourgeois* revolution.<sup>(89)</sup> The historical materialist argues that tension between employers and workers, between landlord and tenant, was becoming more intense in the sixteenth century. This conflict arose because of structural changes in production and the organisation of labour, changes associated with the beginnings of the capitalist mode of production in industry and agriculture.<sup>(90)</sup> The contradictions arising from the conjunction of the feudal mode of production and the beginnings of elements of capitalist production produced the first signs of class conflict which demanded a revolutionary solution. But the subjective and objective conditions for a bourgeois revolution were immature, and it is not yet possible to speak of a self-conscious bourgeois class; rather Marxist historians refer to the capitalist burgher class which was to develop into the bourgeoisie.<sup>(91)</sup>

The Marxist characterisation of the Reformation and Peasant war (sic) is also justified on the grounds that both were anti-feudal. In order to ensure the expansion of capitalism and the development and growth of the bourgeoisie, those institutions which limited that progress in both urban and rural areas had to be altered or eliminated. In particular the growing economic power of the burgher class needed to be expressed in terms of political power. This required that the power of the feudal sector and spiritual territorial authorities be broken. The attack by the reformers on corruption within the Catholic Church was an attack on one of the fundamental pillars of feudal society. Not only was the Church an important

---

89. Wohlfeil, *op.cit.*, p.102.

90. Eugene F. Rice (Jr). The Foundations of Early Modern Europe 1460-1559 (1970), Chapter 2.

91. Gunter Vogler, 'The Peasant War in Germany', Journal of Peasant Studies, Vol. 3, no. 1, 1975, p.111.



land-owner, but it also possessed political influence. Moreover theology dominated intellectual activity, this being "an inevitable consequence of the fact that the Church was the all-embracing synthesis and the most general sanction of the existing feudal domination".<sup>(92)</sup>

The programme of the reformers, including the dissolution of monasteries, the abolition of the special privileges of the clergy and the end of the tithe was, furthermore, one which was ultimately in the interests of the urban burghers, and directly or indirectly contributed to the growing power of that class.<sup>(93)</sup> The demands of the most famous of all peasant programmes, namely The Twelve Articles of the Upper Swabian Peasantry, clearly challenged the bases of feudal society.<sup>(94)</sup> These articles show a connection with the development of capitalism in the countryside, a process which had begun in the fourteenth century, resulting in a disappearance of serfdom in much of Western Europe. In the sixteenth century, faced with a price rise, landlords had begun to put pressure on peasants, enforcing feudal dues and rights previously abandoned, and appropriating the commons and woods for themselves alone.<sup>(95)</sup> Luther's preachings enabled the peasants to voice long-standing complaints in evangelical terms, justified by the Scriptures.

Of course the struggle against the Church, where successful, was not enough to overcome the contradictions within feudalism. Nevertheless, in the final analysis, the Reformation and Peasant War must be seen as the first in a series of revolutionary processes leading to the epoch of bourgeois revolutions in the eighteenth and nineteenth

---

92. Engels, op.cit., p.98.

93. Vogler, op.cit., p.114.

94. Peter Blickle, 'The Economic, Social and Political Background of the Twelve Articles of the Swabian Peasants of 1525', Journal of Peasant Studies, Vol. 3, no. 1, 1975

95. Rice, op.cit., pp.58-65. See also E.K. Hunt, Property and Prophets: The Evolution of Economic Institutions and Ideologies (1978), pp.16-17.

centuries. The historical materialist interpretation of the Reformation and Peasant War does not ignore factors such as the corruption in the church, the struggle between the Holy Roman Emperor and the Papacy, the roles of Luther, Calvin and others. But it seeks to determine what ultimately were the parameters within which these factors were to prove decisive.

Erikson's study of Luther has focussed on the specific religious crises which initiated the course of events known as the Reformation. Concentrating on Luther's own writings, Erikson does not mention the social and economic conditions of the period. His study of Luther attempts to elucidate the nature and course of Luther's revelatory experience making use of psycho-analytic insights. Drawing on his close examination of Luther's writings during that period of his life, Erikson writes that his intention is "to demonstrate that Luther's redefinition of man's condition - while part and parcel of his theology - has striking configurational parallels with inner dynamic shifts like those which clinicians recognise in the recovery of individuals from psychic distress. In brief, I will try to indicate that Luther, in laying the foundation for a 'religiosity for the adult man', displayed the attributes of his own hard won adulthood; his renaissance of faith portrays a vigorous recovery of his own ego-initiative".<sup>(96)</sup> Erikson's analyses lead him to make the claim that "the characteristics of Luther's theological advance can be compared to certain steps in psychological maturation, which every man must take: the internalisation of the father-son relationship; the concomitant crystallisation of conscience; the safe establishment of an identity as a worker and man; and the concomitant

---

96. E.H. Erikson, 'The Search for Identity', in Koenigsberger, op. cit., pp.112-3.

reaffirmation of basic trust".<sup>(97)</sup>

(ii) Questions, dialectic and self-understanding

It follows from the discussion above that there are, as Gadamer terms them, both "productive" prejudices that make understanding possible, and those that "hinder" understanding or promote misunderstanding.<sup>(98)</sup> But the latter cannot be known in advance; they are uncovered in the act of understanding, that is in a self-reflective act of understanding, which is open to the otherness of the object so that the text "as other's meaning can be isolated and valued on its own".<sup>(99)</sup> This act of understanding, in which the horizon of the historian merges with that of the object, involves what Gadamer calls "effective historical consciousness".<sup>(100)</sup> It seeks to be aware of its prejudgments, to control its preunderstanding in its openness to the past. It recognises the historicity of both historian and event, and the relationship between them as a merging of horizons. Yet it retains the "otherness" of the past, respecting its autonomy to "speak" for itself.<sup>(101)</sup>

The openness of effective historical consciousness has, as Gadamer argues, the structure of a question. Indeed the structure of a question is implicit in the presence of strangeness or unfamiliarity in our ordinary experience.<sup>(102)</sup> Recalling Popper's image of a searchlight, Gadamer writes that it is the question which places what is being investigated into perspective. But the openness of a question cannot be unbounded, being limited by the historian's horizon as well as by the horizon of the past event.<sup>(103)</sup> Furthermore, bringing to mind Popper's characterisation of science as progressing by trial and error, Gadamer writes that knowing what questions to ask cannot be taught.

---

97. op.cit., p.120.

98. Gadamer, TM, p.263. Gadamer uses "prejudice" for "presupposition".

99. Gadamer, PH, p.27.

100. Gadamer, TM, p.305.

101. op.cit., p.324.

102. op.cit., p.325.

103. op.cit., p.326.

There is no such thing as a method of learning to ask questions, of learning to see what needs to be questioned. (104)

Some questions are generated by the historical tradition surrounding the event; others by the event itself; others are only apparent after a prolonged dialogue with the past. Questions may originate "outside" the event in that the historian, inspired by recent developments in the social sciences, for example, may seek to explore new and different points of view on the event. Gadamer also speaks of the role of the imagination in stimulating questions. "Imagination" he argues, "naturally has a hermeneutic function...it serves the ability to expose real, productive questions, something in which generally speaking, only he who masters all the methods of his science succeeds".<sup>(105)</sup> There are also "sudden ideas" which, says Gadamer, open the situation for the interpreter.<sup>(106)</sup> Hirsch also suggests that guesses play an important role in the production of questions.<sup>(107)</sup> Criticising any notion that a reliable methodology of interpretation can be built on a set of canons, Hirsch says that "no possible set of rules or rites of preparation can generate or compel an insight into what an author means".<sup>(108)</sup> He therefore proposes that the act of understanding is, at first, a guess but "there are no methods for making...guesses, no rules for generating insights". But he goes on to say that "the methodological activity of interpretation commences when we begin to test and criticise our guesses".<sup>(109)</sup> However, as has been argued, the activity of understanding and interpretation begins when the historian proceeds to read primary and secondary sources, when in his preliminary identification and characterisation of an event, he begins the filling out of the fore-structure of his understanding. This

---

104. op.cit., p.329.

105. Gadamer, PH, p.12.

106. Gadamer, TM, p.329.

107. Hirsch, Validity in Interpretation, p.203.

108. Ibid.

109. Ibid.

preunderstanding precedes and generates the guesses which have a bearing on the event in question.

Thus, as was the case with presuppositions, Gadamer speaks of two kinds of questions: firstly those which, in his words, "inhibit" the state of openness, for the past is unable to answer them, and secondly, the genuinely productive questions which open up possibilities of further questioning and hence help to render the past intelligible.<sup>(110)</sup> Many questions will only become apparent if the historian persists in his openness, or as Gadamer would have it, in the exercise of the Socratic dialectic:

Dialectic, as the art of asking questions proves itself only because the person who knows how to ask questions is able to persist in his questioning, which involves being able to preserve his orientation towards openness. (111)

Dialectic is thus "the art of conducting a conversation" and this implies listening to what the other says.<sup>(112)</sup> Lawrence, in the same context, speaks of partners in the "human historical conversation".<sup>(113)</sup> As has been argued, this dialectic may be regarded as an attempt to recreate the speech situation, to understand the event in its own terms. But it has relevance with regard to interpretations of the fuller meaning of an event. Gadamer writes:

The understanding of a text has not begun at all as long as the text remains mute. But a text can begin to speak...when it does begin to speak, however, it

---

110. Gadamer, TM, p.327.

111. op.cit., p.330.

112. op.cit., p.33.

113. Fred Lawrence, 'Responses to "Hermeneutics and Social Science"', Cultural Hermeneutics, Vol. 2, 1975, p.321. E.P. Thompson's "historical logic" is also characterised above all by the dialogue conducted between the historian and evidence. (Thompson, op.cit., p.231, p.235).



does not simply speak its word, always the same, in lifeless rigidity, but gives ever new answers to the person who questions it and poses ever new questions to him who answers it. (114)

To illustrate the above, consideration will be given to an aspect of the European witch-craze of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

An essential component of that craze was the belief in the witch's flight to secret sabbats, during which rituals were performed which were a deliberate travesty of Christian worship.<sup>(115)</sup> The image of witches on their broomsticks was widespread and persistent throughout the witch hunts. Until the fifteenth century the Catholic Church officially disclaimed belief in the power of witches to fly through the air. This denial was expressed in the *Canon Episcopi* issued about AD 900. It reads:

...It is also not to be omitted that some wicked women perverted by the devil, seduced by illusions and phantasms of devils, believe and profess themselves, in the hours of night, to ride upon certain beasts with Diana, the goddess of pagans, and an innumerable multitude of women, and in the silence of the dead of night to traverse great spaces of earth, and to obey her commands as of their mistress, and to be summoned to her service on certain nights. (116)

Nevertheless, in the fourteenth century the reality of the witch's flight was accepted at some sorcery trials. Lea, reporting on one such trial held in Toulouse in 1335, tells of Anne-Marie de Georgel

---

114. Gadamer, PH, p.57.

115. For descriptions of those proceedings see Montague Summers, The History of Witch-craft (1974) Chapter 4, Ben-Yehuda Nachman, 'The European Witch-craze of the Fourteenth to Seventeenth Centuries: A Sociologist's Perspective', American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 86, no. 1, 1980, pp.5-6.

116. Henry Charles Lea, Materials Towards a History of Witchcraft, Vol. 1, (1957), pp.178-9.

who "under torture confessed that many years ago a tall, dark man with fiery eyes and clothed in skins appeared while she was washing and asked if she would give herself to him, to which she assented. He breathed in her ear and the next Saturday, by the mere effort of her will, she was transported to Sabbat".<sup>(117)</sup>

By the fifteenth century, night flying on a broomstick was firmly accepted as evidence in the witchcraft trials, as well as in the treatises on the subject during that period. The belief was, of course, necessary in order to explain the ability of witches to cover great distances in a short time to attend sabbats, during which the Devil would issue instructions for the performance of *maleficium*.<sup>(118)</sup> In a treatise by the inquisitor Sylvester Prierias written in 1504, the *Canon Episcopi* is reinterpreted as follows:

I say therefore that the Cap. Episcopi seems to prohibit the belief that witches are really carried to the Sabbat, because, although it does not speak of witches, but of a different sect, as has been proved, still it seems to speak of them in so much as concerns that disbelief in real transport. But I say that, though it says those things are done in dreams, because almost always they are done in dream and rarely in the body, yet it does not prohibit belief in the real bodily transport as regards motion and space, but as regards all that occurs, especially the sight of the goddess without deception. (119).

At a trial in Annency in Savoy in 1477 the accused Antoine testified that "a dark man" gave her a stick eighteen inches long and a pot of ointment. When she had annointed that stick with the ointment, she was to place it between her legs, saying, "Go, in the name of the devil go!". She was immediately transported to

---

117. *op.cit.*, p.231.

118 Norman Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons* (1975), pp.100-3.

119. Lea, *op.cit.*, p.357.

the sabbat.<sup>(120)</sup>.

The importance of the change in attitude to the idea of witch flights has been pointed out by Cohn. Thus witch hunting was able to reach massive proportions only once "the authorities themselves accepted the reality of the nocturnal journeying".<sup>(121)</sup> For massive killings occurred "only when supposed witches were forced by torture to denounce others whom they had seen at the sabbat".<sup>(122)</sup> Midelfort reiterates this point writing that "torture led invariably to denunciation, which in turn led to further trials. It is easy to understand how these panic trials...expanded...".<sup>(123)</sup>

Historians have come to terms with the evidence which testifies to these flights. For example, in a tract written by Paulus Grilland in 1525, he describes an incident which occurred in a village near Rome:

I gave an example occurring about twenty years ago, when a peasant in a village near Rome had a wife of the Express Profession. He repeatedly asked her if she were, which she earnestly denied; but suspecting her he kept watch and one night when she was summoned he pretended sleep and watched her and saw her take from a chest a small pot of ointment, strip herself, anoint herself and fly from the house. (124)

In a series of trials held in Franche-Comte during the summer of 1598, this kind of evidence is typical:

---

120. op.cit., p.239.

121. Cohn, op.cit., p.224.

122. op.cit., p.254.

123. H.C. Erik Midelfort, Witch Hunting in South-Western Germany 1562-1684 (1972), p.97.

124. Lea, op.cit., p.403.

Francoise Secretain avowed that in order to go to the Sabbat she placed a white stick between her legs and then uttered certain words and then she was borne through the air to the...assembly. (125)

Trevor-Roper's outright rejection of the phenomenon of flying is reflected clearly in this passage:

Every night these ill-advised ladies were anointing themselves with 'devil's grease', made out of the fat of murdered infants, and, thus lubricated, were slipping through cracks and keyholes and up chimneys, mounting on broomsticks or spindles or airborne goats, and flying off on a long and inexpressibly wearisome aerial journey to a diabolical rendezvous, the witches' sabbat. (126)

But can one, like Trevor-Roper, simply dismiss this widespread belief in witches' flight as a consequence of the creation and perpetuation of a stereotype "by social fear out of popular superstition within an intellectually approved cosmology?" (127)

As an interesting contrast to Trevor-Roper, Summers accepts that there were indeed witches. He writes:

There were some great superstitions; there were some unbridled imaginations; there was deception there was legerdemain; there was phantasy; there was fraud;...yet when every allowance has been made, every possible explanation exhausted, there persists a congeries of solid proven fact which cannot be ignored...(128)

---

125. Summers, op.cit., p.122.

126. H.R. Trevor-Roper, The European Witch-craze of the 16th and 17th Centuries (1969), p.15.

127. op.cit., p.120.

128. Summers, op.cit., p.4.



Moreover Summers argues that punishment of witches was justified, for "witchcraft blazed forth with unexampled virulence and ferocity, that it threatened the peace, nay in some degree, the salvation of mankind".<sup>(129)</sup> But even Summers is unable to accept uncritically the phenomenon of witches' flight. True he does accept that levitation occurs but this phenomenon "is only for a height of a foot or some eighteen inches, and even this occurs seldom save at moments of great solemnity and psychic concentration".<sup>(130)</sup> Summers' view is that witches go to the Sabbat "on foot, or horseback, or by some other means..." for he denies the existence of the broomstick "mode of aerial transport".<sup>(131)</sup>

But the fact is that historically, flying was an integral part of the witch-craze. Recently a theory, which seems to provide historians with an answer to the meaning of that phenomenon, has been suggested by investigations by anthropologists on the use of hallucinogenic drugs to achieve trance states. As Harner points out, "one of the most typical aspects of the shamanistic experience is the change into another state of consciousness, often called a trance, with the shaman feeling that he is taking a journey".<sup>(132)</sup> (And, as Harner observes, the phrase "taking a trip" in current usage is no coincidence).<sup>(133)</sup> As is clear from accounts quoted earlier describing the witches' flight, European witches rubbed their bodies with an ointment.<sup>(134)</sup> From recipes which have survived we know

---

129. op.cit., pp.124-127.

130. op.cit., p.129.

131. op.cit., p.122.

132. Michael J. Harner, 'The Role of Hallucinogenic Plants in European Witchcraft', in Harner (ed), Hallucinogens and Shamanism (1973), p.xii.

133. Ibid.

134. In his work The Golden Ass, Apuleius (born c.A.D114) also described how the witch Pampile turned into an owl by smearing her naked body with an ointment. Apuleius, The Golden Ass (1950), p.88.



that these "flying" ointments contained ingredients such as belladonna, datura and henbane - in short, drugs which are known to have hallucinogenic properties.<sup>(135)</sup> One of the features of belladonna (atropine) is that it can be absorbed through the skin. The image of the witch mounted on her broomstick must not therefore, as Harner has pointed out, be seen simply as a phallic symbol. For the broomstick served as an applicator for applying the concoction to the sensitive vaginal membranes, the fatty base facilitating the absorption of the drugs through the skin.<sup>(136)</sup> Corroboration that the ointment

- 
135. Harner, op.cit., p.129. See also Venetia Newall, The Encyclopaedia of Witchcraft and Magic (1974), p.84. Murray has given examples of formulae for "flying" ointment. One such formula reads:

Baby's fat  
Juice of Water Parsnip  
Aconite  
Cinquefoil  
Deadly nightshade (belladonna)  
Soot

M.A. Murray, The Witch-Cult in Western Europe: A study in Anthropology (1921), p.279.

Allen has also suggested that witches may have used the skins of toads which contain an hallucinogen, called bufotenin. The traditional association between witches and toads, as seen in pictures and accounts of witchcraft at that time, is well-known.

Andrew Allen, 'Toads: The Biochemistry of the Witches' Cauldron,' History Today, Vol. 29, 1979, p.267.

136. Harner, op.cit., p.131. Burland, on the other hand, has stressed the sexual symbolism of the broomstick:

The broom was an instrument which swept away dirt. It was a symbol of purification, and in particular purification through sex. The broom was an image of pubic hair, and its handle was the erect penis. It was ridden astride like a hobby horse and became an excitant, almost performing a masturbatory function. It was imagined that the witches sped through the air on their magical errands riding the broomsticks. This has provided the world of art with many beautiful pictures of pulchritudinous girls learning the art of broom riding from a group of early hags. There was little truth in it, but not much, and if there was any levitation it was under very special conditions rather like those of a seance room.

C.A. Burland, Echoes of Magic (1972), p.125.

does indeed induce the sensation of flying has been provided by Professor Will-Erich Peukert of Göttingen who made such a "flying" ointment according to a seventeenth century formula. Reporting on his experience, Peukert described that he and some of his colleagues rubbed the ointment on their foreheads and armpits after which they slept for twenty-four hours. During this time "they dreamed of wild rides, frenzied dancing, and other weird adventures of the type connected with medieval orgies".<sup>(137)</sup> Hence, as Harner says, "once the use and effects of these natural hallucinogens are understood the major features of past beliefs and practices (of the witch-craze) suddenly seem quite logical and consistent".<sup>(138)</sup>

Interestingly there is evidence showing that there were some contemporaries who understood the hallucinogenic properties of the witches ointment.

...Nider relates that his preceptor told him of a Dominican who, on reaching a village, found a "feminam dementatem" - so demented that she imagined herself to fly by night with Diana. He sought to disabuse her and she promised to show him. On an appointed night he came with trustworthy witnesses, she placed herself in a pannier and rubbed herself with ointment while muttering spells, and fell asleep, with dreams of Domina Venus and other superstitious so vivid that she moved and fell to the floor, injuring her head but still laying in stupor. When she awoke he asked

---

137. Harner, op.cit., p.139. Of course, given the circumstances, they may well have expected to experience that type of dream. Harner gives further evidence, however, quoting Schenk's experiences after inhaling the smoke of burning henbane; he also quotes Castenada's account of his experiences after applying datura ointment to his body.

138. Harner, op.cit., p.138. Anticipating Harner's argument (and not mentioned by him) Dr. Ludwig Mejer in his work *Die Periode der Hexenprocesse* (1882) also claimed that the visions and dreams caused by the drugs used by the witches were so impressive that witches, once sober, believed these to be true. Lea, op.cit., 1076.

her if she had been with Diana, when he had witnessed that she had not left the place, and with wholesome exhortations he led her to detest her error. Joh. Nider, *Formicarius* l. ii, c.4 (ed. Argentinae, 1517, fol. 25), (139)

Nevertheless, as the sources collected by Lea suggest, this was not the view which prevailed when the craze was at its height.

Harner's theory, which is also an example of the double hermeneutic, therefore helps to open an aspect of the past for the historian's understanding of the fuller historical meaning of the phenomenon in question.

Insofar as "understanding consists in the working out of a projection which is certainly constantly revised by what results from further penetration into the meaning",<sup>(140)</sup> understanding is also, therefore, always self-understanding. Thus as Gadamer says, "To understand a text is to come to understand oneself in a kind of dialogue".<sup>(141)</sup> Expressing this idea more fully Gadamer writes:

Only through hermeneutic reflection am I no longer unfree over and against myself, but rather can deem freely what in my preunderstanding may be justified and what unjustifiable. And also only in this manner do I learn to gain a new understanding of what I have seen through eyes conditioned by prejudice. But this implies, too, that the prejudgments that lead my preunderstanding are also constantly at stake, right up to the moment of their surrender, which surrender could also be called a transformation. (142).

Midelfort is an example of a historian who is explicitly self-reflective. His concern was to account for the witch hunts in south western Germany, and having familiarised himself with the historical tradition surrounding the interpretation of the witch-

---

139. Lea, *op.cit.*, p.177.

140. Gadamer, *TM*, p.252.

141. Gadamer, *PH*, p.57.

142. *op.cit.*, p.38.

craze phenomenon, he introduced his own study with an evaluation of various points of view. He has argued that these cannot be accepted uncritically without conducting a dialogue with the events in question. Thus he writes for example:

...the defenders of psychological history have on occasion concluded that certain mental aberrations evident in such famous witchcraft manuals as the *Malleus Maleficarum* can explain all subsequent witch hunts. According to these theories, the celibate inquisitors projected their own feelings of guilt and deprivation onto women, who of course constituted for them acute temptation. (143)

Midelfort goes on to point out that examination of source material reveals that in Germany the courts of inquisition during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were "composed of laymen with wives and families".<sup>(144)</sup> He therefore adds that this kind of generalised psychological approach is inadequate to the study of witchcraft. However Midelfort's own conclusion may be somewhat sweeping for inquisitors were supposedly celibate. The methods of establishing the guilt of a witch, which included stripping her, shaving off her body hair and searching her skin minutely for the Devil's mark and the Witch's mark,<sup>(145)</sup> provide *prima facie* evidence for further attempts to test that theory for its explanatory value in the example above.

---

143. Midelfort, *op.cit.*, p.5.

144. *Ibid.*

145. The Devil's mark was an insensitive spot on the witch's body where the Devil had marked her as a sign of their covenant. These marks were detected by pricking with a sharp pin to reveal the insensitivity of the spot (Hence the emergence of the profession of 'prickers', see Summers, *op.cit.*, p.74). The Witch's mark was a supernumerary teat from which familiars might suck. Jeffrey B. Russell, *A History of Witchcraft, Sorcerers, and Pagans* (1980), pp.80-81.



The hermeneutic circle of understanding, as has been argued, also involves the operation of a "sub-circle", the wholes-part circle. Thus movement towards understanding involves the transformation of partial understanding through the mediation of frames of meaning, but this depends on the perpetual movement by the historian from the particular to the totality and back; hence what was previously obscure, unfamiliar and unintelligible is rendered more clear, more familiar and more intelligible, so that there is a coherence of parts and whole within a particular context. It ought to be noted, that while it might seem that the idea of a hermeneutic of history, insofar as it includes the notion of a double hermeneutic, implies that understanding proceeds in a linear sequence, this may not necessarily be the case. The path towards an increasingly transparent understanding of the past, as it occurs within the hermeneutic circle, is often haphazard, messy and confused.

To conclude the discussion in this chapter, it is clear that there are many possible points of view which have been and may be taken with respect to the past. Present concerns, reflecting what the past means to the historian and the acquisition of new evidence, will continue to be influential in directing historical focus. Thus Thompson, for example, writes as follows:

Each age, or each practitioner, may propose new questions to the historical evidence, or may bring new levels of evidence to light. In this case "history" (when considered as the products of historical enquiry) will change, and ought to change, with the pre-occupations of each generation, or, as it may be, each sex, each nation, each social class. But this by no means implies that the past events themselves change with each questioner, or that the evidence is indeterminate. Disagreements between historians may be of many kinds, but they remain as mere exchanges of attitude, or exercises of ideology, unless it is agreed that they are conducted within a common discipline, whose pursuit is objective knowledge. (146)

---

146. Thompson, op.cit., pp.232-3.



Interpretative variety is endorsed in this thesis. Different pre-suppositions may be compared to a grid; the historian's visions of the past, operating as a search light passing through that grid, provide "pictures" of particular phenomena which may be qualitatively different, even although there may be some features shared by all pictures. However, each point of view must be justified *pragmatically*. The ultimate justification for any point of view adopted in accordance with the particular choice of the historian, becomes evident insofar as it leads him toward understanding in his encounter with the past, effected within the hermeneutic circle. At stake thus, is the richness of that point of view's conceptual framework, its ability to generate new theories, the way it focusses attention on hitherto unexplained areas of research, and hence also its success in the stimulation of methodologically innovative research programmes.<sup>(147)</sup> Assessments as to the merits of respective points of view cannot therefore be made a priori. It is furthermore argued in this thesis that the notion of an ideal rational community, as suggested in Habermas' concept of an idealized dialogue, may provide the medium for adjudication on that appropriateness and merit by any group of professional historians.<sup>(148)</sup>

---

147. These criteria are derived from Bernstein, *op.cit.*, p.448.

148. Chapter 6.

## CHAPTER SIX

### MORAL JUDGMENTS AND OBJECTIVITY

#### (i) Moral judgments

The self-critical historian reflecting on the nature of history, is bound also to question the relevance of that discipline. There are, it seems, fundamentally two answers to this question. Firstly, there are historians who identify with what Connell-Smith calls the "professional" or "antiquarian" approach, insisting that "the past must be studied for its own sake regardless of its relevance for us in the present...".<sup>(1)</sup> The past is investigated "from within", "on its own terms", problems being seen as the people involved saw them.<sup>(2)</sup> It is clear that this is hermeneutically unacceptable, for the approach ignores the importance of what is future to an event as a constitutive part of the meaning of the event, including the contribution made by the historian from his own perspective to that meaning. Each historian has what Troeltsch, like Gatterer, calls a *standort*, that is the historical, social, cultural and philosophical locus he occupies.<sup>(3)</sup> Furthermore, the *standort* is also futural. Thus Stern writes:

As in the physical sciences every calculation of a motion depends on the position of the observer, thus in history every standard is irremediably determined by the spot where one is located, and at which it originates. It originates always as a living connection with the formation of the future. (4)

- 
1. G. Connell-Smith and H.A. Lloyd, The Relevance of History (1972), p.44.
  2. op.cit., p.35.
  3. Alfred Stern, Philosophy of History and the Problem of Values (1962), p.98.
  4. Stern, op.cit., p.22. (Gatterer, who also elucidated the idea of a *standort*, ignored its futural element).

As has already been pointed out, Dilthey's analysis of life revealed its essential temporality, so that past, present and future are all inextricably moments in understanding. Insofar as the historian is concerned with meaning, this includes both meaning of the past, as well as the present and future, the fuller historical meaning lying in the mediation of frames of meaning. Gadamer has argued that the interpreter does not try to disregard himself and his particular situation when attempting to understand the past; he relates the text to that situation if he wants to understand at all. Understanding is therefore also always self-understanding. In short, "our present situation and our projects regarding the future influence our interpretations of the historical past".<sup>(5)</sup> Hence agreement is expressed with Connell-Smith who holds that society may reasonably demand that a professional historian not only satisfy its curiosity about the past, but that he also provide some guidance on present problems.<sup>(6)</sup> Hobsbawm makes the same kind of point arguing that "at all events the shape of the future is discerned by searching the process of past development for clues, so that paradoxically, the more we expect innovation, the more history becomes essential to discover what it will be like. This procedure may range from the very naive - the view of the future as a bigger and better present, or a bigger and worse present so characteristic of technological extrapolations or pessimistic social anti-utopias - to the intellectually very complex and high-powered; but essentially history remains the basis of both".<sup>(7)</sup>

---

5. Ibid.

6. Connell-Smith and Lloyd, op.cit., p.48.

7. E.J. Hobsbawm, "The Social Function of the Past", Past and Present, no. 55, 1972.

It has already been argued that points of view reflect present concerns. Thus, for example, the development of herstory is a result of increasing interest in the role women have played in the past, an interest which is relevant to debates on the status and role of women in contemporary society. But, the question arises as to whether the concept of relevance also includes the passing of moral judgments on the past. In other words, ought a historian to blame or praise the intentions of individuals and the foreseeable consequence of their actions,<sup>(8)</sup> as well as institutions which allow or encourage behaviour judged to be evil or good, and in so doing act as moral educator?

The role of moral judgments in the writing of history is a contentious one. Some historians, for example Butterfield, argue that the historian's task excludes the making of those kinds of judgments, for historians know too little to be in a position to judge. Stressing the need for humility on the part of the historian, (for only God is omniscient), and for the extension of charity to all men, Butterfield writes uncompromisingly:

...moral judgments on human beings are by their nature irrelevant to the enquiry and alien to the intellectual realm of scientific history. (9)

Butterfield goes on to add that moral judgments may be a hindrance, and insofar as historians may use them for polemical purposes, these kinds of judgments can play "a great part in the generation of the national animosities of our time".<sup>(10)</sup>

Commager, also writes that moral judgments are "arrogant" and "futile", and that readers do not require "moral instruction"

- 
8. Clearly to make such judgments about individuals presupposes that they knew what they were doing, and that they could have chosen to act differently.
  9. Herbert Butterfield, 'Moral Judgments in History', in Meyerhoff, *op.cit.*, p.230. (Butterfield would have Hitler's mother write an intimate account of her son, for she "did not hate him too much").
  10. *op.cit.*, p.243.

from a historian.<sup>(11)</sup>

The discussion so far has, however, begged the question as to whether it is *logically* possible to write a neutral history. Dray has pointed out that "if the historians' value judgments are a consequence of the nature of their enquiry, it would make no sense for them ever to try to be 'neutral mirrors'", for the elimination of value judgments would not be logically possible.<sup>(12)</sup> But, it may be asked, if the first part of Dray's proposition is true, does this entail that histories are subjective (personal) and arbitrary?

Positivist philosophers, such as Nagel, in insisting on a clear distinction between fact and value, and on the methodological unity of all disciplines, argue that value judgments are not a necessary part of the writing of history. Nagel writes:

Many writers maintain...that the selectivity of history is peculiar in that the historian is inescapably concerned with 'value-impregnated' subject matter...there appears to be no warrant for any of the various claims that the occurrences studied by historians are distinguished by some inherent differentiating feature from those that are not. Moreover, even when a historian is concerned with admittedly value-impregnated subject matter or with occurrences manifesting various passions, it by no means follows that he must himself share or judge those values or passions.  
(13)

Nagel has clarified the scope of the issue of moral judgments in history. Firstly, is the historian's subject matter value-neutral?

- 
11. quoted by Wright, op.cit., p.6.
  12. William Dray, 'History and Value Judgments', Encyclopaedia of Philosophy (1967), Vol. 4, p.26.
  13. Ernest Nagel, 'The Logic of Historical Analysis', in Meyer-Hoff, op.cit., pp.208-9.



If this is not the case, then secondly, does it follow that moral value judgments must necessarily (logically) enter in the writing of history? If not, then thirdly, is the idea of a morally-committed history desirable? And finally, how do answers to these questions affect the question of objectivity in history?

In accordance with their insistence on a clear distinction between fact and value, the positivists argue that we must first know something objectively before we evaluate it. While there may be certain linguistic difficulties in interpreting the facts objectively, because ordinary language, unlike that of science, is often vague and imprecise, this is not a question of principle: it is rather a practical problem and it is up to the historian to refine the language he uses.<sup>(14)</sup> But this argument has been challenged by Berlin, amongst others. Ordinary language, he argues, is not totally value-free, and this is the language used by historians. While agreeing with Butterfield that "censoriousness, recrimination, moral or emotional blindness to the ways of life and outlooks of others, intellectual or ethical fanaticism, are vices in the writing of history as in life", Berlin argues that moral value judgments are nevertheless a necessary part of the writing of history.<sup>(15)</sup> For facts are value-charged; historians use few if any concepts or categories peculiar to their discipline, (employing those of ordinary speech), and moreover they explain and elucidate as we do in ordinary life using "the same rich, scarcely analysable mixture of physiological and psychological, economic and biographical, aesthetic and ethical, causal and purposive concepts".<sup>(16)</sup> Hence, writes Berlin, "the invocation to historians to suppress even that minimal degree of moral psychological evaluation which is necessarily involved in viewing human beings as creatures with purposes and

---

14. Dray, op.cit., p.27.

15. Berlin, op.cit., p.263.

16. op.cit., p.270.

and motive...seems to me to rest on a confusion of the aims and methods of the human studies with those of natural science".<sup>(17)</sup>

Is Berlin correct?

It has already been shown that hermeneutic thinkers have argued that it is a fact of our experience that life is always interpreted as meaningful; thus what happens is always evaluated by individuals and groups in terms of certain criteria. Consider, therefore, a historian investigating Hitler's Third Reich, writing about the concentration camps set up by that regime. One of the uses to which such camps were put, was to offer inmates as the raw material for medical experiments to be conducted by S.S. doctors. In listing the kinds of experiments performed, Bullock describes how prisoners were subjected "to intense air pressure and intense cold until the 'patient's' lungs burst or froze to death; the infliction of gas gangrene wounds; injection with typhus and jaundice; experiments with bone grafting; and a large number of investigations of sterilisation (for 'racial hygiene'), including castration and abortion".<sup>(18)</sup> Bullock quite properly calls these experiments "ordeals" and speaks of the "sufferings" of the victims.<sup>(19)</sup>

For indeed this is what the experiments meant to the Jews. Furthermore, the terms "ordeals" and "sufferings" imply an attitude of moral disapprobation; they have negative connotations and convey the way the victims felt about the experiments. When therefore, a historian uses such terms, he is, in the first instance, indicating what the events meant to the Jews in question. Of course, an event will not always mean the same to all its contemporaries. For example, a bomb planted in a public place may be interpreted by some as an act of courage by freedom fighters; to others it symbolises the viciousness of urban terrorism. Clearly, the moral connotations disclosed by each description are different. But the point is that

---

17. op.cit., p.271.

18. Allan Bullock, Hitler: A Study in Tyranny (1962), p.700.

19. Ibid.

insofar as the historian is concerned with what events meant to contemporaries, the language available for the elucidation of that meaning is not, and cannot be, neutral. As Atkinson has observed, "a consistently value-neutral terminology is simply not available for the discussion of human affairs. Absolute value-neutrality would make it impossible to engage with the subject matter of history".<sup>(20)</sup> However, it must be stressed that the fact that a historian uses terms like "ordeals", "sufferings" and "terrorist", does not *logically* imply that the historian himself disapproves of those events, although, of course, he may well do so in practice. But at this stage, what is being stressed is that moral value judgments necessarily enter into the structure of historical inquiry, but *only* in the sense that they are an integral constituent of the description of an event. It is therefore argued that it is possible in principle to write a neutral, morally-uncommitted history, albeit in language which is not value-neutral.<sup>(21)</sup>

However, as Wright has pointed out, it appears to be difficult for some historians to maintain that neutrality in practice.<sup>(22)</sup> Expressing the same view, Tapp writes that "interpretations of history

---

20. Atkinson, Knowledge and Explanation in History, p.191.

21. It might appear, at this stage, that some discussion is required on the Is/Ought question, a central concern of moral philosophy. That debate is premised on the assumed separation of statements of fact and statements of value, a separation which therefore poses the central question of the nature of their relationship. As Hudson puts it, "How is what *is* the case related to what *ought* to be the case - statements of fact to moral judgments?" (p.11). However, in this thesis, that relationship is being dealt with within different theoretical assumptions. In hermeneutic terms, facts and values are held to be interpenetrated, and the central question for historians is, therefore, how are facts and values mutually constitutive of historical statements? W.D. Hudson (ed), The Is/Ought Question (1969).

22. Gordon Wright, 'History as Moral Science', American Historical Review, Vol. 81, no. 1, 1976, p.7.

which profess to exclude ethics may well be suspected of smuggling in uncritical moral judgments".<sup>(23)</sup> For example, bearing in mind Butterfield's arguments presented earlier, the following extract from one of his books arguably shows him to be "guilty" of what is presumably a careless slip. While it is true that Napoleon was considered by many of his contemporaries to be a tyrant, it seems that Butterfield's language indicates that he may here be judged to have been hoisted with his own petard:

Where Napoleon carried his dominion he produced or he precipitated what we might call a geological subsidence; and if we say that he only hastened historical processes that were bound in any case to have their effects in the course of time, still it was the running ahead of time that was the evil - there are things which can only be good provided they do not come too quickly. Liberalism and nationalism may be wise and enriching if they have blossomed naturally without the generation of great pressure; but we have learned now not to be happy, as our forefathers were, when sometimes these things have appeared too hurriedly and too soon. If Napoleon may claim to have carried something of the results of the French Revolution throughout Europe, if it may be said that his tyranny provoked amongst the nations movements more portentous still, we may hesitate before we count it to him as virtue that he tore his way into the ancient fabric of the European states, and so mangled the processes of historical change. (24)

The fact that some historians fail to write in a consistently value-free way, (if this is their conception of history in accordance with an antiquarian approach), does not mean that that ideal is unattainable. Rather what would be required in that case is

---

23. E.J. Tapp, 'Values in History', Journal of World History, Vol. 11, 1968, p.371.

24. Herbert Butterfield, Napoleon (1962), p.96.

greater vigilance and care. However, is a neutral history the only alternative, or can a case be put forward for accounts in which the historian's own moral evaluation of the past has been imposed in an explicit, self-conscious way? Thus, for example, apart from describing the "ordeals" and "sufferings" of the Jews, ought the historian also to claim as Arendt for example, does, that the Holocaust was "a crime against humanity?".<sup>(25)</sup> As Wright has pointed out, historians may find it hard to restrain some expression of righteous indignation when dealing, for example, with "the more brutal aspects of the Hitler or Stalin era".<sup>(26)</sup> In the light of arguments developed in this thesis, agreement is expressed with Wright denying the need for that restraint; rather the idea of a hermeneutic of history embodies the concept of morally-committed interpretations of the past as part of the concept of the mediation of frames of meaning. Obviously unlike the situation within ordinary experience where the purpose of moral judgments may not be simply to indicate approval or disapproval but also to affect the behaviour of those being judged, judgments of praise or blame by a historian cannot affect the attitudes or actions of those in the past. Nevertheless, the behaviour of living persons may well be influenced. Indeed the engagement in a dialogue with the past provides both the individual historian and readers of morally-committed historical accounts with an opportunity for self-conscious examination and evaluation of their moral values. Thus, as Oldfield has observed, moral appraisal is a form of moral education.<sup>(27)</sup>

---

25. Hannah Arendt, Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil (1965), p.268.

26. Wright, op.cit., p.9.

27. Adrian Oldfield, "Moral Judgments in History", History and Theory, Vol. 20, no. 3, 1981, p.273.



The question arises as to whether there are universal moral values valid for all time, and to which all will subscribe. Strawson, for example, has argued that "because certain human needs and interests are as fundamental and general as they are, we shall find correspondingly general types of virtue and obligation acknowledged in some form and in some degree in almost any conceivable moral system".<sup>(28)</sup> These virtues and obligations include "the abstract virtue of justice, some form of obligation to mutual aid and to mutual abstention from injury, and, in some form and in some degree, the virtue of honesty".<sup>(29)</sup> However, insofar as hermeneutic philosophy recognises the ontological historicity of man as expressed in the concept of historicism, the belief in absolute moral values cannot be sustained. Stern has described historicism as the view that truth, right, customs, ethics, that is all ideas and values, are products of a given historical epoch or civilization or national and regional collectivity. Hence these ideas and values are valid for those epochs, civilizations or collectivities which produced them. Putting this epigrammatically, Stern states: *veritas filia temporis, virtus filia temporis* - truth is a daughter of time, value is a daughter of time.<sup>(30)</sup> Linge writes that historicism is the view that any reference beyond history to absolutes is not possible.<sup>(31)</sup> As Ebeling puts it:

The completely new thing in historical thinking consists in the fact that it relativises all historical things as 'merely historical'. What earlier ages thought of as man and the world has to be understood historically, but for that reason also its validity is historically limited.<sup>(32)</sup>

---

28. F.P. Strawson, 'Social Morality and the Individual Ideal', in *Freedom and Resentment and Other Essays* (1974), p.39.

29. *op.cit.*, p.38.

30. Stern, *op.cit.*, p.138.

31. Linge, 'Dilthey and Gadamer: Two Theories of Historical Understanding', p.537.

32. quoted in Linge, *op.cit.*, p.539.

Stern has suggested that there are values which are generally subscribed to by a particular group of people in a particular historical period. He calls these values "universal", an unfortunate choice, although he does clarify the sense in which he uses the word:

For example, in the Middle Ages, the religious values of the Catholic Church were universal in the sense that, according to our definition, they were affirmed independently of the individual peculiarities of the appreciating subjects and of the collective peculiarities of the appreciating groups. (33)

Stern argues that "while realising that they are relative to our historical epoch and to our civilization, we believe in our values and truths for the simple reason that they are daughters of our time, and that they, therefore, represent the axiological and epistemological consciousness and conscience of our epoch".<sup>(34)</sup> Of course, Stern is obliged to qualify his claims by pointing out that "we may judge other epochs and civilizations by virtue of our own standards of value as long as we recognise the relativity of our standards to our epoch and civilization, and that we recognise the right of future and foreign civilizations to judge of our standards by virtue of theirs".<sup>(35)</sup>

Clearly, therefore, Stern's choice of "universal" is misleading. It would be doubly misleading if used to characterise contemporary society, for there is by no means the same degree of conformity in the Western World with regard to moral values as there may have been in the Medieval era. Amongst contemporary historians in the

---

33. Stern, op.cit., p.136.

34. op.cit., p.189.

35. op.cit., p.186.

West, at least, it is arguable that two sets of values predominate at present, namely those falling within the Western tradition of liberal morality, and the revolutionary Marxist ethic. The commitment to such values should not, however, be the "product of irrational prejudice", to use Walsh's phrase, (although he is speaking of religious beliefs). Rather these values ought to be held as "a matter of rational conviction" <sup>(36)</sup> and their application to the past within the hermeneutic circle helps us to ensure a critical examination of their tenability. Indeed, as Oldfield points out, moral judgments (like all other judgments) must never be made "too soon and without sufficient attention to evidence which is relevant". <sup>(37)</sup>

Amongst historians who subscribe to the idea of a morally-committed history, the following examples are cited, examples illustrating both the liberal and revolutionary Marxist ethic respectively.

Bullock's evaluation of Hitler is made in terms of explicitly stated liberal values.

The great revolutions of the past, whatever their ultimate fate, have been identified with the release of certain powerful ideas, individual conscience, liberty, equality, national freedom, social justice. National Socialism produced nothing. Hitler constantly exalted force over the power of ideas and delighted to prove that men were governed by cupidity, fear, and their baser passions. The sole theme of the Nazi Revolution was domination, dressed up as the doctrine of race, and, failing that, a vindictive destructiveness, Rauschnig's *Revolution des Nihilismus*.

---

36. Walsh, op.cit., p.101.

37. Oldfield, op.cit., p.263.

It is this emptiness, this lack of anything to justify the suffering he caused rather than his own monstrous and ungovernable will which makes Hitler both so repellent and so barren a figure. Hitler will have his place in history, but it will be alongside Attila the Hun, the barbarian king who was surnamed, not 'the Great', but 'the scourge of God...' (38)

In his discussion on the Reign of Terror, Roberts' commitment to liberal values is clearly evident in the moral disapprobation he expresses:

Many people died: over 100,000 rebels, it seems in the fighting or the repression which followed. Many others suffered maltreatment, assault, the seizure of their property, imprisonment. This was not unremarked by contemporaries, nor has it been by historians, though perhaps we are now in danger of somewhat under-rating such horrors because of the callousing our imaginations have undergone under the impact of much larger-scale brutalities. (39)

In his reflection on the persecution of witches, Russell's liberal stance is manifested as follows:

Some contemporaries recognised the injustice. In 1563, Johann Weyer wrote a treatise *On Magic*, which argued that witches are really harmless old women suffering from mental disorders and that most alleged cases of witchcraft are really susceptible of natural explanations. But Jean Bodin and other intellectual leaders hastened to refute this voice of moderation, accusing Weyer himself of being a witch, and arguing that the similarity of the confessions proved the fact that the sabbat was always and everywhere identical. A little later,

---

38. Bullock, *op.cit.*, pp.804-5.

39. J.M. Roberts, The French Revolution (1978), pp.62-3.

in 1602, Henri Boquet wrote in his *Discourse des sorciers* that he wished that all witches should be 'united in one single body, so that they might all be burned at once in a single fire'. This mania, this eagerness to torture and kill human beings, persisted for centuries. Perhaps we put the wrong question when we ask how this could be. The past half-century has witnessed the Holocaust, the Gulag Archipelago, The Cambodian genocide, and secret tortures and executions beyond number. The real question is why periods of relative sanity, such as those from 700 to 1000 and from 1700 to 1900, occur. (40)

Stojanović has pointed out that "a Marxist ethics, at least one worthy of Marx's name, has yet to be constructed".<sup>(41)</sup> The idea of "two systems" of Marxism has already been mentioned, and it is clear that if one takes Marx's statements as being deterministic in the strict sense, then socialism is an historical inevitability. A Marxist ethics would therefore not make sense unless the individual could influence the course of history. Thus such an ethics depends on what Stojanović calls "a milder variant of determinism".<sup>(42)</sup> If the mode of production is interpreted as being ultimately determining in a non-deterministic sense, then particular historical situations do contain more than one possibility, even though these possibilities are not unlimited, the parameters for effective action having been set, in the final analysis, by the mode of production. A Marxist ethics is one which would "morally stimulate and obligate people to struggle for socialism",<sup>(43)</sup> by contributing to the awakening of the working class's consciousness of its own ethics.<sup>(44)</sup>

---

40. Russell, *op.cit.*, p.84.

41. Svetozar Stojanović, "The Ethical Potential of Marx's Thought", in Bottomore, *op.cit.*, p.170.

42. *op.cit.*, p.180.

43. *op.cit.*, p.181.

44. *op.cit.*, p.176.



Engels' moral commitment to that struggle is clear from this analysis of the 1848 Revolution in Germany:

The working class entered upon this insurrection as they would have done upon any other which promised either to remove some obstacles in their progress towards political dominion and social revolution, or, at least, to tie the more influential but less courageous classes of society to a more decided revolutionary course than they had followed hitherto. The working class took up arms with full knowledge that this was, in the direct bearings of the case, no quarrel of its own; but it followed up its only true policy, to allow no class that has risen on its shoulders (as the bourgeoisie had done in 1848) to fortify its class-government, without opening, at least, a fair field to the working classes for the struggle for its own interests, and, in any case, to bring matters to a crisis, by which either the nation was fairly and irresistibly launched in the revolutionary career, or else the *status quo* before the Revolution restored as nearly as possible, and, thereby, a new revolution rendered unavoidable. In both cases the working classes represented the real and well-understood interest of the nation at large, in hastening as much as possible that revolutionary course which for the old societies of civilised Europe has now become a historical necessity, before any of them can again aspire to a more quiet and regular development of their resources. (45)

In concluding her study on Chinese women, the Marxist feminist, Rowbotham makes her moral commitment explicit:

---

45. Frederick Engels, Germany, : Revolution and Counter Revolution (1969), pp.103-4.

In considering this extremely fundamental relationship of women with our past, and ultimately of all human beings with all history as part of the scope of continuing revolution, the Chinese ask a question we can't afford to ignore - why do we cling to subjection? To say there are still definite limits to the liberation of women after the Chinese Revolution is not to dismiss what has been achieved. Indeed, the attempt to understand historically the point from which women emerged helps us not only to appreciate what has happened in real terms, but also prevents us from lifting their experience mechanically onto ours. We come from different pasts, and the kind of socialism and liberation that we can conceive and create differs greatly. The emphasis on the work situation, the puritanism in sexual matters which appear in the emancipation of Chinese women, is not some formula for western capitalism, or the other socialist countries for that matter, but should be understood as part of a particular process of development. But while we make our own liberation the experience of other revolutions shows how from the most wretched of beginnings the impossible can happen. (46)

To sum up the discussion, Thompson's justification of his own practice of offering value judgments on the past seems particularly apt. He writes:

Only we, who are now living, can give a "meaning" to the past. But that past has always been, among other things, the result of an argument about values. In recovering that process, in showing how causation actually eventuated, we must insofar as the discipline can enforce, hold our own values in abeyance. But once this history has been recovered, we are at liberty to offer our judgment upon it. Such judgment must itself be under historical controls. The judgment must be appropriate to the materials. It is pointless to complain that the bourgeoisie have not been communarians, or that the Levellers did not introduce an anarcho-syndicalist society.

---

46. Sheila Rowbotham, Women, Resistance and Revolution (1974), pp.98-9.

What we may do, rather, is identify with certain values which past actors upheld, and reject others. We may give our vote for Winstanley and for Swift; we may vote against Walpole and Sir Edwin Chadwick.

Our vote will change nothing. And yet, in another sense, it may change everything. For we are saying that these values, and not those other values, are the ones which make the history meaningful *to us*, and that these are the values which we intend to enlarge and sustain in our own present. If we succeed, then we reach back into history and endow it with our own meanings: we shake Swift by the hand. We endorse in our present the values of Winstanley, and ensure that the low and ruthless kind of opportunism which distinguished the politics of Walpole is abhorred.

In the end we also will be dead, and our own lives will lie inert within the finished process, our intentions assimilated within a past event which we never intended. What we may hope is that the men and women of the future will reach back to us, will affirm and renew our meanings, and make our history intelligible within their own present tense. They alone will have the power to select from the many meanings offered by our quarreling present, and to transmute some part of our process into their progress. (47)

(ii) Objectivity

Does the explicit inclusion of moral values into an interpretation imply the abrogation of history as an academic discipline? Does the rejection of a morally-neutral history necessarily entail that the works produced count simply as propaganda? These conclusions are rejected. In agreement with Thompson, it is argued that a clear distinction must be made between history at the level of interpretation and history at the level of moral judgment. In order that an account of the past, subscribing to the thesis that moral judgments are necessary, may count as written history, certain

---

47. Thompson, The Poverty of Theory, p.234.

basic requirements must be met, (the word "necessary" being used here in the sense of desirable and not in the sense of logical necessity). Firstly, the historian must indicate his adherence to that thesis and clarify the actual values used in his judgments, if these are not obvious. Secondly, the objectivity of his interpretation from a particular point of view must be established. For the concept of a morally-committed history in no way excludes the possibility that the interpretation, which has been subjected to moral approbation or disapprobation, may also be judged to be objective. Bullock's assessment of Hitler as "barbaric" does not necessarily imply that his work as a whole is simply an exercise in propaganda. Moreover, historians may agree that an account is objective without supporting the moral stance taken by the interpreter.

Popper's argument that "it is a mistake to assume that the objectivity of a science depends upon the objectivity of the scientist"<sup>(48)</sup> applies to history as well. It has been shown that the self-critical historian tries to discount or eliminate "*merely* personal factors in the operation by which a conclusion is reached", as Dewey, for example, puts this point.<sup>(49)</sup>

Hampson has also written that "to the extent to which he is influenced, the historian's work may be subjective but it cannot be purely personal or arbitrary".<sup>(50)</sup> However, critical self-reflection alone, without submitting one's conclusions to the scrutiny of the relevant professional body, cannot guarantee the elimination of what is "merely personal" or "arbitrary".

---

48. Popper, "Logic of the Social Sciences", *op.cit.*, p.95. (I would include "*solely*", thus...the objectivity of a science depends *solely* upon the objectivity of the scientist).

49. Quoted by Christopher Blake, "Can History be Objective" in P. Gardiner (ed), *Theories of History* (1965), p.335.

50. Norman Hampson, "Subjectivity and Objectivity in History", *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, Vol. 7, no. 3, 1976, p.188.

Objectivity presupposes conformity to the critical methodological tradition shared by any professional group. Thus if we wish to know what counts as an objective historical account within a point of view, we need to elucidate the professional and intellectual values to which historians subscribe and which provide the basis for adjudication of such accounts. Indeed any and every group of professional historians must hold and ensure the transmission of such values if the status of history as an academic discipline is to be guaranteed.

All historians, irrespective of their point of view, are bound by what Edmiston calls the value of rationality, that is "the shared standard to which appeal is made in all methodological criticism, embodying as it does an entire vocabulary of evaluations, right, wrong, correct, false, erroneous, fallacious, circular, tautological, (il)logical, (in)consistent, un(sound), (in)coherent and so on".<sup>(51)</sup> As Atkinson has noted, while these criteria are obviously not specific to history, a person who shows little or no regard for them would not be a historian at all.<sup>(52)</sup>

Furthermore, these criteria also imply that "history has this in common with every other science, that the historian is not allowed to claim any single piece of knowledge, except where he can justify his claim by exhibiting the grounds on which it is based".<sup>(53)</sup> All historians share certain professional standards including those for determining the accuracy of sources by means of relevant scientific tests,<sup>(54)</sup> and for establishing their reliability. The philological rules for the interpretation of texts, as enunciated within the

---

51. James Edmiston, 'Methodology Considered as a System of Ethics', The Human Context, Vol. 7, 1975, p.450. (This standard presupposes adherence to rational rules of thought).

52. Atkinson, Knowledge and Explanation in History, p.194.

53. Collingwood, op.cit., p.252.

54. Arthur Marwick, Primary Sources Humanities Foundation Course Unit 6, 1970.



early hermeneutic tradition, are indispensable in this latter regard. Furthermore, the need for "accurate and full reporting of sources so that other historians can follow the tracks" is subscribed to by all historians.<sup>(55)</sup> In short, "meticulous research",<sup>(56)</sup> to use Marino's phrase, is a *sine qua non* for written history.

Three further criteria in terms of which accounts are judged, namely coherence, in a hermeneutic sense, comprehensiveness and plausibility are postulated in this thesis. The content given to these concepts depends on the point of view taken, that is on the ontological and methodological assumptions held. Thus specific communities of historians will agree on what their field of research is, how its domain may be extended, what problems count as legitimate, and what kinds of theory are explanatory.<sup>(57)</sup>

It has already been argued that the attempt to understand the historical meaning of an event from a specific point of view does not follow a linear course. For misleading presuppositions may be altered in the light of the understanding of a part, which itself may then illuminate the colligated whole, leading in turn to a deeper understanding of another part, thereby suggesting different questions based on altered presuppositions, and so on. Thus it is clear that a coherence involving parts and whole must be sought. Firstly, in the text itself, there must be a coherence of words and sentences; secondly, a coherence between particular thoughts and the intention; thirdly between the text or action

---

55. Atkinson, op.cit., p.82.

56. John A. Marino, "Matrices of Materialist Historiography", Journal of Modern History, Vol. 51, 1979, p.99.

57. cf. Bernstein, op.cit., p.433.

in the context of the author's output, or the agent's character and his life history; and finally between the event in its narrower historical context and in the wider colligated contextual whole, that is in accordance with the rules postulated by the early hermeneutic thinkers.

Clearly this coherence presupposes a comprehensive study of the event and period in question. Indeed, it would be impossible to achieve coherence without the historian being familiar with the primary and secondary sources which go towards constituting the relevant historical point of view. However, while a comprehensive account will include what is relevant, it will also omit what is irrelevant, in terms of the question being asked.

The account will be plausible to the extent that it does succeed in answering the historian's questions, that is, it resolves the questioner's puzzlement. Passmore has suggested that any good explanation must satisfy these requirements - it must be intelligible, adequate and correct.<sup>(58)</sup> An intelligible explanation is one which "refers to modes of connection which have come to be familiar to us".<sup>(59)</sup> In the main, historians tend to use ordinary standards of intelligibility, but it has been argued in this thesis that in terms of the double hermeneutic, historians may make use of theories postulated in related disciplines. If those theories, and the questions which prompted their use, may be seen as being "in some way continuous with existing history"; if they "connect at some point(s) with that multi-faceted thing that history at any time is", then they extend the boundaries of explanation in history insofar as they are recognised to be genuinely explanatory.<sup>(60)</sup>

---

58. Passmore, op.cit., p.111.

59. op.cit., p.112.

60. Atkinson, op.cit., pp.135-6.

An explanation is adequate "if it refers to conditions of which we know that they will in many circumstances produce the given effect, unless we have some positive reason for believing that the circumstances were peculiar".<sup>(61)</sup> Passmore argues that historians, like ordinary men, accept as adequate any explanation which refers to "conditions that are not strictly necessary and sufficient".<sup>(62)</sup> In the case, for example, of an explanation which makes use of the singular hypothetical in order to explain why an individual did what he did, adequacy will depend on the extent to which the historian has elucidated the individual's character; his beliefs, his aims, his particular situation and so on. In the case of a narrative explanation, adequacy depends on whether events have been linked sequentially in such a way that they follow each other without the feeling that something was left out, or that some of the connections between those events remained puzzling.

Passmore writes that if an explanation is intelligible and adequate it is usually taken to be correct in ordinary experience, unless we have reason to be suspicious of it.<sup>(63)</sup> A plausible account is therefore based on evidence; it makes true statements and these "truths must be relatable in publicly checkable ways to evidence".<sup>(64)</sup>

The maintenance and transmission of these intellectual and professional values is ensured by teaching bodies as well as by professional institutions such as scholarly journals, books and congresses. These provide the opportunity for the friendly-hostile co-operation of all historians, and hence the forums for assessing the objectivity and relevance of particular explanations

---

61. Passmore, op.cit., p.113.

62. op.cit., p.122. (Thompson makes the same point, op.cit., p.230).

63. op.cit., pp.113-4.

64. Atkinson, op.cit., p.132.

offered for adjudication in the spirit of Popperean falsifiability by the self-critical historian. It is important to stress that this social aspect of historical research ought to include the participation of *all* historians, irrespective of their subscription to a particular point of view. The hermeneutic thesis has argued that location within any point of view, constituted by specific presuppositions and theories, leads a historian to focus on certain sources, determining what count as facts and how these are to be explained, sometimes resulting in interpretations which may present qualitatively different pictures of past events. Nevertheless it is held that it is possible to postulate conditions within which all historians may communicate, thereby understanding and evaluating the contributions of their colleagues. Without that communication, it is clear that the fields of history would grow increasingly isolated from each other, initially breeding incest, but finally becoming sterile. Indeed, any evaluation not only of an interpretation from a point of view, but of the merits of the point of view itself, that is the richness, flexibility and fruitfulness of respective historical frameworks, requires a comparison with other points of view.

It is suggested in this thesis that Habermas' concept of an idealized dialogue (or Apel's notion of the ideal speech situation) delineate "a model of perfect mutual comprehension" for historians.<sup>(65)</sup> It has already been argued that our common access to a shared language, itself not value-free, provides us with the possibility of understanding each other, even though the analysis of the speech act has revealed the difficulties of achieving transparently clear communication in practice. Within a model of perfect mutual comprehension, the communicative symmetry between partners consists in the attainment of consensus reached by a rational examination of arguments,

---

65. The phrase is Giddens', op.cit., p.66.

the complete and joint understanding of each other, and the shared recognition of the authentic right of the other to take the role he does in the dialogue as a full and equal partner.<sup>(66)</sup> Thus judgments of objectivity and critical evaluations of various points of view may be effected within the parameters of such a model by a linguistic community of historians bound by the ideal of rational discourse. Obviously, a further prerequisite is that the dialogue be conducted within a society free of political restraints.<sup>(67)</sup>

The ideal of a rational community of historians may well be difficult to realize in practice. However that ideal ought not to be abandoned. As Bauman has observed, the projection of an ideal on actual practices acts as an incentive to improvement, and as a standard for evaluation. The gap between the ideal and the actual is made more explicit, and guidance is provided as to how to make discourse more rational.<sup>(68)</sup> In its own terms, the idea of a hermeneutic of history is committed to the pursuit of rationality in the sense above. Paralleling the dialogue between interpreter and the past within the hermeneutic circle of understanding, historians within different points of view ought to strive, through the practice of the Socratic dialogue, towards mutual understanding, ensuring the constant evaluation of the merits (and demerits) of a particular point of view. In so doing, the vitality of the discipline of history as a whole will be ensured.

---

66. Ibid.

67. The postulation of this ideal also provides us with a possible answer to Hoy's question which is of fundamental importance to hermeneutics in general:

Is it possible for philosophy itself to stay within the hermeneutical circle of understanding, and within the limitations imposed by its own historical conditions, yet legitimately posit rational principles as conditions for the possible validity or truth of particular acts of understanding?

Hoy, op.cit., p.118.

68. Bauman, op.cit., p.243.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

### EXPLANATION IN HISTORY

It is clear from the historical survey given in this thesis, that hermeneutic philosophers have devoted virtually no attention to specific historical problems. Dilthey, it is true, dealt with the idea of a hermeneutic method, but gave no formal illustrations of the way a historical event would be interpreted hermeneutically. Thus a central issue in this thesis is to analyse the idea of a formal hermeneutic explanation.

An immediate objection presents itself, for surely the word 'explanation' is inapplicable in a hermeneutic context? Dilthey, after all, had said that nature we explain, while man we must understand (although, as we have seen, Dilthey did not exclude the use of scientific explanations in the hermeneutic practice). There are philosophers who restrict the use of "explain" to describe the activity of giving causes in the form of the hypothetico-deductive model of explanation. Morgenbesser says that "not every way of removing perplexity can count as an explanation".<sup>(1)</sup> On the other hand, Passmore for example, has isolated nine different ways in which the word 'explanation' can be used. He writes that "explaining...is a particular way of using a form of argument; it has no logical form peculiar to it".<sup>(2)</sup> What is common to all forms of explanation is the puzzlement of the questioner and his consequent desire to clarify or to eliminate that puzzlement.

- 
1. Sydney Morgenbesser, "Scientific Explanation", International Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences (1968), Vol. 14, p.117.
  2. Passmore, "Explanation in Everyday Life, in Science and in History", History and Theory, Vol. 2, 1962, p.109.

"Being puzzled", says Passmore, "is a special sort of not knowing". For it is not-knowing in the sense of "not knowing what to make of a situation". And this "puzzling situation presents characteristics which are, from our point of view, unexpected; it interrupts the smoothness of our dealings with the world".<sup>(3)</sup>

(Heidegger made a similar kind of point when he argued that it is only when something in our everyday taken-for-granted world is revealed as missing, broken or perhaps unsuitable, that the world is revealed as an object of contemplation. Possibilities are revealed to man and it is this revelation which makes theoretical knowledge possible. Understanding chooses from possibilities against a background of what is familiar).<sup>(4)</sup> The kind of explanation given depends on the question asked. Hull writes that "from an ordinary point of view it seem implausible that a term like 'explanation' should refer to a single process".<sup>(5)</sup>

Weingartner has pointed out that philosophers are divided between those who wish to provide an account of what historians ought to be doing and those who wish to provide an account of what they actually do.<sup>(6)</sup> We may therefore ask the question whether philosophy of history should be prescriptive? Thus if formal models of explanation proposed by philosophers bear little resemblance to what historians do, then so much the worse for history; historians must strive to implement such models. For example, writers have argued that the covering-law method of explanation ought to be the mode of explanation in history, and while historians may have the right to "indulge in imaginative reconstruction" or to give narratives if they wish, such activities cannot count as explanations, because

3. *op.cit.*, p.107.

4. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, pp.104-107.

5. David L. Hull, 'Central Subjects and Historical Narratives', *History and Theory*, Vol. 14, no. 3, p.273.

6. Rudolph H. Weingartner, 'The Quarrel About Historical Explanation', *Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 58, 1961.

they are not scientific explanations.<sup>(7)</sup> Or is philosophy of history descriptive; does it take as its starting point how historians go about making the past intelligible, and then express these techniques formally, possibly making helpful suggestions to historians in the interests of greater intelligibility and clarity? The idea of a hermeneutic of history which is grounded in an analysis of the historicity of understanding, insists that the fruits of this analysis be incorporated into the practice of history as an attempt to understand the past, while at the same time examining that practice in order to fill out a formal characterisation of such a hermeneutic.

In this chapter, explanatory techniques used by historians will be discussed in conjunction with a philosophical analysis of explanation and in the context of hermeneutic thought.<sup>(8)</sup>

The various senses of the word "explain" elucidated by Passmore may be grouped into three basic senses applicable to historiography, namely, explain "what", explain "how", explain "why".

(i) Explain "what"

We can ask the question: what does X mean? where X is a word, a text, or an event, for example. In each case this is a demand for an elucidation, for putting something into a context. This kind of question is, of course, the traditional hermeneutic one, for the appropriation of meaning is the goal of hermeneutics. And all hermeneutic thinkers have recognised that meaning is necessarily contextual.

- 
7. M. Brodbeck. in Fou's O Mi-k. 'The Autonomy of Historical Understanding', History and Theory, Vol. 5, 1966, p.27.
  8. The discussion which follows applies to explanations given within any point of view. Examples from Marxist historiography will be cited to illustrate this claim, and are included in Appendix B.

A historian asks, for example, what did the calling of the Estates-General mean to the French bourgeoisie?

In his attempt to clarify the distinction between the meaning of history and meaning in history, Walsh has argued that the former falls within the ambit of speculative philosophies of history, while the latter represents the goal of the historian.<sup>(9)</sup> Every historian, says Walsh, assumes that history is meaningful; that it is intelligible in principle in the light of explanatory principles we bring to bear on it.

To explain is to render intelligible; it is  
to find meaning and point in material initially  
not seen to have meaning and point. (10)

The phrase "initially not seen to have meaning and point" is not wholly acceptable to hermeneutics. As Heidegger has argued, we always have a preunderstanding of an event, and while this may be unclear or imprecise, clarity and precision are achieved in the process of coming to a fuller understanding, through the hermeneutic circle of understanding.

Finding "meaning and point" involves the concept of colligation, and although Walsh is unfamiliar with hermeneutics, that concept may be said to be a way of stating the hermeneutic whole-parts thesis of the intelligibility of events. Colligation is that explanatory activity which has as its goal the tracing out of the ramifications of a particular event in a specific historical context.

---

9. W.H. Walsh, '"Meaning" in History', in P. Gardiner, (ed), Theories of History, pp.296-307.

10. op.cit., p.299.

To make a sense of a given piece of history, what has to be done is to see the connections between different historical events, to show how one action, or happening led to another, to show perhaps how certain forces or factors were continuously realized or striven for in the period under consideration. (11)

The idea of colligation therefore restates the important hermeneutic point that all historical explanations must always be contextual. Dilthey, in his later thought, used *verstehen* to describe the way the interpreter grasps the reciprocal relation of parts and whole within a specific context. As has already been pointed out, he also suggested that the subject matter of history be conceived as a dynamic system which may be regarded as analogous to Walsh's colligated whole.

However, what is still needed is to flesh out the question: What does a specific event mean? If we return to the question: What did the calling of the Estates-General mean to the French bourgeoisie?, we can isolate the following kinds of questions, questions which every competent historian on the period will try to answer even if he is not explicitly conscious that this constitutes part of a hermeneutic undertaking.

- (i) What was the bourgeois class? How had it originated? What was its situation in France at the time with respect to political, social and economic institutions? What was its philosophical outlook?
- (ii) What did the actions of the bourgeoisie in the Estates-General mean in the context of that situation? How, in other words, did they interpret that particular situation, or why did they choose to break away from the Estates-General?

---

11. op.cit., p.296.



- (iii) How did their actions influence the king and first two estates? In other words, what did their actions mean to the kings and those estates?

This is obviously not an exhaustive list of the kinds of questions which are subsumed in the broad question given as the illustration of a "what" question. But they suffice to make two points. Firstly, it is clear that the historian is concerned both with what the actions of the bourgeoisie meant to them including what they intended in the context of their situation, as well as how these actions affected others. It must be stressed that the historian is not a mirror reflecting the past. He has immersed himself in the interpretative tradition surrounding the event and he knows, as the bourgeoisie in the Estates-General did not, what occurred in the future. This has become part of the historical tradition in which he stands. The way he appropriates the past must always be from a point of view, and the appropriation will involve a mediation of frames of meaning so that explicitly or implicitly his answer to the question will also reflect his understanding of what those events mean to him in his situation.<sup>(12)</sup>

Secondly, giving answers which aim to make the event intelligible must involve giving narrative explanations, that is, explaining how events came about; for example, how did the Estates-General come to be called? Furthermore, causal explanations are also required, for example, why did the bourgeoisie swear the Tennis Court Oath?

Ricoeur has listed the following considerations which a hermeneutic account will take into account, including the idea that human agents are authors of events; they interpret their actions in terms

---

12. cf. Giddens, op.cit., pp.63-4.

of motives; the way the action of one agent affects another; how norms and institutions regulate projects; how institutions are founded and maintained, broken or renewed.<sup>(13)</sup> Implicitly, therefore, he is also acknowledging that a hermeneutic interpretation will involve the assignment of causes as well as the need for a narrative.

"What" questions therefore provide the hermeneutic framework within which other kinds of questions are asked and answered in order to render the event in question intelligible. This then leads to an examination of the other two ways "explain" is used.

(ii) Explain "how"

We can ask the question, how did you get here? and in reply we would expect an explanation giving a sequential linking of events, in short, giving a narrative. Historians ask, for example, how did Hitler come to be chancellor of Germany in 1933?

There are some philosophers of history who argue that a narrative explanation is the only appropriate mode of explanation in history. Because history is concerned with an explanation of change, "properly detailed narrative is explanatory. Explaining in history is simply giving a sufficiently full account of change".<sup>(14)</sup> As Gilliam expresses this:

If the purpose of history is taken to be the description of changes undergone by an entity from one time to another then the language of

---

13. Paul Ricoeur, 'History and Hermeneutics', Journal of Philosophy, Vol. 73, no. 19, 1976, p.688.

14. R.F. Atkinson, 'Explanation in History'. Proceedings of the Aristotelean Society, Vol. 62, 1972, p.255.

narrative which...gives legitimacy to the idea of change becomes the only appropriate vehicle.  
(15)

Renier<sup>(16)</sup> and Gallie<sup>(17)</sup> hold that narratives are explanatory without involving the use of law-type explanations for, insofar as history is essentially story-telling, narrative implies references to causes, motives, effects and results. But as Atkinson has pointed out, the claim that narratives are explanatory in themselves need not preclude the inclusion of law-type explanations, or explanations which are expressed in terms of the intentions of the agents. But the latter are regarded as being neither necessary nor sufficient conditions for the narrative being explanatory. The inclusion of these other kinds of explanation depends simply on the extent to which they aid the narrative.<sup>(18)</sup>

If we consider the question of how it was that Hitler came to be chancellor in 1933, it is clear that part of the answer will lie in a recounting of events in sequence including the formation of the German National Socialist Party, the abortive *putsch* of 1923, the elections of 1930, Hitler's decision to run against Von Hindenberg, Von Papen's intrigue, amongst other events. But however detailed that narrative, it will still be necessary (if that question is to be answered fully) to analyse what the situation meant to Hitler; that is an elucidation of the context within which he was able to make his bid for power. Furthermore, an attempt must be made to clarify the appeal of the Nazi Party, what it meant to those Germans who supported Hitler (and those

- 
15. Harriet Gilliam, 'The Dialectics of Realism and Idealism in Modern Historiographic Theory', History and Theory, Vol.15, no. 3, 1976, p.257.
  16. G.J. Renier, History: Its Purpose and Method (1950).
  17. W.B. Gallie, Philosophy and the Historical Understanding, (1954)
  18. Atkinson, Knowledge and Explanation in History, p.128.



who did not). Thus answering "how" questions also requires that "what" questions be dealt with as well. "How" questions are also dependent on "why" questions. For a historian wants to know why the *putsch* failed, for example - in short he will also be giving causal explanations.

In terms of hermeneutic thought, historians may also use theories which would not necessarily have been familiar to the protagonists of the time as hypotheses in the giving of causal explanations (in other words the language of these theories is not part of the form of life of which the event was a constituent). Thus, based on a comparative study of Fascist regimes in Europe at that particular time, a historian may formulate an hypothesis which he tests (attempts to refute) against the evidence.<sup>(19)</sup> The justification for using such theories lies in the extent to which they do resolve the puzzlement of the questioner. Another possibility is that the historian consults studies conducted by psychologists and sociologists concerned with an exploration of the origins, growth and outcome of social movements, using hypotheses postulated therein as possible explanatory devices.<sup>(20)</sup>

- 
19. For example, the phenomenon of Fascism has been explained as a movement which tried to mobilise the masses for rapid industrialization in countries where economic development was delayed. Examples of so-called modernisation theories to account for Fascism include James A. Gregor, The Ideology of Fascism: The Rationale of Totalitarianism (1969), A.F.K. Organski, 'Fascism and Modernisation', in S.J. Woolf (ed), The Nature of Fascism (1960). The explanatory value of some of these theories has been challenged. G. Allardyce, 'What Fascism is Not: Some Thoughts on the Deflation of a Concept', American Historical Review, Vol. 84, no. 2, 1979.
  20. For example, Kedward deals with two theories which attempt to give psychological explanations for outbursts of "group aggression, conformity and subservience between the wars". H.R. Kedward, Fascism in Western Europe 1900-1945 (1969), pp.191-195.

To illustrate the way narratives are informed by analyses and elucidations of meaning, as well as being complemented by causal explanations, reference is made to an extract from Russell's *A History of Witchcraft, Sorcerers, Heretics and Pagans*.<sup>(21)</sup>

His concern in that passage is to try to account for the occurrence of the witch-craze phenomenon through an examination of some of the laws pertaining to paganism, sorcery and heresy passed during the course of the eight, ninth and tenth centuries. The sequential linking of events is clearly evident, from the 'List of Superstitions', to a revised baptismal formula, the efforts of the Synod of Rome in 743 and of the Synod of Paris in 829, and finally to the *Canon Episcopi*, c.900. But Russell is not content simply to furnish a narrative; he also provides detailed elucidations of the meaning of these measures. For example, the *Canon Episcopi*'s ambiguity is clearly spelt out. For while its intention was to deny the actual existence of witches, it came to be reinterpreted during the witch-craze. With Diana identified as Satan, the idea of the witches's sabbat could find its justification in that document. Russell also offers an hypothesis (implicit rather than explicit) in an attempt to account for the gradual decline of pagan beliefs. The hypothesis is something of the sort, "the institution of severe punishments for certain practices is bound to reduce and eventually eradicate such practices".

The idea of a hermeneutic of history makes the following points with regard to the issue of narratives. Firstly, it denies that history is intrinsically and solely narrative. It agrees with Mandelbaum that to view history as solely narrative is to set up a model for historiography "which is far too simplistic".<sup>(22)</sup>

---

21. Appendix A.

22. Maurice Mandelbaum, 'A Note on History as Narrative', *History and Theory*, Vol. 6, 1967, p.419.



But it disagrees with McCullagh, for example, who denies that narratives are genuinely explanatory because they contain no universal statements.<sup>(23)</sup> This is to have a monolithic conception of explanation restricting the term to the giving of law explanations.

Secondly, it rejects the alternative which holds that history is only analysis, as implied for example in Acton's dictum that history must deal with problems rather than periods.<sup>(24)</sup> For it is difficult to see how one could analyse a particular period for example, Germany post-Versailles to 1933, without giving some narrative. As Atkinson says, "there must be a chronological guiding thread of some sort".<sup>(25)</sup> But history is not merely narrative:

A consistent chronology...is...a considerable step in the direction of explanation, though doubtless it will leave a great deal unexplained. (26)

Hence the idea of a hermeneutic of history agrees that narrative is essential to history while denying that history is essentially or really only narrative.<sup>(27)</sup>

Thirdly, it holds that the kind of explanation given depends on the question being asked; it will be influenced "as much by the nature of a particular period or what is known about it as by an historian's personal preferences", as Atkinson notes.<sup>(28)</sup> In short, different kinds of questions reflect both "the nature

---

23. C.B. McCullagh, 'Narrative and Explanation in History', *Mind*, Vol. 78, 1969.

24. in Atkinson, Knowledge and Explanation in History, p.19.

25. op.cit., p.22.

26. op.cit., p.133.

27. Gilliam, op.cit., p.254.

28. Atkinson Knowledge and Explanation in History, p.21.

of the particular phenomena under consideration as well as the interests of the historian".<sup>(29)</sup>

Fourthly, it agrees with Mandelbaum, who, rejecting the view that historical inquiry and writing is essentially a question of constructing narratives, adds that it is false to "assume that all of the relationships which historians seek to establish amongst the events with which they deal are sequential in character".<sup>(30)</sup> History is an activity which is not best represented by the model of story-telling. Rather, in the analysis of complex patterns of change, the relationship which is fundamental to historiography is that of part and whole; in short, this states the hermeneutic position.<sup>(31)</sup> Thus, ultimately, events are integrated into an "organised whole".<sup>(32)</sup>

It has been argued that answering "what" questions involves "how" questions, and that these are bound up with "why" questions. "How" questions similarly, are closely and inextricably inter-linked with "what" and "why" questions. In practice, historians do not separate out these kinds of questions; this is being done simply for the sake of methodological clarity.

(iii) Explain "why"

We can ask, why did he do something? why did X happen? and this represents a demand for the cause or causes of an event. The historian will ask, for example, why was there a counter-revolution in the Vendée? As Walsh has remarked, the notion of causation is

---

29. op.cit., p.20.

30. Mandelbaum, op.cit., p.414.

31. op.cit., pp.417-8.

32. Hull, op.cit., p.274.

a complex one and "statements of radically different types are brought together under the general rubric 'causal statement'".<sup>(33)</sup> In contemporary historiography, this kind of question has been dealt with in two basic ways.<sup>(34)</sup>

Firstly, there is the view that a genuine explanation in history, as in any other discipline, consists in subsuming the event to be explained under a law or laws. Secondly, reacting against this claim in favour of the methodological unity of all disciplines, it has been argued that history is *sui generis*, concerned with unique, particular events, with its own way of dealing with "why" questions through the practice of imaginative rethinking in order to grasp the intention of the historical agents involved in particular events. This is, of course, the traditional hermeneutic concern. Vico, as we have seen, spoke of recovering and recapturing forms of thought through the use of the imagination. Gatterer too held that to rethink or to reexperience imaginatively events constituted the highest form of historical understanding, providing a form of intuitive knowledge in terms of which the past was made present. Dilthey elucidated various categories of *verstehen* (in the psychologistic sense), variations of that process whereby signs given to our senses are interpreted in order to grasp their "psychic reality".<sup>(35)</sup>

The hermeneutic tradition would therefore pose the question above as, what did X mean to him? and thus by-pass the demand for a causal answer, dealing with the question through the technique of *verstehen*. But it is argued in this thesis that while *verstehen* is useful in generating hypotheses, it does not, in its psycho-

---

33. Walsh, *op.cit.*, p.297.

34. The issue of functional explanation which is a type of causal explanation, is dealt with in Appendix B.

35. Chapters Two and Three.

logistic sense, constitute a formal explanation. Thus we will discuss the issue as a "why" question, why did he do so-and-so?, and show that this question in turn is dependent upon, and inter-linked with, "what" and "how" questions.

Beer has pointed out that the idea of imaginative reenactment has been defended as "rational explanation".<sup>(36)</sup> Atkinson calls rational explanations those which deal with "an agent's intentions, purposes, beliefs, standards".<sup>(37)</sup> But before dealing with these kinds of explanations, the issue of causal explanation in general in history will be examined.

(a) The hypothetico-deductive model of explanation

In putting forward his theory of causal explanation Popper writes as follows:

I suggest that to give a causal explanation of a certain *specific event* means deducing a statement describing this event from two kinds of premises; from some *universal laws*, and from some similar or specific statements which we may call the *specific initial conditions*.  
(38)

(It is important to note that Popper made no claim that this theory was one of explanation in general - he was concerned specifically with causal explanations).<sup>(39)</sup> Popper holds that there are two conditions which universal laws must satisfy; they must be strictly universal insofar as they are statements which are true for any place and time until they have been falsified, and secondly they must be empirically falsifiable.<sup>(40)</sup>

---

36. Samuel H. Beer, 'Causal Explanation and Imaginative Re-enactment', History and Theory, Vol. 3, 1964, p.23.

37. Atkinson, 'Explanation in History', p.241.

38. Popper, POH, p.122.

39. A point made by Donagan. Alan Donagan, 'The Popper-Hempel Theory Reconsidered', History and Theory, Vol. 4, no. 1, 1964, pp.127-8.

40. Karl K. Popper, The Logic of Scientific Discovery (1968), pp.68-70. Popper, OS, p.262.

Popper made a distinction between the generalizing sciences, subdivided into theoretical and applied sciences, and the historical sciences. In the case of the latter, historians are not concerned with discovering laws, as in the theoretical sciences, nor do they deal with prediction and control, the object of the applied sciences.<sup>(41)</sup> While not denying that history is concerned with the "actual singular or specific event",<sup>(42)</sup> Popper nevertheless advocates the methodological unity of all disciplines:

...I am going to propose a doctrine of the unity of method; that is to say, the view that all theoretical or generalizing sciences make use of the same method, whether they are natural or social science...I do not intend to assert that there are no differences whatever between the methods of the theoretical sciences of nature and of society; such differences clearly exist, even between the various natural sciences themselves, as well as between the various social sciences...But...the methods in the two fields are fundamentally the same...The methods always consist in offering deductive causal explanations, and in testing them. (43)

But Popper goes on to make an extremely important point, which, as will be argued later, seems to have been ignored by his critics in the field of historiography.

This has sometimes been called the hypothetico-deductive method, or more often the method of hypothesis, for it does not achieve absolute certainty for any of the scientific statements which it tests; rather, these statements

---

41. Popper, POH, p.143., Popper OS, p.263.

42. Popper, POH, p.143.

43. op.cit., pp.130-1.



*always retain the character of tentative hypotheses, even though their character of tentativeness may cease to be obvious after they have passed a great number of severe tests. (44)*

Hempel, in his first formulation of the method, writes that a scientific explanation of an event in question consists of:

- (1) a set of statements asserting the occurrence of certain events  $C_1 \dots C_2$  at certain times and places.
- (2) a set of universal hypotheses, such that
  - (a) the statements of both groups are reasonably well confirmed by empirical evidence.
  - (b) from the two groups of statements the sentence asserting the occurrence of event E can be logically deduced. (45)

But even in this initial formulation, Hempel acknowledged (in his measles example) that "it can hardly be said to be a general law to the effect that any person who has not had the measles before will get them without fail if he stays in the company of somebody else who has the measles; that a contagion will occur can be asserted only with a high probability".<sup>(46)</sup>

In a later paper Hempel distinguished between two basic types of scientific explanation, both explaining an event in terms of some antecedents and relying on the use of relevant generalizations. The first is the deductive-nomological mode of explanation which Hempel defines as "the deductive subsumption of the explanandum under the principles which have the character

---

44. *op.cit.*, p.131. (my italics). I would add that these hypotheses are then regarded as "universal laws".

45. Carl G. Hempel, 'The Function of General Laws in History', in P. Gardiner (ed), *Theories of History*, p.345.

46. *op.cit.*, p.350.

of general laws".<sup>(47)</sup> These laws "connect the explanandum event with the particular conditions cited in the explanans, and this is what confers upon the latter the status of explanatory (and in some cases causal) factors in regard to the phenomenon being explained".<sup>(48)</sup> The second type of scientific explanation is the probabilistic explanation which is an "assertion to the effect that if certain specified conditions are realised, then the occurrence of such and such a kind of event will come about with such and such a statistical probability".<sup>(49)</sup> Hempel says that this explanation is "nomological in that it presupposes general laws, but because these laws are of statistical rather than of strictly universal form, the resulting explanatory arguments are inductive rather than deductive in character".<sup>(50)</sup> History, according to Hempel, tends to use this second type of explanation.<sup>(51)</sup>

It must be pointed out that Hempel called these two types of explanation "models"; hence they must be seen as serving to remind us that they "constitute ideal types or theoretical idealisations and are not intended to reflect the manner in which working scientists actually formulate their explanatory accounts".<sup>(52)</sup> Rather scientists often use elliptic or partial explanations which he characterises as "explanation sketches".<sup>(53)</sup> But they are useful as models because, amongst other points, they reveal logical connections between steps followed in explanations, and provide standards for critical appraisal of such explanations.<sup>(54)</sup> In the case of history, Hempel seems unsure as to whether these explanation sketches could be filled in fully. For the generalizations needed to complete the explanations may be common

---

47. Carl G. Hempel, "Explanation in Science and in History", in Nash, op.cit., p.81.

48. op.cit., p.84.

49. Ibid.

50. op.cit., pp.85-6.

51. op.cit., p.91.

52. op.cit., p.87.

53. Ibid.

54. Ibid.

knowledge and may be difficult to express precisely.<sup>(55)</sup> While, as Atkinson has observed, this may be a "harsh exposure of the standards of explanatory cogency" in history in Hempelian terms,<sup>(56)</sup> what is at stake is the status of law explanations in history.

Most critics of the Popper-Hempel view, sometimes referred to as the covering-law method of explanation, justify their criticism firstly by an appeal to the way historians actually go about writing history. The inescapable conclusion is that thus far no such *universal laws* have been discovered and that it is unlikely that they will. Taylor, for example, asking the question: Why did Henry VIII dissolve the monasteries? proposes three possible "universal generalizations" each of which he shows to be untenable. The universal "Whenever a king is in need of money to finance his administration he seizes monasteries" is plainly false. Attempting to widen the scope of such a generalization, Taylor's next suggestion is also shown to be open to counter examples, "Whenever the supreme political authority needs finance it seizes that property the seizure of which is least likely to arouse either strong retaliation by the owners or widespread popular revolt". But when Taylor narrows the scope of the generalization, he ends up with one which applies only to the question at stake - "When a king exactly like Henry VIII in exactly the same situation etc., etc."<sup>(57)</sup> (Interestingly this is the way Donagan formulates the singular hypothetical in accounting for why an individual did what he did, as will be discussed below). Taylor's criticisms are, however, contingent upon the "universals" of the hypothetico-deductive model being conceived of as universal

---

55. *op.cit.*, pp.91-4.

56. Atkinson, *Knowledge and Explanation in History*, p.108.

57. Daniel M. Taylor, *Explanation and Meaning* (1970), pp.74-76.

and absolute.

Other criticisms are directed at the examples of laws given by Popper and Hempel. The latter has given as an example of a universal statement "populations will tend to migrate to regions which offer better living conditions", while admitting that it is difficult to state this hypothesis accurately in the form of a general law which is "reasonably well confirmed by all the relevant evidence available".<sup>(58)</sup> Donagan observes that "it is *always* difficult and it has *never* been done".<sup>(59)</sup> Criticisms of Hempel must, however, take into account the points he stressed, namely that historians use the probabilistic model and that their attempts must be regarded as explanation sketches.

Criticisms of Popper, however, can be attacked in a fundamental sense, for it may be argued that they are misconceived. Popper has given numerous examples of universal statements, including the "trivial universal laws" which we take for granted, such as "if of two armies which are about equally well-armed and led, one has a tremendous superiority in men, then the other never wins".<sup>(60)</sup> He also cites examples of sociological laws or hypotheses such as "you cannot introduce agricultural tariffs and at the same time reduce the cost of living"; "you cannot, in an industrial society, organise consumers' pressure groups as effectively as you can organise certain producers' pressure groups"; "you cannot make a revolution without causing a reaction", and so on.<sup>(61)</sup>

---

58. Hempel, 'The Function of General Laws in History', pp.349-50.

59. Donagan, *op.cit.*, p.143.

60. Popper, *OS*, p.264.

61. Popper, *POH*, p.62.



The fact that Popper uses the word "trivial" to describe these "laws" has contributed to the criticism levelled at him. However, it must be pointed out that, specifically in the case of Popper, historiography on the subject of the covering-law model has been silent on his conception of science, his principle of falsifiability, and the importance of these with reference to his model of causal explanation. For Popper's universal laws are conceived of as hypotheses or conjectures, and the criterion of the scientific status of such hypotheses or conjectures is their falsifiability. The force of a particular universal law, or series of laws, is the degree of confirmation enjoyed at a particular time, within a particular paradigm. The various sociological laws above, (and it is to be noted that Popper adds "or hypotheses"), are analogous to the laws or hypotheses of the natural sciences.<sup>(62)</sup> The point is that the historian (like the scientist) deduces testable propositions from an hypothesis and tries to refute the hypothesis by examining the relevant historical material.

Agreement...is taken as corroboration,  
*though not as final proof*; clear disagreement  
 is considered as refutation or  
 falsification. (63)

As an example illustrating Popper's argument consider this passage:

Perhaps the last liberty to be promoted by the  
 Reformation in the sixteenth century was that  
 of the mind. Movements of missionary passion  
 are not given to tolerance and scepticism, nor  
 do they provoke such reaction in those they

---

62. Ibid.

63. op.cit., p.133 (my italics).



attack; among the first victims of this new age of religious controversy were the spirit of free enquiry and the patience extended to the conformist. Luther could be highly obscurantist at the expense of intellectuals of Erasmus's type; the fate of the so-called Catholic reformers of Italy shows how under the pressure of the great heresies toleration of reasonable diversity changed into fierce hostility; Thomas More developed from the speculative humanist of Utopia (1516) into the persecuting lord chancellor of 1530. (64)

The hypothesis is clearly stated namely, "Movements of missionary passion are not given to tolerance and scepticism, nor do they provide such reaction in those they attack". This is tested successfully by Elton through examination of the attitudes and actions of Luther, the Catholic Reformers of Italy, and Thomas More.

As to the way such hypotheses are obtained, Popper's position is that we always start with "something in the nature of a theory, such as a hypothesis, or a prejudice or a problem...which in some way *guides* our observations, and helps us to select from the innumerable objects of observation those which may be of interest".<sup>(65)</sup> In hermeneutic terms the interpretative and historical traditions in which the historian stands, contribute to his fore-structure, to his point of view on the event being studied.

Consider now Beer's criticism of Popper's position. Popper is accused of "bad generalizing", of being guilty of the "vice" of

---

64. G.R. Elton, 'Introduction' to The New Cambridge Modern History, Volume II: The Reformation (1958), p.3.

65. Popper, POH, p.134.

the "dogma of universality".<sup>(66)</sup> Thus when Beer says that the generalizations used by Tilly "are not universal in form but are relative to a certain context or contexts", and his explanations are therefore "relative", being neither "perfect" nor "complete", he is in fact *not* refuting Popper. On the contrary, he is confirming the Popperean view. This may be expressed in another way - Beer's criticisms, like all others of Popper's explanatory thesis, are *not* hermeneutic, since they fail to place the hypothetico-deductive model in the whole corpus of Popper's thoughts on the philosophy of science.

The various so-called "revisions" of the covering-law model as discussed by Dray, are, arguably, misnamed as "revisions".<sup>(67)</sup> For example, Scriven's so-called "normic" generalizations or truisms which he postulates against the hypothetico-deductive model (admittedly as a criticism of Hempel), remind one of Popper's examples. Scriven characterises normic generalizations as being less-than-universal laws which are neither universal nor statistical(!), and examples cited include "a reasonable man with better reasons for doing something than he had when he previously did it, will do it again", and "preventing attack is a good reason for invasion when victory is certain without too much fighting and moral considerations are not too highly regarded".<sup>(68)</sup>

Similarly Popper would surely not disagree with Rescher and Helmer who have postulated "limited" or "restricted" generalizations which hold within a limited period of time or in a limited geographical area.<sup>(69)</sup> Nor with Joynt and Rescher, who suggest the use of

---

66. Beer, op.cit., p.8.

67. William H. Dray, Philosophy of History (1964), p.15ff.

68. Michael Scriven, 'Truisms as the Grounds for Historical Explanations', in Gardiner P. (ed), op.cit., p.467.

69. quoted in Dray, op.cit., p.16.

limited generalizations relating to a particular state of technology and to the institutional practices of a certain place and time.<sup>(70)</sup>

Neither would Popper quarrel with Checkland who advocates the use of models ("elaborated hypotheses") in order to try to answer, for example, questions about the conditions which have governed the growth of output per head in a particular society.<sup>(71)</sup> Such hypotheses, says Checkland in Popperean spirit, must be tested in relation to the data available to the historian.<sup>(72)</sup> Clearly the value of an hypothesis depends on its success in elucidating the problem under consideration. As Fogel says:

For the historian...the tool (hypothesis) that fits is the one most appropriate to the historical reality that is being analysed and that will yield the most information from the available data. (73)

Beer gives a good example of the workings of the covering-law model in terms which would be acceptable to Popper (despite Beer's criticism already noted). The example chosen is Tilly's paper on the counter-revolution in the Vendée.<sup>(74)</sup> Drawing firstly on his detailed study of the Vendée, and on a systematic comparison of the various localities in that area which were counter-revolutionary, as well as on those which were not; and secondly, inspired by generalizations from sociology such as theories on urbanisation, Tilly postulated his hypothesis, "In the Vendée in 1793, counter-revolution occurred where there was a junction of rural and urban life".<sup>(75)</sup> Beer having described Tilly's

- 
70. C.B. Joynt and N. Rescher, 'The Problem of Uniqueness in History', History and Theory, Vol. 1, no. 2, 1961, pp.155-158.  
 71. S.G. Checkland, 'The Historian as Model Builder', The Philosophical Journal, Vol. 6, 1969, pp.42-45.  
 72. Ibid.  
 73. Robert William Fogel, "The Limits of Quantitative Methods in History", American Historical Review, Vol. 80, 1975, p.341.  
 74. Beer, op.cit., pp.10-20.  
 75. op.cit., p.11.

methodology, goes on to write:

All this is common place of methodology: students of society, like natural scientists, do not just study brute facts (or evidence about them). They also bring to that study certain ideas, vague or precise, which selectively focus attention and suggest possible connections...Tilly clearly does not treat...general statements as universal laws...he takes them rather as suggestions of what *might* be the case rather than hypotheses of what *would* be the case. (76)

Furthermore, Beer stresses that Tilly is "systematically selective, his selection being guided in part by theory", while also taking note of the evidence. His explanation, which is a relative one, is based on hypotheses "limited in their validity to a certain context (or contexts)".<sup>(77)</sup> Neither Popper nor a hermeneutic historian would quarrel with these judgments of approbation.

The witch-craze phenomenon offers an interesting opportunity to study examples of Popperean theory in practice. For it is an event which has only recently become the focus of historical investigation, and is far from being fully understood. It therefore offers an example of what might be called "history in the raw" with historians groping to find explanatory frameworks which will illuminate those events. As Nachman has pointed out, that investigation involves three main questions: firstly, why was there specifically a *witch-craze*? In other words, why were witches singled out for persecution? Secondly, what was the significance of the timing of the craze? Thirdly, why were most of the victims women?<sup>(78)</sup> (This third question illustrates

---

76. op.cit., pp.12-3.

77. op.cit., pp.14-5.

78. Nachman, op.cit.



the hermeneutic point that the historian's present influences the way he approaches the past, and in this case, the specific topic chosen. Recent interest in witchcraft owes something to the feminist movement, which has led to a greater interest in the role of women in history, or herstory. Of course, however, studies of the witch-craze are also the result of the growth of social history and the closer cooperation between anthropologists and sociologists, on the one hand, and historians on the other). One attempt to answer the third question will be examined briefly.

Discussing the social and spiritual inferiority accorded to women during the medieval period, Anderson and Gordon postulate the following hypothesis in order to try to explain why most of those persecuted as witches during the witch-craze were women:

The scapegoating of women as witches was possible and became effective only because there still existed in late medieval and post-Reformation Europe a powerful framework of denigrating beliefs relating to women which those who constructed the stereo-type witch and initiated the moral panics could draw upon in credible way. (79)

In their efforts to test that hypothesis, Anderson and Gordon ask whether, where the status of women was higher, "there was a correspondingly lower level of witch mania and witch persecutions".<sup>(80)</sup> Factual evidence indicates that one country where this did occur was England, and therefore Anderson and Gordon have tried to isolate the differences between the persecution of witches in England and elsewhere. They show that the laws relating to witchcraft were less elaborate and that there was less differentiation in the way witches were treated by the English legal

---

79. Alan Anderson and Raymond Gordon, 'Witchcraft and the Status of Women - the Case of England', British Journal of Sociology, Vol. 29, no. 2, 1978, p.174.

80. op.cit., p.175.



system.<sup>(81)</sup> Furthermore while there were less recorded executions in Britain during this period, sentences were also generally more lenient. And finally, English witchcraft was less dependent on its association with the Devil.<sup>(82)</sup> Attempting to explain this distinctiveness they have brought forward evidence which demonstrates that English women "had a status and independence which found no parallel elsewhere (except perhaps in Holland)".<sup>(83)</sup> Although also concluding that no claim is being made for understanding English witchcraft by referring to the status of women alone, they make the point that to focus on the position of women "is to draw attention to a long neglected dimension of English witchcraft".<sup>(84)</sup> And, as they conclude, the debate as to why primarily women were singled out will undoubtedly continue,<sup>(85)</sup> with the various hypotheses postulated being tested by in-depth studies of the various examples of that phenomenon in attempts at falsification.

---

81. op.cit., p.176.

82. op.cit., p.177.

83. Ibid. To the best of my knowledge Holland escaped the witch-craze.

84. op.cit., p.182.

85. Ibid. Another new perspective from a feminist point of view has recently been suggested although I am not aware if it has been followed up. Walters proposes that "witchcraft is one form of cultural protest", and that "witches defended female crafts and medical skills against encroaching male professionalism and a violently patriarchal church". Juliet Mitchell, 'Women and Equality', in Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley (eds), The Rights and Wrongs of Women (1976).

(b) Rational explanations

As was pointed out at the beginning of this chapter the idea that "why" questions can be answered by *verstehen* as imaginative rethinking is one to which some writers in the field of historiography still subscribe. For example, Beer quotes Walzer's defence of the method of "sympathetic understanding" in which the latter claims that when scientific explanation fails, the historian must resort to "that intuition which comes, above all, from the practice of history".<sup>(86)</sup> It has been argued that Dilthey himself was aware of the charge of scepticism to which a purely psychologistic conception of *verstehen*, as the recovery of intention, was vulnerable, and in his later thought, his emphasis was on *verstehen* as interpretation of forms of life through language which is publicly accessible.<sup>(87)</sup> Thus when Farr, for example, speaking of *verstehen*, says that in contemporary thought it has taken a linguistic turn, being concerned with "public, shared meaning, paradigmatically communicated through language",<sup>(88)</sup> he reveals his unfamiliarity with the hermeneutic tradition as a whole. Even Walzer himself makes it clear that sympathetic understanding cannot function without an understanding of the social and economic conditions and the prevalent ideas of the period in question.<sup>(89)</sup> But at this point our concern is with "why" questions and the recovery of intention in order to explain a certain event. What was missing in Dilthey's thought, and indeed other early hermeneutic thinkers, was a formal expression of *verstehen* as the recovery of intention. An attempt will therefore be made to elucidate a formal explanation.

---

86. Beer, op.cit., p.20.

87. Chapter Two.

88. James Farr, 'Hume, Hermeneutics and History: A "Sympathetic Account"', History and Theory, Vol. 17, no. 3, 1978, p.309.

89. Beer, op.cit., p.21.

Abel has rejected the view that *verstehen* is a method by means of which intentional human behaviour is explained. According to him, "the operation of *verstehen* is based upon the application of personal experience to observed behaviour. We 'understand' an observed or assumed connection if we are able to parallel either one with something we know through self-observation does happen. Furthermore, since the operation consists of the application of knowledge we already possess, it cannot serve as a means of discovery. At best it can only confirm what we already know".<sup>(90)</sup> Its importance is that it provides the historian with hunches which assist him in formulating hypotheses about human behaviour.<sup>(91)</sup>

Nagel makes the point that it is essential to distinguish between *verstehen* as a way of generating "suggestive hypotheses" and *verstehen* as a way of "validating proposed explanations".<sup>(92)</sup> He argues that *verstehen* in the first sense does function usefully as "a source of fertile ideas", but that as a method, *verstehen* does not "supply any criteria for the validity of conjectures and hypotheses concerning the springs of human action".<sup>(93)</sup>

Attempts to express *verstehen* formally are grouped under the label "rational explanation", as has already been pointed out. What is the status of such explanations? Are they *sui generis* or can they be considered as being, in principle, forms of the Popperian hypothetico-deductive model of explanation?

Dray's version defends the former view. According to Dray, a rational explanation is one which "displays the rationale of what

---

90. Theodore Abel, 'The Operation called *verstehen*', American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 54, no. 3, 1948, p.216.

91. op.cit., p.217.

92. Ernest Nagel, 'On the Method of *verstehen* as the Sole Method of Philosophy', Journal of Philosophy, Vol. 50, 1953, p.156.

93. Ibid.

was done", in that it is a "reconstruction of the agent's calculation of the means to be adopted towards his chosen end in the light of the circumstances in which he found himself".<sup>(94)</sup>

Dray's argument is that the object of a rational explanation is to show that something was the appropriate thing to have done in a situation rather than to show that the thing was done in accordance with certain laws. Hence a rational explanation contains an element of appraisal which is missing in covering law explanations, and which is required in giving a rational explanation.

Hempel has argued that Dray's formulation is non-explanatory because it does not explain why the individual did in fact do what he did.<sup>(95)</sup> Whereas Dray's formulation is as follows:

A was in a situation of type C. In a situation of type C, the appropriate thing to do is X. (96)

Hempel's reformulation reads:

A was in a situation of type C. A was disposed to act rationally. Any person who is disposed to act rationally will, when in a situation of type C, invariably (with a high probability) do X. (97)

This, Hempel says, is a 'nomological explanation', in which the normative principles have been replaced by statements of dispositions, that is, statements connecting dispositions with manifestations of their presence.<sup>(98)</sup> Thus Hempel is able to claim:

---

94. William H. Dray, Laws and Explanation in History (1957), Chapter 5.

95. Hempel, 'Explanation in Science and History', p.100.

96. Ibid.

97. op.cit., p.101.

98. op.cit., p.102.



...the nature of understanding, in the sense in which explanation is meant to give us an understanding of empirical phenomena, is basically the same in all areas of scientific inquiry; and...the deductive and probabilistic model of nomological explanation accommodates vastly more than just the explanatory arguments of say classical mechanics; in particular they accord well with the character of explanations that deal with the influence of rational deliberation, of conscious and subconscious motives, and of ideas and ideals on the shaping of historical events. In so doing, our schemata exhibit, I think, one important aspect of the methodological unity of all empirical science. (99)

The Hempelian formulation as one form of explanation used by historians is accepted in this thesis. For example, in the following extract, the September Massacres are explained partly in terms of a statement of dispositions to the effect that in a situation of counter-revolution and invasion, people will invariably act in a way which expresses their panic and fear:

In the wake of the revolution of 10 August 1792 followed the grisly episode known as the September Massacres, when the prisons were entered by armed bands, who set up hastily improvised "people's" tribunals and executed some 1,100 to 1,400 of their inmates - priests and political prisoners among them, but mainly common-law offenders: thieves, prostitutes, forgers and vagrants. It was a mysterious episode, defying exact analysis; yet it seems to have been largely the product of a panic-fear engendered by the threat of counter-revolution and invasion; Verdun, a bare 200 miles from the capital, had just fallen to the Prussians; and able-bodied Parisians, responding to the summons of Danton, the new Minister of Justice, were flocking to enrol for service at the front, thus leaving the city more exposed. (100)

---

99. op.cit., p.106.

100. George Rudé, Revolutionary Europe 1783-1815 (1964), p.131.



Two further points must, however, be made on the subject of rational explanations. Firstly, does Hempel's formulation allow for freedom of choice? Does it cover the idea of an explanation which involves the agent's intention? Secondly, Hempel has made reference to "subconscious motives". How do historians account for irrational actions?

Donagan has argued that "most historians would be sceptical of a preferred explanation in which it was assumed that all agents of the same psychological type, or in the same sociological position, when confronted with a situation of the same kind, will act in a certain kind of way".<sup>(101)</sup> The "methodological scepticism", Donagan continues, may be formulated as "the presupposition of individual choice", which is an affirmation of the traditional doctrine of free will, "that man ultimately has an unconditional power to choose how he will act".<sup>(102)</sup> As Donagan goes on to say, "there is much in any man that he cannot alter", habits are unlikely to be changed except by "vigilant effort", and his "emotional dispositions are no more a matter of choice than the kind of body he has".<sup>(103)</sup> Furthermore, while an individual does operate within certain institutionally-determined limits, so that the possibilities from which he can choose are circumscribed, nevertheless he has the ability to have chosen otherwise and the opportunity to have acted otherwise. While historians may not affirm the doctrine of free will overtly, they proceed as if it were true when giving explanations concerned with individual actions. Berlin writes:

---

101. Donagan, op.cit., p.148.

102. op.cit., p.149.

103. Ibid.

...all the discussions of historians about whether a given policy could or could not have been prevented, and what view should therefore be taken of acts and characters of the actors, are intelligible only on the assumption of the reality of human choices...I do not wish here to say that determinism is necessarily false, only that we neither speak nor think as if it could be true, and that it is difficult, and perhaps impossible to conceive what our picture of the world would be if we seriously believed it...(104)

Pachter concurs, stating that "for practical purposes...the historian deals with individuals as if their decisions were free".<sup>(105)</sup>

Donagan's formal model of explanation, which is an implicit affirmation of free will, will be put forward to account for individual choices and actions. The question is, as a causal explanation, is it antithetical to the idea of the hypothetico-deductive model of explanation in Popperian terms?

Popper's notion of the "logic of the situation" may arguably be regarded as an implicit acknowledgement of the idea of free will.<sup>(106)</sup>

Wilkins says of situational logic that it constitutes the historians' attempt to "assess or evaluate the rational adequacy of the acts of historical agents, given what they know about the agent's situation and his beliefs about his situation".<sup>(109)</sup>

According to Wallace this indicates that Popper recognises that there is a fundamental difference between the methodology of the historian and that of the natural scientist, because the former deals with intentional actions. Thus, she says, "the distinguishing characteristics of history cannot be the discovery of objective universal laws from which particular events necessarily follow".<sup>(108)</sup> Clearly Wallace has misinterpreted Popper who never made such a claim. Moreover, as will be argued, the idea of situation logic is not

---

104. Sir Isaiah Berlin, 'Historical Inevitability', reprinted in Meyerhoff (ed), op.cit., pp.251-2.

105. Pachter, op.cit., p.463.

106. Popper, OS, p.97, Popper, POH, p.149.

107. In Carol Wallace, 'Review Essay on Popper', History and Theory, Vol. 18, no. 3, 1979, p.426.

108. Ibid.

antithetical to Popper's hypothetico-deductive model of explanation.

Explaining what he means by situational logic Popper writes:

...our actions are to a very large extent explicable in terms of the situation in which they occur. Of course, they are never fully explicable in terms of the situation alone; an explanation of the way in which a man, when crossing a street, dodges the cars which move in it may go beyond the situation and may refer to his motives, to an "instinct" of self-preservation, or to his wish to avoid pain etc. But this psychological part of the explanation is very often trivial as compared with the detailed determination of his action by what we may call the *logic of the situation*. (109)

Donagan has attempted to use Popper's views as a springboard for his own formulation of an explanation which takes the doctrine of free choice into account. Donagan argues firstly that what a man does depends on the way he conceives of a situation rather than the way it is, (the latter, according to Donagan, being suggested by Popper). Secondly, while Popper calls the "psychological part" of the explanation "trivial", Donagan stresses that "trivial", must be interpreted as "obvious" rather than as "unimportant". These "criticisms" cannot, however, be taken seriously as they do not challenge the fundamental thesis. Nor, it is suggested, would Popper disagree with Donagan on these points. Thirdly, Donagan says that "Popper has neglected to draw attention to the fact that what he calls the 'psychological part' of such an explanation contains no covering law".<sup>(110)</sup> But, to reiterate, Donagan has misunderstood the way Popper uses "universal law", and hence, while Donagan postulates his model of explanation to account for individual choice as being antithetical to Popper, it may be shown rather to be in accordance with the latter's position.

---

109. Popper, OS, p.97.

110. Donagan, op.cit., p.147.

Taking as his example an attempt to explain why Brutus decided to join the conspiracy led by Cassius, Donagan gives the answer: Brutus resolved to preserve the Republic at all costs, and judged that the logic of his situation was that only by joining Cassius could the Republic be preserved.<sup>(111)</sup> Expressing the explanation formally, it entails:

- (i) a singular hypothesis (in this case - if Brutus judged that to preserve the Republic it was necessary to perform a certain act, he would perform that act).
- (ii) the statement of initial conditions (in this case, Brutus judged that to preserve the Republic, it would be necessary to join Cassius' conspiracy).
- (iii) from this we deduce the explanandum, Brutus joined the conspiracy of Cassius. (112)

Donagan goes on to say that such an explanation may need to be filled out, by reconstructing the agent's process of inference from his intention and his appreciation of the situation.<sup>(113)</sup> Clearly this involves the use of a "what" question - what did the situation mean to Brutus? Thus the event must make sense in its historical context. A narrative of events prior to Brutus' decision, in order to throw light on that meaning, would also be necessary. It would require the use of *verstehen* as the sympathetic rethinking of Brutus' intentions, given the historian's familiarity with the protagonists and the period as a whole, providing him with possible hypotheses to test against

---

111. op.cit., p.150.

112. I would add to the explanans as follows:

- (i) If Brutus judged that to preserve the Republic it was necessary to perform a certain act, he would perform that act, if he did want to preserve the Republic.
- (ii) Brutus judged that to preserve the Republic, it would be necessary to join Cassius' conspiracy, and he did want to preserve the Republic.

113. op.cit., p.151.



the evidence (as Abel argued). Donagan himself remarks in connection with his model that "the only way in which an hypothesis about an historical agent's intention can be corroborated is to deduce falsifiable statements from it, and to investigate whether they are, in fact, falsified".<sup>(114)</sup>

Thus an answer to the question, why did someone do something? (assuming that action to have been freely chosen within certain historically-circumscribed possibilities) *is* given within the broad framework of the hypothetico-deductive model of explanation conceived of in Popperian terms. In order to arrive at the premises of the explanans, answers to "what" and "how" questions are also required. To illustrate this latter point let us look briefly at the following extract which attempts to account for the Massacre of St. Bartholomew, 24 August 1572.

The third civil war (1568-70) left the Huguenots more powerful than ever. They preserved the right to exercise their religion (a right which they rarely allowed to Catholics in those regions which they dominated) and were granted the further right to garrison four towns in southern France (Edict of Pacification of St. Germain, 8 August 1570). Once more Catherine tried to solve all the kingdom's problems on a personal level. Her daughter Margaret was to marry the young Huguenot leader Henry of Navarre, the son of Anthony de Bourbon. Coligny came to court and joined the king's council. His plan was to unite France by a war against Spain. The Revolt of the Netherlands presented a unique opportunity.

Coligny was in touch with Louis of Nassau and the Sea Beggars. Charles IX, under the influence of Coligny's charismatic personality, ardently supported these plans. But they were flawed from the outset. Coligny underestimated the religious and partisans passions generated by ten years of hate campaigns, mutual terror and civil wars. He was vastly over-optimistic about the ability of an exhausted France

---

114. Ibid.



to face the duke of Alva's formidable *tercios*, the famous Spanish infantry regiments. This prospect terrified the queen mother, and the military experts in the king's council agreed with her. But Coligny persisted. His followers talked of changing the king's council to make it amenable to their plans. What the Huguenots had never even hoped for in three civil wars, they seemed now on the verge of achieving peaceably: the capture of the king's government.

Everything seemed to hinge on Coligny. Catherine therefore determined to have him murdered. But the plot misfired; Coligny was only wounded. The Huguenots breathed vengeance; the king promised an investigation. Catherine was desperate, but she managed to persuade the unstable young king that the Huguenots were now planning a *coup*. 'Then kill them all', he is reported to have shouted. This does not seem to have been Catherine's intention. She seems to have wanted to do away with some dozen Huguenot leaders. But once more and, one may think, again inevitably, events escaped from her control. On the sultry summer's night of 24 August 1572, St. Bartholomew's Day, Catherine's son, the duke of Anjou (later Henry III), the Guises, the municipal authorities of Paris and, above all, the Paris mob transformed the selective killings into a general massacre of the Huguenots (and anyone else they disliked) in Paris and in the provinces. This time Coligny did not escape. (115)

The massacre was ordered by Catherine de Medici. Following Donagan, the formal explanation of that event entails:

- (i) a singular hypothesis - if Catherine judged that to prevent a coup it was necessary to do away with Huguenot leaders, she would order that act, if she wanted to prevent a coup.
- (ii) The statement of initial conditions - she judged it so, and she wanted to prevent the coup. In order to arrive at this understanding, the account contains

---

115. H.G. Koenigsberger and George L. Mosse, Europe in the 16th Century (1968), pp.252-3.

a narrative of events preceding the decision (only events from 1570 onwards have been included, although strictly speaking one requires knowledge of events from at least 1562, the date generally accepted as marking the beginning of the French Wars of Religion). The account also tries to elucidate what these events meant to the Huguenots in general, to Coligny, to Charles IX and, of course, to Catherine herself. In short the contexts against which the decision was taken are clarified.

(iii) the explanandum - she ordered the act.

(c) Explanations of irrational actions

Historians may come across actions which they might find difficult to class as rational. It may of course be the case that the historian has been incorrect in the end he has attributed to the agent, and hence he has mistakenly seen the act as irrational. But where the historian is not thus misinformed it is, as Izenberg has suggested, necessary that he be able to provide certain criteria for identifying what counts as an irrational act.<sup>(116)</sup> Attempting to isolate criteria for judgments of the inappropriateness of an action, Izenberg speaks of cases "in which the behaviour in question is unsuitable or inadequate as a means for accomplishing the agent's self-proclaimed purposes. This disparity between means and end makes us suspect that the agent is not correctly, or at least not fully, describing his own purposes and motivations".<sup>(117)</sup> Of course, as Izenberg points out, the agent may not have had adequate information, as was said above, but, if this is *not* the case, and if also we are not questioning his "intellectual capacity", then actions which turn out differently from what we would expect, given his acknowledged intention might

---

116. Gerald Izenberg, 'Psychohistory and Intellectual History', History and Theory, Vol. 14, no. 2, 1975.

117. op.cit., p.142.

lead us to believe that there were other intentions besides the declared ones. A person may act in a way which is inappropriate to the norms of the society in question, but provided he is aware of his own norms and standards, and acts consistently in accordance with them, his actions cannot be called inappropriate. It is only when his actions are inconsistent and contradictory in terms of their own norms, that the historian may look for explanations beyond those given by the agent, that is in terms of his declared purposes. Having then classed an action as irrational, the historian may apply psycho-analytic theories, trying to "go beneath the deceptive surface of conscious motives to give the real reasons for behaviour-reasons unknown to the agent".<sup>(118)</sup>

These kinds of explanation are, by general consensus, held to be in the field of psychohistory. This field has generated much controversy. Voicing a common criticism, Bainton, when discussing psycho-analytic attempts to understand Luther, points to the lack of material on which to base a reconstruction of "all the turmoils of Luther's inner life".<sup>(119)</sup> But as Izenberg points out, without sufficient evidence no such analysis could or should be attempted.<sup>(120)</sup> Other criticisms include some which are, as Izenberg remarks, "misplaced or frivolous". They stem from the fear of the historians of "having the purity of their discipline contaminated by other disciplines with scientific pretensions and technical jargon".<sup>(121)</sup> Thus, Barzun, for example, argues that history is "addressed to the common reader whose 'understanding'... is governed by a far subtler use of words than the technical...That

---

118. op.cit., p.40.

119. Roland H. Bainton, 'Interpretations of the Reformation', American Historical Review, Vol. 66, no. 1, 1960, p.81.

120. Izenberg, op.cit., p.139. The usefulness of Erikson's analysis is accepted in this thesis.

121. Ibid.

is intelligible to him which he finds sufficiently congruent with his experience (direct or vicarious) to make him accept the neighbouring strangeness and integrate it into a new imaginative experience. For this purpose the explanatory force of common speech cannot be bettered".<sup>(122)</sup> Barzun goes on to say that the "technical words" used by the psychohistorian "would not increase knowledge, would not explain further, because they would not really be about the man but about his situation considered typical..."<sup>(123)</sup> It seems therefore that Barzun has not grasped what is at stake in giving psycho-analytic explanations.

The concept of irrational actions counts against the early hermeneutic claim that making sense of the past consists simply in the recovery of intention. To be fair, however, it must be pointed out that Dilthey had suggested that an interpreter, by conscientiously following an author's train of thought, could reveal elements which remained unconscious in the latter, hence being able to claim that he (the interpreter) understood the other better than he had understood himself. The idea of a hermeneutic of history, employing a double hermeneutic, endorses the possibility of using psycho-analytic explanation where justified (as has already been indicated). Sanction for the use of psycho-analytic theory depends on the evidence available, as well as a well-founded judgment as to the incompleteness or inadequacy of the more "traditional" modes of explaining individual actions. As Passmore has pointed out, theories from psychology, sociology and economics, for example, have affected the procedures of the historian, although this occurs "usually after a decent interval and a considerable show

---

122. Barzun, op.cit., p.46.

123. op.cit., p.48.

of reluctance" on the part of the historians.<sup>(124)</sup> Historians may quite properly be wary of applying theories which they themselves do not fully understand, but they ought not thereby to dismiss out of court the possibility of others who are qualified to do so.

Justifying his attempt at working towards a psycho-analytic interpretation of Bismarck, Pflanze admits that historians operate under the severe handicap of insufficient evidence, "for the primal experiences that produce the basic character-traits which occur in the earliest years of life ... are hidden from the subject himself by repression and other mechanisms of defence".<sup>(125)</sup> Accepting too that Freudian psychology is speculative in character, Pflanze nevertheless argues that even if such an account may in the long run be judged a failure, insofar as it raises certain questions it may count as a pre-condition for a later more successful explanation. The kind of explanation a historian might give using psycho-analytic theory is illustrated in a passage from Pflanze's paper.<sup>(126)</sup>

To sum up on the issue of "why" questions, it is held that historians do use the form of the hypothetico-deductive model of explanation conceived of in Popperean terms to answer these kinds of questions. The "laws" used are not laws in the nineteenth century positivist sense. Rather they must be seen as hypotheses, as conjectures, which the historian will test against the evidence in an attempt at their falsification. In so doing, he may alter or refine these hypotheses in his efforts to make the

---

124. Passmore, op.cit., p.121.

125. Otto Pflanze, "Toward a Psycho-analytic Interpretation of Bismarck", American Historical Review, Vol. 77, no. 1, 1972. p.419.

126. Appendix C.



event(s) in question intelligible. In short, the procedure occurs through the operation of the hermeneutic circle of understanding. Strange as it may seem, therefore, bearing in mind the traditional dichotomy between the *naturwissenschaften* and the *geisteswissenschaften*, the operation of the hypothetico-deductive model of explanation conceived of in Popperean terms *is* itself "hermeneutic".

To conclude on the issue of explanation in history, it has been argued that there is no single, formal *hermeneutic* model of explanation. The different kinds of questions asked by historians from their respective points of view require different kinds of answers. But it has also been shown that answers to "what", "how" and "why" questions are interlinked and interdependent. In practice the historian does not necessarily separate them out as has been done in this chapter for the sake of methodological clarity. But while there is no single specifically hermeneutic form of explanation, all explanations are essentially hermeneutic, insofar as they must always be contextual, and in as much as the historian's ultimate concern is with the fuller historical meaning of events.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### CONCLUSION

Hermeneutics has been defined as the philosophical theory of interpretation of the meaning of texts and actions. The idea of a hermeneutic of history has been developed through a fleshing out of that definition by firstly, considering the history of hermeneutics; secondly, taking into account contributions made by Popper and Kuhn to the philosophy of science; thirdly, relating hermeneutics to issues raised by the philosophy of history, and particularly the question of explanation in history and the problem of historical objectivity; and finally through a dialogue with written history.

The Renaissance emphasis on the importance of a critical scrutiny of texts, and the rejection by the Reformers of the idea of an institutionalized interpretation of patristic texts, stimulated the early development of hermeneutics as the concern with the interpretation of the meaning of texts. Flacius, Spinoza and later, Ast, Wolf and Schleiermacher tried to develop interpretative rules which would guarantee the truth of such interpretations aimed at a recovery of the author's intention. All stressed the need for the interpreter to be linguistically competent, and that the work be placed in its literary and broader historical context, thereby giving expression to the idea of a hermeneutic circle in terms of which parts are always understood in terms of a whole, and the whole in terms of its parts. The Scientific Revolution and Enlightenment were also crucial in the development of hermeneutics insofar as they led to the extension of the notion of interpretation to actions. Gatterer's reaction against the early positivist conviction that history must become more scientific in its method was anticipated by Vico, both arguing that history was *sui generis*. Because its subject matter was

concerned with human ideas (Vico), or the *geist* or spirit of a nation (Gatterer), history required an appropriate mode of explanation, namely imaginative rethinking. Anticipating Dilthey, Gatterer raised the question as to whether the objective recovery of the past through imaginative rethinking was possible in principle, given the subjective contribution by the historian to that task but he failed to analyse the dialogue between the historian and the past.

The thought of Dilthey has proved crucial not only for the development of hermeneutics in general, but for the idea of a hermeneutic of history in particular. His writings cemented the changed focus of hermeneutics from its early philological concerns towards epistemological issues. Although Dilthey explicitly recognised the historicity of existence, he too failed to follow up the methodological consequences of that insight for the interpretation of past events. If the historian himself is bound by the horizons of his own historical context, how is understanding of the past through imaginative rethinking possible? That question was begged by previous hermeneutic thinkers (apart from Gatterer), as was the even more fundamental question, how is understanding possible? Clearly too, the explicit recognition of the subjective contribution by the historian to the writing of history required a reexamination of the question of objectivity. But because Dilthey was still influenced by the Cartesian tradition and the Enlightenment, he failed to relinquish the idea of a universally valid objective interpretation. For he was unable to see how to save historical knowledge from relativity given the historicity of experience. These are issues with which subsequent hermeneutic philosophers have been concerned, and with which the idea of a hermeneutic of history must grapple in order that history be grounded on a sound epistemological foundation.

Like Vico and Gatterer, Dilthey made a clear distinction between what he called the *naturwissenschaften* and the *geisteswissenschaften*. While he emphasized that each required its own methodology, he did not deny that the latter might also use scientific explanatory techniques. But he insisted that objectifications of *geist* had always also to be understood in order to grasp their meaning. Extending the idea of *verstehen* from its psychologistic sense to include the elucidation of an event in its contextual wholes, Dilthey also stressed the linguistic competence of the interpreter. The idea of a hermeneutic of history accepts that both senses of *verstehen* are used in history, and play an important role in historical explanation. The elucidation of contextual meaning provides an answer to a "what" question, while *verstehen*, as imaginative rethinking, helps to generate hypotheses which are then expressed formally in rational explanations conceived of in a Popperian sense.

In analysing the structure of understanding, Heidegger showed that all understanding and interpretation operates within the hermeneutic circle of understanding. The interpreter always begins with a preunderstanding of an event which is enlarged or changed in the process of coming to a fuller understanding. Thus understanding is always also self-understanding, and it involves the parts/whole hermeneutic circle so that every act of understanding is at once a movement between present and past, between fore-structure and that being investigated, as well as between parts and whole.

Gadamer has attempted to fill out the circle by showing how tradition enters into and shapes the act of understanding a text. A historian's participation in the interpretative historical tradition surrounding the event in question helps him to formulate a starting point in terms of which he grasps the meaning of that event. But understanding, as the fusion of horizons, entails that the meaning of a text always goes beyond its author. Understanding is not merely reproductive, that is insofar as it



clarifies the historical horizon within which certain questions come to be posed; it is also always productive, reflecting the interpreter's own concerns. Although Gadamer has insisted that his aim is not to provide a methodology for the *geisteswissenschaften* his thought has certain methodological consequences: it raises the issue of incommensurability, it invites the charge of hermeneutic anarchy, and also calls into question the possibility of an objectively valid interpretation. These charges have been levelled by Hirsch, for example, who insists that hermeneutics is concerned solely with the recovery of intention.

The issue of intention is a crucial one in hermeneutics. The question as to whether the recovery of intention is possible in principle is answered by the interpreter's linguistic and cultural competence. But while the idea of a hermeneutic of history accepts that the recovery of intention is part of the historian's task, it by no means exhausts that task. The speech act theory of meaning provides a useful model for the elucidation of the role of intention in communication, but it is challenged in this thesis as being incomplete insofar as it conceives of the hearer or reader as being a passive partner in that communication. Part of the meaning of a text or action (regarded as a text analogue, following Ricoeur's argument), is given by the interpreter who is himself an historical being. Thus the past is not simply understood in its own terms, as the early hermeneutic thinkers and possibly Winch, for example, held. It is also necessary to reinterpret the meaning of the past and thus practice what Giddens has called the double hermeneutic. Thus, as Taylor and the critical hermeneutic philosophers such as Apel and Habermas have also argued, a hermeneutic interpretation may well involve the imposition of theories which would have been unknown to the protagonists in question, for example, psycho-analytic theories. In short, hermeneutics is concerned with the fuller historical meaning of events.



The way the historian contributes to the meaning of the past is elucidated through an examination of the operation of the hermeneutic circle. Apart from transcendental presuppositions which provide the necessary conditions for the possibility of understanding anything at all, the fore-structure of the historian's understanding is constituted by two kinds of presupposition, namely those he has of the nature of his field and those which he holds with respect to the particular aspect of the past being investigated, including definitions and theories. The way the past is characterised and explained therefore depends on the point of view taken.

A survey of the history of hermeneutics reveals that no hermeneutic philosophers have spelt out the idea of a formal hermeneutic explanation. It is argued in this thesis that there is no such *single*, formal model of explanation, but that historians use different kinds of explanation depending on different kinds of questions asked, these explanations being inter-linked and inter-dependent. All explanations are, however, essentially hermeneutic in that they are always contextual and insofar as the historian's ultimate concern is with the meaning of events. In giving causal explanations it is argued that the historian makes use of the hypothetico-deductive model conceived of in a Popperian sense. While this may, at first sight, seem to be untenable in the idea of a *hermeneutic* of history (for history has traditionally been defined as antithetical to the natural sciences in hermeneutic thought, as we have seen), the explanation for this lies in science's hermeneutic turn as reflected in the philosophy of Popper and Kuhn. The concepts of a point of view and paradigm recognise that there is no absolute starting point for any investigation, and that scientists, like historians, always operate within specific historical contexts. Scientific laws, like historical generalizations, are put forward as hypotheses, conjectures or guesses offered for falsification.

There are many points of view or kinds of history, and present interests and concerns, the availability of new theories from related disciplines and the possibility of newly-discovered evidence, ensure the likelihood of changing foci on the past in accordance with the concept of a fuller historical meaning. The appropriateness and tenability of presuppositions about a particular event are tested by the self-reflective historian in a dialogue with the past within the hermeneutic circle. The intellectual and professional values shared by historians provide the criteria for judging objectivity within a point of view. While the imposition of moral value judgments on the past is regarded as part of the notion of the mediation of frames of meaning, judgments of their relevance must be clearly distinguished from assessments of objectivity.

It must be stressed that the explicit recognition of the necessary role of the historian's subjectivity in the writing of history is not a weakness for which historians need apologise. History has long been regarded as science's "poor relation". One aim of this thesis has been to dispel this sense of inferiority. For not only has science itself taken a "hermeneutic turn" but, even more strongly, it is only insofar as the historian *does* adopt a point of view that the past can be illuminated for his understanding. The essential contribution of the historian to his subject matter and to his discipline, therefore, constitutes a strength of that discipline and ensures its dynamism.

Each point of view must, however, be justified, that justification being a pragmatic one. The success with which questions generated from within a particular point of view are answered, reflects ultimately on the merit of that view itself. The opportunity for comparing and assessing the strengths and shortcomings of respective claims is contained within the ideal of rational discourse in a politically free society as is suggested, for example, by Habermas' model of idealized dialogue. Not only is this wider communication, that is the cooperation and competition which forms the social aspect

of historial research, a necessary prerequisite for historical objectivity, but the Socratic dialogue conducted by *all* historians provides an antidote to the danger of historical parochialism.

# APPENDIX A

Extract from: Jeffrey B. Russell, A History of Witchcraft, Sorcerers, Heretics and Pagans (1980)

...In the course of the eighth and ninth centuries the growing influence of theology upon civil law produced a legal association of sorcerers with demons. The word *maleficium*, originally 'wrong-doing' in general, now came to mean malevolent sorcery in particular, and the *maleficus* or *malefica* was presumed to be closely associated with the Devil. Sorcery could now be prosecuted not simply as a crime against society but as a heresy against God. The law fixed the identification of paganism with demonolatry. A 'List of Superstitions' drawn up at the Council of Leptinnes in 774 prohibited sacrifice to saints, evidence of the lingering confusion in the popular mind between new saint and old deity. The same council approved a baptismal formula that asked the catechumens to 'renounce all the works of the demon, and all his words, and Thor, and Odin, and Saxnot, and all evil beings that are like them'. Charlemagne ordered death for anyone sacrificing 'a human being to the Devil and (offering) sacrifice to demons as is the custom of the pagans'.

The law helped transfer the characteristics of evil spirits to human witches. The pagans had set out offerings of food and drink for minor spirits. The Synod of Rome in 743 assumed that these spirits were demons and outlawed the offerings. The demonic spirits were then transformed into *bonae mulieres*, the ghostly 'good women' who wandered out at night going into houses and stealing food. Finally, the *bona mulieres*, were transformed into witches. Likewise the term *striga* or *stria*, originally a blood-drinking night spirit, became a common word for a witch. The early Middle Ages were tolerant of sorcery and heresy in comparison with the tortures and executions of the Roman Empire and with the hangings and burnings of the later Middle Ages and Renaissance. Two or three years' penance was normal for *maleficium*, incantation and idolatry. But the law gradually became both more comprehensive and more severe. The Synod of Paris on 6 June 829 issued a decree with sinister implications for the future, citing the stern passages of Leviticus 20:6 and Exodus 22:18. The synod argued that since the Bible decreed that a *maleficus* should not be permitted to live, the king had a right to punish sorcerers severely. In England Alfred the Great threatened *wiccan* with the death penalty, and Ethelstan ordered execution for *wiccecraft* if it resulted in death.

Such measures were bound to reduce and eventually eradicate pagan practices, and condemnations of pagan rites gradually became perfunctory repetitions of earlier condemnations issued when the



problem was more serious. Once in a while the sources report something fresh, such as the struggle of St. Barbato against the residual paganism of the Lombards in the ninth century. At Benevento these pagans adored a snake and a sacred tree, around which they danced in a circle. The Synod of Rome in 826 complained that 'many people, mostly women, come to Church on Sundays and holy days not to attend the Mass but to sing broad songs, and do other such pagan things'.

The most important legal document of the early Middle Ages relating to witchcraft is the Canon Episcopi, issued about AD 900. The canon says:

'Some wicked women are perverted by the Devil and led astray by illusions and fantasies induced by demons, so that they believe that they ride out at night on beasts with Diana, the pagan goddess, and a horde of women. They believe that in the silence of the night they cross huge distances. They say that they obey Diana's commands and on certain nights are called out in her service... Many other people also believe this to be true, although it is a pagan error to believe that any other divinity exists than the one God... Such fantasies are thrust into the minds of faithless people, not by God, but by the Devil. For Satan has the power to transform himself into the figure of an angel of light. In this form he captures and enslaves the mind of a miserable woman and transforms himself into shapes of various different people. He shows her deluded mind strange things and unknown people, and leads it on weird journeys. It is only the mind that does this, but faithless people believe that these things happen to the body as well'.

The Canon Episcopi had enormous influence. It was widely and incorrectly believed to date back to the fourth century and, thus possessing the authority of great antiquity, entered into the major medieval collections of canon law. Since the canon dismissed the physical reality of witchcraft and condemned those who believed in it as weak in faith, it helped to forestall the witch-craze. Later, when canon lawyers and theologians accepted the reality of witchcraft, they had to twist their way around the canon. Yet the Canon Episcopi is far from a monument to early medieval scepticism, for it indicates that belief in these strange phenomena was widespread, and its influence helped to spread them. The Canon Episcopi itself helped to establish the historical concept of the sabbat. As the chief of a demon horde, Diana was equated with Satan. The women who followed her must then be worshippers of the Devil. Though they did not really follow her out in their physical bodies, they did ride with her in spirit, so that their spirits were servants of Satan. They obeyed the Lady goddess (*domina*) rather than the Lord Christ (*Dominus*), and they met secretly on specific nights to worship her. (pp52-54).



## APPENDIX B

### Functional Explanation

The extent to which functional explanation has become institutionalized as a mode of *historical* explanation is, at this stage, unclear. As G.A. Cohen has pointed out, a functional explanation is a special type of causal explanation, it is "a consequence explanation in which the occurrence of the *explanandum* event ... is functional for something or other, whatever 'functional' turns out to be." Thus functional explanations derive their particularity from "generalizations of distinctive logical form", namely, the function of x is to  $\phi$ , and therefore answer "why" questions under certain conditions. (p250, p253, p263). Burke argues that the functionalist approach assumes that "a society cannot be understood simply by investigating the intentions of its members, because of the importance of unintended consequences". Clearly, therefore, in terms of arguments advanced in this thesis, Burke's recommendation that functional explanations be used in history is endorsed. But, as he states, they should not be seen as "replacements for other kinds of historical explanation, which they complement rather than contradict, since they tend to be answers to different questions rather than different answers to the same questions" (p50). Percy Cohen points out that "functional explanations do not explain why there are functional interrelationships in social life, and why functional interdependence therein varies" (p66). David Walsh answers that demand by the call for "the phenomenological analysis of the everyday processes by which a known and taken-for-granted social world is constructed by its members in terms of common sense interpretations of that world" (p69). This clearly amounts to the operation of the first hermeneutic, that is an elucidation of the meaning of a situation for those participating within it. The functional explanation would then constitute part of the second hermeneutic. G.A. Cohen, in a similar vein, writes that while functional explanations answer some questions, they also give rise to others, and that these latter kinds of explanation may therefore require elaboration. His suggestions, amongst others, include a "purposive" elaboration, which articulates the beliefs and desires of agents, and a form of elaboration which he regards as appropriate in cases of self-deception, that is when a functional fact operates through the mind of an agent without his full acknowledgement of that fact (pp 287-9).

With regard to a historical materialist point of view, G.A. Cohen has argued "that there is no well stated alternative to the view that major Marxian explanations are functional in character" (p279). This view arises from Cohen's defense of the "Primary

...../Thesis"

Thesis" which maintains that "the nature of a set of production relations is explained by the level of development of the productive forces embraced by it (to a far greater extent than vice versa)" (p134). Thus, as Andrew Levine and Eric Olin Wright put it, Cohen is arguing that "productive forces ... explain relations of production functionally. A given set of relations of production is determined by the functional requirements necessary for the expansion of productive forces (p51). Cohen writes, "... the production relations are of a kind R at time t because relations of kind R are suitable to the use and development of the productive forces at t, given the level of development of the latter" (p160). Clearly, therefore, Cohen is required to elucidate "the structure of interconnections between forces and relations of production which make functional explanations of this sort defensible", as Levine and Wright have pointed out (p51). As an illustration of his argument, Cohen has cited Marx's attempt to explain why the working day in Britain was reduced by the Factory Acts passed in the course of the nineteenth century. According to Cohen, Marx postulated two reasons without establishing a "bond uniting them". These two reasons are contained within the following: "'apart from the working class movement that daily grew more threatening, the limiting of factory labour was dictated by' the need to 'curb the passion of capital for a limitless draining of labour power' ". Cohen's suggested "functional" generalization, which is not to be regarded as a general "law", reads as follows: "substantial changes in economic structure which favour the immediate welfare of the subordinate class occur when the class fights for them and they increase - or at least preserve - the stability of the system (for reasons independent of allaying a felt grievance of the exploited)". Thus, "the change is functional for the system other than because it reduces the anger of the proletariat". (294-5).

Cohen's thesis has been challenged by Levine and Wright who argue that Cohen has neglected the question of a theory of class capacities, which they hold to be "crucial for any adequate account of revolutionary social transformations". (p50) That theory must be based upon analysis of the development of social relations of production, as well as of the State and ideology (p68). Because Cohen's defense is therefore held to be "partial" and "one-sided", Levine and Wright characterise it as "defective both theoretically and politically" (p50).

Leaving aside the question of the tenability of Cohen's thesis, it is clear, from an examination of the writings of Marxist historians such as Perry Anderson and E.J. Hobsbawm, for example, that the analysis of historical explanation given in this thesis applies equally well to their interpretations. This conclusion is also suggested by E.P. Thompson, for his elucidation of "historical logic" in no way suggests that historical materialist historians employ different "rules of thought", even though they operate within a different theoretical framework. (pp 230-242).

In the following passage from his work, Lineages of the Absolutist State (1974), Anderson writes: ... The American War of Independence allowed Paris to achieve a political revenge on London, by proxy: but the French role in North America, although vital to the success of the American Revolution, was essentially a spoiling operation, which brought no positive gains to France. Indeed, it was the costs of Bourbon intervention in the War of American Independence which forced on the ultimate fiscal crisis of French Absolutism at home. By 1788, the State debt was so large - payment of interest on it accounting for nearly 50 per cent of current expenditure - and the budgetary deficit so acute, that Louis XVI's last ministers, Calonne and Loménie de Brienne, resolved to impose a land tax on the nobility and clergy. The *Parlements* furiously resisted these schemes; the monarchy in desperation decreed their dissolution; then, retreating before the uproar from the propertied classes, reestablished them; and finally, capitulating to the *Parlements'* demands for an Estates-General before any tax-reform was granted, convoked the three Estates amidst the disastrous grain shortage, widespread unemployment and popular misery of 1789. The aristocratic reaction against Absolutism therewith passed into the bourgeois revolution which overthrew it. Fittingly, the historical collapse of the French Absolutist State was tied directly to the inflexibility of its feudal formation. The fiscal crisis which detonated the revolution of 1789 was provoked by its juridical inability to tax the class which it represented. The very rigidity of the nexus between State and nobility ultimately precipitated their common downfall. (p111-2).

Anderson's concern here is to account for the occurrence of the French Revolution of 1789. Narrative is evident in the sequential linking of the War of American Independence, the attempt by two of Louis' ministers to impose a land tax on the first and second estates, the conflict between the crown and the *parlements* and the convoking of the Estates-General. A brief elucidation of the meaning of the War of American Independence is provided, and an hypothesis to account for the collapse of the French Absolutist State is suggested by the phrase "the historical collapse of the French Absolutist State was tied directly to the inflexibility of its feudal formation". (p112)

This brief extract from Hobsbawm's Age of Revolution (1977) provides an example of a kind of rational explanation: "The statesmen of 1815 were wise enough to know that no settlement, however carefully carpentered, would in the long run withstand the strain of state rivalries and changing circumstance. Consequently they set out to provide a mechanism for maintaining peace - i.e. settling all outstanding problems as they arose - by means of regular congresses". (p131)

Hobsbawm's aim is to provide an answer to the question, why did the Concert of Europe come into being after the Napoleonic Wars? Once

...../more,



more, in accordance with Donagan's argument, the formal explanation entails the following:

(i) A singular hypothesis - if the statesmen of Europe judged that to maintain peace in Europe it was necessary to provide a mechanism for settling outstanding problems as they arose by means of regular congresses, they would provide that mechanism, if they wanted to maintain peace.

(ii) Statement of initial conditions - they judged it so and wanted to maintain peace. The postulation of these statements presupposes an understanding of the effects both of the French Revolution and the wars which followed on Britain and on Europe. In short, the context within which the decision was taken requires elucidation.

(iii) The explanandum- the statesmen arranged the holding of regular congresses.

Walter L. Adamson, "Marx's Theory of History: A Review Essay", History and Theory, Vol 19, no 2, 1980.

Perry Anderson, Lineages of the Absolutist State, 1974.

Peter Burke, Sociology and History, 1980.

G.A. Cohen, Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defense, 1978.

Percy S. Cohen, Modern Social Theory, 1968.

E.J. Hobsbawm, The Age of Revolution, 1977.

Andrew Levine and Erik Olin Wright, "Rationality and Class Struggle", New Left Review, no 123, 1980.

E.P. Thompson, The Poverty of Theory, 1978.

David Walsh, "Functionalism and Systems Theory" in Paul Filmer et.al., New Directions in Sociological Theory, 1972.

# APPENDIX C

Extract from: Otto Pflanze, "Toward a Psycho-analytic Interpretation of Bismarck", American Historical Review, Vol 77, no 1, 1972.

In the successive stages of Bismarck's development can be discerned the emergence of an inner conflict whose origin may lie in the oedipal triangle with his parents. The frustration of his relationship to his mother, who failed to provide the warmth and approval he required, and his natural ambivalence toward his father, heightened by the latter's failure to act out his role as the figure of authority in the household, were further complicated by displacement from a friendly environment (associated with the father, his ancestry and social milieu) to a hostile one (associated with the mother, her ancestry and social milieu). As his horizon enlarged, Bismarck became aware of the developing conflict between Junker and bourgeois, conservative and progressive, authority and freedom, which reached a preliminary climax in the revolutions of 1830, the Hambach Festival of 1832, and the Frankfurt putsch of 1833 - events that occurred when Bismarck was fifteen to eighteen years old. The personal problem that began in the nursery became immensely complicated and ramified by his widening social consciousness in adolescence. Hence it was more or less a foregone conclusion that in 1832 the *Burschenschaft* at Göttingen would lose him as a prospective recruit. Other attitudes of Bismarck that appeared in later years may perhaps be traced to these early experiences: his contempt for men dominated by wives, his contempt for intellectuals (the word "professor" was a favourite derogatory epithet), his hostility toward bureaucratic government and suspicion of *Geheimräte* (his maternal grandfather's career), his proclivity for rising late (the children of the Plamann Anstalt were awakened at 6:00 A.M.), his constant longing for the country and dislike of Berlin, and his preference in agriculture for forests (his mother had ordered the cutting of an ancient wood at Kniephof).

Psychoanalysts tell us that the trauma we all normally suffer in childhood may be repressed but never extinguished. It may be that Bismarck's resumption in 1847 of the career he had abandoned in 1838 a few months before his mother's death stemmed from an unconscious wish to fulfill her ambition for him, from his desperate need to win the maternal love he felt had been denied him. That the "man of blood and iron" was plagued by enduring internal stresses he himself admitted to an aide and personal friend, Robert von Keudell. "Faust complains about having two souls in his breast, but I harbor a whole crowd of them and they quarrel. It



is like being in a republic ..... I tell most of what they say, but there are also whole provinces into which I will never let another person look." To another close associate, Christoph von Tiedemann, he was a strange "mixture of hard, iron energy and childish softness." "There is no good picture of me," Bismarck once complained. All the artists had painted a "forceful expression". "Actually I have a dreamy, sentimental nature." This softer, more vulnerable side to Bismarck's personality can also be seen in his health problem of the 1870s and 1880's. (pp. 431-2)

# BIBLIOGRAPHY

## A. HERMENEUTICS AND PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY.

### (i) Books

- Apel, Karl-Otto,  
Analytic Philosophy of Language and the *Geisteswissenschaften*, D. Reidel Holland, 1967.
- Atkinson, R.F.,  
Knowledge and Explanation in History, Macmillan, 1978.
- Bauman, Zygmunt,  
Hermeneutics and Social Science: Approaches to Understanding, Hutchinson, 1978.
- Berger, Peter L. and Luckmann, Thomas,  
The Social Construction of Reality, Penguin, 1966.
- Berlin, Isaiah,  
Historical Inevitability, Oxford University Press, 1954.
- Blackburn, Robin (ed),  
Ideology in the Social Sciences, Fontana, 1972.
- Bleicher, Josef,  
Contemporary Hermeneutics: Hermeneutics as Method, Philosophy and Critique, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980.
- Bloch, Marc,  
The Historian's Craft, Manchester University Press, 1954.
- Bottomore, Tom (ed),  
Modern Interpretations of Marx, Basil Blackwell, 1981.
- Braybrooke, David,  
Philosophical Problems of the Social Sciences, Macmillan, 1965.
- Brown, Richard Harvey and Lyman, Stanford M. (eds),  
Structure, Consciousness and History, Cambridge University Press, 1978.

- Burke, Peter,  
Sociology and History, Macmillan, 1980.
- Carr, David and Casey, Edward S. (eds),  
Explorations in Phenomenology, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague,  
 1973.
- Carr, E.H.,  
What is History?, Penguin, 1961.
- Cohen, G.A.,  
Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence, Oxford University  
 Press, 1978.
- Cohen, Percy S.,  
Modern Social Theory, Heinemann, 1968.
- Collingwood, R.G.,  
The Idea of History, Oxford University Press, 1946.
- Connell-Smith, G. and Lloyd, H.A.,  
The Relevance of History, Heinemann, 1972.
- Delzell, Charles F. (ed),  
The Future of History, Vanderbilt University Press, 1977.
- Dilthey, Wilhelm,  
Pattern and Meaning in History: Thoughts on History and  
 Society, Harper and Row, 1961.
- Donagan, Alan and Donagan Barbara (eds),  
Philosophy of History, Macmillan, 1965.
- Douglas, Mary (ed),  
Rules and Meanings, Penguin, 1973.
- Dray, William H.,  
Laws and Explanation in History, Oxford University Press,  
 1957.
- Dray, William H.,  
Philosophy of History, Prentice-Hall inc., 1964.
- Feuer, Lewis S.(ed),  
Marx and Engels: Basic Writings on Politics and Philosophy,  
 Doubleday, 1959.

- Filmer, Paul, Phillipson, Michael, Silverman, David,  
Walsh, David,  
New Directions in Sociological Theory, Collier-Macmillan,  
1972.
- Finberg, H.P.R. (ed),  
Approaches to History, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg,  
Truth and Method, Sheed and Ward, 1975.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg,  
Philosophical Hermeneutics, (translated and edited by  
David E. Linge) University of California Press, 1976.
- Gallie, W.B.,  
Philosophy and the Historical Understanding, London, 1954.
- Gardiner, Patrick (ed),  
Theories of History, The Free Press, 1965.
- Gardiner, Patrick (ed),  
The Philosophy of History, Oxford University Press, 1974.
- Giddens, Anthony,  
New Rules of Sociological Method, Hutchinson, 1976.
- Gouldner, Alvin, W.,  
The Two Marxisms, Macmillan, 1980.
- Habermas, Jürgen,  
Knowledge and Human Interests, Heinemann, 1972.
- Habermas, Jürgen,  
Legitimation Crisis (tr. by Thomas McCarthy), Heinemann,  
1976.
- Hamlyn, D.W.,  
The Theory of Knowledge, Macmillan, 1970.
- Heidegger, Martin,  
Being and Time, (translated by John Macquarrie and Edward  
Robinson). Basil Blackwell, 1967.
- Hirsch, E.D. (jr),  
Validity in Interpretation, Yale University Press, 1967.

- Hoy, David Couzens,  
The Critical Circle: Literature and History in  
 Contemporary Hermeneutics, University of California Press,  
 1978.
- Hudson, W.D. (ed),  
The Is/Ought Question, Macmillan, 1969.
- Kuhn, Thomas S.,  
The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, University of  
 Chicago Press, 1970.
- Lakatos, Imre, and Musgrave, Alan (eds),  
Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge, Cambridge University  
 Press, 1970.
- Löwith, Karl,  
Meaning in History, University of Chicago Press, 1949.
- Magee, Bryan,  
Modern British Philosophy, Paladin, 1973.
- Magee, Bryan,  
Popper, Fontana/Collins, 1973.
- Makkreel, Rudolf, A.,  
Dilthey: Philosopher of Human Studies, Princeton University  
 Press, 1977.
- Marwick, Arthur,  
The Nature of History, Macmillan, 1970.
- Marwick, Arthur,  
Primary Sources, Humanities Foundation Course, Unit 6, The  
 Open University Press, 1970.
- Marx, Karl,  
Capital, Volume I (tr. by Ben Fowkes), Pelican, 1976.
- McShane, Philip (ed),  
Language, Truth and Meaning, Gill and Macmillan, 1972.
- Meyerhoff, Hans (ed),  
The Philosophy of History in Our Time, Doubleday Anchor  
 Books, 1959.



- Nash, Ronald H. (ed),  
Ideas of History: Volume 2: The Critical Philosophy of History, E.P. Dutton & Co., 1969.
- Nathanson, Maurice (ed),  
Phenomenology and Social Reality, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1970.
- Newman, Fred, D.,  
Explanation by Description, Mouton, 1968.
- Palmer, Richard, E.,  
Hermeneutics, Northwestern University Press, 1969.
- Popper, Karl, R.,  
The Poverty of Historicism, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1961.
- Popper, Karl, R.,  
The Open Society and its Enemies: Volume 2, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966.
- Popper, Karl, R.,  
The Logic of Scientific Discovery, Hutchinson, 1968.
- Pratt, Vernon,  
The Philosophy of the Social Sciences, Methuen, 1978.
- Renier, G.J.,  
History: Its Purpose and Method, London, 1950.
- Ricoeur, Paul,  
History and Truth, Northwestern University Press, 1965.
- Shaw, William, H.,  
Marx's Theory of History, Hutchinson, 1978.
- Spinoza, Benedict de,  
A Theologico-Political Treatise, (translated by R.H.M. Elwes), Dover, 1951.
- Stern, Alfred,  
Philosophy of History and the Problem of Values, Mouton, 1962.
- Strawson, P.F.,  
Freedom and Resentment and Other Essays, Methuen and Company, 1974.

- Taylor, Daniel, M,  
Explanation and Meaning, Cambridge University Press, 1970.
- Thompson, E.P.,  
The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays, New York, 1978.
- Thomson, David,  
The Aims of History, Thames and Hudson, 1969.
- The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology (tr. Glyn Adey and David Frisby), Heinemann, 1976.
- Tucker, Robert C. (ed),  
The Marx-Engels Reader, W.W. Norton, 1978.
- Walsh, W.H.,  
An Introduction to Philosophy of History, Hutchinson University Library, 1967.
- Western Marxism : A Critical Reader, New Left Review, 1977.
- Wilson, Bryan R.,  
Rationality, Blackwell, 1974.
- Winch, Peter,  
The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963.
- Wolf, Janet,  
Hermeneutic Philosophy and the Sociology of Art, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975.
- (ii) Articles
- Abel, Theodore,  
 "The Operation called *Verstehen*". The American Journal of Sociology, Vol 54, no 3, 1948.
- Adamson, Walter L.,  
 "Marx's Theory of History : Review Essay", History and Theory, Vol 19, no 2, 1980.
- Adelman, Howard,  
 "Rational Explanation Reconsidered: Case Studies and the Hempel-Dray Model". History and Theory, Vol 13, 1974.
- Arthur, Christopher E.,  
 "Gadamer and Hirsch : The Canonical Work and the Interpreter's Intention". Cultural Hermeneutics, Vol 4, 1977.

- Atkinson, R.F.,  
 "Explanation in History". Proceedings of the Aristotelean Society, Vol 62, 1971/2.
- Barzun, Jacques,  
 "History: The Muse and Her Doctors". American Historical Review, Vol 77, no 1, 1972.
- Beer, Samuel H.,  
 "Causal Explanation and Imaginative Re-enactment".  
History and Theory, Vol 3, 1964.
- Berlin, Sir Isaiah,  
 "Historical Inevitability", in Meyerhoff, Hans (ed),  
The Philosophy of History in our Time, Doubleday Anchor Books, 1959.
- Bernstein, Howard R.,  
 "Marxist Historiography and the Methodology of Research Programs", Studies in Marxist Historical Theory, Beiheft 20, Wesleyan University Press, 1981.
- Betti, Emilio,  
 "Hermeneutics as the General Methodology of the *Geisteswissenschaften*", in Bleicher, Josef, Contemporary Hermeneutics: Hermeneutics as Method, Philosophy and Critique, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980.
- Blake, Christopher,  
 "Can History be Objective?" in Gardiner P(ed), Theories of History, The Free Press, 1965.
- Blakeley, Thomas,  
 "Responses to 'Theory and Practice' ". Cultural Hermeneutics, Vol 2, 1975.
- Brinton, Crane,  
 "Intellectual History". International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, Vol 6, 1968.
- Brown, Richard Harvey,  
 "History and Hermeneutics: Wilhelm Dilthey and the Dialectics of Interpretative Method". in Brown, Richard Harvey and Lyman, Stanford M(eds): Structure, Consciousness and History, Cambridge University Press, U.S.A., 1978.
- Bübner, Rudiger,  
 "Responses to 'Hermeneutics and Social Science' ".  
Cultural Hermeneutics, Vol 2, 1975.

- Bullock, Alan,  
 "The Historian's Purpose: History and Metahistory", History Today, Vol 24, Nov. 1979.
- Butterfield, Herbert,  
 "Moral Judgments in History", in Meyerhoff, Hans, The Philosophy of History in Our Time, Doubleday, 1959.
- Checkland, S.G.,  
 "The Historian as Model Builder". The Philosophical Journal, Vol 6, 1969.
- Cohen, Jon S.,  
 "The Achievements of Economic History: The Marxist School", Journal of Economic History, Vol 38, 1978.
- Connolly, William E.,  
 "The Critical Theory of Jürgen Habermas - Review Essay". History and Theory, Vol 18, no 3, 1979.
- Dallmayr, Fred R.,  
 "Phenomenology and Social Science: An Overview and Appraisal". from Carr, David and Casey, Edward S.(eds). Explorations in Phenomenology, Martins Nijhoff, The Hague, 1973.
- Dallmayr, Fred R.,  
 "Hermeneutics and Historicism: Reflections on Winch, Apel and Vico". Review of Politics, Vol 39, no 1, Jan 1977.
- Dilthey, Wilhelm,  
 "The Rise of Hermeneutics". (translated by Fredric Jameson) New Literary History, Vol 3, no 2, 1972.
- Donagan, Alan,  
 "Robin George Collingwood". Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Vol 2, 1967.
- Donagan, Alan,  
 "The Popper-Hempel Theory Reconsidered". History and Theory, Vol 4, no 1, 1964.
- Dowling, John J.,  
 "Values and Objectivity". The Human Context, Vol 7, 1975.
- Dray, W.H.,  
 "History and Value Judgments". Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Vol 4, 1967.

- Edmiston, James,  
 "Methodology Considered as a System of Ethics". The Human Context, Vol 7, 1975.
- Enfield, Roy,  
 "Marx and Historical Laws", History and Theory, Vol 15, 1976.
- Farr, James,  
 "Hume, Hermeneutics and History: A 'Sympathetic' Account". History and Theory, Vol 17, no 3, 1978.
- Fitzgerald, L.P.,  
 "Value Judgments and Objectivity". The Philosophical Journal, Vol 14, no 1, 1977.
- Fleming, John V.,  
 "Historians and the Evidence of Literature". Journal of Interdisciplinary History, Vol 4, no 1, 1973.
- Fletcher, D.J.C.,  
 "Karl Popper's Scientific and Social Philosophy".  
Unpublished Paper, University of Natal.
- Fogel, Robert William,  
 "The Limits of Quantitative Methods in History". American Historical Review, Vol 80, 1975.
- Forrester, Mary,  
 "Practical Reasoning and Historical Inquiry". History and Theory, Vol 15, no 2, 1976.
- Freeman, Eugene,  
 "Objectivity as 'Intersubjective Agreement' ". Monist 57, 1973.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg,  
 "The Power of Reason". Man and World, 1970.
- Gadamer, Hans-Georg,  
 "Hermeneutics and Social Science".  
 "Summation".  
 "Responses to 'Theory and Practice' ".  
Cultural Hermeneutics, Vol 2, 1975.



Gadamer, Hans-Georg,

"Theory, Technology, Practice: The Task of the Science of Man". Social Research, no 44, 1977.

Gardiner, Patrick,

"The Philosophy of History". International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, Vol 6, 1968.

Geras, Norman,

"Althusser's Marxism: An Assessment" in Western Marxism: A Critical Reader, New Left Review, 1977.

Gilliam, Harriet,

"The Dialectics of Realism and Idealism in Modern Historiographic Theory". History and Theory, Vol 15, no 3, 1976.

Goldstein, Leon J.,

"A Note on Historical Interpretation". Philosophy of Science, Vol 42, 1975.

Goldstein, Leon J.,

"Epistemic Attitudes and History". Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, Vol 37, 1976/77.

Gram, Moltke S.,

"'Truth and Historicity' : A Review Essay". History and Theory, Vol 13, 1974.

Habermas, Jürgen,

"The Hermeneutic Claim to Universality", in Bleicher, Josef, Contemporary Hermeneutics: Hermeneutics as Method, Philosophy and Critique, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980.

Hampson, Norman,

"Subjectivity and Objectivity in History". Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology, Vol 7, no 3, 1976.

Harsgor, Michael,

"Total History: The Annales School". Journal of Contemporary History, Vol 13, 1978.

Hecht, J. Jean,

"Social History" International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, Vol 6, 1968.

- Hempel, Carl G.,  
 "The Function of General Laws in History", in Gardiner  
 P.(ed), Theories of History, The Free Press, 1965.
- Hempel, Carl G.,  
 "Explanation in Science and in History", in Nash, Ronald  
 H.(ed), Ideas of History: Volume 2: The Critical Philosophy  
 of History, E.P. Dutton & Co., 1969.
- Higham, John,  
 "Beyond Consensus: The Historian as Moral Critic".  
American Historical Review, Vol 67, no 3, 1961.
- Hirsch, Eric D.(jr),  
 "Truth and Method in Interpretation". The Review of  
 Metaphysics, Vol 18, 1965.
- Hobsbawm, E.J.,  
 "Karl Marx's Contribution to Historiography" in Blackburn,  
 Robin(ed), Ideology in the Social Sciences, Fontana, 1972.
- Hobsbawm, E.J.,  
 "The Social Function of the Past", Past and Present, no 55,  
 1972.
- Hollinger, David A.,  
 "T.S. Kuhn's Theory of Science and Its Implications for  
 History". American Historical Review, Vol 78, 1973.
- Hübner, Kurt,  
 "On Theories in Historical Sciences". Man and World,  
 Vol 8, 1975.
- Hull, David L.,  
 "Central Subjects and Historical Narratives". History and  
 Theory, Vol 14, no 3, 1975.
- Izenberg, Gerald,  
 "Psychohistory and Intellectual History". History and  
 Theory, Vol 14, no 2, 1975.
- Jameson, J. Franklin,  
 "The Future Uses of History", American Historical Review,  
 Vol 65, no 1, 1959.

- Jonas, Hans,  
 "Change and Permanence : On the Possibility of Understanding History". From Carr, David and Casey, Edward S. (eds), Explorations in Phenomenology, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1973.
- Jones, Gareth Stedman,  
 "History : The Poverty of Empiricism" in Blackburn, Robin (ed), Ideology in the Social Sciences, Fontana, 1972.
- Kenwick, William E.,  
 "Metaphysical Presuppositions". The Journal of Philosophy, Vol 52, no 25, 1955.
- Kersten, Fred,  
 "Phenomenology, History, Myth". in Nathanson Maurice (ed), Phenomenology and Social Reality, Martinus Nijhoff, 1970.
- Kuhn, T.S.,  
 "Logic of Discovery or Psychology of Research?"  
 "Reflections on my Critics"  
 in Lakatos, Imre and Musgrave, Alan (eds), Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge, Cambridge University Press, 1970.
- Kupperman, Joel J.,  
 "Precision in History". Mind 84, 1975.
- Lawrence, Fred,  
 "Self-Knowledge in History in Gadamer and Lonergan".  
 in McShane, Philip (ed), Language, Truth and Meaning, Gill and Macmillan, 1972.
- Lawrence, Fred,  
 "Responses to 'Hermeneutics and Social Science'". Cultural Hermeneutics, Vol 2, 1975.
- Lee, Dwight E. & Beck, Robert N.,  
 "The Meaning of 'Historicism' ". American Historical Review, Vol 59, no 3, 1954.
- Levine, Andrew, and Wright, Erik Olin,  
 "Rationality and Class Struggle", New Left Review, 123, Sept/Oct 1980.
- Linge, David E.,  
 "Dilthey and Gadamer: Two Theories of Historical Understanding". American Academy of Religion Journal, Vol 41, 1973.

- Lüthy, Herbert,  
 "What's the Point of History?" Journal of Contemporary History, Vol 3, no 2, 1968.
- Macklin, Ruth,  
 "Reason vs Causes in Explanation of Action". Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, Vol 33, 1972/3.
- Mandelbaum, Maurice,  
 "Historicism". Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Vol 4, 1967.
- Mandelbaum, Maurice,  
 "A Note on History as Narrative". History and Theory, Vol 6, 1967.
- Marino, John A.,  
 "Matrices of Materialist Historiography", Journal of Modern History, Vol 51, 1979.
- Martindale, Don,  
 "*Verstehen*". International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, Vol 15, 1968.
- Masterman, Margaret,  
 "The Nature of a Paradigm", in Lakatos, Imre and Musgrave, Alan (eds), Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge, Cambridge University Press, 1970.
- Meldin, A.I.,  
 "Historical Objectivity: A Noble Dream?", in Nash, Ronald H. (ed), Ideas of History: Volume 2: The Critical Philosophy of History, E.P. Dutton and Co., 1969.
- Mill, John Stuart,  
 "Ethology - The Science of the Formation of Character", in Nash, Ronald H. (ed), Ideas of History: Volume 2: The Critical Philosophy of History, E.P. Dutton and Co., 1969.
- Mink, Louis, O.,  
 "The Autonomy of Historical Understanding". History and Theory, Vol 5, 1966.
- Morgenbesser, Sydney,  
 "Scientific Explanation". International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, Vol 14, 1968.

- McCarthy, Thomas,  
 "Responses to 'Theory and Practice' ". Cultural Hermeneutics, Vol 2, 1975.
- McCullagh, C. Behan,  
 "Colligation and Classification in History". History and Theory, Vol 17, no 3, 1978.
- Nagel, Ernest,  
 "On the Method of *Verstehen* as the Sole Method of Philosophy". The Journal of Philosophy, Vol 50, 1953.
- Nagel, Ernest,  
 "The Logic of Historical Analysis" in Meyerhoff, Hans (ed), The Philosophy of History in Our Time, Doubleday, 1959.
- Nield, Keith and Seed, John,  
 "Theoretical poverty or the poverty of theory: British Marxist historiography and the Althusserians", Economy and Society, Vol 8, 1979.
- North, Douglass, C.,  
 "Economic History". International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, Vol 6, 1968.
- Oldfield, Adrian,  
 "Moral Judgments in History", History and Theory, Vol 20, no 3, 1981.
- Pachter, Henry, M.,  
 "Defining an Event: Prolegomenon to any Future Philosophy of History". Social Research, Vol 41, 1974.
- Palmer, Richard,  
 "Responses to 'Hermeneutics and Social Sciences' ". Cultural Hermeneutics, Vol 2, 1975.
- Passmore, John,  
 "Explanation in Everyday Life, in Science, and in History". History and Theory, Vol 2, 1962.
- Peters, Ted,  
 "The Nature and Role of Presupposition: An Inquiry into Contemporary Hermeneutics". International Philosophical Quarterly, Vol 14, 1974.



- Popper, Karl R.,  
 "Normal Science and Its Dangers" in Lakatos, Imre, and  
 Musgrave, Alan (eds), Criticism and the Growth of Know-  
 ledge, Cambridge University Press, 1970.
- Posel, D.,  
 "Radical Science - In the Last Analysis". Unpublished  
 Paper, 1979.
- Psathas, George,  
 "Ethnomethods and Phenomenology". Social Research, Vol 35,  
 1968.
- Quinton, Anthony,  
 "Karl Raimund Popper". Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Vol 6,  
 1967.
- Reill, Peter Hanns,  
 "History and Hermeneutics in the Aufklärung: The Thought  
 of Johann Christop Gatterer". Journal of Modern History,  
 Vol 45, 1973.
- Ricoeur, Paul,  
 "Human Sciences and Hermeneutic Method: Meaningful Action  
 Considered as a Text". Social Research, Vol 38, no 3,  
 1971, reprinted in Carr, David and Casey, Edward S. (eds),  
Explorations in Phenomenology, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague,  
 1973.
- Ricoeur, Paul,  
 "History and Hermeneutics". The Journal of Philosophy,  
 Vol 73, no 19, 1976.
- Rickman, H.P.,  
 "Wilhelm Dilthey".  
*"Geisteswissenschaften"*.  
Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Vols 2 & 3, 1967.
- Rickman, H.P.,  
 "Dilthey and the Writing of Intellectual History". Journal  
 of World History, Vol 13, 1971.
- Rock, Paul,  
 "Some Problems of Interpretative Historiography". British  
 Journal of Sociology, Vol 27, no 3, 1976.

- Scharff, Robert C.,  
 "Non-Analytical, Unspeculative Philosophy of History: The Legacy of Wilhelm Dilthey". Cultural Hermeneutics, Vol 3, 1975/6.
- Scriven, Michael,  
 "Truisms as the Grounds for Historical Explanations", in Gardiner, P.(ed), Theories of History, The Free Press, 1965.
- Shaw, William H.,  
 "'The Handmill gives you the Feudal Lord': Marx's Technological Determinism", History and Theory, Vol 18, no 2, 1979.
- Shils, Edward,  
 "Tradition". Comparative Studies in Sociology and History, Vol 13, 1971.
- Shiner, Larry,  
 "A Phenomenological Approach to Historical Knowledge". History and Theory, Vol 8, 1969.
- Skinner, Quentin,  
 "Hermeneutics and the Role of History". New Literary History, Vol 7, no 2, 1972.
- Speier, Hans,  
 "The Communication of Hidden Meaning". Social Research, Vol 44, 1977.
- Stojanović, Svetozar,  
 "The Ethical Potential of Marx's Thought" in Bottomore, Tom (ed), Modern Interpretations of Marx, Basil Blackwell, 1981.
- Tapp, E.J.,  
 "Values in History". Journal of World History, Vol 11, 1968.
- Taylor, Charles,  
 "Neutrality in Political Science", in Laslett, P. and Runciman, W.G. (eds), Philosophy, Politics and Society, (Third Series), Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1969.
- Taylor, Charles,  
 "Interpretation and the Sciences of Man". Review of Metaphysics, Vol 25, 1971, reprinted in Carr, David and Casey, Edward, S.(eds), Explorations in Phenomenology, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1973.

- Vico, Giambattista,  
 "The New Science", in Gardiner, P.(ed) Theories of History,  
 The Free Press, 1965.
- Vico, Giambattista,  
 "A New Conception of Historiography" in Donagan, Alan, and  
 Donagan, Barbara (eds), Philosophy of History, Macmillan,  
 1965.
- Wallace, Carol,  
 "Has History Any Meaning? A Critique of Popper's Philosophy  
 of History: A Review Article". History and Theory, Vol 18,  
 no 3, 1979.
- Walsh, W.H.,  
 " 'Meaning' in History", in Gardiner, P.(ed), Theories of  
 History, The Free Press, 1965.
- Weingartner, R.,  
 "Historical Explanation". Encyclopedia of Philosophy,  
 Vol 4, 1967.
- Winch, Peter,  
 "Understanding a Primitive Society". in Wilson Bryan, R.,  
Rationality, Basil Blackwell, 1977.
- Wisdom, J.O.,  
 "General Explanation in History". History and Theory,  
 Vol 15, no 3, 1976.
- Wright, Gordon,  
 "History as a Moral Science". American Historical Review,  
 Vol 81, no 1, 1976.

B. HISTORICAL EXAMPLES CITED:

(i) Books

- Allardyce, Gilbert (ed),  
The Place of Fascism in European History, Prentice-Hall Inc,  
 1971.
- Anderson, Perry,  
Lineages of the Absolutist State, New Left Books, 1974.

- Apuleius,  
The Golden Ass, Penguin, 1950.
- Arendt, Hannah,  
Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil,  
Penguin, 1965.
- Barker, Elinor, G.,  
The Bourgeoisie in Eighteenth Century France, Princeton  
University Press, 1955.
- Bullock, Alan,  
Hitler: A Study in Tyranny, Penguin, 1962.
- Burke, Peter,  
The Renaissance Sense of the Past, Edward Arnold, 1969.
- Burland, C.A.,  
Echoes of Magic, Peter Davies, 1972.
- Butterfield, Herbert,  
Napoleon, Duckworth, 1962.
- Cohn, Norman,  
Europe's Inner Demons, Paladin, 1975.
- Dowd, David L.(ed),  
Napoleon: Was he the Heir of the Revolution? Holt, Rinehart  
and Winston, 1964.
- Elton, G.R., (ed)  
The New Cambridge Modern History, Volume 2, The Reformation,  
Cambridge University Press, 1958.
- Engels, Frederick,  
Germany: Revolution and Counter Revolution, Lawrence and  
Wishart, 1969.
- Gregor, James, A.,  
The Ideology of Fascism: The Rationale of Totalitarianism,  
1969.
- Harner, Michael, J.(ed),  
Hallucinogens and Shamanism, Oxford University Press, 1973.
- Hobsbawm, E.J.,  
The Age of Revolution, Abacus, 1977.

- Hunt, E.K.,  
Property and Prohets: The Evolution of Economic Institutions and Ideologies, Harper and Row, 1978.
- Hyde, J.K.,  
Society and Politics in Medieval Italy, Macmillan, 1973.
- Janeway, Elizabeth,  
Man's World, Woman's Place: A Study in Social Mythology, Penguin, 1971.
- Kedward, H.R.,  
Fascism in Western Europe 1900-1945, Blackie, 1969.
- Klassen, Peter J.,  
Europe in the Reformation, Prentice Hall, Inc., 1979.
- Koenigsberger, H.G. and Mosse, George L.,  
Europe in the Sixteenth Century, Longman, 1968.
- Koenigsberger, H.G. (ed),  
Luther - A Profile, Macmillan, 1973.
- Lea, Henry, Charles,  
Materials Towards a History of Witchcraft, 3 Volumes, New York, 1957.
- Lubasz, H. (ed),  
The Development of the Modern State, Macmillan, 1964.
- Midelfort, H.C. Erik,  
Witch Hunting in South-Western Germany 1562-1684, Stanford University Press, 1972.
- Mitchell, Juliet and Oakley, Ann,  
The Rights and Wrongs of Women, Pelican, 1976.
- Murray, M.A.,  
The Witch-Cult in Western Europe: A Study in Anthropology, Oxford, 1921.
- Newall, Venetia,  
The Encyclopedia of Witchcraft and Magic, The Dial Press, 1974.
- Rice, Eugene F. (jr),  
The Foundations of Early Modern Europe, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970.



- Roberts, J.M.,  
The French Revolution, Oxford University Press, 1978.
- Ross, James Bruce and McLaughlin, Mary Martin (eds),  
The Portable Renaissance Reader, Penguin, 1968.
- Rowbotham, Sheila,  
Women, Resistance and Revolution, Pelican, 1974.
- Rudé, George,  
Revolutionary Europe 1783-1815, Collins, 1964.
- Rupp, E.G., and Drewery, Benjamin (eds),  
Martin Luther, Edward Arnold, 1970.
- Russell, Jeffrey, B.,  
A History of Witchcraft, Sorcerers, Heretics and Pagans,  
 Thames and Hudson, 1980.
- Summers, Montague,  
The History of Witchcraft, The Citadel Press, 1974.
- Trevor-Roper, H.R.,  
The European Witch-Craze of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries, Penguin, 1969.
- Woloch, Isser,  
The Peasant in the old Regime: Conditions and Protests,  
 Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977.
- Woolf, S.J. (ed),  
The Nature of Fascism, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1960.

(ii) Articles

- Allardyce, Gilbert,  
 "The Place of Fascism in European History", in Allardyce,  
 Gilbert (ed), The Place of Fascism in European History,  
 Prentice-Hall Inc., 1971.
- Allardyce, Gilbert,  
 "What Fascism is Not: Thoughts on the Deflation of a Concept".  
American Historical Review, Vol 84, no 2, 1979.

- Allen, Andrew,  
 "Toads: the Biochemistry of the Witches' Cauldron", History Today, Vol 29, 1979.
- Anderson, Alan and Gordon, Raymond,  
 "Witchcraft and the Status of Women - the Case of England".  
"British Journal of Sociology, Vol 29, no 2, 1978.
- Bainton, Roland, H.,  
 "Interpretations of the Reformation". American Historical Review, Vol 66, no 1, 1960.
- Ben-Yehuda, Nachman,  
 "The European Witch-craze of the 14th to 17th Century: A Sociologist's Perspective". American Journal of Sociology, Vol 86, no 1, 1980.
- Blickle, Peter,  
 "The Economic, Social and Political Background of the Twelve Articles of the Swabian Peasants of 1525". Journal of Peasant Studies, Vol 3, no 1, 1975.
- Bouwsma, William, J.,  
 "The Renaissance and the Drama of Western History".  
American Historical Review, Vol 84, 1979.
- Engels, Friedrich,  
 "The Marxist Interpretation of Luther", in Koenigsberger, H.G.(ed), Luther: A Profile, Macmillan, 1973.
- Erikson, E.H.,  
 "The Search for Identity", in Koenigsberger, H.G.(ed),  
Luther: A Profile, Macmillan, 1973.
- Ficino, Marsilio,  
 "The Golden Age in Florence", in Ross, James Bruce and McClaughlin, Mary Martin (eds), The Portable Renaissance Reader, Penguin, 1968.
- Harner, Michael J.,  
 "The Role of Hallucinogenic Plants in European Witchcraft", in Harner, Michael J.(ed), Hallucinogeus and Shamanism, Oxford University Press, 1973.
- Lucas, Colin,  
 "Nobles, Bourgeois and the Origins of the French Revolution".  
Past and Present, Vol 60, 1973.

- Maland, D.,  
 "The Italian Renaissance - A Problem of Interpretation".  
History, Vol 44, 1959.
- Mandrou, Robert,  
 "Porchnev, Mousnier and the Significance of Popular Uprisings" in Woloch, Isser, The Peasantry in the Old Regime: Conditions and Protests, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977.
- Morrill, J.S.,  
 "French Absolutism as Limited Monarchy". (Review Article),  
The Historical Journal, Vol 21, no 4, 1978.
- Mousnier, Roland,  
 "Conjoncture and Circumstance in Popular Uprisings" in  
 Woloch, Isser, The Peasantry in the Old Regime: Conditions and Protests, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977.
- Pflanze, Otto,  
 "Towards a Psycho-analytic Interpretation of Bismarck",  
American Historical Review, Vol 77, no 1, 1972.
- Porchnev, Boris,  
 "Popular Uprisings as Class War: The Revolt of the *Nu-Pieds*"  
 in Woloch, Isser, The Peasantry in the Old Regime: Conditions and Protests, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977.
- Ritter, G.,  
 "Origins of the Modern State", in Lubasz, H.(ed), The Development of the Modern State, Macmillan, 1964.
- Salmon, J.H.M.,  
 "Venality of Office and Popular Sedition in Seventeenth-Century France", Past and Present, no 37, 1967.
- Vogler, Günter,  
 " 'The Peasant War in Germany' by Friedrich Engels - 125 Years after". Journal of Peasant Studies, Vol 3, no 1, 1975.
- Wohlfheil, Rainer,  
 "On 'The Peasant War in Germany' by Friedrich Engels - 125 Years after". Journal of Peasant Studies, Vol 3, no 1, 1975.