

SOME RECENT VIEWS OF THE NATURE OF THE PAST
AND HISTORICAL EXPLANATION

by

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PREFACE

With what period or periods of time is the historian concerned? In how much of that period or periods of time is the historian interested? What is the function of the historian to be once he has decided upon his period of concern and those aspects of that period in which he is interested?

The answers to these questions have long been a topic of debate. Even today, they are far from settled issues. Historiographers have, however, attempted to give answers to these questions, and historians answer them implicitly or explicitly every time they write a book which they call "history."

This work will study the answers which a particular group of English philosophers of history give to these three questions. These five philosophers of history are all members of what can loosely be called the "Collingwood School." The five men are Robin Collingwood, Herbert Butterfield, William Walsh, Patrick Gardiner, and William Dray. These five writers are associated either as students, as teachers, or as influencers of each other.

In different ways, these men address themselves to the three questions posed at the beginning of this preface, and it is the thesis of this work that they answer these questions by holding that history is oriented toward the past, the thoughts and events of which are all conceivably important, and subjects of concern to the historian, who, after studying this past, explains what happened therein in a manner that is intelligible to his contemporaries.

The plan of this thesis is as follows: First, the notions which each author presents in his work are discussed. Then, the pertinent implications which are contained in these notions are made explicit. Comparisons among the writers will be made as the thesis is developed.

CHAPTER I

ROBIN COLLINGWOOD

Collingwood's General Definition of History

Robin George Collingwood, "founder" of the informal school which bears his name, was the possessor of a versatile philosophical mind. A student and teacher at Oxford, Collingwood was a Fellow of Pembroke College. In 1935, he became Waynflete Professor of Metaphysical Philosophy.¹ His classic work, The Idea of History, contains the exposition of his most salient ideas about what history is and what the historian does. It also outlines many of the problems germane to this thesis, and influences many of the solutions to these problems which others of his school would give.

Historical thinking, for Collingwood, stands alone. It is unlike mathematical thinking, theological thinking, or scientific thinking. It is unlike these because it is suited to perform a task for which these other forms of thinking are unsuited.

Historical thinking is concerned with the past.² The past is a time before now.³ The type of thinking which is able to apprehend such a time and the events which presumably transpired then is distinctive.⁴

¹ Patrick Gardiner, Theories of History (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1959), p. 249.

² Robin Collingwood, The Idea of History (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946), p. 2.

³ Ibid., p. 5. ⁴ Ibid.

The knowledge gained by historical thinking is similarly distinctive, as distinctive as the subject matter of the past.⁵

Collingwood suggests that history is "a kind of research or inquiry."⁶ The object upon which this research or inquiry is brought to bear is the "actions of human beings that have been done in the past."⁷ History, or the special type of research or inquiry, proceeds by "interpreting evidence";⁸ its purpose is "for human self-knowledge."⁹ Its value "is that it teaches us what man has done and thus what man is."¹⁰

According to Collingwood, merely because a tale is told about events which happened prior to the present does not qualify that tale as history. As an example, he reviews certain Sumerian inscriptions which impute the actions of man to the whims and wills of gods. In quick strokes, Collingwood points out that because these tales do not stem from research, because they are not concerned with human actions, because they do not interpret evidence, and because their purpose is not human self-knowledge, these stories are not history; indeed, if this is all the Sumerians knew about the past, or if this is the only way in which they handled the past, then for them, history did not exist.¹¹

As Collingwood continues to dwell on these stories and myths which speak of a time which is not present but which do not necessarily merit the title "history" for doing so, he gives a title to his definition of history,

⁵Ibid., p. 7. ⁶Ibid., p. 9. ⁷Ibid. ⁸Ibid., pp. 9-10. ⁹Ibid., p. 10.

¹⁰Ibid. ¹¹Ibid., pp. 10-12.

and to those histories which also meet his criteria. That title is "scientific history,"¹² and it is to be contrasted with "theocratic history," and with "myth," and other "quasi-histories" with which men have sought to relate incidents not immediately present.¹³

Collingwood suggests that the "research or inquiry" which is history is brought to bear on the "actions of human beings that have been done in the past." The word "actions" has a special definition for Collingwood. For Collingwood, "actions of human beings that have been done in the past" refer only to rationally-motivated, thought-caused actions. It is only in the rational motivations for human deeds that the historian is interested. As Collingwood says, "it is not knowing what people did but understanding what they thought that is the proper definition of the historian's task."¹⁴ The historian is not interested in natural events, such as the development of a mountain range; he is only concerned with thought-motivated human action.¹⁵

The historian expresses his concern with the thought-caused action of the past by re-enacting that thought in his own mind.¹⁶ He thinks thoughts which have been thought in the past. Because the same thought or thoughts can be re-enacted at will, perhaps centuries after the first occurrence, Collingwood considers that thoughts are eternal.¹⁷

It is through the eternality of thought that the past lives on into the present. Natural beings die, to be replaced at a later date by other

¹²Ibid., pp. 14-15. ¹³Ibid. ¹⁴Ibid., p. 115. ¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 215. ¹⁷Ibid., pp. 217-218.

natural beings; but thoughts can be re-thought, and the past can, in this manner, live into the present.¹⁸

One aspect of the re-enactment of the thought-caused actions of humans in the past is the use of "historical imagination." Collingwood asserts that it is essential for the historian to utilize his imagination because the evidence which the historian finds is never complete. The historian must construct a picture of what must have happened based on incomplete evidence. Collingwood uses the example of a man who sees a ship in one position on the water, looks away for a while, and then sees it in another position. He imagines that it sailed from one point to the other.¹⁹ He did not, however, actually see it sail from one point to the other, nor does he have any evidence that it did. All he can do is imagine that it must have sailed from point to point.

Historical imagination is used not only in constructing a story of what must have been, but also as a tool in the evaluation of the evidence which is discovered or presented. Using our imagination, we discern what could possibly have happened; and what could not possibly have happened; what statements are credible, and which are not; what is to be believed, and what cannot be believed, and is unbelievable, one could say, "even by the wildest stretch of the imagination."²⁰

In the use of imagination, the historian resembles the novelist, with some important differences. Both the historian and the novelist attempt to

¹⁸Ibid., p. 225. ¹⁹Ibid., pp. 240-241. ²⁰Ibid., p. 245.

construct a story which is coherent; but the story constructed by the historian must be a story which is true, and the events (and presumably the thoughts) described must be thoughts and events which really occurred, and told as they really happened.²¹ Also, unlike the novelist, the historian's picture must "be localized in space and time"; it "must be consistent with itself"; and it must be a story which "stands in a peculiar relation to something called evidence."²² Collingwood points out that everything is potential evidence if we come to it with the right question, seeking from it the right kind of information, asking the right questions about the thoughts behind it.²³

Collingwood makes a distinction between the "scissors-and-paste" historian and the scientific historian. The "scissors-and-paste" historian seeks to take the testimony of past historians, eyewitnesses, and other authorities, and cutting out the reports and testimonies which he needs, pastes them together to form what he believes is a complete story of the incident or time-period he is studying or writing about. The scientific historian, on the other hand, uses the statements not as portions of a story which he plans to relate, but as evidence which can be used to tell a story.²⁴ The statements are not finished building blocks, but rather they are evidence to which various questions can be put, such as, "why did so-and-so make this statement?" "What was he thinking about when he said this?"²⁵

²¹*Ibid.*, pp. 245-246. ²²*Ibid.*, p. 246. ²³*Ibid.*, p. 247.

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 275. ²⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 278-282.

Implications of Collingwood's Ideas

Collingwood's orientation is clearly toward the past. The basis for his claim that history is an autonomous branch of knowledge is that it studies a distinctive subject matter, a subject matter whose distinctiveness derives partially from the fact that it has occurred in the past.

While oriented toward the past, however, he does not consider all of the past to be of equal importance. The historian is to be concerned only with the thought-caused actions of human beings of the past. Indeed, to know the rational motivation for an action is to understand an action; to describe merely the outward aspects of a human action is to understand nothing.

The historian, therefore, explains, according to Collingwood, by re-creating thought. To relate a series of incidents or to describe a number of happenings does not constitute explanation. Full and real understanding of a human action of the past, the subject matter of history, is gained only by re-thinking the thought which caused it. Furthermore, rational thought of the present can substitute for a lacuna of evidence for rational thought of the past. The historian can use his imagination to construct a reasonable explanation of the past, using incomplete evidence as a framework.

CHAPTER II

HERBERT BUTTERFIELD

Criticism of the Whig Historian

Herbert Butterfield, Professor of Modern History in the University of Cambridge, is the only one of the five authors studied in this work who is not connected with Oxford. Because of his notions, however, he is classified as a member of the "Collingwood School."

According to Butterfield, in his The Whig Interpretation of History, there is a prevalent method of writing history which he claims is best typified by the "whig historians." Though largely unnamed, these historians were wont to see certain aspects of the past as clear predecessors and causes of events and institutions and fortunate and unfortunate circumstances of the present.¹

Typically, the method works as follows: Let us assume that the whig historian were living in the United States in the twentieth century. As a true whig historian, he would be interested in the causes of those institutions and concepts of which he was opposed. He would also see history as being progressive, that is, improving "in every way every day."²

Being in favor, say, of a strong federal government as opposed to greater rights for the individual states, he would be able to trace the "heroes" and the "villains" of the past who, through their labors or machinations, as the case may be, were the ones who brought the favored concept

¹ Herbert Butterfield, The Whig Interpretation of History (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), p. 16.

² Ibid., p. 3.

into being, or the ones who attempted to oppose it. The favored concept has a perfectly clear line of descent, and perfectly clear sponsors and opposers. One can tell with whom it originated, and exactly who are the personalities of the past to be congratulated or condemned for their handling of it. Lincoln, for example, would be an obvious "hero," while Jefferson Davis would be an obvious "villain."

Also, two assumptions are made by the whig historian. The first would be that the concept of a strong federal government, in this case, was seen in exactly the same way by Lincoln and Davis as he, the historian, sees it today. That is, Lincoln and Davis structured the importance of a strong federal government in the same manner as the modern-day historian may structure it. The attitudes which they took toward the situation, and the actions which they took were a function of the fact that they did structure it in the same way as men would do so today.

The second assumption made by the whig historian is that Lincoln and Davis, for example, in their views of the importance of federal governmental power, and in the actions which they took on the basis of their views of this power, were motivated by their desire to "play for posterity." That is, the power of the federal government in relation to the state governments today are such as they are because Lincoln was the winner in his struggle with Davis, and Lincoln planned the situation which exists today. The situation that exists today is exactly as he wanted it; a few modifications here and there, but substantially the same. A corollary of this assumption is that Davis, had he known about today's situation would have specifically

opposed it, and that because he lost, he might as well never have lived, from an historical point of view, because the situation which he wanted for the future did not come about. If we, then, have a desirable balance between federal governmental power and states' power, Lincoln is a man to thank and praise, as are all others who similarly wanted the same strong federal government and worked for it.

It is with this view, which construes the past as a conscious anticipation of the future in very specific ways, that Butterfield takes issue.³ For Butterfield, the past is a far, far too complex affair to unravel in such a neat, surgical manner.

Butterfield claims that the historian must start off with an assumption far different from those of the whig historians. The historian must assume that he is able to know minds which were unlike his own, minds which had entirely different outlooks and values than those which his mind possesses.⁴

In fact, the historian must not only assume that the minds of the past differed from his own, but he must realize that his main task is to seek out and explain the differences. As Butterfield puts it: "...the chief aim of the historian is the elucidation of the unlikenesses between past and present and his chief function is to act in this way as the mediator between other generations and our own."⁵

³Ibid., pp. 11-12. ⁴Ibid., p. 9. ⁵Ibid., p. 10.

The historian cannot stand in the vantage point of the present, and look back at the past and see it as some sort of time period whose whole function was to prepare for our present. Rather, he must enter the past, see it with its own eyes, make it his present, and bring that sense of understanding to the rest of us.⁶ The past is a time with its own integrity, its own meaning, and within its own context it stands alone. Its meaning does not derive from its comparison with our time; its meaning is independent. The actions, say, of Lincoln must be seen within the context of his own times, rather than from the context of our own times.

The whig historian is accustomed to seeing aspects of the past, and characters of the past as the causes of the institutions and concepts of the present. Butterfield, however, claims that all we can say as far as the relation between past and present is concerned is that all of the past produced all of the present. The past is far too complex to be able to isolate one specific cause of a contemporary institution or concept.⁷

Butterfield on "The Historical Process"

If we cannot trace specific causes of specific events, how then are we to conceive of the relationship between the past and the present if we wish to say something more specific than merely all of the past produced all of the present? What else can be said about the relationship between the past and the present?

⁶Ibid., p. 16. ⁷Ibid., pp. 19-20.

In answer to these questions, Butterfield speaks of the "historical process."⁸ The historical process is everything that happened in the past, and it caused everything that we know today. This historical process consists both of what was planned, and what was not planned; of the intention of people and groups, as well as of the frustrations of the same people and groups.

Let us, for an example, return to the development of the power of the federal government over the power of the individual states. The whig historian might see Lincoln as the "hero" of the present situation, and Jefferson Davis as the "villain", as the one who wanted to frustrate Lincoln's intentions, but whose failure allowed Lincoln's intentions to succeed, and who, in view of the end result, is irrelevant from an historical point of view.

According to Butterfield's notion of the historical process, however, it is not easy to pick out "heroes" and "villains" from the past, if indeed, one can do it at all. Because as far as Butterfield is concerned, the actions of heroes are conditioned by the actions of villains, as every event and action of the past is conditioned by all of the other events and actions.

The United States today, and its concept of federal power versus states power is indeed the result of the actions and decisions of Abraham Lincoln; but Lincoln did not act in a vacuum. He reacted to actions and decisions of Jefferson Davis, Stonewall Jackson, and countless other historical figures,

⁸ Ibid., pp. 34-63, passim.

North and South. In fact, the status of federal power today is as much a legacy left by Davis as by Lincoln.

Or, we might take another example. The United States Constitution is the result of not the individual will of one or two men, but of the successes and failures of a large number of men who tried to get their way or prevent others from getting theirs. George III, British generals, southern slaveholders, northern lawyers, and properties New Englanders all played their part in its development. Surely, not all of them did so consciously, or were even alive when it was written, but to deny the role of any of these groups or individuals would be to give a false picture of the development of this document. All of them played their part, and for Butterfield, the question of who were the heroes, and who were the villains are meaningless ones. The historian's interest is in the net effect of all of the interrelationships between and among the countless number of parties and individuals involved.

Butterfield on "History and Judgments of Value"

Butterfield issues another caution to the historian, based upon a criticism of the whig historian. It is not possible to show the value of any certain action, he claims, on a long-term basis. That is, one cannot say that because a king of England did such-and-such in the 13th century that 20th century Britons are thereby beneficiaries. It is only possible to show very short-term benefits which a certain act may have had.⁹ This is an extension of his idea that the past as a whole consists of a historical

⁹Ibid., pp. 75-76.

process which has produced the present, a past in which an innumerable amount of actions and interactions went in to producing one modern institution or concept.

The historian, however, though hopefully aware of the incredible complexity of the past, is still obliged to know all that he can about it. Indeed, because the complexity of the past does cause the present, and because even events in the past can only be understood if we understand all of the complex sub-events, the only way the historian can make anything clear is to provide as much detail as possible. It is the task of the historian, in fact, to get at the concrete, the accidental, for in this way only can events be explained.¹⁰

If, for example, the historian were offering an explanation of the French Revolution, and the listener did not understand the explanation, the historian would be called upon to provide greater detail. In the words of Butterfield: "He [the historian] explains the French Revolution by discovering exactly what it was that occurred; and if at any point we need further elucidation all that he can do is to take us into greater detail, and make us see in still more definite concreteness what really did take place."¹¹

Butterfield on "The Art of the Historian"

Once the historian has garnered all of the explanatory detail, however, he must relate it to his readers. Butterfield says he cannot merely put down all of the details on paper and expect they will somehow speak for themselves.¹²

¹⁰Ibid., p. 69. ¹¹Ibid., p. 72. ¹²Ibid., p. 91.

On the contrary, the historian utilizes something of his own personality in the carrying of these details of the past into his own generation. "By imaginative sympathy he makes the past intelligible to the present. He translates its conditioning circumstances into terms which we today can understand. It is in this sense that history must always be written from the point of view of the present. It is in this sense that every age will have to write its history over again."¹³

In other words, the historian of the present century steps back into past centuries, and makes the past his present by seeing it with sympathetic eyes, by realizing that it has an integrity and a value all of its own. He then brings back the past into which he has stepped, and in terms which we his contemporaries can understand, he tells us about it.

If history consists of each and every detail of the past acting on each and every other detail, no book could be big enough to contain these almost-infinite number of details. So, the historian has to leave out some of the details and still bring us the story. It is, says Butterfield, one of his "primary problems"; how is he to know which one of the indispensable details to leave out?¹⁴

Butterfield suggests that the historian borrow a technique of the world of art. It will be recalled that late 19th century France saw the development of a school of painters called the Impressionists. These artists depicted scenes and figures by suggesting them, instead of actually

¹³Ibid., p. 92. ¹⁴Ibid., pp. 101-102.

drawing them out in all of their fullness. Their paintings suggested, rather than portrayed, an entire scene. They painted with splashes of color, and hints of the whole, without, they said, really distorting what we see when we look at the actual scene ourselves.

It is this type of technique which Butterfield suggests that the historian borrow. It is manifestly impossible to give every detail of the past; on the other hand, the more detail, the better the historical writing. Faced with this dilemma, the historian must resort to the technique of the impressionist painter. He suggests enough of the detail of the past to give a picture which, while not complete, is not distorted.¹⁵

Butterfield on "Moral Judgment in History"

The historian is charged with the task of seeking out and describing the events and interconnections between these events of the past. What is his reaction to be when he disagrees with the motives of the characters whom he is describing, or with the actions and deeds which they performed? How ought it or how does it affect his work?

Butterfield holds that if the historian is really doing his job, moral judgments will not enter into his work. He will do his job of discovering detail without censure and without absolute praise or blame.

As Butterfield says: "His [the historian's] materials and his processes, and all his apparatus exist to enable him to show how a given event

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

came to take place. Who is he to jump out of this true office and merely announce to us that it ought never to have happened at all?"¹⁶

This idea flows from Butterfield's aversion to the kind of historical technique used by whig historians. They were wont to praise and blame characters in the past, men who, in their opinion, either stood in the way of progress or fostered progress. Butterfield's notions about what is proper for the historian's account excludes any value judgments. All that was, was, and that's all there was to it. The historian's judgment about something being desirable or undesirable is irrelevant.

Implications of the Notions of Butterfield's Whig Interpretation

It is clear that Butterfield, as Collingwood, holds that the proper area of concern for the historian is the past. Butterfield insists upon the idea that the historian must concentrate upon the past, and sets the past up as an entity of its own, with values and contexts of its own. The past stands in a relationship which is independent of the present, as far as the historian is concerned, and is emphatically not subservient to the present, nor merely a fortunate prelude to our time. The historian only happens to live in the present, and tells his story to the present, but is concerned with the past and its values.

Unlike Collingwood, who was primarily interested in only the mental aspects of the past, Butterfield plainly explains that he is interested in every single detail of the past.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 120.

This is seen in his insistence upon the historical process, in his insistence that the entire past caused the entire present. Every event in the past conditioned every other event; every detail is important. We must know which aims were frustrated, as well as which succeeded; there are no "heroes" and no "villains," everything just was, and the historian's task is to find out exactly what was. Detail is everything, and if a more profound explanation is desired by the historian's reader or listener, then more facts and details will have to be provided. Judgments about the morality or value of a certain event or person are out of place; the historian is only to discern and describe.

If the historian is interested in the past, and in every detail of the past, what is his role as the relator of all of these details?

Butterfield claims that the historian interprets the past to his own generation, explaining the differences of the past to the present. The historian looks not for the similarities, so that he can say to his contemporaries, "See how like us were these people who lived so long ago; see how they were in favor of the same things which we favor; see how they saw things in exactly the same way." On the contrary, the historian is charged with explaining to his generation how different was the past and its people; with explaining the difference in outlook between people of the past and people of the present; and with the task of giving his auditors the reasons why, so that they too can understand the difference, and note the change.

The manner in which the historian tells what he has discerned about the past is markedly different from the manner suggested by Collingwood.

Collingwood states that when the historian is relating to his contemporaries what he has discerned from the past, he must use his imagination to fill in the gaps in the details available. Butterfield, however, states the historian must decide which of the details he has learned can be omitted from his story, so that his listeners can hear an undistorted (yet not completely accurate) but simplified, story. Because the historian is charged with obtaining as many details as possible, and because the most accurate historical version will be the one with all of the details, the historian must decide just how inaccurate he can become and still tell an undistorted story; for to render all of the details would be impossible. Both Butterfield and Collingwood are interested in the same end product: A coherent, undistorted, accurate rendition of the past which in some manner takes all of the details, mental and physical, into account; yet each suggests going about it in a different manner.

Butterfield's Man on His Past

Four years after the American publication of his work The Whig Interpretation of History, Herbert Butterfield published a work entitled Man on His Past. This book is mainly an exploration of the history of historiography and historical methods.

Parts of Butterfield's discussion in this work are not applicable to the topics under consideration in this paper, but others are germane not only because they speak to some of the topics of our own discussion, but

also because of their relationship to those things about which Butterfield spoke in The Whig Interpretation of History.

For Butterfield, historiography can broadly be defined as the study of the manner in which men wrote history in the past, as well as the ways in which they are doing so today.

What value, however, is this study to the historian, to the practicing writing historian who wishes to study not his own method, but events and happenings which have gone on in the past?

Butterfield answers that the practicing historian can often write the history of a certain subject best, if he writes it as a history of the historiography of that subject. He gives as an example the French Revolution.¹

In other words, if the historian were to take all of the versions of the French Revolution which have been written, and studies the approaches used by various historians in writing about that event, he might well be able to write a good history of the event itself.

The first objection that comes to mind immediately is that of Collingwood's objection to "scissors-and-paste" history, which was noted earlier in this work. Collingwood objects to writing a history of a particular event merely by sitting down and piecing together the works of previous historians who also dealt with the topic.

¹Herbert Butterfield, Man on His Past (Cambridge: The University Press, 1955), p. 24.

But this is not what Butterfield is suggesting. He is saying that by noting what treatment a particular incident received in the past, one could note what parts of the incident were of interest to certain historians, when and where interests shifted, when and where certain terminologies arose, when and where certain personalities received different treatment, and so on. By noting these changes in emphasis, and varying treatments, the historian might well obtain a new insight into a matter which perhaps he had only seen from the perspective of his own generation, and his own time.

This thinking is, of course, in line with Butterfield's admonition in The Whig Historian that the historian must see the past as a time period with its own integrity, and not merely as a forerunner to his own time. Seeing a part of the past as a number of other historians of the past saw it, might well assist the contemporary historian to break out of his "present-centered" shell.

Butterfield also points out that the history of historiography can be valuable in allowing us to see that certain titles which we have given to periods of time in the past do not necessarily refer to real entities merely because we have become accustomed to using them.

For example, says Butterfield, the Renaissance was not an objective entity; rather, it is only a concept which has developed over the years.² That is to say, the men who lived during the time period covered by the term "Renaissance," did not necessarily say, "We are living during the Renaissance."

²Ibid., p. 136.

They were not aware that "The Renaissance" began at a certain date, nor were they aware of its ending on a certain date.

But from our vantage point, we may be deluded, having heard the term so frequently, into believing that there really was an objective entity called "The Renaissance," an entity which began at a certain date, ended at a certain date, and of which those living between those dates were fully and completely aware. Having this delusion, we may study the past with concepts which are foreign and unnatural to it.

One of the best ways to correct these delusions, or to rid ourselves of the notion that a certain concept is somehow a "real" entity, is to study the history of the historical treatment which a certain time period of the past was received by historians. When we, for example, study the treatment which that period we call "The Renaissance" received prior to its being called "The Renaissance," we may see the artificiality of such titles, says Butterfield. Of course, it would seem that Butterfield is not opposed to the use of such concepts, when and if they are useful organizing principles, or can shed light on the past, but the historian should not lose sight of the fact that they are just principles.

An example of the value of the history of historiography to the historian is in a study of the studies made by historians on the origins of the Seven Years' War. In this example, Butterfield attempts to show how historians have viewed Frederick's notion that Prussia was threatened in 1756, and his giving this threat as a reason for invading Saxony in that year.³

³Ibid., p. 143.

Butterfield's main point in this discussion is that the historians of the past who have treated this incident, treated it in what we now know and see to be a faulty manner, not because they were lying to us, or propagandizing, necessarily, for political reasons, but because, very simply, they did not have certain facts. A portion of the facts for the proper treatment of this episode were found in the Russian archives, and until such time as these were open to historians, any treatment of the episode which lacked the facts contained therein was bound to be faulty.⁴

Besides the importance of getting all of the possible facts, Butterfield indicates, as noted above, that by studying the treatment given a certain incident by historians in the past, we may be able to note certain discrepancies in their accounts, certain shifts in emphasis, and certain changes in interpretation, which may give the contemporary historian an insight into the kinds of evidence which is still lacking, and even indicate to him that earlier historians may have possessed a slant on the episode in question that would prove more fruitful, given more evidence, than some later historians.⁵

Implications of the Ideas of Butterfield's Man on His Past

We have already seen in his other book, The Whig Interpretation of History, how Butterfield feels about the past, and its relation to the present, and how the historian relates to both. In this work, he reinforces

⁴Ibid., p. 169. ⁵Ibid., p. 170.

these notions with his admonition to view the past as past historians saw it.

He also advises the historian on the importance of discerning all possible details of the past, and to regard everything as important, even to the extent of regarding as important that which others have said about the past. The best example of the importance of getting all the details is his description of how a lack of details, hidden in the archives of a certain country, prohibited historians from giving a really accurate description of an event which many assumed was familiar and well-known. Facts and details are all-important for Butterfield; they are prior to and formers of theories and concepts, and the more of them that are obtained, the more accurate will the historian's work be.

The emphasis in this work is clearly that historical accuracy on the part of the historian has nothing to do with how far he may have been from the event or events in question; rather, the emphasis in this work is upon the ability of the historian to let the details of the past speak to him, rather than on his ability to dictate to them.

CHAPTER III

WILLIAM H. WALSH

An Overview of Walsh

William Henry Walsh has been, since 1947, a Fellow and Tutor of Newton College and Lecturer in Philosophy in the University of Oxford.¹ He begins his work, An Introduction to the Philosophy of History, by taking a broad view of the philosophy of history, after which he divides the subject into two main branches.

As Collingwood, Walsh attempts to establish the autonomy and legitimacy of the philosophy of history and its relation to other disciplines.

Walsh's validation of the whole subject of philosophy of history depends upon his division of that topic into two main headings. He points out that the philosophy of science tells us very little about the subject matter which is of concern to the scientist, but it can tell us a great deal about the techniques, assumptions and methods used by the scientist in handling his subject matter. Similarly, the philosophy of history can refuse to deal with the subject matter with which historians are concerned, can refuse to look at that subject matter for "inner secrets," and yet be most helpful in describing the techniques, assumptions and methods used by the historian.

Walsh then proceeds to denominate the two different approaches which can be taken by a philosophy of history. The type of study which examines the techniques, assumptions and methods of the historian is called a "critical philosophy" of history. The type of study which examines the

¹Gardiner, Theories of History, p. 295.

subject matter which the historian examines, with a view toward perceiving some "inner secret" therein, is called a "speculative philosophy" of history.²

It is with the critical philosophy of history that Walsh is mainly concerned, and it is with that notion that this section of this work will be concerned, for it is under this topic that Walsh speaks to the type of matters which relate most directly to the thesis of this work.

Walsh then gives another overview; this time, he glances broadly out over the whole field of the critical philosophy of history. The overview of this subject deals basically with the problems with which a critical philosophy of history would deal.

The critical philosophy of history would have to deal, first, with the relationship between history as a form of knowledge and other forms of knowledge. While it deals with past events, it does more than merely record them as they have occurred. Rather, it offers "a significant record" of past events, a record which shows the connection which Walsh believes to exist between events.³ This is not to imply that historians do what Positivists would have them do, that is, induce laws from the events studies; rather, historians, though indeed interested in the connection between events, are still more interested in specifics than generalities.⁴ How the branch of knowledge which is able to view the events in the past with an

²William H. Walsh, An Introduction to the Philosophy of History (London: Hutchinson's University Library, 1951), pp. 14-15.

³Ibid., p. 16. ⁴Ibid., pp. 16-17.

eye to producing from them a "significant" record relates to other branches of knowledge is then, the first of the problems which a critical philosophy of history must study.

The second problem which a critical philosophy of history would have to study is the question of truth and fact in history. History has a problem which is not shared by other branches of knowledge. The facts of its subject matter are not open to direct inspection, as are the facts of the subject matters of other branches of knowledge. This poses a basic difficulty of deciding which of the statements about the past are true and which are false. Evidence is the tool used to distinguish truth from falsehood, evidence which must itself be tested for reliability and meaning by the historian.⁵

A third problem of history which is suited to an investigation by a critical philosophy of history is the problem of historical objectivity.

Walsh points out that all historians are in favor of an objective explanation of the past, and all historians frown upon the idea that the past should be explained from a propagandistic point of view. Nonetheless, more often than not, if a number of historians are exposed to the same set of raw facts, more than one explanation of the meaning of these facts will emerge. This type of situation would in all likelihood not result if a number of biologists were exposed to the same number of uninterpreted biological facts; it is more likely that they would all explain them in the same way.

⁵Ibid., pp. 18-19.

Because there is no standard or accepted way of interpreting uninterpreted historical facts, and because a number of historians looking at the same facts are likely to come up with more than one interpretation, people believe that history is an unscientific discipline.⁶

There appear to be three possibilities to explain this seeming lack of objectivity in explanation.

First, one could say that historians cannot be objective, that their personal biases are so strong that they surely will intrude into their work. Hence, any and all talk about the desirability of historical objectivity, is just so much wishful thinking, for historians will never be objective as scientists are objective.⁷

Or, one could say that the condition of mass non-objectivity among historians is a temporary affliction, that at some time in the future, given more knowledge of a certain kind, historians will become objective.⁸

Or, finally, one could say that historical objectivity is different from scientific objectivity, and that it is possible for both the historian and the scientist to be considered objective in their interpretations without sharing the same kind of objectivity. As the artist is objective and subjective, so is the historian.⁹

However, the relationship between history and other forms of knowledge, the question of truth and fact in history and the problem of historical objectivity are not the only problems which a critical philosophy

⁶Ibid., pp. 19-20. ⁷Ibid., pp. 20-21. ⁸Ibid., p. 21. ⁹Ibid.

of history might study. There is also the complex problem of the sufficiency and reputability of explanation in history.

When the scientist attempts to explain a situation, he does not look for an answer to the larger question of "why"; he is, says Walsh, mainly concerned with the process of inducing general laws and gaining what we might call an "external view."¹⁰ Not so with the historian. He seeks to place a certain event into its wider context. He looks to see and discern the "inner relationships" in which a particular event stands to other events in the process.¹¹ When he has done this, he has done what the historian must do. The scientist, on the other hand, would be looking for a different end result to a study of an event. He would be looking for a general law which could be applied to other events and systems of events. Walsh does say that the historian uses general laws as presuppositions to his work, but he does not make them explicit as does the scientist, nor are they the purpose of his work.¹²

These then are the four problems which a critical philosophy of history would have to study,¹³ and it is the resolution or the hopeful resolutions of problems such as these four that make a critical philosophy of history a reputable member of the philosophy family.

Walsh on "History and the Sciences"

Walsh elaborates upon the four problems contained in the critical

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 22. ¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 23. ¹² *Ibid.*, p. 24. ¹³ *Ibid.*

philosophy of history. He starts with a preliminary characterization of history, particularly as regards the problem of directly perceiving that which one is studying.

Walsh claims that it will not do to say that history is distinctive because it aims at an "intelligent reconstruction of the past," while the natural scientist, as a representative of another discipline, is interested and concerned with, and bases his studies upon, presently-evident and directly-perceivable phenomena. For, according to Walsh, the geologist as well as the historian is aiming at an "intelligent reconstruction of the past."¹⁴ He points out that even though one can say that the historian is concerned with the past, it is not true that the historian is interested in the entire period prior to the present. He is not, for example, interested in pre-historic man.¹⁵ Hence, Walsh is not ready to recognize that the difference between history and other disciplines is due to the fact that historians are concerned with the past while other types of scholars are not.

But Walsh is willing to admit that although the historian is not the only scholar interested in the past, he is, indeed, interested in the past, and in the human past at that. If he is interested in natural events, such as earthquakes or other natural phenomena of the past, he is only interested insofar as they affected human beings.¹⁶

Granted that history is a branch of knowledge which is interested in the human past, and in the natural events which have affected the human past,

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 29-30. ¹⁵Ibid., p. 30. ¹⁶Ibid., pp. 30-31.

Walsh then touches briefly upon the type of knowledge which history hopes to derive from its concern with the past. History, says Walsh, intends to put together a "significant" narrative of past experiences of human beings; "significant" as opposed to "plain."¹⁷ In other words, Walsh holds that the historian must do more than merely list what happened in the past to human beings, or merely record what it is that they thought about what was happening to them. The events and experiences listed must be connected in some way. Ranke, says Walsh, is an example of the historian who tells us "precisely what happened," but who nonetheless gave us only "plain" history.¹⁸

Thus far, Walsh and Butterfield are in agreement. Butterfield, although holding that every detail of the past was important, admitted that the historian did not merely record neutrally all that occurred, that the historian was obliged to interpret what he recorded so that it would be meaningful to those of his own generation.

Walsh also believes that there should be a "unity of plot or theme" in the version of history which the historian brings forth.¹⁹ Undoubtedly, this does not mean that history is to be organized around a single organizing principle such as the primacy of economics. What is meant is that the historian should put together a coherent story, as suggested by Collingwood, and an undistorted story, as suggested by Butterfield.

Any systematically related knowledge arranged in an orderly way would merit the title of "science," according to Walsh; only, however, if we can induce general laws from this knowledge do we customarily call it science.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 32-33. ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 32. ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

If we can say that "Every time x happens, one will get y," then we have the type of generalization which we expect to get from science. Science has another characteristic. Because one can induce generalization from its observations, we feel that we can predict what the observed phenomena will always do under certain circumstance.²⁰

Also, if the natural scientist says "Every time x happens, one will get y," this must not be a bit of private knowledge known or divulged only to one particular scientist. Any scientist anywhere, possessing the same facts, or able to observe the same phenomena, must be able to reach the same conclusion.²¹

If these are the characteristics of science, then, how does history measure up against these characteristics? What is Walsh's opinion about how closely history approximates the natural sciences in their methods and aims?

The scientific method, according to Walsh, induces general laws from observation of a number of specific events. Its basic interest is in the ability to see a regularity in the observed events.

History, on the other hand, is far more interested in the specific, individual events than in any generalization which may be induced from them.²² Also, whereas scientists predict, historians are not basically interested in doing so.²³

Scientists claim to be objective; do historians also claim this objectivity? Walsh says that historians claim to be objective in only one way;

²⁰ Ibid., p. 36. ²¹ Ibid. ²² Ibid., p. 41. ²³ Ibid.

that is, that the statements made by historians claim to be either true or false.²⁴ Historians do not claim that all historians will see the same set of facts in the same way.

Given the characteristics of science set up by Walsh, and the characteristics which he ascribes to history, it would appear that history does not approximate the methods and aims of science. History does not, as does science, seek to induce generalizations from its observations, place emphasis upon prediction, or claim that its practitioners will manifest explanatory objectivity.

Walsh concludes his discussion of the relationship between history and the sciences with an examination of two theories of historical thinking, the idealist and the positivist.

The idealist explanation of historical knowledge is seen in Collingwood. As we have seen when discussing Collingwood, this account of historical knowledge says that history is a concrete science whose object is individual truths, among the most important being the thoughts which people have thought in the past. Walsh claims that the idealist approach says that it is through an intuitive process that we know the thoughts of those who lived in the past.²⁵

He objects to the idealist account of historical knowledge, casting doubt upon the intuitive nature of the approach, as he sees it, and also upon the immediacy of the knowledge claimed. For example, Collingwood claims that

²⁴Ibid., p. 41. ²⁵Ibid., pp. 42-44.

it is possible to re-think the same thoughts as Napoleon or Caesar. If this is so, how do we reconcile this claim with the fact that the historian will sometimes reach a false conclusion?

Also, says Walsh, if intuition is so reliable, why does psychology find it necessary to use the methods of natural science instead of intuition?²⁶

The logical positivist account of historical knowledge claims that historical procedure "does not differ in principle from that of natural science. In each case, conclusions are reached by appeal to general truths, the only difference being that the historian usually does not, while the scientist does, make explicit the generalizations to which he appeals."²⁷ Walsh points out that nineteenth century positivists placed the primary emphasis upon the inducing of generalizations. That is, the historian would gather together all of the facts which he could, and then, studying these facts, would attempt to induce from them general laws with which predictions could be made. Modern positivists, says Walsh, like K. R. Popper, allow the historian to place his primary emphasis upon a search for facts, sacrificing the emphasis which the older positivist used to place upon the induction of generalization. The drawback to this concession, however, is that the historian cannot consider himself really scientific; rather, he must look upon himself as somewhat of a technician or an engineer.²⁸

Walsh objects to the positivist account of historical knowledge. He

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 44-45. ²⁷ Ibid., pp. 45-46. ²⁸ Ibid., p. 46.

feels that what is involved in such an approach is an arbitrary decision that all branches of knowledge must operate in the same manner, and then having decided what this method of operation must be, and what rules must be adhered to, they use this as a yardstick to measure all "existing disciplines."²⁹

Walsh on "Historical Explanation"

Walsh opens this section of his work by explaining and then criticizing Collingwood's theory of historical writing. He reviews the salient aspects of Collingwood's thoughts on this matter, pointing out in particular the idea that history is concerned with the thoughts of those who lived in the past, and that the understanding of these thoughts involves a special type of understanding, an understanding that is unique and immediate.³⁰ Whereas the natural scientist can only observe and describe his observations from the outside, the historian, according to Collingwood, can get "inside" his subject, and know what it is like to be, say, Julius Caesar.³¹

Walsh is prepared to accept the idealist position that the historian "must penetrate behind the phenomena" which he studies.³² But he has serious doubts about the method used to penetrate behind the phenomena. The idealist suggests intuition; the re-thinking of the past is an immediate type of knowledge. Walsh feels that this is much more easily suggested than done. He believes that if we are to re-think a person's thoughts, we must have "experience, first-or second-hand, of the ways in which they

²⁹ Ibid., p. 47. ³⁰ Ibid., p. 48. ³¹ Ibid. ³² Ibid., p. 57.

commonly react to the situations in which they find themselves."³³ In order to gain this type of subsidiary knowledge about a person more than intuition is required; unless, that is, one believes that one can intuit this "common reaction." Because intuition is inadequate for the task of learning the common reactions of people, intuition as a method of gaining knowledge of thought of the past is rejected.³⁴

Furthermore, holds Walsh, by omitting all types of human mental activity which is not thought, Collingwood leaves out much of the stuff of human history. For history is concerned not only with thought, but also with emotions, doings and experiences.³⁵ One must be able to intuit these also if one is to understand the past.

Walsh favors the method of explanation which he calls "colligation." Rather than depending upon the explanation of the thought behind an event to explain the event, as do the idealists, those who hold to the notion of colligation believe that an event can be explained if one traces "its intrinsic relations to other events and locating it in its historical context."³⁶ The principle behind this type of explanation is the notion that in order to know any entity, we must know the relation in which it stands to all other entities; the "flower in the crannied wall" idea. The meaning of the Magna Carta is only seen if we put it into its feudal context, and examine the events which preceded it, succeeded it, and are analogous to it. The

³³ Ibid. ³⁴ Ibid., p. 58. ³⁵ Ibid., pp. 58-59. ³⁶ Ibid., p. 59.

Revolution of 1688 and its events are meaningful only if we see it in its time and context.

Another method of historical explanation explored briefly by Walsh is the one which proceeds by seeking out "certain dominant concepts or leading ideas" by which to make meaningful the facts and events which the historian may discern. These leading ideas have relations to other leading ideas, and a "significant" narrative can bring out the meaning of both the ideas and the facts.³⁷

What Walsh is saying is that the historian, after studying a certain group of facts, decides that they can be grouped together and explained with a certain organizing principle. Once he has set out this organizing principle, which might be something as broad as, say, the French Revolution, the facts which he already has in hand, as well as new facts which are later discovered, take on significance because the organizing principle allows them to be placed in such a relationship and order that their significance is easily seen and realized.

In concluding his discussion of historical explanation, Walsh brings out a final point. He speaks about "history and knowledge of human nature." He says that no matter what type of history is being written, the historian doing the work must know human nature.³⁸

He must have a knowledge of people in order to understand how the figures about whom he may be talking fit into humanity in general; he must

³⁷Ibid., p. 62. ³⁸Ibid., p. 65.

have some idea of what is normal, and what is not; what is absurd, and what is reasonable.

Certain procedures in the writing of history can be taught to the historian; for example, ways of handling evidence, what primary and secondary sources are, and other commonplace procedures and techniques. But in addition to these procedures and techniques, the historian also needs the knowledge of human nature of which Walsh speaks.

Walsh on "Truth and Fact in History"

This section, as Walsh points out, brings us face to face with a basic epistemological problem: Can human beings ever really know truth or "state fact precisely?"³⁹ Walsh does not answer this question directly, but the question anticipates two theories of truth and their application to history.

The two theories of truth which Walsh discusses are the correspondence theory and the coherence theory.

According to the correspondence theory, a statement is true "if it corresponds to the facts; and conversely, if it corresponds to the facts it is true."⁴⁰ There are difficulties inherent in this obvious-sounding definition. It is not always easy to apprehend the facts; we may be laboring under illusions at times. Also, we, says Walsh, change facts when we think about them.⁴¹

The coherence theory defines truth as a "relation not between statement and fact, but between one statement and another. A statement...is

³⁹*Ibid.*, p. 72. ⁴⁰*Ibid.*, p. 73. ⁴¹*Ibid.*, pp. 73-76.

true if it can be shown to cohere, or fit in with, all other statements we are prepared to accept."⁴²

The objection which Walsh cites against this theory is that it could be said to create truth, instead of discovering it.⁴³

When applied to history, the correspondence theory has a number of unacceptable implications.

It implies, first of all, that the past is completely "over and done with" and that this completed past can be reconstructed. Those who hold to the coherence theory say that these two claims are contradictory. It is said one must make a choice, but one cannot have a past that is both completely finished and one that can be known.⁴⁴

Second, the correspondence theory implies that the historian must accept certain authorities as completely authentic and trustworthy,⁴⁵ but historians no longer "appeal to authority" to prove their points.⁴⁶

For Walsh, the correspondence theory of truth as applied to history means that the statements that are made correspond to things we can see, or originate from evidence about which people believe there is no doubt. He correctly points out, however, that one must utilize interpretation in order to merely describe what looks like a "certain" event.⁴⁷

Even if we depend upon memory to supply us with the facts about which we can make corresponding statements, we are faced with a problem. For memory involves not only remembering, but thinking about what we are

⁴²Ibid., p. 76. ⁴³Ibid., p. 79. ⁴⁴Ibid., p. 81. ⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 82. ⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 81-84.

remembering, and this distinction is easier to make in theory than in practice.⁴⁸ In other words, memory may not be such a pure provider of facts about which corresponding statements can be made.

Walsh then turns to an examination of the coherence theory of truth as applied to history.

The coherence theory described above holds that all truth is relative.⁴⁹ Knowledge as it comes to us is only probable, though some of it is more probable than other knowledge.⁵⁰

An objection to the coherence theory of truth as applied to history is that it "leaves the whole structure of historical beliefs in the air without any necessary connection with reality," according to Walsh.⁵¹ Something, after all, can be coherent, but false.

Walsh does not accept the coherence theory, and sees its faults. He claims that something did happen in the past, that there is evidence which refers to this past, and that this evidence is not necessarily made up by the historian.⁵² He agrees with the correspondence theory "that there is an attempt in history, as in perception, to characterize an independent reality."⁵³

Faced with the serious objections to both the correspondence theory and the coherence theory of truth as both are applied to history, Walsh offers a synthesis from the two theories.⁵⁴

The synthesis is based upon the experiential fact that we do view

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 84-85. ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 86. ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 87. ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 89-90. ⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 90. ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

events as having happened in the past, happening right now, or going to happen in the future. Similarly, it is an experiential fact that we view certain events as happening within ourselves, and others as happening "out there." Neither experiential fact, however, can be proven; that is, we can no more prove that there is a past than we can prove that there is an "out there" distinct from experiences within ourselves. It is not "logically necessary" that there be either a "past," or an "out there"; we merely assume it because we think we experience it.⁵⁵

This assumption, however, that there is a "past," and that there is an "out there" as distinct from "in here," is an assumption which Walsh believes we do make; and it is, according to him, of immense value. For if we combine this assumption with the notion that our beliefs must have internal coherence, then we possess the only "criterion of truth available to us, in history as in other branches of factual knowledge..."⁵⁶ This is the synthesis which Walsh makes, then, between the correspondence and coherence theories of truth.

Walsh on "Can History be Objective?"

As Walsh points out at the outset of this section of his work, the idea of explanatory objectivity is most important for history and historians; for unless history and historical interpretations have an objectivity whereby there can be some sort of common agreement about the interpretations made by historians, then history cannot call itself a "genuine science."⁵⁷ If

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 91. ⁵⁶Ibid., p. 93. ⁵⁷Ibid., p. 97.

"anything goes," and any interpretation is as good as any other interpretation, then historical study does not stand on a firm basis.

As a matter of practice, says Walsh, historians do see their work as something other than propaganda. That is, historians hold that what they say is "really so," and not merely said because they like the sound of it. They do admit, however, that historical writing and research has a subjective element to it, a subjective element which some historians consider essential, rather than undesirable. Their reason for believing this is their recognition that the historian must have some point of view.⁵⁸ When this awareness is joined with the awareness that history is necessarily selective, in that only a portion of the past is written about, and only some of the facts are emphasized, and that it is the historian who decides what portions and facts to select, then the view that subjectivity is essential to history is reinforced.⁵⁹

Various factors create subjectivity in historical writing. An obvious factor is the personal bias of the historian doing the work. Or, one can find that a group prejudice is operative and finds its way into the work concerned. Sometimes, conflicting theories of historical interpretation will cause one piece of historical study to differ radically from another piece of historical study on the same general problem. Finally, the moral and metaphysical presuppositions which the historian brings to his study of human beings of the past can and usually will affect the writing being done.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 97-99. ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

This last factor is difficult, if not impossible, to remove from an historic point of view, and those who believe that no historical work is ever really accurate or objective because this factor cannot be removed have a potent argument, according to Walsh.⁶⁰

In fact, Walsh considers it so potent that he accepts it; he agrees that historical thinking is always subjective.⁶¹ After agreeing to this premise, Walsh re-adjusts his view of the primary aim of the historian. It is no longer the primary aim of the historian to discover the truth about the past for its own sake; historical writing, in the re-adjusted view, now serves a practical purpose. It fulfills the human need of civilized people "to form a picture of the past for the sake of their own present activities"; for people "are curious about the past and wish to reconstruct it because they hope to find their own aspirations and interests reflected there."⁶² History, says Walsh, thus "illuminates not the past, but the present."⁶³ All history becomes propaganda, except that some of this propaganda is written with certain accepted procedures concerning evidence, and is therefore propaganda on a different level than propaganda written without benefit of these accepted historical procedures.⁶⁴ The name which Walsh applies to the view that history is always written from a subjective point of view is "the perspective theory."⁶⁵ The only alternative to this view, according to Walsh, is the development of "a single historical point of view," Because this might be impossible, historians must settle for the perspective theory.⁶⁶

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 100-108. ⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 109-111. ⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 111. ⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 112. ⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 112-116. ⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 117-118.

Summary and Implications of the Ideas of Walsh

Whereas Collingwood and Butterfield are quite clear about the existence of the past, Walsh, as we have seen, explores certain very real epistemological difficulties connected with a branch of intellectual inquiry which deals with a time period which is no longer existent. Nonetheless, he does accept the premise that history, as a discipline, is concerned with the past and not with the present, or with the future.

As evidence for this statement, we can recall some of the following aspects of Walsh's discussion.

First, Walsh made a fortunate distinction between the two uses of the word "history." The first use was that history was the "totality of past human actions." This was contrasted with the use of the word to denote the written interpretation of these past human actions. The important part of this distinction for our purposes here is that Walsh emphasized the time period in which those actions were done in which history is interested.

Or, we can note that Walsh pointed out that historians look to the past, and try to construct what he calls a "significant" narrative of this past. It is, indeed, the past which is being described; it is the past out of which a significant narrative is constructed.

Third, Walsh points out that while history is no more interested in the past than is geology, nonetheless the historian is interested in the past, albeit not in the entire time span which could be called the past. In fact, it might be pointed out that the geologist may be interested in a more remote past than the historian.

Fourth, Walsh points out that even if the past does not exist, the historian would have to assume it. The assumption of the existence of the past, as a knowable time, is an important portion of his synthesis between the correspondence and coherence theories of historical knowledge; for once the past is assumed, then we can base the coherent story upon this assumption.

Finally, Walsh speaks of the importance of the past for the historian, in that the past serves the present, and we look back into the past in order to see whether or not our ideals and values are to be found there, and in this way, history "illuminates not the past, but the present."

The importance of this final point which Walsh makes about the past and history is twofold. First, Walsh does say that the past is the area in which the historian concentrates his efforts. His purpose is to illuminate the present, but he searches the past in order to do so.

Second, we must note how radically this idea of the function of history differs from that which Butterfield put forth. Butterfield would have said that the notion that history illuminates the present after searching the past is a perfect example of using the past to serve the present, as a perfect example of not recognizing that the past has its own integrity. The whig historian, he would have said, was guilty of this very thing.

Collingwood might have said that using the past to illuminate the present smacked of prophecy, and if there was one thing that the historian was not, it was a prophet. The historian was concerned with the past only

for the sake of the past, for the sake of putting together a coherent story about it, a coherent and true story.

The evidence from his work indicates that Walsh believes that the historian is primarily interested in the past. But it may be asked: In how much of the past is the historian interested?

When discussing the distinction between history and the natural sciences, Walsh admitted that the historian was interested in specifics, rather than in inducing general laws, or in generalities. Being interested in specifics would imply that the historian was interested in any and all of the specifics, rather than in just some of them; indeed, the interest in the accidental and the concrete was one of the marks of history.

Second, Walsh pointed out that the historian is interested in natural events as well as in human actions, insofar as these natural events affected human actions. Because the possibilities of natural events influencing human events are practically infinite, Walsh would have to say that everything that happened in the past, natural or human, would be of interest to the historian.

Third, Walsh's ideas expand the interests which Collingwood supposes the historian to have in human beings of the past. While Collingwood suggested that the historian interest himself in the thoughts and the thought-caused actions of people in the past, Walsh says that the historian should be interested in more than the thoughts of people in the past. Walsh says that the feelings, the emotions, the nervous reactions, any and all impulses, reactions and deeds of past human beings are of interest to the historian.

This greatly broadens the area of interest for historians.

Fourth, the idea of "colligation," of placing events in their relationship to other events, appears to demand a knowledge of all possible detail, for how could one know that one had correctly placed an event into a relationship with other events, unless they were all known? I may think that I have a meaningful idea of the size of a chicken egg after I have compared it to a robin's egg and an ostrich egg; but I would have a still more meaningful idea if I compared it to eggs intermediate in size between any two of these eggs. Similarly, the more events and facts which I can discern in and about the past, the more meaningful will any single event and fact be, by the principle of colligation.

Finally, the notion that the coherence theory of truth is useful in historical thinking would seem to imply that the more facts and events that the historian knows, the more coherent will be any given fact. For coherence implies being coherent in relationship to other known facts, and unless one knows a great many facts (ideally all of them), one can never really know whether or not any individual statement is coherent or incoherent.

It seems also, that the evidence from Walsh's work indicates that the historian reads the past and tells his contemporaries what he got out of it.

The historian is charged by Walsh with giving a significant view of past events. Exactly how the historian is to do this, what relationships between events are considered significant and which are not, we are not told, but assumedly "significant" means important in the eyes of the contemporaries or readers of the historian.

Also, the historian is charged with seeking out and presenting a narration which has a unity of plot or theme; a narration which possesses coherence. Undoubtedly, the coherence and unity is for the benefit of those to whom the narration is related.

Walsh, then, also comes to the position, as did Collingwood and Butterfield, that historians are conceivably concerned with every detail of the past, and that the historian "reads" these details and informs his contemporaries what he has learned from this reading.

CHAPTER IV

PATRICK GARDINER

The Ideas of Gardiner

Patrick Gardiner's The Nature of Historical Explanation is, as its title promises, basically an inquiry into what goes on when the historian purports to explain why something happened, or did not happen, in the past.

Explanation and causations are topics of considerable interest to contemporary historical writers, such as Collingwood, Butterfield, and Walsh. One's decision to whether or not history is a type of science or an autonomous branch of knowledge rests upon one's view of what constitutes reputable explanation.

We have seen that Positivist School of historians adheres to the view that the aim of the historian is to examine a large body of evidential events and facts, and then attempt to induce generalizations from this historical evidence which will allow him to explain the facts which were examined, as well as other analogous, identical, or similar facts.

The arguments of this school of historians has not been convincing, however, to the writers whom we have so far examined. Collingwood, Butterfield and Walsh have been among those who believe that one of the reasons why history and science are different disciplines and branches of knowledge is because the method of explanation used in each is different. They said that the historian is not looking for generalization in order to explain; rather, he is interested in looking for specifics, for the accidental, for

the concrete. They have said that the only way in which the historian can explain something is to bring in more and more specifics, whether those be in the form of thoughts of the past, as suggested by Collingwood, more facts of any kind, as suggested by Butterfield, or in seeking to "colligate" specifics among other specifics, as suggested by Walsh.

In his book, Gardiner, a Fellow of St. Anthony's College, Oxford, attempts to examine what is involved in historical explanation, and to see if the difference between historical explanation and explanation found in other fields works to the detriment of history, or is indigenuous and proper for history.

Gardiner makes a distinction made also by Walsh in his work. He points out that we use the word history in two ways; both as the word meaning "past events, activities, thoughts, and so forth," and also as the word meaning the printed matter produced by historians.¹ The implication of such an explanation, the same implication which could be seen in Walsh, is that what the historian produces in his writing can logically be entirely different from past reality of events, activities and thoughts. Gardiner's exploration of historical explanation is an examination of possible ways in which the historian could be sure of an identity between the content of his writings, and the events of the past.

Gardiner examines explanation in science and everyday life. His aim is to show that what constitutes reputable explanation is sufficiency for

¹Patrick Gardiner, The Nature of Historical Explanation (London: Oxford, University Press, 1952), p. ix.

the occasion; that is, there are certain situations where a given explanation is quite satisfactory, but where under other circumstances it would not be as satisfactory. For example, a physics professor might come home from a full day of teaching, and found that his front window had been shattered, allowing the rain that had fallen that day to enter the living room and ruin the furniture. If his wife explained that one of the neighborhood children had accidentally thrown a baseball through the window, the physicist would immediately understand the cause of the broken window, and accept this explanation as satisfactory. If, however, under calmer, more academic circumstances, the same physics professor asked of his class why it was that windows break when hard objects strike them, he would no doubt expect his answer to be given in terms of force, speed, mass, tension, immovable objects and other similar terms. An explanation couched in terms of a "neighbor child" would no longer be satisfactory.²

Because there are times when we are satisfied with imprecise, non-scientific explanations, the historian can thereby give them, be reputable intellectually, and yet be unscientific in his explanation. For Gardiner does indicate that history is not the same type of intellectual endeavor as are the natural sciences.

Gardiner proceeds by agreeing with Walsh; he says that the philosophy of history (apparently by this term he means what Walsh meant by the term of the "critical philosophy of history") says that history is neither a

²Ibid., pp. 1-27, passim.

completely separate type of subject matter, a subject matter which bears no relationship to any other kind, nor is it a type of science.

There are those, however, who do claim that history is completely autonomous. Gardiner says that those who say this given several reasons for doing so.

The first is that the scientist is interested in inducing generalizations, making hypotheses, and making predictions based upon his study of the evidence. The historian, however, is not interested in doing this; his interest "is principally in finding out what happened and in describing what happened in all its detail...."³

Whereas the scientist is interested in being able to rise to higher and higher levels of generality, and attaining great precision in his generalities, the historian is not. In fact, quite the opposite. Where the scientist is interested in paring away any irrelevant factors, the historian is eagerly interested in recording all of the factors; the more dissimilarity he can find when comparing situations, the better he likes it. The terminology which the historian uses seems to be adapted to the purpose of seeing the dissimilar, the accidental, the unique, the concrete.⁴

It may be said that when the historian claims to be autonomous, he puts himself into a difficult epistemological position insofar as the subject matter of history is concerned. For scientists can see and presently observe the phenomena which they study, but historians cannot. What

³Ibid., p. 54. ⁴Ibid., p. 60.

historians study is in the past, is over and done with, and not directly observable.

Gardiner says, however, that this is not really a problem. For although it is true that the object of historical study is that which is no longer present, there is evidence for the existence of the events of the past, and it is this evidence which the historian studies.⁵

Finally, Gardiner holds that there are those who would claim that just as science has its causative factors, and scientists speak in terms of one event causing another, there are those who say that, for history, thought is the substitute for that which the scientist says are causes. In other words, history is a kind of science, and thought plays the role of cause.

Gardiner, however, says that causes as found in natural science are not the same things as thoughts and plans which men have and which may motivate their existence. Thoughts and plans "operate on a different sphere of existence; that is why it is muddling to say, for instance, that 'cause' for an historian..." is an "invisible engine" type of thing.⁶ Gardiner reinforces the autonomy of history, for if there is any aspect of history which resembles science, it is the notion that one event can cause another event, or that what a man thinks motivates his actions. If, however, one of the main characteristics of man, the fact that he does think, is not to be considered as a cause in the scientific sense, then history does appear independent of science.

⁵Ibid., pp. 63-64. ⁶Ibid., p. 51.

Gardiner then goes specifically to the topic of historical explanation, and begins by discussing the Positivist position which says that the historian seeks to explain by first collecting the facts, and then looking for the causes which can explain these facts.⁷ Gardiner takes issue with this position. He objects that it implies facts are somehow items which can be stumbled upon.⁸ He says facts are made, not discovered. But even if facts are made, rather than discovered, they must not be falsehoods, according to Gardiner. "Historical statements, if they are to count as 'historical' must purport to describe what actually happened: This is a truism."⁹

Gardiner reiterates that the historian is interested in the individual event.¹⁰ Historians, in fact, cannot be said to be using general laws because in every incident they are interested in the unique aspects of that incident.¹¹ If an historian is found, now and then, using generalizations in his writings, these generalizations are loose generalizations; they are not intended to be precise.¹² They are definitely not meant to be scientific.¹³

Gardiner pointed out that explanation of events are as precise as they have to be, and that a varying amount of precision will be necessary depending upon the audience to whom the explanation is being presented. He now returns to that point in a slightly different manner, but basically the reasoning is the same.

⁷Ibid., p. 70. ⁸Ibid., p. 71. ⁹Ibid., p. 80. ¹⁰Ibid., pp. 82-83.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 89-90. ¹²Ibid., p. 93. ¹³Ibid., p. 98.

Gardiner says that historical explanations can be given on many levels.¹⁴ He means by this that when the historian speaks of causes in history, his definition of "cause," and his readiness to accept something as a "cause," is dependent upon his interest in a particular question, in the reasons why he is interested, and the extent of his interest.

He might, for instance, using Gardiner's example, explain the causes of the First World War on several levels. A newspaper journalist might explain it by referring to the assassination at Sarajevo. A political scientist might explain it by resorting to a comparison of the governmental systems of the nations which became involved. A diplomatic historian might speak of the system of alliances which forced nations to battle when they might not have done so otherwise. All are answers to the question of "what caused the First World War?" Each answer might be different, yet none of them wrong.¹⁵

How does the historian decide upon which level to answer a particular question, or give an explanation? The answer, says Gardiner, depends upon his "standpoint."¹⁶ If the historian is writing diplomatic history, or an economic history, or an artistic history or a military history, his standpoint will determine the level upon which his explanations are given.

If the historian can write history at certain levels, and from certain standpoints, and if a number of differing, yet still-correct versions can be presented concerning any incident, depending upon the aspect being sought out, when, or at what point, is the explanation of an event complete? How

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 105-106. ¹⁵ *Ibid.* ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

many levels does any incident have? Do we get a superior overall picture by combining all the versions, written on different levels from different standpoints?

Presumably, of course, since the historian is charged with investigating specific events, there are practically an infinite number of specific events, and practically an infinite number of levels of explanation. The more levels of explanation which were offered for a particular incident, the better; but the chances of ever giving all of them would be, no doubt, very slim.

Gardiner concludes with an examination of some other aspects of historical explanation. He reviews the concept of thoughts as causes, or Collingwood's argument, and rejects it.¹⁷ He states that motives, for example, are not causes; rather, they are "instances," or general reasons for action.¹⁸ This is in line with his earlier rejection of thought as a cause analogous to scientific causes. Criticizing the idealist position, he claims that we cannot know what is in another person's mind; we can only know what he tells us in his mind.¹⁹ When we say that we are re-thinking or re-living another's thoughts, we only mean that we think that so-and-so thought such-and-such, and the evidence at hand bears out our thinking. We can never be sure; at any rate, facts, and not intuition, are needed.²⁰ We cannot become another person, or really think his same thoughts; we only think that we can, says Gardiner.²¹

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 114-120, *passim*. ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 124-125. ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 129-130. ²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 132-133.

This criticism of Collingwood agrees with the criticism of this position voiced by Walsh, and his distrust of intuition.

Gardiner does qualify his remarks, however, by admitting that it is possible for us to imagine what another human being is thinking, and that often, this is enough for historical purposes.²²

Implications of the Ideas of Gardiner

Much of Gardiner is quite clear-cut insofar as his ideas about the proper object of historical study, the amount of detail desired, and the role of the historian are concerned. Nonetheless, it is well to sum them up here, for he differs from some of the men previously discussed in some of his conclusions, and agrees with some of them in others.

There is no doubt that Gardiner believes that the past is the proper time period upon which to concentrate historical study. He recognizes that there is a problem with the past; that is, the past is gone, and with it, the events that composed the past. But Gardiner holds that as long as we have the evidence for events of the past, the events themselves need not be present.

Also, Gardiner's ideas about the autonomy of history in relation to science suggest the amount of detail he thinks is desirable in historical explanation, and how much of the past he thinks is important.

It will be recalled that in his discussion he claimed that one of the basic reasons for the complete separation between history and science was

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 135-136.

that science looked for universals, for very generalized laws, whereas history looked for the specific, the detailed, the concrete, the accidental. Specifics are therefore important, the mental as well as the physical specifics, although Gardiner did differ from Collingwood in his estimation of the causative importance of thoughts.

Finally, the historian is the transmitter of the detail of the past to his contemporaries, but in a special sense, according to Gardiner. The historian does not merely look to the past, note a profusion of details which are there extant, and pass them on to his readers. On the contrary, there are no facts extant; the historian creates them through skillful interpretation of the evidence which is all that he has to work with. In seeing the historian in this role, Gardiner emphasizes not the manner in which the historian ought to transmit what he has learned of the past, as did Collingwood, Butterfield and Walsh; Gardiner emphasizes how the historian shall obtain that which he is to transmit. The transmission is a function of the level upon which the story is being told.

CHAPTER V

WILLIAM DRAY

The Ideas of Dray

William Dray, author of Laws and Explanations in History, is currently Assistant Professor of Philosophy at the University of Toronto. He was formerly a student at Oxford,¹ and studied philosophy under Walsh.

As Gardiner, whose work stimulated and caused his own,² Dray is interested in the problem of historical explanation, and of the relationship between historical and scientific explanation.

We have seen that in the opinion of the men whom we have previously discussed it was generally agreed that there is a real difference in the aim of the scientist and the historian. The scientist attempts to generalize, to utilize the evidence before him in order to induce general laws which apply to all cases involving similar evidence, and which are of value in the process of predicting because of their general application. The scientist wants to be able to say that whenever "A" occurs, then "B" will follow... every single time without exception, unless the nature of "A" is changed so that it becomes "not-A." In order to induce a general law of this kind, the scientist will view large amounts of evidence, or the same evidence over and over again, so that there is no doubt that in a countless number of cases, all of which can be repeated by anyone who wishes to check, that the

¹Gardiner, Theories of History, p. 402.

²William Dray, Laws and Explanation in History (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), "preface."

event described by the scientist in his general law has always occurred and, with a great deal of probability, will always occur.

As was shown in Gardiner's discussion, the precision of these generalities becomes very great, and for the scientist, such a precise and generalized explanation is the only type which gives a reputable explanation from a scientific point of view. He may, however, be satisfied with less from a non-scientific point of view.

The historian, however, again according to the Collingwood school, seems to have an entirely different aim. His aim is not to generalize, but to make specific; not to induce laws, but to note and record and interpret the concrete, and the accidental. He is alive to the differences in the situation, to the distinctions between that which occurred at a time prior to the present. When he has delineated differences and distinctions, his explanation, he feels, has been made.

Dray indicates that this difference in explanatory methods is satisfactory to those who, tautologically, agree with it. But a problem arises when one says, "because both of these methods of explanation are opposite in technique, they cannot both be right. Both may be wrong, or one may be right and the other wrong, but they cannot both be right." Because science is apparently successful and seemingly able to both explain and control the phenomena which it explains, obviously the scientific method of explanation, involving the use of general laws is the correct method. The method used to "explain" in history is really not an explanatory method at all. If

history ever wishes to be able to say that it, too, can offer reputable and intellectually satisfying explanations, then it must adopt the method of scientific explanation, and induce generalized laws from its data.

It is this assertion, that history ought to adopt the explanatory methods of science, that Dray explores in his work.

Dray calls the general law, whose use is considered as the only method of reputable explanation by some, the "covering law." The theory that only general laws can be used to explain satisfactorily is called the "covering law theory." As Dray says in his statement of the model of the covering law: "...what the 'covering law' theory maintains is that explanation is achieved, and only achieved, by subsuming what is to be explained under a general law."³

A general law only means that it is a law which generalizes for every case which is exactly the same. Its level of generalization is relative.

For example, the scientist can note that he will get water every time he mixes hydrogen and oxygen in a certain ratio. But this general law applies only to the creation of water; it has nothing, for example, to do with the action of, say, another liquid. There are, however, generalizations which presumably have higher levels of generalization than the one about the creation of water, generalizations which include not only water but also, say, any liquid, a generalization which holds that the molecules of any

³ Ibid., p. 1. The term "covering law" originated with Hempel.

liquid tend to move more rapidly as the heat which is applied to the liquid increases.

For history, and the application of the general law to its explanations, this distinction between the levels of generalization is important. For historians who do apply the covering, or general, law to historical explanation are well aware that history presents special problems along these lines.

For example, let us assume that one were to explain the crossing of the Rubicon by Caesar. The covering law theorist would say that it could be explained by saying that "anytime a Roman legislature did such-and-such, a Roman general would do such-and-such, given an identity of circumstances." Such a covering law has a relatively low level of generality; it covers cases in which only Roman legislatures and Roman military leaders named "Caesar" are involved. Because of the low level of generality, and the relatively high level of specificity involved in such a case, the use of a covering law appears absurd and useless.

In order to justify the use of a covering law, through which explanations are said to be reputable, the covering law theorist sometimes loosens the connection between the law which is used to explain, and the case which is being explained. He might say, "to be sure, it does not always apply, but in most cases involving Roman legislatures and Roman military leaders, such-and-such will happen if the legislature does such-and-such."

But as Dray points out, the effort to appear less useless only makes

manifest the dilemma of the covering law theorist in history. If he applies the law tightly to every specific historical action, then the level of generality is so low that the utility of a law is far from clear. If he loosens the law to allow the law to appear more general, then the law does not necessarily apply to the specific case in question.⁴

This dilemma is a result of the purpose of history and the aim of the historian, according to Dray. "History...seeks to describe and explain what actually happened in all its concrete detail."⁵ The historian is interested in that which is concrete, which is different, which may have happened in the way it did once, and only once, and perhaps could never happen again.

The covering law theorist, however, might object and say that the historian only believes he is looking only for specifics, but in reality, he is constantly classifying and comparing these classifications of data. For example, the historian uses the term "Revolution" and applies this same term to a number of events which occurred at a different time, but which the covering law theorist could claim had a number of characteristics in common. The historian speaks of the French Revolution, and other revolutions. He similarly speaks of the Norman Invasion, the Normandy Invasion and other invasions. Surely, the revolutions or invasions noted above must have had something in common, otherwise the term "revolution" or "invasion" is completely meaningless. If they had something in common, then generalities can be proclaimed about them.

⁴Ibid., pp. 31-32. ⁵Ibid., p. 45.

Dray, however, says that this argument is deceiving. To be sure, historians do classify, and admit that there are common elements in all occurrences of revolution, as there are common occurrences in the notion of invasion. But the historian is not at all interested in these common characteristics. On the contrary, he is interested, for example, in the specifics of the French Revolution, in its concrete differences from other revolutions, in those things and events which made it what it was.⁶ Though both the French and English Revolutions may have involved kings, only the French Revolution had Louis XVI; only the English Revolution had Charles II.

Dray holds that instead of laws, the historian uses judgment to explain.⁷ That is, the historian says, in effect: The reason why a certain event happened or failed to happen is because of the following reason, a reason dictated not by any general law, but dictated by my experience and judgment which has been developed through working with many historical situations, and a great many historical facts.

Such an explanation, of course, would not be acceptable to the physicist who was trying to explain light waves. He would not say that light waves act in such-and-such a way because I judge that they do; they act in such-and-such a way because of the general law which covers such phenomena.

Dray points out, however, that the explanation which the historian gives is a pragmatic explanation.⁸ Dray means by this what Gardiner meant when he spoke about explanations which were good enough given certain circumstances. For Dray goes on to say that the historian seeks, by explanation, to make

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 47. ⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 51. ⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

something clear, rather than to control or predict by his explanation, as the scientist does.⁹

Dray says that there are three ways of explaining the causal relationship. The first is by proving that a certain event must be present before the second event occurs. This is the kind of proving that goes on in a laboratory, where there are certain controls applied to the experiment, controls which can add and remove conditions to show which are crucial, and which are nonessential to the causation of one event by another.

The second way of showing a causal relationship is by showing that B follows A and general theory C covers the entire process. This is the method of formal logic, or covering law theory; and the general law which covers this example of causation is often reached on the basis of the work done in the first example, the example of laboratory work.

The third way of showing a causal relationship is that which examines all of the conditions of a caused event, and which, utilizing the judgment of the observer, declares that of all the conditions surrounding the caused event, one or more of them could not have been absent if the caused event were to occur. That is, certain conditions were of sufficient necessity and importance that their absence would have modified or prevented the occurrence of the caused event.¹⁰ There are no laboratory experiments here, no formal covering laws; only the judgment of the observer which says, "I think conditions A, B and C were essential to the occurrence of the caused event."

⁹ Ibid., pp. 75-78. ¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 105-106.

Because the historian depends upon an examination of conditions, and a judgment that certain conditions were essential in the causing of an event, he is forced to make clear what conditions presented themselves for his judgment in order to justify his decision to those who read his work. Hence, the reader must know the conditions which confronted the historian so that the judgment can be made.¹¹ on the historian.

Dray points out that there are those who claim that because the historian has to display all of the conditions of a past event, if he is to show its cause, then there is no real need to pick out one or two and designate that "these were those which were crucial; the others were not." Those who make this objection say that when we do pick out certain essential causative conditions, we are allowing the "practical" to enter into the world of the "historical," and it does not belong there. He says, however, that failure to pick out certain conditions as essential to the causing of other conditions and events is the same thing as writing history "from no point of view whatever," and he doesn't believe that this can be done.¹²

Implications of the Ideas of Dray

How does Dray feel about the amount of past detail in which the historian should be interested?

Concerning this point, Dray clearly joins all those who hold that the historian must be interested in each and every one of the details of the past, to the exclusion of none.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 113-114. ¹² *Ibid.*, p. 114.

It will be recalled that Dray believed the historian used not covering laws to explain, but used his judgment as an historian. In order to justify that judgment, however, to his readers, the historian must first place before them all of the conditions and facts of the event in question. After doing so, he is then able to match his judgment against any and all others who would examine the same set of conditions with an eye toward explanation; only after doing so could he consider that he had done all possible to justify his judgment, for a reasonable judgment could be made only after an examination of all circumstances. No details are unimportant, for all are needed to make and justify historical judgment.

But after such judgment is made, some details become less important than others. The whole purpose of making a judgment, for Dray, is to explain why a certain event did or did not occur. Certain facts are more important, more significant than others, says Dray; only the historian who writes from no viewpoint would say otherwise, and to write from no viewpoint is impossible, he claims. Paradoxically, however, it is necessary to know all of the details of the past before one can make a decision claiming that only some of all of the details are important.

On the role of the historian in "explaining the past," Dray holds that the historian views all of the details of the past, both the physical and the mental, notes them, then decides which are important and relates his judgment to his readers. He must not stop at any step in the process, says Dray; he has not done his job when he has merely noted all of the facts without using his judgment.

CONCLUSION

Based upon the evidence in this thesis, it seems clear that implicitly or explicitly, the members of the Collingwood school suggest that conceivably, the historian is concerned with everything that happened in the past, and that his task is to study this past and present an intelligible explanation and narration of it to his contemporaries. In leading to this conclusion the five writers studied took different paths, and suggested different methods, but, that is the implication which each of their works contained.

Though the historian is conceivably concerned with every specific event and fact of the past, the five writers studied impose certain restrictions upon that which they conceive should be his primary interest. Collingwood, for example, would limit the historian to the rational thought which motivated human action of the past; while yet admitting that natural events could sometimes affect these rational thoughts. Butterfield advises the historian to seek after the entire historical "process," holding that while all of the past is responsible for all of the present, the historian will have to produce a coherent and undistorted version of this past which at best will be a suggestion of the whole past. Walsh suggests that the historian will be forced to exercise subjective judgment, in the absence of objective criteria for selection from the facts of the past. Gardiner recognized the necessity to concentrate only upon certain levels or strata of an event in the past. Dray said that the historian's judgment was his only trustworthy ally in his confrontation with the past; a judgment which would

construe some of the past as significant for the consideration of the particular case at hand upon which the historian was working, and other parts of the past as insignificant.

The purpose of the suggested techniques and criteria for selection of certain parts of the past from among the entire past (all of which were conceivably important), was to provide the historian with those techniques and criteria which would allow him to select those parts of the past enabling him to provide his contemporaries with an intelligible explanation of the past.

Each of the writers considered provided a different view of what constituted an intelligible, sufficient, and reputable historical explanation. Collingwood said a re-creation of past thoughts was necessary; Butterfield said a consideration of the historical "process" with an avoidance of oversimplification; Walsh stressed that historical explanation depends upon the ability of the historian to exercise judgment combined with a respect for the given evidence; Gardiner holds that historical explanation can never be complete; that at best an explanation will show only one facet of a total situation which occurred in the past; and Dray holds that explanation depends not upon the discernment and utilization of laws which could "cover" an historical situation, but upon the utilization of the judgment of the historian.

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SOME RECENT VIEWS OF THE NATURE OF THE PAST
AND HISTORICAL EXPLANATION

by

HERBERT SAMUEL RUTMAN

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Every time an historian writes for others to read, he implicitly or explicitly informs his readers about the period of time in which he is interested, the details of that period which he considers significant, and what he conceives the function of the historian to be.

The Collingwood school of historiographers, a group of five men who are associated either as students, as teachers, or as influences upon each other, put forth notions which have significant implications for the study of the problems of the functions of the historian and his area of interest. The thesis of this work is that these five men, Robin Collingwood, Herbert Butterfield, William Walsh, Patrick Gardiner, and William Dray, imply that the historian is concerned with the past, all of which is conceivably important, and a subject of concern to the historian who, after studying this past, explains what happened therein in a manner that is intelligible to his contemporaries.

Robin Collingwood sees the past as the area of interest for the historian, and is concerned with stressing that history is "a kind of research or inquiry" which is brought to bear upon the "actions of human beings that have been done in the past." Specifically, Collingwood is interested in the rational thought which motivated these actions, and states that the historian must re-think and thereby re-create these thoughts of the past in his own mind. For Collingwood, the only way in which the historian is able to explain the past is through an understanding of the rational motivations of past human actions.

Herbert Butterfield sees all of the past as responsible for all of the present. He speaks of the entire historical "process" which is the past.

Confronted with this entire past, the historian must accept it as it is; moral judgments cannot enter into his work. Nor is this past to be viewed as a drama consisting of "heroes" and "villains" who are responsible for the institutions and concepts of the present of which the historian is in favor or to which he may be opposed. Rather, the historian is to see that no event of the past existed in a vacuum, that it was influenced by other events. In the face of this complexity, the historian who would explain the past to his contemporaries must merely suggest the whole of the past, for he is unable to portray it completely.

William Walsh also sees the complexity and cross-currents of influence which comprise the past in which the historian is interested. The historian can use the complexity of the past for his own advantage in explanation, says Walsh. He suggests that historical explanation is best accomplished with the process of "colligation." By this he means that any event or specific occurrence of the past has a meaning only when it is compared to other events and occurrences. The fuller the context into which an event is placed, the more we can know about it, and hence, the more precise will be our historical explanation. Along these lines, Walsh is also ready to admit that in the last analysis, the writing of history is a subjective affair; that the historian must rely upon his own judgment in explanation.

Patrick Gardiner is similarly ready to recognize the complexity of the past and its relationship to historical explanation. For Gardiner, the past can be seen correctly from a number of different vantage points. For example, one can see a revolution from the political vantage point, or the military

vantage point, or the economic vantage point. That is, Gardiner holds that the historian can explain the French Revolution to a group of political scientists, a group of military leaders, and a group of economists, and possibly tell three quite different, but correct, stories. Furthermore, each of the stories told can vary in profundity of explanation. Gardiner believes that a subjective "standpoint" is required for a reputable historical explanation.

William Dray asserts that the complexity of the past will not yield to easy organization and convenient classification. He rejects the idea that a law or laws can be used to explain the relationship between events and occurrences. On the contrary, Dray holds that the historian uses only his judgment to see the relationship, if any, between aspects of the past, or aspects of the past and present. Far from seeking to classify in order to explain, the historian must seek to differentiate. For Dray, the concrete and the accidental is of explanatory value.