

## THE CONCEPT OF UNIVERSAL HISTORY\*

*Antonio Caso*

### History as Science

*Is history a science?* — Thinkers (philosophers, historians, sociologists),” according to Altimira, “can be ranged into three groups with regard to this problem. Some deny altogether any scientific character to history, others acknowledge that history, in part, has such a character, and others, finally, affirm such a character and even attempt to constitute with it a new species of inquiry.”<sup>1</sup>

No error can be committed — at least it would be inexplicable that it was committed — if that error was not based in some way on real data which were susceptible of being interpreted as they were by those who made the erroneous judgment. Spencer said — and his expression has met with good fortune since — *that there is a fund of truth in false things*. If, with respect to the nature of history and to its scientific or artistic character, there exist grave differences of opinion, this condition will probably be grounded in the fact that the very characters of history are susceptible of diverse interpretations, because, perhaps, the thing that we wish to define is incoherent in itself and, as John Stuart Mill teaches, “there is no agreement on the point of the definition of a thing except when there is agreement about the object of the definition.” But it may also be the case that though history is coherent in itself it is so complex that in one of its aspects it appears as science and in another as art, or as art and science simultaneously, or as science and art *sui generis*. It could, finally, be the case that though not coherent on the whole in itself history adds to its at least relative incongruence a heterogeneity: Then the difficulty of defining it would explain the discrepancy of opinions to which Altimira refers.

There are great and well-known differences between a work of history such as that of Herodotus and one such as that of Polybius. Between history as St. Augustine conceives it and as Fustel de Coulanges understands it the differences are also obvious. But the differences are not so profound and decisive that we must consider the poetic works of Herodotus and St. Augustine’s theological works as diverse in their essence from the works of Polybius and Fustel de Coulanges. Philosophical history is, fundamentally, a single knowledge. Similarly, the science of Albertus Magnus and Roger Bacon, and that of Descartes and Galileo, are aspects of the same science, so long as we make reference always to the entire complex of ideas of the century

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which engendered the particular scientific work and tinge it with the spirit of the eras which followed and made rectifications.

Consider, then, not the complete content of historical works, but what of the historic exists in them. Eliminate whatever is conventionally the auxiliary, contingent, and extrinsic — political and moral speculations, philosophical and religious reflections, mystical or pedagogical tendencies, etc. — and there will always remain a *sui generis* ground which will be, precisely, the object of the definition of history, whether it be considered as art or science, or as art and science simultaneously, or as art or science *sui generis*.

History, at first view, does not reproduce the general type of the sciences. This is, probably, the opinion of the impartial reader. While physics, chemistry, biology and sociology reproduce the physiognomic characteristics of a single ideational family, history separates itself from the common type. But we submit that this is a superficial opinion. Nevertheless, some deep cause must sustain it since it is so commonly held.

History, essentially, proceeds *ad narrandum*, reconstructing and reliving the past. The sciences, instead of turning their gaze to the past, fix it towards the future. History sets itself to investigate in the perennial development of life the life that was, the world that perished, the societies, traditions and customs that have disappeared. Its object of knowledge does not exist in the present; time incorporated that object in its passage and converted it into the present moment, or unmade that object forever.

What kind of science is this, so different from the others, which does not know in order to predict but in order to relive? How will history be able to maintain its scientific character when it refers to the past instead of dedicating itself to the future? What general facts will it discover? What natural symmetries and oppositions will it make precise, which are valid only for the past and are limited, in consequence, in universality and are contingent in relation to the future?

*History and the Sciences.* — The logical procedure of the sciences is deductive or inductive, but it always implies a general element towards which it is directed or from which it departs in order to effectuate reasoning. Through induction the scientific investigator derives from the study of certain facts a general result that does not admit of restrictions of time or space different from those of its terms — and if it admits of such restrictions we do not treat of a true induction but of an apparent induction. We refer, then, to the synthetic expression of what has been discovered previously, but without any passage from something known to something unknown and without augmentation of scientific knowledge. An astronomical, physical, or biological law covers an *indefinite* multiplicity of possible cases which will have to confirm that law uniformly insofar as they are produced. In contrast, what has been called

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historical generalization is merely the synthetic expression of a certain people's, individual's, or civilization's previously defined attributes, which are, in sum, things that will not vary in the course of time. The possibility of variation is exhausted by the very essence of the historical fact, which is always referred to the past.

Deduction, equally, in deriving from a general proposition conclusions which are less general or particular, does so with a character of uniformity not only for the real, but for the possible, and without restrictions of place or time. In contrast, if the historian generalizes deductively or inductively he will do it always within the restrictions of the definition of his study. He will always refer to what has been at a certain time and will never again return in an identical form. The historian will define *ad libitum* the importance of the object of his knowledge: he can propose the history of a special individual (the biography of Cromwell or of Frederick the Great), the history of a city such as Florence or Paris, or the history of the civilization of Renaissance Italy, but Cromwell, Frederick the Great, Florence, Paris and Italian Renaissance civilization are equally individuals, equally unique in space and time. The role of inductive generalization or of reflections obtained by deduction from some historical generalization will never be the same as the function of the same logical procedures in the sciences. History contains rational elements resulting from a final constructive elaboration. The sciences, as we have said, contain results which are much less contingent; not simple generalizations, but laws; not summaries of observations, but uniformities of relations without any limitations of time and space but those inherent in their formulation; no aid from final intuitions, but efforts which fulfill their end by their formulation, which carry their object in themselves.

*Historians of particular events.* — All historians treat of particular events. An historian of genius, such as Thucydides, will describe the Peloponnesian War, revealing the essential and deep rivalry between Athens and Sparta, evoking the terrible and admirable period, saving from forgetfulness the specific attributes of men and things contemporary to him (the present always forms part of the past for the consciousness that perceives it). It is true that this philosophical spirit will tinge the work with perspicacious moral reflections and grave political considerations. It is true that he will put magnificent speeches in the mouths of heroes such as Pericles, but these disquisitions will not form the ultimate end of his work, although they may abound in it. What will make of his works always books of history and not treatises of moral philosophy will be the ultimate synthetic vision, the reconstructive intuition, the achieved aim of animating situations which are singular in time and space with data first refined by reason and then organized by the creative imagination.

The innumerable mythological, theological, historical and metaphysical

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allusions that fill *The Divine Comedy* do not detract from its incomparable poetic stamp, nor do the noble aesthetic qualities of his style and the magic of his expression that would appear, at first blush, to be ineffable diminish the final meaning of Bergson's *Creative Evolution*. The ultimate aim, which in the great poet is the freest creation and in the French philosopher is universal intuition of the *élan vital* of existence, is, in the Greek historian, ideal resurrection of heroes and personalities who in reality lived and worked, engendering an historic epoch which is memorable for humanity. If the historian, as does Thucydides, succeeds in offering us the illusion of making those revived Hellenic nations move and develop before our eyes; if their action is revealed to our consciousness as is that of our contemporaries, he will have realized his design. The revelation of the *uniqueness* and singularity of the past is the ambition of history.

*Synthesis.* — *In summary, while the sciences refer to genera, uniformities and laws, history, even when it uses rational procedures, does not formulate laws when it generalizes but simply generalizes as a means to its ultimate end which is the intuition of the individual.*

*While the sciences study what repeats itself universally, what occurs one time and several times and always, history refers to the unique, to what never comes back again to be what it was.*

*While the sciences are masters of time and are developed in order to predict the future, history sets its gaze towards the past, is confined to it, and investigates it only.*

*The concept of science and history.* — Various thinkers have preferred to modify the concept of science in order to make the concept of history fit within it. Others, in contrast, who were more respectful of the truth and, in consequence, are less numerous, have preferred to declare that History is not a science.<sup>2</sup>

In speaking of Hegel Sir Alex Grant said that to take philosophy from Hegel's *Philosophy of History* is the same as to take poetry from Shakespeare — the debt is nearly universal. With even better reason we could affirm, suppressing all limitation, that it is a universal debt to take philosophy from Aristotle. We recur for the discussion of our theme to the Stagirite and interrogate his concept of *science* first and then his concept of history.

Aristotle was the direct opposite of a recalcitrant Cartesian, a sworn enemy of erudition and philology. We do not recur, then, to a violent and *a prioristic* philosopher, to whom the tradition has little importance, but to the one among all the Greeks who was the first historian of philosophy. That is to say, we recur to a great philosopher who was also an illustrious historian. "Aristotle," says Boutroux, "dedicated himself to profound historical studies in all the domains of science."<sup>3</sup>

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Philosophy is, for Aristotle, *knowledge of the universal* and each science is a *partial* philosophy which is restricted to a certain object of knowledge. But without an element of generality there is no science. Aristotle declares, essentially, that there is no science of the particular as particular.<sup>4</sup>

With respect to history the Stagirite teaches: "The true difference (between the historian and the poet) resides in the fact that one refers to what has been and the other to what would have been able to be. This is what makes poetry something more philosophical and serious than history, since *poetry is occupied more with the universal and history more with the particular*. The universal, in general, is the whole of words or of deeds which probably or necessarily concern a given character, and the aim of poetry is to fit appropriate names to the generalities. The particular is, for example, what Alcibiades has done or what he has suffered."<sup>5</sup>

Putting together in the form of a syllogism both ideas we will have as the major premise that there is no science of the particular, as the minor premise that history knows the particular, and as the conclusion that there is no science of history.

It is true, as Altamira wishes to say, that the notion of science which Aristotle had is not precisely the contemporary notion (the concept of science is one of the most disputed points in the philosophy of our time), but whether we consider that concept as it appears in Greek intellectualism, in Emile Boutroux' philosophy of contingency, or in the contemporary pragmatism of James and Le Roy (which affirms the contingency not of laws, but of the very scientific facts) it will always be true to say that without an element of generality there is no science. That is to say that history, if it was knowledge of the particular, would have no right to be counted among the group of the sciences as a species of the common gender.

Who will fail to admit that without *types, genera, formative ideas, uniformities, or values* science is impossible? Who will be able to speak of a science *of the particular* without perceiving immediately the contradiction in the expressed terms? Though the Spanish historian previously cited would desire it, the mere vicissitudes of the concept of science do not affect the general problem that Aristotle resolved so clearly and so philosophically: At any time and in whatever philosophical system one investigates or even chooses by chance, science is impossible without a *substratum* of universality (even when it is not *necessary* as Aristotle thought it to be). The antithesis is indisputable and profound, and the conclusion of the proposed syllogism is perfect: *history is not science*.

Of the four great forms of intellectual activity — philosophy, science, art, and history — philosophy and science always refer to things that are not individual, universal, or general; art refers to absolute and possible individuality; and history refers to the particular and real, never to abstraction or generality.

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The greatest of the philosophers also teaches, in the paragraph cited, his preference for poetry over history, because "*poetry is occupied more with the universal and history more with the particular.*" On this point the genius of the Stagirite is not contradicted. The philosopher is one who knows how to find in the universal the explanation of the individual and in the necessity that he intuits the contingency that is given to him in experience. The poetry of a Shakespeare, by creating eternal types of human passion, such as Hamlet, Othello, and Lear, comes closer to philosophical intuition of the universal than the supreme historian such as Tacitus who only succeeds, by referring to some notable living personality (Caligula, Nero, or Domitian), in underscoring contingent and *historical* evil, which is less real and less perverse, within its essential particularity, than the vividly real, which is intuited aesthetically through innumerable experiences by the creative genius of the artist.

*The thought of Schopenhauer on history as science.* — Other great thinkers have followed Aristotle's example and have denied to history the character of science. Schopenhauer, as we are going to see immediately, shares Aristotle's judgment, and we should point out in passing that the German philosopher, as well as his Greek counterpart, were men who were amply gifted with the *form of universal sympathy* which, according to Hoffding, is the historical sense. The philosophical system of Schopenhauer has greater psychological than logical unity.

Poetry contributes more than history, according to Schopenhauer, to knowledge of human nature: "In this sense, we have to expect from the first more true lessons than from the second. Aristotle recognized this when he said: *Etres magis philosophica et meliore poesis est quam historia.*

"History cannot aspire to place itself in the same rank with the other sciences, since it cannot claim for itself the qualities that distinguish them. It lacks the fundamental character of all sciences, the subordination of known facts, in place of which it can only offer us their coordination. There is not, then, system in history as there is in any of the sciences. History is a type of learning, not a science, since in no manner does it know the particular through the general, but is obliged to take the individual fact directly and drag it, so to speak, along the ground of experience, while the sciences fly above because they have acquired vast general notions through which they dominate the particular and can, at least within certain limits, embrace in a glance the possibility of the things belonging to their domain so that they can contemplate with tranquility even the eventual and the future. The sciences, since they are systems of general notions, treat only of genera; history always treats of individual things, which means that if it were conceded a scientific character it would be a science of individuals, which implies contradiction.

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Also, one draws from the preceding that all the sciences without exception treat of what always exists, whereas history relates what has existed but one time and will never exist again."<sup>6</sup>

The concept implies, in truth, a certain indisputable inferiority for history, but also a constant superiority. The sciences *soar* over the ground of experience and history *drags along*. Let us accept the metaphor and continue the allegory. But by flying the sciences take for themselves no more than abstract aspects, that is to say, ideals, and, therefore, irreal. History, *dragging itself along*, encounters the real individual, describes it, and delivers it to us as concrete and unique intuition. To soar will imply advantages, but we must confess that dragging along also has them, if we treat of grading the importance of both forms of *knowledge*. In the world there are no *astronomical, physical, or biological facts*. There are beings, *natural systems* as Bergson would say, *historical facts* which, compared among themselves, show common attributes which are the object of scientific laws. History, by dragging itself along, pervades and receives reality itself, whereas the sciences do no more than soar and see above it. The eagle, on his summit, does not distinguish everything; the serpent, in contrast, by limiting his horizon feels the earth with the crawling body. Philosophy is the eagle and history is the serpent. Both are sacred beings.

In summary, in history there is serial coordination but no system and no formation of hierarchies of notions as there is in science and philosophy. *History is a learning, not a science*. It is, perhaps, a form of irreducible knowledge, even when it participates in the character of science and of art. *The characters of historical facts, according to Meyer and Andler*. But it is not sufficient to affirm the particularity or individuality, the singularity or *uniqueness* of the facts which constitute the object of history, or to affirm history's character of pastness. It is necessary to define these characters, complementing the philosophical teachings of Aristotle and Schopenhauer which negate the scientific value of historical knowledge with the contributions offered by contemporary professional historians.

"The essential affirmation of the study of descriptive history," says Andler (summing up the conclusions of the famed historian Edward Meyer), "is that the object of this science is formed by individual facts. This does not mean that one treats only of facts which occur in individual human beings. Groups, peoples, and civilizations are collective individuals which have their own particularity. There are not two centuries or two actions which are the same. History has for its object the tracing of existing differences between these particular structures of men or of human groups which it describes as they are, changing and active, but irreducible."<sup>7</sup>

Meyer deduces highly important consequences from this fundamental concept of the object of the historical disciplines:

1. — *In the first place, general causes are not the resource of historical*

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*investigation*. Such causes exist, but they are not to be defined in historical inquiry. The action of general facts, whether psychological or economic, provides only limits and does not explain the particular phenomena studied by the historian. Such facts are not sufficient to achieve the prediction of particular events which develop in the closed domain limiting the general facts themselves.

II. — Besides, "*the states of permanent things* are not history. Nothing such as the existence of the Alps has predetermined the historical existence of the peoples of Central Europe: the histories of Switzerland, Italy, Germany, and France are not intelligible except in light of the existence of the Alps, but the existence of the Alps does not belong to history. Historical facts are those which change and work through their change: peoples who are not civilized, whose social state does not change, are not historical peoples. They are as isolated and immobile blocks of granite around which the tide of peoples flows. Inorganic and uncivilized masses can throw themselves precipitously against evolved civilizations, as did the Huns and the Mongols who assailed Europe and who operated mechanically as projectiles."

III. — On the other hand, *collective facts are not historical facts*. The destiny of the multitudes cut loose in one of Caesar's battles has no importance. The strategic and tactical plan which gave victory is the fact which merits attention. *The masses are the substratum of history*, the material on which events are realized and institutions are carved. Material is not interesting except with regard to the form that it takes, and this form is an individual work.

IV. — As far as history is extended, it will never escape from the bounds of particular facts. Particular life is of a civilization such as that of the Western and Eastern peoples of the Ancient Era. *History is never a science of the general. Not only is it difficult to discover the laws of history; it is contradictory to search for them.*<sup>8</sup>

When history is conceived as description of the unique, irreducible, and past individual, whether one treats of men, peoples, civilizations, or races, one sees clearly in what manner its object is appropriately distinguished from that of the sciences. The sciences study universal recurrences, oppositions and adaptations which are reducible to generic uniformities; similarities, contrasts, and symmetries — all that falls under the dominion of the rational act, that is formulated in ideas or notions that generalize attributes, in judgments that compare ideas, in reasonings that compare judgments or that result from elementary reasonings. History, which utilizes abstract scientific notions that limit or circumscribe its own field, is *the learning which drags itself along* so that it can better touch its object. It is referred to what in logic are called the *lowest species*, that is to say, to real beings, to facts that are not selected by analysis, to entities that do not appear at the behest of theories, to what is not an object abstracted from life, but to the life itself from which all



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objects have been abstracted, always individual, singular, irreducible, different.

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*History and poetic creation.* — In order to study the nature of history it is necessary to recur, rather than to the disquisitions of philosophers, to the works of the historians themselves. They are the ones who best can indicate to us the essence of the activity that they practice.

We will recur to the masters of the historical genre and we will see how their labor is not only an effort of criticism and documentation, but is even more a poetic creation or at least has much of the artistic in it.

It is true that today history is not written with the end of moralizing or delighting, even when it is true, on the other hand, that no one was ever moralized by history and that, written by Xenophon and Plutarch, it delighted all men. It is true, also, that history has been strengthened through the centuries with the riches of a more detailed erudition. Otfried Muller has been able to call philology the "*integral and full perception of ancient intellectual life,*" and his definition is worthy of his heroic life consecrated to the perfection of historical knowledge. Nevertheless, far from being capable of reduction to mere erudition, respected for its completeness, history is an organic and aesthetic attempt at reconstruction of the past. Only the one who reconstructs the life that was the world that was once made and later dispersed in the sempiternal evolution of things merits the name of historian. The object of history is what happened once in time and space and will never return as it was, whether one treats of humanity, of animal or vegetable species, or, finally, of the planet itself, a great historical being which made all history possible. History's objects are unique beings among their kind, unique among men, peoples, races, and civilizations, always personal and individual, always different.

*Biography and history.* — The word biography has been reserved for the history of a human person. Biography is always history. That is to say, it is a faithful portrait of a unity, whether one treats of a being or of a nation. The great historians are those who, besides possessing the unavoidable accomplishments of erudition and criticism, know how to restore and revive the matter of their investigations.

The historical work begins with a critical and scientific preface. Sources are discussed, documents are assayed, and witnesses are tested before the tribunal of "pure reason." But this effort is not sufficient. It is necessary to follow the historical work further until it achieves its ultimate end.

When the facts have been tested scrupulously and the documents speak with

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clarity the most admirable work has not yet begun. It is necessary to complete the investigation with an intuition of the whole.

Suppose, in order to use a metaphor which perhaps illuminates the doctrine, that the historian is as one who had to construct a solid body with data which, diminished and dispersed, lay in museums and ruins, in libraries and archives. Suppose that the solid which had to be constructed was a pyramid. But now imagine that despite having calculated and designed the geometrical construction one had not yet had the immediate and luminous intuition of the total pyramid, that one had not seen in the mind the conjunction of the sides of the pyramid in a single point. Despite all the effort of criticism, the geometrical solid could not be constructed.

*The historian and the geometer.* — As it goes with the geometer, so it goes with the historian. It is necessary *to intuit, to project* consciousness towards an ideal point on which the whole converges as do the sides of the pyramid in the illustrative metaphor. If one divines the point of convergence, if one has the artistic genius necessary to sympathize mysteriously with the character of a people or of a man of genius, one achieves *ipso facto* historical creation. If one remains indefinitely in an attitude of bare and incomplete criticism one is not an historian.

Now, this final effort is essentially artistic. It is achieved only through intuition. It is fulfilled only through poetic genius.

Why does the story of Joan of Arc told by Michelet or the biography of Frederick the Great written by Carlyle captivate us? Why do we always prefer a few pages from Titus Livius to a repertory of facts about the Roman Republic, or the severe and elegant style of Tacitus to all the information about the crimes of the Caesars? Because criticism is not intuition and voluminous chronicles do not revive the past. Because history is always art, the profound art of evoking over the dust of the centuries the soul of the centuries.

Common wisdom says that history repeats itself. This is not true. History never repeats itself. Neither the genius of Greece nor the majesty of Rome will ever be reborn from their venerable ruins. Themistocles will never return to lead his generous and triumphant hosts. The heroes who once lived will never return again. There is a fund of eternal renewal in the universe. Jesus expressed the mystery of the perennial youth of creation: "My father still works."

*Bacon's conception.* — It is difficult to characterize better than Bacon did the appropriate rank and universal extent of history: "The most exact classification that can be made of the human sciences is drawn from consideration of the three faculties of the soul which are the sites of science.

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History refers to memory, poetry to imagination, and philosophy to reason.”

“The proper object of history is constituted by individuals, inasmuch as they are found circumscribed in time and space, because though natural history seems to be occupied with species, nevertheless, if it treats of species it is only because of the similarities that natural things show when they are comprehended in this way. Such similarity leads to the belief that he who knows one individual knows them all, a belief which induces to confusion. If one sometimes encounters unique individuals within their species, such as the sun and the moon, or finds certain aspects that separate individuals from their species, one still does not have the least ground for excluding them from a natural history. There is no more ground for excluding individuals from a civil history. Now, all these concerns have to do with memory.”

“History is natural or civil. The divisions of natural history are drawn from the state and condition of nature which can be found in three different states and under three types of regimes.”

“Either nature is free and develops in its ordinary course, as in the heavens, the animals, the plants, and all that is presented to our view; or nature by virtue of the evil disposition and resistance of rebellious matter, is thrown outside of its bounds, as in the case of monsters; or, finally, it is, through human art and industry, constrained, modeled, and in certain mode rejuvenated, as in the case of artificial works.”

“The deeds of man are related in civil history. Without doubt, divine things do not shine in natural or civil history, so these things also constitute a species of history which is commonly called sacred or ecclesiastical history. In our opinion the importance of the arts and letters is great enough to warrant a special history for them, which in our plan is comprehended together with civil and ecclesiastical history.”

By considering the precise and prophetic concepts just drawn from *De Dignitatis et Augmentis Scientiarum* one will see how Bacon achieved the formulation of a complete concept of universal history, in the sense that his knowledge cannot be confined within the domain of the human but has to include the study of the entire universe, as much in its typical forms as in its exceptional aspects (the history of monsters). That is to say, for the great philosopher history refers to the totality of existence, as do the sciences and philosophy, only its viewpoint is the consideration of the individual and not of the generic and common.

Generally, when we think of something historical we reflect on human history and especially on political history. Nevertheless, neither is all history political nor is it even simply human. The stars have their history as do the animal and vegetable species. The concept of universal history must include human and nonhuman history; that is to say, it must be the total history of the universe.

“All energy tends to be degraded into heat and heat to be spread uniformly

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among bodies." This great cosmological law is the foundation of history. If physical laws were reversible as are pure mechanical laws, the principle of eternal recurrence or orbital return, which the Stoics conceived and which Nietzsche formulated in his *Zarathustra*, would express the transformations of the universe, because time is infinite and within its infinity the possible transformations of matter and force would be exhausted without fail. By reproducing *one* of the combinations of events *all of the others* would follow identically in their rigorous order by virtue of the law of causation. As Marcus Aurelius said: "The things of the world are always the same in their orbital revolutions, from above to below, from century to century."<sup>9</sup>

*The principle of Carnot and Clausius.* — The great law of Carnot and Clausius, the principle of the degradation of energy, introduces *historicity* into existence and nourishes and sustains it constantly. If only the first law of energy, the principle of conservation, operated, history would not exist, and purely mechanical and essential *reversibility* would make of cosmic facts phenomena without history, pure mechanical or geometrical relations. But Carnot's law makes time a real factor, an active dimension of universal existence.

"A pendulum which moves in the atmosphere from A to B," says Boutroux, "must overcome a resistance, but in order to overcome it will produce an amount of work and by working will lose part of its energy. If, then, the direction of movement is changed the pendulum will not return to its original point because it will have lost energy both in its initial and in its reverse motion. It can be established as a universal rule that whenever there is work the original quantity of energy is irreparably diminished with the production of heat."<sup>10</sup>

That is to say, physics, with regard to mechanics and pure geometry, is a new science which takes into account and considers in its study not only the quantity but also the quality of forces. Heat is of an inferior quality to work. Boutroux adds: "Physical laws cannot be reduced to those of mechanics."

Existence has probably been developing through a constant change in potential, which implies a constant qualitative transformation. The quantity of energy has remained the same, but its quality has been degraded. Without a fall in cosmic potential work would be impossible. Hence, the degradation of energy means an irreversible and real succession of phenomena or, in other words, an historical order. To summarize: *Nothing is lost and all is transformed through the irrevocable order which is history.*

*Astronomical history.* — The solar system bears witness to the enormous drama which drew the sun and the planets from the primitive nebula, casting them into their trajectories through space. The ring of Saturn, the moons of

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Jupiter, the melancholic little world that lights up the nights of our globe are remains, testaments of a history that they reveal in their sempiternal revolutions.

At the beginning everything was submerged in a primitive and incoherent homogeneity. The acts of the cosmic drama are patiently deciphered by the astronomers and reveal to us the various dynamic moments of the Creation. There was a planet, between Jupiter and Mars, which broke, perhaps, into a thousand irregular fragments, forming asteroids which are as obedient as the stars themselves to universal gravitation.

*Chemical and geological history.* — The different chemical elements are probably also data for a *chemical history*. The new scientific spirit seems to fulfill the fantasy of the old alchemists. By submitting some chemical compounds to radiation from the marvellous *simple body*, Sir William Ramsay finds evidence that guarantees the possibility of some elements being transmuted into others. Ozone, which is merely non-electrified or allotropic oxygen, evinces different properties from those of the famous element discovered by Lavoisier.

Geologists show the dramatic shifts in the earth's history through the superposition of its strata. Flora and fauna which are specific to each layer are analyzed by paleontologists and naturalists. Just as an historian knows how to reconstruct a civilization from excavations in the venerable Hellenic or Latin soil that yield only a few remains of its immortal monuments, so Cuvier could reconstruct, with a bone or a vertebra, the complete skeletal form of the great antediluvian animals.

*Natural history.* — The exemplary works of Lamarck and Darwin opened up magnificent historical perspectives to science. One could then conceive that the most distinct and diverse species could grow one out of the other. Man himself, once isolated as an Olympian from his brothers, began to acknowledge the immense accumulation of qualities and attributes that link his existence to universal life. Just as is the case with the simple bodies of chemistry, the organic species are unstable and historical. At one time there were neither chemical nor biological laws. Only at a certain historical moment does the magnificent complexity of attributes which are analyzed today by chemists, naturalists, physicists, and biologists begin to develop.

Evolution is universal and not only human. Time has worked on all things and has exerted its action on them. History is not peculiar or exclusive to men and human societies. Insofar as anything is within time, far from remaining unalterable it is linked with other things in an incessant transformation. The very orbits of the planets are not identical over successive revolutions. An eternal register is open on life and the world and in it are inscribed all of the events, whether mournful or fruitful, human or nonhuman. The only thing

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that never changes is the law of eternal change. To exist is to be transformed or, in other words, to have a history.

*Science, History, Art and Philosophy.* — In light of the preceding discussion it appears that the appropriate field for the historian is as vast as that of the learned man or of the philosopher. Science is prediction, generalization towards the future, "anticipation of experience." Its sphere is the future as intimately linked through the present with the more remote past. Philosophy investigates the intimate nature of things, final and ontological causes, the being which is hidden in everlasting change, the essence which is veiled through interminable evolutions. History turns its view to the past. It leaves to metaphysics the eternal present and to science the constant future, and applies itself to examining the register of time for the world that was made and the reality that was actualized. The historian is an incorrigible romantic. He applies himself humbly to learning how life unfolded on earth, how the globe became separated from its origin, how each concrete being came forth from the imperceptible in the course of time.

The scientist is the heroic one, the philosopher the holy one, and the historian the poet. The first symbolizes the ambition which anticipates reality, the second the mystical peace in changeless being. The historian gathers with his pious hands the works of the centuries and with the dust of the ages reconstructs extinct civilizations, species and celestial bodies. Time, invincible and indifferent, gives to everything its reason and takes from everything its illusions.

### History as an Irreducible Form of Knowledge

*Philosophy and its object.* — Unlike the sciences which investigate *laws*, philosophy investigates *principles*, that is, synthetic intuitions of the world. To order *first principles*, as Spencer said, is to philosophize. We see clearly, then, the end of metaphysics. The sciences offer abstract analyses of being, but existence is concrete. If we had to content ourselves with the collections of efficacious and coordinated abstractions that are called geometry, algebra, astronomy, chemistry, etc., our knowledge would remain permanently truncated; it would be knowledge for action, not for knowledge itself. Scientific formulae are the ideal and practical designs of life, not life itself.

Philosophy is initiated with a primary intuition — Plato's idea, Aristotle's potency and act, atoms, monads, Schopenhauer's will, Bergson's *élan vital* — and with data elaborated by science, historical descriptions, and artistic creations. It then develops its synthesis and delivers to consciousness the various supreme approximations of the spirit to reality: Platonism,

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Aristotelianism, monadology, idealism yesterday and pragmatism or transcendental phenomenology today.

History, like philosophy, has a universal scope. While things *are being* they do not concern history. As soon as they no longer are they will belong to it. History does not have to demonstrate any principle. Like Newton *it does not make hypotheses*. It does not know whether or not the world exists as a totality. That might be a plausible theory, but in the end it is only a theory. God and the soul are treated by history as they were by Kant as ideas of pure reason. In contrast, plurality is its object and difference its preoccupation. Philosophy argues that existence is creation and evolution. History knows about concrete creations and realized changes. Philosophy says: "All is imagination or memory, inheritance or abrupt variation, repetition or originality." History only perceives unities which are never repeated, even when they always tend to repeat themselves.

*The mission of history.* — "The living organism is a thing which lasts. Its past is totally prolonged into its present and remains actual and active there. If this were not so could we understand that the organism passes through definite phases and changes in age, that it has, in sum, a history? Wherever something lives there is a register open in which time is inscribed."<sup>11</sup>

The mission of history is to read the register of which Bergson speaks, but it is not easy to decipher the sometimes enigmatic characters of the living text. One must reconstruct the past, severing it from the present, without ever abstracting in order to generalize. One must make an approximation to each singular life with that form of spiritual approximation which is so different from pure reason: the intuition of the concrete individual.

*The difference between Philosophy and History.* — We do not identify, then, as Croce does, history and philosophy.<sup>12</sup> They both have in common the investigation of concrete entities — metaphysical principles or singular things. They are also in agreement in considering time as real duration, not as a vacant model of existence. But in other respects history and philosophy differ. To philosophize is to strain towards universal explanation, whereas to do history is to describe indefinable unities. The difference is obvious and unvarying.

To define an object of knowledge is to reduce it to genera, to think of it in relation to a gender, as a species or gender included within a wider one (*dictum de omnibus et nullo*). Now, the indefinable is the historical. Thus, as Croce himself says, the thesis of descriptive history, of *historiography*, is true. Description is an intellectual operation which, grounded in the intuition of the individual, serves as a complement to generalizing and defining intelligence.

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Scientific analysis reduces each real being to groups of general formulae which define attributes, but a being is not a group of attributes; it is an individuality (*singulare quid*) from which reason selects attributes, that is to say, common aspects which do not have history. Only *durable concretes* have history — a sun, a planet, an animal, a man, a people, or better put, the Sun; the Earth; Bucaephelus, Alexander's horse; Plato of Athens; Dante Alighieri; England; Holland; Roumania; New Spain; Medieval Civilization; the Indo-European Race: everything that will never be exhausted of attributes, despite the unremitting erosion of analysis, because it exists, really, within its own unicity.

Philosophy and history, both of which are intuitive, express what is undefined and indefinable by the sciences. Neither the *supreme genera* nor the *lowest species* of the logicians are susceptible of definition.

When it attains to ultimate notions reason confesses its essential limitation. It is powerless to explain these notions and yet it presupposes them as the principles of all explanation.

The same situation occurs when reason encounters the other limit of its sphere of action. Individuals and historical events, which would imply the conjunction of infinite genera, infinite laws, infinite uniformities and symmetries, are also undefinable by reason. Neither the simple nor the complex, neither the universal essence of things nor their incomparable individual character, neither universality nor individuality is the object of knowledge for pure reason, the tireless elaborator of generalizations and abstractions.

Such are the limits of pure rational knowledge: philosophy, which is intuition of the universal, and history, which is reconstruction of the individual, of the unique, of the incomparable realities which existence deposited in its continuous overflowing. Between these two disciplines fit all of the sciences and all of the endeavors. The genius of Plato and of Thucydides define the eternal summits of intelligence from which one discerns from a distance the hidden and ineffable infinite which religions sometimes evoke or humanize with the splendor of their myths and their pious and comfortless impotence.

*The difference between History and Art.* — History and art, which are grounded in essentially identical intuitions, differ from one another from various viewpoints. History is intuition of the *individual-concrete-real*; it studies what has been but once in time and space. Art treats of the *individual-concrete-possible*. It does not matter to the artist whether or not a given fact has occurred, whether the complex of circumstances has worked in this way or another. So long as the fact was possible within the conditions determined by the artist himself he will be able to create beautiful works by giving us his



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intuition of reality. *Reason and its determinations are for the artist but a limit to his action. For the historian they are a constant element in his endeavor, an integral function of his activity.* Thus, Croce has referred correctly to the logical elements of historical judgment. The historian *a fortiori* is confined to narration of the event. He lets us know his particular intuition of something that was for one time and will never again be present under the same conditions and with the same aspects.

But, knowledge of the individual which has been real also falls within knowledge of the possible individual; at least reason conceives of the first intuition as a species of the second. Thus, the artist can treat of what has been and of what would have been able to be in the same work of art; that is to say, he can mix historical and artistic intuitions in the same representation of reality. This hybrid genre, formed jointly by history and art, includes the epic, the ballad, the novel, and the historical drama. However, what there is of historical reconstruction in the work of art, even when it is better and more exact than what can be found in some genuinely historical works, is subordinated to the *final end* of the work, which is aesthetic and not historical.

The opinion of Aristotle and Schopenhauer, who see something more profound in art than in history, seems to be unquestionable. But this does not mean that we should deny to historical knowledge its indisputable necessity. But whereas the historian does not offer us more than an aspect of reality (the aspect that reality effectively had in a determinate space and time), the artist shows us the greater number of individual aspects, condensed in a psychological moment; that is to say, he gives us the fundamental characteristic of reality. His mission is to destroy those generalities of the common life and of the social milieu in which the historical occurs in order to extract in all of its transparent purity and virgin meaning the necessary symbol, the absolute expression of the real and contingent individualities of history.

The activity of the artist differs, then, in two essential respects from the task of the historian. The end of history is not the same as the end of art, and if both are disinterested activities of the spirit, this similarity should not lead to their confusion: History presents distinctive and different characteristics from those of art and, thus, is able to demand its autonomy as an irreducible form of knowledge.

*The historical sense.* — The historical sense, according to Hoffding, is a form of *universal sympathy*. Perhaps it is the supreme form of human sympathy. To know how to interpret in luminous syntheses the successive crises in the life of the species is not merely to understand but to love; to love intellectually as Spinoza and Socrates loved, and as those have loved who in the limitless development of thought have succeeded in unifying in a single act of

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consciousness knowledge and emotion, representation and will, the precise, geometrical logic of pure reason, and the vital logic of instinct and sentiment. Historical truth, which like metaphysics is quintessentially human, is engendered only within the harmony of ideas and intuition, within the intimate coherence of spirit.

History has to be written Platonically, by philosophizing with the total spirit. Only so is new life infused into the inert, do extinct institutions and beliefs rise up again, does the motley mass of men and things evoked over the ruins consecrated by the veneration of peoples recover vivacity. Only so does the vast treasure chest of relics which humanity has deposited on the planet in fulfilling its constant destiny — its perpetual death and its perpetual resurrection — become dynamic again.

History is a *creative imitation*, not an invention as art is, or an abstract synthesis as are the sciences, or a philosophical intuition of universal principles.

### Notes

1. *Modern Questions of History*, p. 106.
  2. "The human spirit," says Bacon, "once it has been seduced by certain ideas, whether by virtue of their enchantment or through the empire of tradition and faith, is obliged to give way and to put itself in accord with them. Though the proofs that refute such ideas be very numerous and conclusive, the spirit forgets them, depreciates them, or through some subtle distinction sets them aside and rejects them, not without grave damage to itself. But the spirit finds it necessary to safeguard the authority of its beloved sophisms." *Novum Organum*, Aphorism 46.
  3. *Great Encyclopedia*, Article on "Aristotle."
  4. *Metaphysics* II, II. *Nicomachian Ethics*, VI, II.
  5. The reader will find in a later chapter a discussion of the hypothesis of Windelband and Rickert, who have found in values the universal element of history. (This discussion is not reproduced here, *Trans.*)
  6. *The World as Will and as Representation*, Chapter XXXVIII.
  7. *German Philosophy in the Nineteenth Century*.
  8. *Op. cit.*, p. 216.
  9. *Soliloquies of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius*, p. 188 of the Spanish version of don Fausto Diaz de Miranda; Biblioteca clásica, Book CXVII.
  10. *The Idea of Natural Law*, p. 109 of the Spanish version of A. Caso.
  11. Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, p. 16.
  12. *Logic*, Part II, Chapter IV and relevant note.
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