

On the Need for Theory in the Discipline of History

Ever since the era of neo-Kantianism, our academic field has been caught in a self-definition: history has to do with what is individual and specific, whereas the natural sciences concern themselves with what is general. The history of science has passed this antithesis by. The hypothetical character of its statements and the intertwining of subject and object in its experiments have introduced an element of relativity into the natural sciences that can justly be called "historical." At the same time, many of the social sciences and the humanities have placed themselves under systemic constraints, which have long since cut through the unifying tie of the historical worldview. As the dispute over Popperianism shows, a battle line no longer divides the paired opposites of the natural sciences and the humanities. This has hardly affected our research practice, however, and in consequence the historical profession finds itself isolated. History has been thrown back upon itself and no longer occupies a clear place within an academic world that has in the meantime become dehistoricized.

We can escape from our isolation only via a new relationship to other disciplines. This means that we must recognize our need for theory or, rather, face the necessity of doing theory if history still wants to conceive of itself as an academic discipline. This is not an attempt to borrow theorems from neighboring disciplines to establish hyphenated alliances. It would be rash to couple sociology and history in a way that would set the conditions for deriving our own disciplinary concept from a social science

(*Gesellschaftswissenschaft*) somehow conceived in sociological terms. Instead, I would propose that we can push our way out of our own characteristic bottlenecks only by concentrating on those points that are themselves in need of theory or that promise theoretical insights.

1. It is an irony of the semantic history of “history” that “history itself” (*Geschichte selber*) or “history pure and simple” (*Geschichte schlechthin*) originally meant the need for theory within our discipline. As soon as people gave up thinking “history” in conjunction with certain subjects and objects that were assigned to it, the discipline of history was obliged to conform to a system. When the terms “history itself” and “the philosophy of history” (*Geschichtsphilosophie*) first appeared around 1770, they were identical in meaning. In the course of time, the metahistorical component of these expressions was absorbed by the newly coined term “historicity” (*Geschichtlichkeit*).

Recent discussions of historicity face the theoretical challenges that have resulted from the crisis of historicism. The concept of historicity is used to halt the permanent process of relativization for which historicism was reproached. Historicity absolutizes relativity, as it were, if I may use this nonconcept. The influence of Heidegger cannot be overlooked here, even though he did not exactly promote this discussion within our field. As early as *Being and Time*, there is an almost complete abstracting from history. Historicity is treated as a category of human existence, yet no intersubjective or transindividual structures are thematized. Although Heidegger points the way from the finitude of *Dasein* to the temporality of history, he does not pursue it any further. That is why, on the one hand, the danger of a transhistorical ontology of history (as, for example, devised by August Brunner) lurks behind the fruitful category of historicity. On the other hand, when Heidegger applies his philosophy to history—where it receives an eschatological coloring as the history of Being—it is no accident that traditional historical-philosophical schemata of decay and ascent become visible.

Historicity and the categories assigned to it open onto a historics (*Historik*) and onto a metahistory that investigate mobility instead of movement and changeability instead of change in a concrete sense. There are many similar formal criteria concerning historical (*historisch*) acting and suffering, which are basically “timeless” across history and serve to unlock history (*Geschichte*). I am thinking of such criteria as: “master and servant”; “friend

and foe"; the heterogony of purposes; the shifting relations of time and space with regard to units of action and potential power; and the anthropological substratum for generational change in politics. The list of such categories could be extended; they refer to the finitude that sets history in motion, so to speak, without capturing in any way the content or direction of such movements. (Often enough, Christian axioms—like those of negative theology—are hidden behind such categories; they appear again and again in Wittram's book on interest in history, for example).

Historicity is supposed to outline both the conditions of possibility for histories (*Geschichten*) as such and the place that historical research occupies within them. It clears the historian of the charge of a putative subjectivity; one cannot escape this subjectivity to the extent that "history" (*die Geschichte*) constantly passes both the historian and the writing of history (*die Historie*) by. Here, the "transcendence" of history signifies the process of overtaking that continuously forces the researcher to rewrite history. Thus, the rewriting of history becomes not only the correction of mistakes or a compensatory act, but part of the presuppositions of our profession—provided that *Geschichte* is transcendent with regard to *Historie*. We can therefore say that just as in the past history (*Historie*) as the art of narration developed its own historicities (*Historiken*), the discipline of history today has conceptualized historicity as outlining the conditions of possibility both for history in general (*Geschichte überhaupt*) and for the discipline of history (*Geschichtswissenschaft*) more narrowly defined.

The problematic of historical anthropology demonstrates how difficult it is to introduce metahistorical categories into concrete research. Nipperdey has recently pointed this out, and no doubt our western neighbors, with their structuralist, ethnological, and psychosociological approaches, are ahead of us in this respect. Again and again, one is faced with the aporia that enduring formal criteria are themselves historically conditioned and remain applicable only to phenomena that can be delimited historically. In other words, in the course of research, all metahistorical categories will change into historical statements. Reflecting on this change is one of the research tasks of historical anthropology in particular and of any kind of history in general.

2. Discussion of the systematic premises of "history in itself" (*Geschichte an sich*) leads to a reversal of the question, to a turn toward the need for theory in the practice of research. A specifically historical question

can legitimate itself academically only by going back to the historicity that inhabits or precedes it; for the purpose of research, it has to unfold its own theoretical premises.

The individual disciplines that have distanced themselves from the assumption of a historical experience of the world have all developed particular systematics relative to their own objects of research. Economics, political science, sociology, philology, linguistics: all can be defined in terms of their objects of study. By contrast, it is much more difficult for history to develop a historical systematics or a theory referring to an object of study based on its actual objects of research. In practice, the object of history is everything or nothing, for history can declare just about anything to be a historical object by the way in which it formulates its questions. Nothing escapes the historical perspective.

Significantly, history “as such” (*Geschichte “als solche”*) does not have an object—except for itself, which does not solve the question of its object of research but only doubles it linguistically: the “history of history.” Here, the extent to which “history pure and simple” (*Geschichte schlechthin*) originally was a metahistorical category becomes clear. The question, then, is whether defining an object of study will help the discipline of history regain the historical character that distinguished it up to the eighteenth century. Certainly not. Our concept of history remains ambivalent: in reference to an object, history becomes a historical category; without an object, it remains a metahistorical quantity—and a reservoir of theological, philosophical, ideological, or political classifications that are accepted more or less uncritically.

I would therefore like to narrow down my thesis: history conceived as ubiquitous can only exist as a discipline if it develops a theory of periodization; without such a theory, history loses itself in boundlessly questioning everything. I assume that metahistorical and historical categories will be forced to converge in the question of periodization. Such a question has both a systematic and a historical character. This can be demonstrated by means of a few examples.

a) Let me first refer to a topic of our study group for modern social history, namely, *conceptual history*. Conceptual history, as we attempt it, cannot manage without a theory of periodization. We do not mean temporality of a general kind, which can be procedurally stylized into historicity and which has to do with history in a fundamental way. It is, rather, a question of the-

oretically formulating in advance the temporal specifics of our political and social concepts so as to order the source materials. Only thus can we advance from philological recording to conceptual history. One hypothesis regarding our dictionary of fundamental historical concepts is that, despite continual use of the same words, the political-social language has changed since the eighteenth century, inasmuch as since then a "new time" has been articulated. Coefficients of change and acceleration transform old fields of meaning and, therefore, political and social experience as well. Earlier meanings of a taxonomy that is still in use must be grasped by the historical method and translated into our language. Such a procedure presupposes a frame of reference that has been clarified theoretically; only within such a frame can these translations become visible. I am speaking here of the "saddle period" (*Sattelzeit*), as it was called by the study group. This period thematizes the transformation of the premodern usage of language to our usage, and I cannot emphasize strongly enough its heuristic character.

We cannot master our task if we try to write a historical-philological history of words at a comparatively positivistic level. We would then get bogged down in the mass of source material and could at most provide an incomplete glossary of sociopolitical expressions. In doing so, we would have to record the history of a lexical item with different meanings or be forced to trace word by word what are supposedly constant meanings. Such an additive description, by which we proceed hand over hand through history, requires a temporal indicator, which, drawing on the sum of the linguistic findings, points out to us that there is a history at all. The theoretical anticipation of the "saddle period" between about 1750 and about 1850 amounts to a statement that during this period the old experience of time was denaturalized. The slow decline of Aristotelian semantic content, which referred to a natural, repeatable, and therefore static historical time, is the negative indicator of a movement that can be described as the beginning of modernity. Since about 1770, old words such as *democracy*, *freedom*, and *the state* have indicated a new horizon of the future, which delimits the concept in a different way; traditional *topoi* gained an anticipatory content that they did not have before. A common denominator of the sociopolitical vocabulary can be found in the increased emergence of criteria pertaining to movement. The productivity of this heuristic anticipation is demonstrated by a series of ideas that thematize concepts of movement themselves, such as progress, history, or development. Although these words are old, they are al-

most neologisms, and since about 1770, they have had a temporal coefficient of change. This offers a strong incentive to read and interrogate other old concepts of the political language in terms of features indicating movement. The hypothesis of a denaturalization of the historical experience of time, which also affects the semantics of sociopolitical expressions, is supported by the emergence of the modern philosophy of history, which appropriates these terms.

In other words, only a theoretical anticipation that uncovers a specific time period can open the possibility of working through certain readings and transposing our dictionary from the level of positivistic recording to that of a conceptual history. Only theory transforms our work into historical research. This presupposition has so far proved its worth. The entire linguistic space of sociopolitical terms has—while retaining the identity of many words—moved from a quasi-static tradition that changed only over the long term to a conceptuality whose meaning can be inferred from a future to be newly experienced. This presupposition does not have to hold for all words, however.

Once the natural constants determining the old historical experience of time have been destroyed—in other words, once progress has been set free—a wealth of new questions emerges.

b) One of the most important concerns the theoretical premises of *structural history*. The answer can be found only by asking about the historical determination of time in statements that are supposed to indicate duration. If one assumes that historical time remains embedded within natural time without being entirely contained in it; or, put differently, that whereas the time of day may be relevant for political decisions, historical connections cannot be measured with a clock; or, put differently yet again, that the revolution of the stars is no longer (or not yet again) relevant for historical time, we must find temporal categories that are adequate to historical events and processes. Categories of the type developed by Braudel can therefore be introduced into empirical research only if we are clear about the theoretical significance of what can last. This consideration leads us into a fundamental dilemma.

We are always using concepts that were originally conceived in spatial terms, but that nevertheless have a temporal meaning. Thus we may speak of refractions, frictions, and the breaking up of certain enduring elements that have an effect on the chain of events, or we may refer to the retrospec-

tive effects of events upon their enduring presuppositions. Here, our expressions are taken from the spatial realm, even from geology. They are undoubtedly very vivid and graphic, but they also illustrate our dilemma. It concerns the fact that history, insofar as it deals with time, must borrow its concepts from the spatial realm as a matter of principle. We live by naturally metaphorical expressions, and we are unable to escape from them, for the simple reason that time is not manifest (*anschaulich*) and cannot be intuited (*anschaulich gemacht werden*). All historical categories, including progress, which is the first specifically modern category of historical time, are spatial expressions by origin, and our discipline thrives because they can be translated. "History" originally also contained a spatial meaning, which has become temporalized to such a degree that we refer to the doubling of "structural history" if we wish to (re-)introduce statistics, duration, or long-term extension into our concept of history.

In contrast to other modes of study, history as a discipline lives by metaphorical expression. This is our anthropological premise, as it were, for everything that must be articulated in temporal terms is forced to rely on the sensory bases of natural intuition. The impossibility of intuiting pure time leads directly into methodological difficulties concerning whether meaningful statements about a theory of periodization can be made at all. A specific danger lurks behind these difficulties: namely, that our empirical research naively accepts metaphors as they come to us. We must rely on borrowings from everyday linguistic usage or other disciplines. The terminology borrowed and the necessity of using metaphorical expressions—because time does not clearly manifest itself—requires constant methodological safeguards that refer to a theory of historical time. This leads us back to the question of "duration."

Evidently, certain long-term processes prevail, whether they are supported or opposed. One can, for example, ask whether the rapid industrial development after the Revolution of 1848 happened despite the failed revolution or because of it. There are arguments for and against; neither side is necessarily convincing, but both sides indicate a movement that establishes itself across the political camps of revolution and reaction. In this case, the reaction may have had a more revolutionary effect than the revolution.

If revolution and reaction are both indicators of one and the same movement, sustained by both camps and driven forward by both, then this pair of ideological concepts evidently indicates a continuous historical move-

ment, a structure of irreversible, long-term progress, which transcends the political pros and cons of reaction and revolution. Progress itself is thus more than an ideological category. Even the category of the reasonable middle way, which was habitually invoked at the time, is only meaningful if a stable coefficient of change is introduced. The scope of action for a movement that is already pre-given makes it impossible to statically grasp any reasonable middle way, for this middle way is forced to oscillate between "right" and "left." Its meaning changes by itself over time. When we ask about their temporal meaning, spatial metaphors thus necessitate prior theoretical considerations. Only then can we define what, for instance, is meant by duration, delay, or acceleration in our example of the process of industrialization.

c) The destruction of natural *chronology* leads to a third issue. Chronological sequence, by which our history is still guided at times, can quite easily be exposed as a fiction.

In the past, the natural course of time served as the immediate substratum for possible histories. The calendar of saints and sovereigns was organized by means of astronomy; biological time provided the framework for the natural succession of rulers, on which self-reproducing legal titles in the wars of succession depended—until 1870, symbolically enough. All histories remained rooted in "nature," directly embedded in biological pre-givens. The mythological superelevation of astrological and cosmic time, which contained nothing ahistorical in the prehistoric age, pertains to the same experiential realm. But since the triad of antiquity, the Middle Ages, and modernity has structured chronological succession, we have succumbed to a mythical schema that tacitly structures all of our scholarly work. This schema is obviously not of any immediate use for the relation between duration and event. We must, rather, learn to discover the simultaneity of the nonsimultaneous in our history: it is, after all, part of our own experience to have contemporaries who live in the Stone Age. And since the large-scale problems of the developing countries are coming back to haunt us today, it becomes imperative to gain theoretical clarity about the nonsimultaneity of the simultaneous and to pursue related questions. The seemingly metahistorical question about historical structures of time has again and again proved relevant to concrete research questions. Among these, there also belongs

d) the interpretation of *historical conflicts*. Historical processes are driven forward only so long as the conflicts inherent in them cannot be solved.

As soon as a conflict dissolves, it belongs to the past. A historical theory of conflicts can be sufficiently developed only by bringing out the temporal qualities inherent in the conflict. In historiography, conflicts are usually dealt with by introducing opponents as stable subjects, as fixed entities whose fictive character can be recognized: "Hitler" and "Hitler within us."

The historical subject is an almost inexplicable quantity. Think of any famous personality or of the "people," which is no less vague than "class"; think of the economy, the state, the church, and other such abstract entities or powers. Perhaps only in psychological terms can we understand how "effective forces" come about and how they are reduced to subjects. If one applies the temporal question to such subjects, they dissolve very quickly, and it turns out that intersubjective connections are the proper topic of historical research. Such connections, however, can be described only in a temporal way. The desubstantialization of our categories leads to a temporalization of their meaning. Thus the scale of past or future possibilities can never be outlined on the basis of a single modality or unit of action or from one unit of action. Such a scale refers, rather, to that of one's opponents. Therefore only temporal differences, refractions, or tensions can express the trend toward a new structuring of reality. In this way different temporal relations and factors of acceleration and delay unexpectedly come into play.

When one thematizes long, average, and short periods of time, it is difficult to establish causal relationships between the temporal layers thus singled out. We recommend working with hypotheses that introduce constant factors, against which variables can be measured. This does not prevent us from seeing the constant factors as themselves dependent on variables or other constant factors. Such historical relativism, if well thought through, seems to lead to the functional method. This method excludes infinite regress. Once temporal differences among the intersubjective connections have been thematized, it is difficult to hold on to the supposedly scientific character of causal chains, on whose basis we are accustomed to interrogate the past so as finally to arrive at the absurdity of linear questions of origin. Perhaps lines of direct derivation from past *pregivens* hide a secularized derivative of the Christian doctrine of creation, living on undetected.

In the course of nineteenth-century research, the categories of spontaneity, of historical uniqueness, and of historical forces, which were originally designed with an eye to genuine historical time, became bound up in substances such as personality, the people, class, certain states, and so on.

This made possible historically naive statements at which we smile today. Nevertheless, there is a hidden difficulty here as well. Though I am not in a position to evaluate it, I would like to direct attention to it. I mean

e) *temporal series*. Schumpeter once said that one can only make historically meaningful statements if there is a possibility of comparison in sufficient temporal depth. Comparisons based on temporal series, however, presuppose a subject conceived as being continuous. Only when measured against such a subject can changes be discernible at all.

I feel that these subjects, thought to be continuous, should be introduced only hypothetically. Here I would invoke the New Economic History. What is exciting about these researchers' view of history, in my opinion—if I judge the work of Fogel correctly—is that they gain genuinely historical insights via theoretical premises that are not characteristic of our discipline. Fogel once presented calculations based on his theories that refute the argument that slave labor in the United States was economically unprofitable before the outbreak of the Civil War. The number sequences were verified empirically, and they indicate that the efficiency of black labor rose in relation to westward migration. Through such an insight, the moral significance of liberal propaganda gains a tremendous weight *per negationem*, for the purely moral argument that no human being must be a slave increases in conclusiveness to the degree that the supposed economic proof loses power (a proof that the liberals, of course, also used in a subsidiary fashion).

This is an example of how determinable phenomena emerge more clearly thanks to a theory that excludes certain data from consideration. Moreover, excluding certain questions under certain theoretical premises makes it possible to find answers that would otherwise not have come up: a clear proof of the need for theory in our discipline. If one supposes the necessity of forming theories—and such theories must not be restricted to temporal structures—it follows from previous examples that we must become aware of the hypothetical character of our method. This will be demonstrated by way of further examples, which can instruct us about the naive use of historical categories and about the similarly naive criticism of these categories.

f) Our discipline works under a tacit presupposition of *teleology*. We all know a book that is disreputable today, Treitschke's history of Germany in the nineteenth century.¹ In this book, Treitschke presented the glorious path of Prussian history, which led to the unity of the German Reich, ex-

cluding Austria. In so doing, Treitschke deployed a teleology that organized and oriented the wealth of his recorded references, like a magnet. The unity of the German Reich, excluding Austria, was the premise *ex post facto* under which he read his sources. In this, he openly admitted that his statements were conditioned by his position. And in the preface, he made clear that he intended to show that everything had to happen the way it did and that those who had not comprehended this yet could learn it from his book. Three theorems are contained in this bundle of statements:

1. The teleological principle as the regulating idea of his statements and as the organizing principle for the selection of sources;
2. Consciously admitted positionality; and
3. The historical-philosophical certainty with which Treitschke claimed to have history pure and simple on his side.

He thus wrote a history of victors who, on the basis of their own success, reproduce world history as the Last Judgment. These three theorems—knowing history to be on one's side, the teleological principle as a regulative idea of analyzing sources, and the historian's positionality—cannot be tackled as easily as someone who accuses Treitschke of bias or nationalism might believe.

If every historian remains rooted in his situation, he will be able to make only observations that are framed by his perspective. These, however, evoke final causes. A historian can hardly escape them, and if he disregards them he relinquishes the reflection that teaches him about what he is doing. The difficulty does not so much lie in the *final causality* deployed but in naively accepting it. It is possible to come up with as many causes as one wishes for any event that ever took place in the course of history. There is no single event that could not be explained causally. Whoever gets involved in causal explanations will always find reasons for what he wishes to demonstrate. In other words, causal derivations of events do not themselves contain any criteria for the correctness of the statements about them. Thus Treitschke, too, was able to come up with proofs for his theses. If one reads the same sources from different angles today, Treitschke's political position will be found to be outdated, but its theoretical premise, which triggered the causality he was searching for, will not. We must keep this reservation in mind when we seek to reject explanations of final causality in an ideological-critical way.

Any history, because it is *ex post facto*, is subject to final constraints. It is impossible to do without them. Yet one can escape the schema of causal addition and narrative arbitrariness only by introducing hypotheses that, for example, bring into play past possibilities. Put differently, perspectivism is tolerable only if it is not stripped of its hypothetical and, therefore, revisable character. Stated more concisely: everything can be justified, but not everything can be justified by anything. The question of which justifications are admissible and which are not is not only a matter of the sources at hand, but above all a matter of the hypotheses that make these sources speak. The relationship between the circumstances, the selection, and the interpretation of the sources can only be clarified by a theory of possible history and, therefore, a possible discipline of history.

Chladenius was probably the first to reflect upon *positionality* as a premise of our research. He wrote a theory of the discipline of history, which, although it was conceived before historicism, contains many ideas that surpass Droysen's *historics*. Because of its dry and didactic language, it has unfortunately not yet been republished, but it remains a treasury of insights untouched by historicism. Chladenius defined all historical statements as reductive statements about a past reality. "A narrative completely abstracted from one's own point of view is impossible." But Chladenius did not historically relativize point of view or regard the formation of judgments as subject to revision. Consequently, he believed that he could discern a reality congealed within past objects. Statements about such a reality were, in his opinion, however, necessarily subject to rejuvenation, given that no past totality could completely be reproduced. The expression "rejuvenated" is already conceived in temporal terms and is no longer spatial. For Chladenius, what is "young" is what is present, and the past is interrogated from this epistemological-formal perspective of progress. History becomes visible only through the lens of the present. Such a teleology dispenses with a criterion of direction that points toward the future, as it is sought within the horizon of the philosophy of history.

The third theorem that Treitschke brought into play, namely, having history on his side, is an ideological fiction. This fiction thrives on the category of *necessity*, which Treitschke tacitly introduces in order to represent as inevitable the course of German history to the point at which the German Reich excluded Austria. The determination of necessity hides a flat tautology, which is not only deployed by Treitschke but by any historian

who refers to it. Identifying an event as necessary amounts to a double statement about that event. Whether I say that something happened or whether I say that it happened by necessity is identical from an *ex post facto* perspective. Something did not happen more so only because it had to happen. By making a statement about an event and by adding that it had to have happened, I vindicate for this event a necessary causal chain—a necessity that in the end derives from the omnipotence of God, in whose place the historian is acting.

Put differently, the category of necessity continuously obscures the necessity of forming hypotheses, which alone can allow for causal chains. We can risk making statements of necessity insofar as we formulate them with reservations. Cogent reasons can be devised only within the framework of hypothetically introduced premises. This does not exclude the possibility that different ways of asking questions will bring into view completely different causes. Correctness in interpreting sources is not only assured by the source data but, first of all, by making the question concerning possible history theoretically evident.

Thus teleological questions and the questioner's positionality cannot be eliminated; rather, any statement about reality involving a claim of necessity is subject to our critique. This critique refers to temporal determinations: it is directed against the uniqueness and the unidirectionality of historical processes, which in some respect are a secularized derivative of providence, of a providence that for us remains hidden in the declaration of urgent necessity. A theory of periodization that is adequate to the complex historical reality requires multilayered statements.

g) This leads to the well-known discussion about (vulgar) Marxist *monocausality*, a discussion in which Western historians often congratulate themselves on their own superiority. The charge that history cannot be interpreted in a monocausal way, however, can easily be reversed. Whether I introduce one cause, two, five, or an infinite amount of causes says nothing at all about the quality of my historical reflections. A monocausal schema permits statements that are very reasonable from a hypothetical point of view. Let me call to mind the works of Schöffler; their insights often rest upon monocausal explanations—which is the very source of their fruitfulness and their surprising accuracy. When Marxists offer monocausal constructions—for example, when they indicate dependencies of the “super-structure” upon the “base structure”—this is a legitimate procedure of

hypothesis formation. The real objection that can be raised against Marxists is not to be found in monocausality as a possible historical category but, first, in the facts that they use this category naively (though precisely on this point they agree with many of our historians); and, second and more importantly, that they are often forced to formulate their statements upon command and are not allowed to question them critically. Properly seen, the objection against monocausality is an objection against blindness to hypotheses; on a different methodical level, it is also directed against any subjection to political directives. The reflection on positionality and the determination of goals is thus politicized and eludes scholarly verification. This touches on a tricky problem; everyone is familiar with the ambiguous ground on which, for example, Communist historiography operates as a discipline. Yet we must keep in mind, with regard to Marxist problematics, party-political ties and the compulsion both to change one's goals (when the situation changes) and to self-criticism. I come thus to my concluding section.

3. The Communist camp has the specific political advantage of a continuous reflection on the relationship between *theory and practice* in scholarly work. However valid objections against the control of historiographical guidelines by party politics in Marxist countries may be, every historiography does in fact perform a function within the public sphere.

Yet we must distinguish between the political *function* that a discipline serves and the particular political *implication* that it may or may not have. Thus the pure natural sciences do not have any political implications if judged by their subject matter: their results are universally communicable, and, taken by themselves, they are apolitical. That does not preclude the fact that the political function of these sciences—let me call to mind the utilization of nuclear physics or of biochemistry—can be far more influential than that of the humanities or the social sciences. The discipline of history, by contrast, always performs a political function, albeit a changing one. Depending on whether it is conducted as church, legal, or court history, whether it is political biography, universal history, or something else, its social place changes, as does the political function exercised by the results it achieves as an academic discipline. The political implications of historical research are not adequately determined in this way, however. They depend on the kinds of questions posed by a given line of research. However trivial it may sound, one must bear in mind that topics in music his-

tory, for instance, do not involve political questions in the same way as do topics in diplomatic history. Not even the ideological reduction of historical activity to political interests can substitute for the disciplinary evidence of a given method and the results thereby achieved. Political function and political implications are not enough. Those who blur the distinction transform history into lessons in ideology and deprive it of its critical task, a function it may (but need not) have as a discipline.

Turning away from our initial question about the theoretical premises that guide us on our path to the sources, the question of how dependent we are on forming hypotheses, let us take a path that leads from our sources back into the public sphere. Marxist reflection always takes this path into consideration, whereas in our profession it is followed for the most part naively or merely verbally invoked. Here, we take on the worn-out issue of didactics, which can certainly be discussed scientifically, in a way analogous to our specialized research. I assume that we can talk meaningfully about the didactics of history only if history as a discipline uncovers its own theoretical premises. The discontent with history as a school subject might then turn out to have the same roots as the lack of a capacity for theoretical reflection that characterizes our discipline. Stated positively, if we accept the compulsion to do theory, didactic consequences that "didactics" itself is unable to locate will impose themselves.

Although we have refined and mastered our philological-historical tools over a century and a half, historians all too easily let their path from the sources to the public sphere be mapped out for them by particular constellations of power. Precisely the great successes achieved on the positivistic level served to encourage an arrogance that has been especially susceptible to national ideologies.

The path from research into the sources back toward the public sphere has different ranges: in the university, it remains comparatively close to research; at school, it leads further away; at a greater distance, it reaches the public sphere of our political spaces of action; it finally extends to the public in the global sphere of addressees of historical statements.

Here we must remember that historical statements can reproduce past states of affairs only in a reductive or rejuvenated way, for it is impossible to restore the totality of the past, which is irrevocably gone. Strictly speaking, the question of "how it really was" can only be answered if one assumes that one does not formulate *res factae* but *res fictae*. If it is no longer possi-

ble to restore the past as such, then I am forced to acknowledge the fictive character of past actualities so as to be able to theoretically safeguard my historical statements. Any historical statement is a reduction if measured against the infinity of a past totality that is no longer accessible to us as such. In the vicinity of a naive-realistic naively realist theory of knowledge, any compulsion toward reduction is a compulsion to lie. However, I can dispense with lying once I know that the compulsion toward reduction inherently belongs to our discipline. In addition, this both involves a political implication and allows didactics to gain a legitimate place within the realm of the historical discipline. We must ask ourselves continually what history means, what it can be and what it is supposed to be for us today: at the university, at school, and in the public sphere. This is not to say that research activity ought to have its aims prescribed from the outside in political and functional terms, but we should always be aware of the specific political implications that our field of research does or does not have, and of the propositional form that we must develop accordingly. Then we can better define the political function that history has or ought to have on the basis of the discipline of history itself. It is important to dissolve the aporia of historicism—its adherents were convinced that one could not learn anything from histories any more, even though the discipline of history counted as teaching. For this reason, I would like to bring out four *practical consequences* of the previous considerations:

(a) The types of systematic questions concerning “historicity” mentioned at the beginning and the demand for a historics directly lead to today’s methodological dispute within the discipline of sociology. Methodologically, the compulsion to form hypotheses, once it has been articulated, moves the discipline of history closer to the social sciences in general—closer, that is, than has perhaps been recognized so far. In any case, it appears to me that the commonalities go so far as to suggest combining *social studies* (*Gemeinschaftskunde*) and *history lessons* (*Geschichtsunterricht*) in school.

(b) The supposed wealth of historical material and the difficulties of theoretical premises concerning it discussed above both suggest studying the discipline of history as a *single major*. This is not to say that minors are to be dispensed with. Rather, minors ought to be studied for the very reason that they offer different theoretical approaches, but as *subsidiary* and *complementary subjects*, which are of particular benefit to historical questions. Foreign languages are certainly subsidiary subjects of this kind, and so are linguistics,

law, and economics, or any other subjects that promote specialization within the subject area of history and, above all, widen the angle of vision.

For schools, this would mean that such subsidiary subjects could nonetheless be subjects for teaching. Why, for instance, should French be taught only by philologists but not—for a certain stretch—also by historians of French constitutional history or by experts on political or philosophical texts in the French language?

At the university level, all minors would accordingly be utilized in different ways, which would be subsidiary or complementary to the respective majors. Foreign languages for history majors would have to be taught differently to some degree; instead of remaining truncated majors (which they are), foreign language instruction would need to specifically thematize historical or sociological types of questions.

Conversely, history as a subsidiary subject for a student of linguistics ought not to be taught as merely a thinned-down extract from Plötz [a standard reference work for historians]. Bridges ought to be built in interdisciplinary tutorials and discussion sections. Only experiment can succeed here.

(c) A further practical consequence results from the theory of periodization alluded to above. Neither a course of study determined by chronological sequences, which lives by filling in their gaps, nor the triad of introductory seminars in ancient, medieval, and modern history, which is derived from a mythical schema, is methodologically cogent. Furthermore, thus far professorships have been organized in a way that stems from the humanistic myth of Cellarius, which is no guarantee of its correctness.

In addition, the purpose of a university degree required for the teaching profession must not be prescribed in political and functional terms—by reference to didactics—from the outside; rather, this purpose can only be defined anew by adhering to the necessity of theory formation in our discipline. So long as the still customary three introductory seminars differ only in terms of the areas of linear chronology studied and their respective means of analysis, their organization will remain implausible. The sequence of ancient, medieval, and modern history plus “contemporary history” is legitimated neither by the general historical-philological method that they share nor by a theory of different temporal levels. The necessity of forming hypotheses is also common to all three areas. In accordance with ongoing planning at Bielefeld University, let me therefore suggest a new *canon of undergraduate education*.

A first course ought to serve as an introduction into the historical-philological methodology that interprets sources from all time periods comparatively. Continual use of the same method would be conducive to identifying differences in source and temporal conditions in a particularly clear way.

A second course could be defined as a seminar on “analyzing problems” (Blumenberg). Here it would be important to develop a wealth of historical questions that cannot be derived from the sources directly; answering them would require that information and hypotheses from all areas of the social sciences be consulted.

It goes without saying that both introductory courses will need to be planned in conjunction; they could be merged in practice.

In a third—elective—introductory course, it would be important to acquire the knowledge base and the fundamental principles of a subject that is subsidiary or complementary to the discipline of history. This would be the place to prepare for future specialization in ancient and medieval history, for example, by studying Greek or Latin literature and linguistics. It would also be the place to begin studying other, auxiliary disciplines, depending on the main emphasis of one’s interests. Statistics, economics, or an introduction to jurisprudence might be recommended as subjects to complement modern history. Obviously there would be an infinite number of possible combinations. It remains crucial that the subsidiary or complementary subject contain its own theory and also its own systematics, and that it not be exclusively shaped by historical-philological methodology. The refraction of different questions constitutes the stimulation in this third introductory course. To me, it seems inevitable that such a program can only be fulfilled if the discipline of history is studied as the only major, if subsidiary subjects are also tested in oral examinations, and if they become subjects that can be taught in schools. Our theoretical considerations have thus led us quite informally to a new canon of undergraduate education that does not abolish the traditional topics of teaching but reconfigures them in a disciplinary and didactic way.

(d) A final conclusion results from didactic considerations themselves. It aims at what is often evoked as *exemplary teaching* and concerns the ways in which such teaching can be accomplished academically and in terms of personnel policies. Exemplary teaching concerns not only the issue of developing examples for past situations, conditions, or epochs but also the task

of making teaching exemplary for us as well. In order to grasp the double-sidedness of exempla—namely, being exemplary both for something and for us, we need to go back before German Idealism, which has distorted exemplarity in a philosophical-historical way.

The question of meaningful selection continues to impose itself. Examples of social-historical and structural-historical phenomena for teaching cannot be sought on a short-term basis. Here, schools and universities must complement each other. It is important to stimulate the interaction between schools and universities, and it appears to me that no one is more suited for this than the secondary-school teacher who is teaching in a university. These schoolteachers ought not to form a nonprofessorial teaching staff, which is the worst of all possible solutions. Rather, such teachers really ought to be able to come from schools and also return there or, upon proof of their academic qualifications, be able to change over altogether to university teaching or to adult education in general. Secondary-school teachers at universities ought to do both at the same time: teach school at half load and teach at the university by conducting two- to four-hour seminars. Disciplinary and didactic questions could then be blended together. Thus, an osmosis between schools and universities would be established, which would prevent a new, negative type of professorship from forming among the nonprofessorial teaching staff when old full professors retire. The real threat is not the democracy of secondary-school teachers, but the democracy of secondary-school teachers already looming behind plans for an integrated university (*Gesamthochschule*). Secondary-school teachers who alternate between teaching at a university and teaching school certainly produce conflicts in social status and prestige, but it seems more important to me that we face difficulties where they actually emerge instead of insisting on total solutions whose very wording is suspicious.

Translated by Kerstin Behnke



Social History and Conceptual History

Anyone who is concerned with history—whatever this may be—and defines it as social history is obviously delimiting his topic. Anyone who specifies history as conceptual history is obviously doing the same. Nevertheless, the two definitions are not the usual delimitation of special histories within a general history. The economic history of England, for example, or the diplomatic history of the early modern age or the church history of the West are special topics of such a kind, predetermined as worthy of investigation via their subject matter, time period, and region. In such cases, we are dealing with special aspects of general history.

Social history and conceptual history are different. On the basis of their theoretical self-justification, they make a general claim, one that can be extended and applied to all special histories. All history deals with intersubjective relationships, with forms of sociability or with social stratifications; therefore, the characterization of history as social history makes an enduring, irrefutable, and, so to speak, anthropological claim that lies concealed behind any form of historiography. And which history would not have to be comprehended as such before it congeals into history? Investigating concepts and their linguistic history is as much a part of the minimal condition for recognizing history as is the definition of history as having to do with human society.

Historical Retrospective

Both social history and conceptual history have existed as explicit modes of questioning since the Enlightenment and the discovery of the historical world it included, that is, since the time when previous social formations became porous and linguistic reflection also came under pressure to change from a history that was being experienced and articulated as something new. Anyone who follows the history of historical reflection and historical representation since then encounters both approaches again and again, whether they explicate one another, as in Vico, Rousseau, and Herder, or whether they exist in isolation from one another.

The claim to reduce all historical utterances concerning life and all changes in them to social conditions and to derive them from such conditions was asserted from the time of the Enlightenment philosophies of history up to Comte and the young Marx. Such claims were followed by histories that, methodologically speaking, employed a more positivistic approach: from histories of society and civilization, to the cultural and folk histories of the nineteenth century, up to regional histories that encompassed all aspects of life, from Möser to Gregorovius to Lamprecht, their synthetic achievement can aptly be called social-historical.

By contrast, since the eighteenth century there have also been deliberately thematized conceptual histories (*Begriffsgeschichten*)¹—the term apparently derives from Hegel—which have retained a permanent place in histories of language and in historical lexicography. Of course, they were thematized by disciplines that proceeded in a historical-philological manner and needed to secure their sources via hermeneutic questioning. Any translation into one's own present implies a conceptual history; Rudolf Eucken has demonstrated its methodological inevitability in an exemplary fashion for the humanities and all the social sciences in his *Geschichte der philosophischen Terminologie*.²

In practical research, reciprocal references that bring together social-historical analyses or analyses of constitutional history together with questions of conceptual history are ubiquitous. Their mutual connection, more or less reflected upon, has always been present in the disciplines concerned with antiquity and in research on the Middle Ages: especially where minimal sources are available, no fact can be recognized without taking into ac-

count the manner of its former and present conceptual assimilation. Obviously, the reciprocal interlacing of social and conceptual history was systematically explored only in the 1930s; we are reminded of Walter Schlesinger and, above all, of Otto Brunner. In neighboring fields, Erich Rothacker was a similar force in philosophy, as was Carl Schmitt in jurisprudence and Jost Trier in linguistics.

In the political aspects of research, social and conceptual history were conjoined against two very different tendencies, both dominant in the 1920s. On the one hand, there was a parting with concepts concerning the history of ideas and of spirit (*ideen- und geistesgeschichtliche*), which were pursued outside a concrete sociopolitical context—for their own sakes, as it were. On the other hand, history ceased to be regarded as primarily a political history of events, and instead its longer-lasting presuppositions were investigated.

As Otto Brunner emphasized in the second edition of *Land und Herrschaft*,³ he wanted “to ask about the concrete presuppositions of medieval politics, without, however, representing it itself.” He sought to focus on long-term structures of social conditionality (*Verfaßtheit*) and changes in these—which were never merely of the moment—doing so by thematizing particular linguistic self-articulations of social groups, associations, or strata and the history of their interpretation. It is no accident that the *Annales*, which emerged from an analogous research interest, established in 1930 the rubric “Things and Words.” For Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch, linguistic analysis was an integral part of social-historical research. In Germany, Gunther Ipsen did pathbreaking work in modern history by complementing his social-historical, specifically demographic investigations with linguistic research. All these ideas were taken up by Werner Conze when he founded the Workshop for Modern Social History in 1956–57.⁴ Thanks to Conze’s initiative, conjoining social-historical and conceptual-historical questions became one of its enduring challenges, as did the differential determination between them, which will be the topic of the following pages.

The Impossibility of an “Histoire Totale”

There is no history without societal formations and the concepts by which they define and seek to meet their challenges, whether reflexively or

self-reflexively; without them, it is impossible to experience and to interpret history, to represent or to recount it. In this sense, society and language belong to the metahistorical premises without which *Geschichte* and *Historie* are unthinkable. Social-historical and conceptual-historical theories, questions, and methods thus refer to all possible areas within the discipline of history. Thus, too, the wish to conceive a "total history" occasionally sneaks in. Though for pragmatic reasons the empirical investigations of social or conceptual historians concern limited topics, this self-limitation does not lessen the claim to generality; it follows from a theory of possible history, which must presuppose society and language.

Social-historical and conceptual-historical approaches necessarily proceed in an interdisciplinary fashion, because they work within specializations that are methodologically mandated. It does not follow from this, however, that their theoretical claim to generality could be posited as absolute or total. It is true that they operate under the constraint of having to presuppose the totality of societal relations, as well as their linguistic articulations and systems of interpretations. But the formally irrefutable premise that all history has to do with society and language does not allow the farther-reaching conclusion that it would be possible, so far as content is concerned, to write a "total history" or even to conceive it.

As numerous and plausible as the empirical objections against a total history are, an objection against its possibility follows from the very attempt to make it conceivable. The *totum* of a social history and the *totum* of a linguistic history can never be completely projected onto one another. Even if we make the empirically unrealizable assumption that both areas could be thematized as a finitely delimited totality, there would remain an unbridgeable difference between any social history and the history of comprehending it.

Linguistic comprehension does not catch up with what takes place or what actually was the case, nor does anything occur without already being changed by its linguistic assimilation. Social history (*Sozialgeschichte oder Gesellschaftsgeschichte*) and conceptual history stand in a reciprocal, historically necessitated tension that can never be canceled out. What you do will only be told to you by the following day; and what you say becomes an event by eluding you. What occurs interpersonally or socially and what is said during that event or about it gives rise to a constantly changing difference that renders any *histoire totale* impossible. History takes place in

the anticipation of incompleteness; any interpretation that is adequate to it therefore must dispense with totality.

Characteristically, historical time again and again reproduces the tension between society and its transformation, on the one hand, and its linguistic processing and assimilation, on the other. Any history lives by this tension. Social relations, conflicts, their solutions, and their changing presuppositions are never congruent with the linguistic articulations by which societies act, comprehend, interpret, change, and reform themselves. This thesis can be tested on two counts: history occurring *in actu*, and history that has happened and is past.

History, Speech, and Writing As They Occur

When social history and conceptual history are referred to each other, the differential determination between them relativizes the claim of each to generality. History neither becomes resolved in the mode of comprehending it, nor is it conceivable without such comprehension.

The connection between everyday events is pregiven in an undifferentiated way, for humans, being endowed with language, are co-originary with their societal existence. How can this relation be determined? As they occur, individual events depend on linguistic facilitation; this is comparatively clear. No social activity, no political deal, and no economic trade is possible without accounting, without planning discussions, without public debates or secret talks, without commands—and obedience—without the consensus of those involved and the articulated dissent of conflicting parties. Any everyday history in its daily course is dependent on language in action, on talking and speaking, just as no love story is conceivable without at least three words—you, I, we. Any societal event in its manifold connections is based on advance communicative work and on the work of linguistic mediation. Institutions and organizations, from the smallest association to the United Nations, must depend on them, whether in oral or in written form.

As self-evident as this observation may be, it is equally self-evident that it must be qualified. What actually takes place is, obviously, more than the linguistic articulation that has led to the event or that interprets it. The command, the cooperative resolution, or the elemental cry to kill is not identical with the act of killing itself. Lovers' figures of speech are not re-

solved in the love that two people experience. The written rules of organization or their spoken modes of performance are not identical with an organization's acts.

There is always a difference between a history as it takes place and its linguistic facilitation. No speech act is itself the action that it helps prepare, trigger, and enact. Admittedly, a word often triggers irrevocable consequences; think of the Führer's command to invade Poland, to mention a striking example. But precisely in this case the relation becomes clear. A history does not happen without speaking, but it is never identical with it, it cannot be reduced to it.

For that reason, there must be further advance work and performative modes beyond spoken language in order for events to be possible. There is an area of semiotics that transcends language. Think of bodily gestures in which language communicates only in an encoded form; of magical rituals, including the theology of sacrifice, which has its historical place not in the word but on the cross; of modes of group behavior habituated by symbols or by modern traffic signs. All are matters of a sign language that is comprehensible without words. All of the signals mentioned can be verbalized. They can be reduced to language, but it is particular to them that one has to do without spoken language in order to trigger or control appropriate actions, attitudes, or modes of behavior through them. Let me call to mind further extralinguistic preconditions: spatial nearness or distance; distances that either harbor or delay conflict; temporal differences between age groups within a generation or due to the bipolarity of the sexes. All these differences contain in themselves events, conflicts, and reconciliations that are made possible prelinguistically, even if they can, but do not have to, take place by virtue of linguistic articulation.

There are thus extralinguistic, prelinguistic, and postlinguistic elements in all actions that lead to a history. They are closely attached to the elementary geographical, biological, and zoological conditions that, via the human constitution, all have an effect on societal events. Birth, love, and death; eating, hunger, misery, and diseases; perhaps happiness, but in any event robbery, victory, killing, and defeat—all are also elements and performative modes of human history, reaching from the everyday to the identification of political power structures. Their extralinguistic pre-given data are difficult to deny.

Certainly, the analytic distinctions made here can hardly be compre-

hended in the concrete context of the actions that constitute events. All prelinguistic pre-given data are linguistically recovered by human beings and are mediated in concrete conversation through their doings and sufferings. The spoken language or the writing that is read, the particular conversation that is effective—or overheard—intertwine in the topical performance of what happens to form an event that is always composed of extralinguistic and linguistic elements of action. Even if conversation ceases, linguistic pre-knowledge remains present—it is inherent in human beings and enables them to communicate with those confronting them, be they human beings or things, products, plants, or animals.

The more highly aggregated the human units of action—for instance, in modern processes of labor and their economic interconnections, or in the increasingly complex political spaces of action—the more important conditions of linguistic communication become for maintaining the ability to act. Linguistic mediation extends from the audible range of a voice through communication devices—writing, the printing press, the telephone, and broadcasting to the screen of a television set or a data processor—including the institutions of their modes of transmission, from the postman and print media to the news satellite, including the consequences that intervene in any linguistic codification. People have always tried either to fix the range of spoken language permanently or to expand and accelerate it so as to anticipate, trigger, or control events. This comment may suffice to demonstrate the intertwining of any social history and any conceptual history in their respective enactment of speaking and acting.

Spoken words, writing that is read, or events that take place cannot be separated *in actu* but can only be divided analytically. Someone who is overwhelmed by a speech will experience this not only linguistically but all over his body, and someone who is being silenced through an action will experience his dependence on language all the more, so as to be able to move again. This personal interrelation of speech and action can be transferred to all levels of the social units of action, which are becoming increasingly complex. The interrelation between “speech acts” and “actual” happenings ranges from individual instances of speaking and acting to the multiple social interrelations through which events, in all their interconnections, occur. Despite all historical variation, this finding constitutes any history that occurs, and it has considerable effects on the representation of past histories, especially on the difference between social history and conceptual history.

Represented History and Its Linguistic Sources

The empirical connection between action and speech, acting and speaking, as demonstrated so far, breaks up as soon as we shift our view back from the history occurring *in eventu* to past history, with which the professional historian deals *ex eventu*. The analytic separation between an extralinguistic and a linguistic level of action gains the status of an anthropological pre-given datum, without which no historical experience can be transferred into everyday or academic statements at all. What has happened, and has happened beyond my own experience, is something that I can experience merely by way of speech or writing. Even if language may—in part—have been only a secondary factor in the enactment of doings and sufferings, as soon as an event has become past, language becomes the primary factor without which no recollection and no scientific transposition of this recollection is possible. The anthropological primacy of language for the representation of past history thus gains an epistemological status, for it must be decided in language what in past history was necessitated by language and what was not.

In anthropological terms, any “history” constitutes itself through oral and written communication between generations that live together and convey their own respective experiences to one another. Only when, with the passing of older generations, the orally conveyed space of recollection melts away, does writing become the primary carrier of historical imparting. It is true that numerous extralinguistic remainders indicate past events and conditions: ruins left over from catastrophes; coins that are evidence of economic organization; buildings that bespeak communities, political rule, and services; streets that bespeak trade or war; agricultural landscapes that testify to age-long labor; monuments that testify to victory or death; weapons that indicate struggle; tools that indicate invention and use. These are all “relics” or “findings”—or images—that can testify to everything at the same time. Everything is processed by special historical disciplines. Certainly, what “actually” may have taken place can, beyond all hypotheses, only be guaranteed by oral and written records, that is, by linguistic evidence. Only at the linguistic sources does the path divide between what is to count as “linguistic” and what is to count as “actual” in the events of the past. Under this aspect, genres and their differentiations can be related anew to one another.

What belonged together, and how it did so, *in eventu* can only be de-

terminated by linguistic evidence *post eventum*; depending on how these linguistic records, this oral or written tradition, are handled, the most different genres move more closely together and others move apart.

Myths, fairy tales, dramas, epics, and novels all presuppose and thematize the original connection between speech and action, between suffering, speaking, and being silent. Only this making present of history as it occurs establishes a meaning that remains worthy of memory. All histories do just this, using true and fictitious utterances to do justice to events worth remembering or retrieving words congealed into writing that testify to the combination of speaking and acting.

Unmistakable situations bring about their own changes; behind them, something like “destiny” can appear. It remains a challenge for any self-interpretation and interpretation of the world to find them out and hand them down. In a more or less accomplished fashion, all memoirs and biographies belong to this genre; in the English language, they emphasize the interrelation between language and life—“Life and Letters.” In addition, all histories that follow events in their immanent dynamics belong here. “He said this and did that; she said that and did something else; something surprising, something new followed from it that changed everything”—many works are structured according to this formalized schema, especially those, like histories of political events or of diplomacy, that make it possible to construct *in actu* the course of events by virtue of the state of the sources. Viewed as linguistic achievements, these histories enter into a series that ranges from myths to novels.⁵ Only when they claim academic status do they depend on the authenticity—which needs to be checked—of the linguistic sources; these sources need to vouch for the interrelation of speech acts and actions, an interrelation that previously had to be presupposed.

What can be distinguished analytically, the prelinguistic from the linguistic, is brought together again “in analogy to experience” thanks to the work of language: it is the fiction of the (f)actual. Viewed in retrospect, what has actually taken place is only real in the medium of linguistic fiction. In contrast to the speech that acts in history as it takes place, language thus gains an epistemological primacy that urges it continuously to make decisions about the relationship between language and action.

When submitted to this alternative, some genres articulate themselves in a very one-sided way. There are annals, which only register results—namely, what happened, but not how it came to happen. There are hand-

books and “narrative” works of history, which concern actions, successes, and failures, but not the words or utterances that led to them, only that great men act, or that highly stylized subjects of action become active in a speechless fashion, as it were: states or dynasties, churches or sects, classes or parties, or whatever else is hypostasized as a unit of action. Rarely, however, are linguistic patterns of identification investigated; without them, such units of action would not be able to act at all. Even where spoken speech or its written equivalents are included in the representation, linguistic evidence comes under ideological suspicion or is read only instrumentally with pre-given interests and evil intentions in mind.

Even investigations made from the perspective of the history of language, which primarily thematize the linguistic evidence itself, tend to refer it to a “real” history that must first itself be linguistically constituted. But the methodological difficulties of referring speaking and language to social conditions and changes, to which sociolinguistics in particular is exposed, cling to the aporia of having to constitute linguistically the field of objects of which they are about to speak, an aporia that is shared by all historians.

For that reason, the other extreme will also be found in the future: editing the linguistic sources as such, the written remains of formerly spoken or written utterances. The accident of tradition will then have thematized the difference between extralinguistic and linguistic action. And everywhere, it is the task of the good commentator to track down the sense of the document that could not be found at all without the differential determination of speech and facts.

Thus we have established three genres, which, given the alternative of speech act and actual act (*Tathandlung*) either refer to each other or, in the extreme case, are thematized separately. Epistemologically, a double task always falls upon language: it refers to the extralinguistic connections of events as well as—by doing so—to itself. Conceived historically, it is always self-reflexive.

Event and Structure—Speaking and Language

Although we have so far spoken only about history as it occurs and history as it has occurred, asking how speech and action relate to each other *in actu*, in a synchronic section, as it were, the question expands as soon as diachrony is thematized as well. Here, as in the relation of speaking and

acting in the enactment of events, synchrony and diachrony cannot be separated empirically. The conditions and determinants that, in a temporal gradation of various depths, reach from the “past” into the present intervene in particular events just as agents “simultaneously” act on the basis of their respective outlines of the future. Any synchrony is *eo ipso* at the same time diachronic. *In actu*, all temporal dimensions are always intertwined, and it would contradict experience to define the “present” as, for instance, one of those moments that accumulate from the past into the future—or, conversely, that slip as intangible points of transition from the future into the past. In a purely rhetorical manner, all history could be defined as a permanent present in which past and future are contained—or as the continuous intertwining of past and future that makes any present constantly disappear. If we focus on synchrony, history deteriorates into a pure space of consciousness in which all temporal dimensions are contained at once, whereas if we focus on diachrony, the active presence of human beings would, historically speaking, have no space of action. This thought experiment is designed only to refer to the fact that the differential determination between synchrony and diachrony, introduced by Saussure, can everywhere be analytically of help without being able to do justice to the complexity of the temporal interwindings in the history that is taking place.

With these reservations, we shall use the analytic categories of synchrony, which aims at the topical presentness of events, and diachrony, which aims at the temporal dimension of depth that is also contained in any topical event. Many presuppositions have a long-term or a medium-range effect—as well as a short-term one—on a history that is taking place. They delimit the alternatives of action by making possible or setting free only certain alternatives.

Characteristically, social history and conceptual history both, in ways however different, theoretically presuppose this connection. It is the link between synchronic events and diachronic structures that can be investigated historically. An analogous connection exists between spoken speech, synchronically, and the diachronically pregiven language that always takes effect in a conceptual-historical way. What happens is always unique and new, but never so new that social conditions, which are pregiven over the long term, will not have made possible each unique event. A new concept may be coined to articulate experiences or expectations that never existed before. But it can never be too new not to have existed virtually as a seed

in the pregiven language and not to have received meaning from its inherited linguistic context. The two lines of research thus broaden the indispensable diachronic dimensions, variously defined, of interplay between speaking and acting within which events occur, and without which history is neither possible nor conceivable.

A series of examples can elucidate this. Marriage is an institution that, regardless of its prelinguistic biological implications, is a cultural phenomenon with numerous variants across the history of humanity. Since it is a form of sociality between two or more human beings of different genders, marriage belongs among genuinely social-historical research topics. At the same time, obviously one can talk about it in a social-historical manner only when written sources inform us about various kinds of marriages and the ways in which they have been conceptualized.

Two methodological approaches can be constructed, in the simplified form of a model. One is primarily directed at events, at acts of speech, writing, and action; the other is primarily directed at diachronic presuppositions and their long-term changes. The latter approach seeks to find social structures and their linguistic equivalents.

1. This way, an individual event can be thematized: for instance, the marriage ceremony of a ruler, about which dynastic sources offer us ample information, including the political motives that were in play, the nature of the contractual conditions, the kind of dowry that was negotiated, the way in which the ceremonies were organized, and suchlike. The course of this marriage can also be reconstructed and narrated anew, including the sequence of events, up to such terrible consequences as when, for instance, following the death of a spouse, the contractually determined inheritance led to a war of succession. Today an analogous, concrete history of a marriage can also be reconstructed from the circle of people making up its sub-histories—an exciting topic in the history of the everyday, which uses numerous sources that have not been deployed before. Both concern unique, individual histories, which may contain some unparalleled suspense between happiness and misery, and which both remain embedded in their religious, social, and political contexts.

2. Social history and conceptual history cannot manage without such individual cases, but it is not their primary interest to investigate them. To characterize the second methodological approach—again, in a model-like simplification—both focus on the long-term conditions that are effective

diachronically and that make possible each individual case. Both inquire into the long-term occurrences that can be derived from the sum of individual cases. Put differently, they inquire into the pregiven linguistic conditions under which such structures have entered into social consciousness and under which they have been comprehended and also changed.

Let us first follow specifically social-historical and then specifically conceptual-historical modes of procedure.

The synchrony of individual marriage ceremonies and of the speeches and letters exchanged in connection with them is not omitted by social history. Rather, it is embraced diachronically. Thus, for example, numbers of weddings can be statistically ascertained from the perspective of social-historical questions so as to prove population increases for each social stratum. Questions to be asked include: When did the number of weddings expand beyond the number of the houses and farms pregiven by estates that had a specified amount of food? How can the number of weddings be related to wage and price graphs, to good and bad harvests, so as to make it possible to weigh the economic and natural factors relating to the reproduction of the population? How can numbers of marital and extramarital births be related to each other so as to measure social situations of conflict? How do numbers of births and deaths of children, mothers, and fathers relate to each other, so as to explain long-term changes in "typical" married life? How does the graph of divorces run, allowing us to draw conclusions about the typical marriage? All these questions, which have been singled out almost at random, have in common that they help construct "actual" long-term occurrences that are not directly contained as such in the sources.

Laborious preparatory work must be done to render source statements comparable in order to aggregate series of numbers from them, and systematic reflection is needed, both beforehand and afterwards, to interpret the aggregated series of data. Longer-term structural statements cannot be derived directly from the linguistic sources. The sum of the concrete individual cases that occur synchronically and that are verified is itself mute and unable to "verify" long-term, medium-range, or in any way diachronic structures. In order to derive permanent statements from past history, preparatory theoretical work and the employment of a subject-specific disciplinary terminology are necessary. These alone enable one to track connections and interrelations that could not yet have been perceptible to the people affected by them.

What has “actually”—and not linguistically—occurred in history in the long term remains an academic construction, viewed in social-historical terms; evidence for it depends on the plausibility of the underlying theory. Any theoretically based statement must submit to methodological control by the sources in order to claim past actuality, but the reality of long-term factors cannot be sufficiently justified on the basis of individual sources. For that reason, ideal types can be formed, following Max Weber, for instance; they combine various criteria of describing reality in such a way that the connections that are to be presupposed can be interpreted with consistency. To take a case from our series of examples, it is possible to develop typical marriage and family trajectories for peasants and those below them, together with the average number of births and deaths, in correlation with wage and price series or with the sequence of crop failures, working hours, and the tax burden, to determine how marriage and family trajectories at the peasant level can be distinguished from those at lower levels, and how both changed in the transition from the preindustrial age to the industrial age.

The factors in individual cases, not the cases themselves, can then be structured in such a way that the economic, political, and natural presuppositions—depending on the importance of the wage and price structure, the tax burden, or harvest results—become understandable for a marriage typical of a certain social stratum. Questions to be asked are: Which factors are homogeneous and for what period of time? When are they dominant and when recessive? The answers make it possible to determine time limits, periods, or thresholds of epochs, according to which the history of peasant marriages and of those below the peasant level can be organized diachronically.

So far our series of examples has been consciously selected for clusters of factors that allow primarily extralinguistic series of events to be structured diachronically and to be related to each other. Establishing them presupposes a social-historical theory. Aided by a subject-specific terminology (here that of demography, economics, and finance), it permits a determination of permanence and change that cannot be found in the sources as such. The theoretical claim thus grows in proportion with the distance it must keep from any “self-proclamation” of the sources so as to construct long-duration limits or typical societal forms.

Certainly, quite different clusters of factors than those mentioned so far also enter into the history of marriages posited as “typical.” Such factors cannot be investigated without an interpretation of their linguistic self-

articulation. We thus arrive at the conceptual-historical procedures required to distinguish between topical speech and its linguistic pregiven data, a distinction analogous to that between event and structure.

Theology and religion, law, custom, and tradition each posit the framework conditions for any concrete marriage that antedate the individual case diachronically and that generally outlast it. Altogether, institutionalized rules and patterns of interpretation establish and delimit the *lebensraum* of a marriage. In this way, “extralinguistic” patterns of behavior are also determined, but language remains the primary instance of mediation.

A marriage can neither be entered into nor conducted without certain linguistically articulated pregiven conditions (although their number and stringency are decreasing). These range from traditions to legal acts to sermons, from magic to the sacraments to metaphysics. What therefore needs to be investigated are the kinds of texts, of various social classifications, in which particular marriages have been conceptualized. These texts may have come into existence spontaneously, like diaries, letters, or newspaper reports, or, at the other extreme, they may have been formulated with a normative intent, as were theological treatises or juridical codifications and their interpretations. In all cases, language-bound traditions diachronically establish the life sphere of a possible marriage. And when changes become apparent, they do so only when the notion of marriage has been conceptualized anew.

The theological interpretation of marriage as an indissoluble institution ordained by God is dominant right into the eighteenth century; its main purpose is to preserve and propagate the human race. Depending on the rules that determined the prerogatives of particular social groups, a marriage was authorized only when the economic basis of the home was sufficient to feed and bring up children and to guarantee mutual spousal support. Thus numerous people were legally excluded from the prospect of marrying. As the nucleus of the home, marriage remained embedded within estate prerogatives. This changed in the wake of the Enlightenment, which in a new departure, dealt with marriage in the *Allgemeines Landrecht* in terms of contractual law. The economic tie was loosened, and the freedom of the spouses as individuals was so much expanded that divorce—which had been theologically prohibited—became permissible. The common law did not give up the theological determinations and those pertaining to estate prerogatives, but the concept of marriage—and this can

only be registered by way of a conceptual history—shifted decisively in favor of greater freedom and self-determination for both spouses.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, we finally find an entirely new concept of marriage. Theological justification is replaced by an anthropological self-justification; the institution of marriage is divested of its legal framework so as to give space to the moral self-realization of two loving people. The Brockhaus of 1820 emphatically celebrates this postulated autonomy and innovatively conceptualizes it as a marriage of love. With this, marriage loses its previous primary purpose of begetting children; the economic tie is cut; and Bluntschli later goes so far as to declare a marriage without love to be immoral. As such, it comes under the obligation of being dissolved.⁶

We have thus sketched out three conceptual-historical stages; each has structured the inherited normative economy of argumentation in different ways and innovatively altered its decisive points. Seen in terms of linguistic history, common law and romantic-liberal conceptual formations both had the character of an event. They affected the entire linguistic structure on whose basis marriages could be conceived. It was not that diachronically pre-given language as a whole had changed, but its semantics and a new linguistic pragmatics had been set free.

One cannot derive from the conceptual-historical procedure any history of the actual wedding ceremonies and marriages that may have occurred alongside this linguistic self-interpretation. The economic constraints stressed by the social-historical viewpoint continue to remain in force to restrict certain marriages, to make them more difficult, and to weigh them down. Even if the legal barriers were lowered, social pressures continued to remain in effect so as not to turn marriage for love into empirically the only, normal case. Certainly, much could be said in favor of the hypothesis that, in a case of temporal anticipation, as it were, the concept of the love marriage, once it was developed, found prospects for its realization that improved in the long term. Conversely, it cannot be denied that already before the romantic conceptual formation of the love marriage, love as an anthropologically pre-given datum had entered even into marriages that, being defined by estate prerogatives, do not mention it.

What follows, for determining the relationship between social history and conceptual history, is that they need each other and relate to each other, yet cannot ever be made to coincide. What, in the long term, was “actu-

ally" effective and did change cannot be completely derived from sources handed down in written form. That requires preparatory theoretical and terminological work. Yet what can be demonstrated, from the written records, as conceptual history involves the linguistically delimited space of experience and testifies to innovative ventures that might have registered or initiated new experiences. This, however, does not permit conclusions about an actual history. The difference between acting and speaking, which we have documented with reference to history as it takes place, also in retrospect prevents social "reality" from ever converging with history in its linguistic articulation. Even if speech acts and actual acts (*Tathandlungen*) remain intertwined in a synchronic section (which is itself an abstraction), diachronic change, which remains a theoretical construct, does not take place in the same temporal rhythms or temporal series with regard to "real history" and conceptual history. Reality might have changed long before the change was conceptualized, and concepts might likewise have been formed to set free new realities.

Yet there is an analogy between social history and conceptual history, to which I will refer in closing. What, in each case, takes place as unique in history as it occurs is possible only because presupposed conditions repeat themselves with a longer-term regularity. A wedding ceremony may be subjectively unique, but repeatable structures express themselves in it. The economic conditions of a wedding ceremony depend on harvest results, which vary every year, or on longer-term economic changes, or on the tax burden that disrupts planned budgets every month or every year (apart from the regular services required of the peasant population). All these presuppositions are effective only by virtue of regular, more or less steady repetition. The same is true for the social implications of a marriage ceremony, which can only be grasped in a specifically linguistic way. The pregiven data of traditions, of the legal setting and perhaps of theological interpretation—all these institutional bonds are only effective *in actu* by repeating themselves periodically. They change only slowly, but their structures of repetition do not break as a result. What is called "long duration" is only historically effective if the time of the events, unique in each case, contains repeatable structures whose speeds of transformation are different from those of the events themselves. The topic of all social history is contained in this interrelation, which is only insufficiently defined by "synchrony" and "diachrony."

The interrelation between topical speech and pregiven language is to

be determined in an analogous, but not homogeneous fashion. When a concept, for instance that of "marriage," is used, experiences of marriage, which have a long-term effect and which have entered into the concept at and as its foundation, are linguistically stored in it. And the linguistic context, which is also pregiven, regulates the range of its semantic content. With any topical use of the word *marriage*, the linguistically determined pregiven data that structure its sense and its understanding repeat themselves. Here, too, linguistic structures of repetition are set free, yet also delimit the scope of speech. And any conceptual change that becomes a linguistic event occurs in the act of semantic and pragmatic innovation, which makes it possible to comprehend what is old in a different way and to understand in any way what is new.

Social history and conceptual history have different speeds of transformation and are based in distinguishable structures of repetition. Therefore, the academic terminology of social history remains dependent on the history of concepts, so as to access linguistically stored experience. And equally, conceptual history remains dependent on the results of social history, so as to keep in view the difference between vanished reality and its linguistic evidence, which can never be bridged.

Translated by Kerstin Behnke



Three *bürgerliche* Worlds?

PRELIMINARY THEORETICAL-HISTORICAL REMARKS

ON THE COMPARATIVE SEMANTICS OF CIVIL SOCIETY

IN GERMANY, ENGLAND, AND FRANCE

Whoever uses the term “bourgeoisie” (*Bürgertum*), is thinking of a modern social formation whose origin seems to be clearly in the French and the Industrial revolutions.¹ Whoever speaks of “civil society” (*bürgerliche Gesellschaft*) may come to the same finding but proceeds on the shaky ground of a millennial tradition. For *bürgerliche Gesellschaft*, *société civile*, or civil society are etymologically translations from the Latin. They refer to the Roman *societas civilis* which, for its part, had its terminological model in the *koinōnia politikē* of the Greeks. Purely etymologically, we are thus facing a finding of astounding continuity, and what Aristotle or Cicero said about “civil society” is, then, in no way entirely outdated. For contained in the etymology are the earlier conceptions of a free political self-organization that cannot be erased from the European experience. Thus, as a recallable meaning, the idea that citizens (*die Bürger*) can or should rule over themselves was at no time eliminated from the concept of “civil society.” In the theoretical definition of the *cives* of a *societas civilis*, the political self-definition of those who exercise power as free citizens was always emphasized, be it over themselves, over others, or in an alternating fashion, as in the case of democracy, such that ruler and ruled theoretically overlap. Even though they have been enriched or contested over and over again, there are normative elements that continue to endure, at least in the theoretical history of civil society in Europe, regardless of changing political and social situations. That a citizen could only be someone who held political responsibility (be it in

a community or city, in an estate, in a territory or state, or as the prince) and that a citizen could only be someone who exerted power (be it over oneself or over others or alternately with others): in this formal generality, the meaning—derived from constitution of the Greek polis—of a *politēs*, a *civis*, a citizen, a *citoyen*, or indeed a *Bürger* is never lost. To this extent, *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* (civil society) and its equivalents are as traditional as they are modern.

Whoever speaks of modern civil society and simply calls it "civil society," seemingly tied to the present day, cannot dispense with the traditional meanings of this concept. Thus the so-called rule of law or the sociologically high assessment of the stabilizing roles played by the middle strata (*Mittelschichten*) for a social existence belongs to Aristotle's principles. They surface again and again behind all historical transformations in characterizing a civil society. Something similar goes for the conserving function of the moderately rich, or the mediating task of the nobility between the people and the ruler, or the similar mediating task of the middle estates between the nobility and the lower strata (*Unterschichten*): such determinations of position could always call upon Aristotle.

However, the concepts of *Bürger* and *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* are not just characterized by the fact that they preserved their normative content over the long term and kept it constantly available; on the contrary, the constructions of the concept also referred over and over again to unique situations. These situations concerned the ways in which concrete understandings were comprehended linguistically by the particular concept. In conformity with his experience, Aristotle always let his *koinōnia politikē* rest upon slaves and metics who were, by nature, not entitled to civil rights. Work was not a qualifying criterion for participation in political power, quite in contrast to modernity, or more precisely, to modernity at least since Locke defined work as a prerequisite of property and property as a prerequisite of political rights.

Three epochal stages can be cited which transformed and enriched the concept of civil society beyond the initial local community, or even dissolved its specifically urban-bourgeois (*stadtbürgerliche*) components. From the first century B.C., Roman rights of citizenship were increasingly expanded, finally extending—in 212 A.D.—to all the free inhabitants of Imperial Rome. Thus a double citizenship became possible, that of the regional community and that of the general political formation, something

which, seen structurally, could always repeat itself thereafter. Against this background, Stoic teachings gained a wider sense, embracing not only all the citizens but all human beings as members of a *societas humana*.²

A new, epochal shift in meaning brought about by the Augustinian doctrine of two *civitates* was not possible without the influence of Stoic teachings on a narrower civil society and a broader human society. The citizenry of the *civitas dei* was to include every human being, irrespective of gender, age, race, or social and political status. Participation in the theocracy conferred spiritual qualities of citizenship on Christians without regard to their earthly or worldly situation. Still contained within the concept of the educated German bourgeoisie (*deutsche Bildungsbürger*) or the intelligentsia are elements of this nonpolitical, intellectual, or spiritual tradition.

A similarly profound epochal shift also took place in the early modern period. It helped spur our present-day meaning of the term "civil society." Up through the eighteenth century, it was evident in the common European Latin linguistic tradition that a *civis* could only be one who exercised power. Any head of household who, with regard to internal matters, could be in charge of house and home, spouse, children, and servants, was capable of exercising political power externally: as a participant in the judicature or administration of a municipality, as a member of or representative in the estates, finally and above all, as ruling lord of a territory. In the sense of this traditional, conformist theory based on the experience of a society of estates, free peasants, citizens, or members of the lower or upper nobility were always *cives* of the *societas civilis*. Since the high Middle Ages, an indicator of this estate-based ruling order was that it was always simultaneously defined in political, social, and legal terms—spheres that could not be empirically separated. That changed gradually, although profoundly, during the course of early modern times.

Politically, the ruling estates lost ground in the same measure as the royal sovereign took all political power of decision upon himself. Prior to the French Revolution, this was never entirely successful because the estates still had their say in what happened, but by and large, only legal privileges and positions of social leadership remained for the old estates. Apart from England, where sovereignty remained with the king in Parliament, the political power of decision migrated to the jurisdiction of the monarch and his court. In view of the sovereignty of royalty, but only in this respect, all the "citizens" became transformed into an association of subjects (*Untertanen*-

verband). As Zedler reflected, a citizen becomes both subjected and subject (*Untertan* and *Subjekt*): And as such, citizens no longer have any ruling rights. "Here, 'republic' is understood as civil society, a composite of rulers and subjects who have merged together with one another to preserve and promote the common welfare."³ Thus, slowly arising from the association of subjects there emerged a civil society (*Bürgergesellschaft*) still directed at the common good but apolitical in the sense of exercising power—in a variation of Schlözer's definition of the concept: a *societas civilis sine imperio*.⁴ With this, a previously unimaginable result is tentatively conceptualized, namely that there could be a civil society without domination, or, at the very least, that this is thinkable.

The traditional estate society not only changed politically but also *legally* in its graduated organization. The privileged estates, particularly the nobility and the clergy, abruptly lost all their privileges in the French Revolution, and the same thing happened gradually in other European countries. Any supremacy secured up until then by the birthright of the nobility and the bourgeoisie was subjected to the civil-juridical principle of equality. After the French Revolution, rule could no longer be a personal, legal entitlement. This became a norm which, of course, first acquired weight with the revolutions of 1830 and 1848. Old ruling rights persisted only in the House of Lords and the Upper Chamber. All rule was theoretically depersonalized in favor of the sovereignty of the state, which could be represented by a ruler or a parliament, or by both at once.

Seen only in *social* terms, the former ruling estates still remained in the leadership positions that they had always occupied within the framework of the *societas civilis* envisaged by Aristotle. Their reputation, their relationships, their familial cohesion, their assets, and above all, their ownership of land and access to royal courts secured continued influence for the old estates, above all the nobility, on the political decisions of the authorities of the states to which they belonged. Even though they were no longer politically influential in the same way as they had been under the old order of civil society, and even though they were also no longer legally influential as they had been under the old order of privileges, the old estates remained socially (*sozial*) powerful—that is, since the nineteenth century, effectively shaping society in the field of foreign policy.

Here, we already find ourselves within the sphere of pure "society" (*Gesellschaft*), of modern civil society. In exaggerated terms, its citizens were

not concerned with exercising political rule but rather with procuring participation in the authority of the state in order to secure their economic interests. On the grounds of legal equality—political power delegated to the state or bound up with its particular constitution—these citizens moved within a space of living conditions that were secured but not prescribed by the state. It was no longer the space of legal but of social inequality, the space of working and economically active citizens in which the individual principle of achievement predominated. This involved satisfying increasing needs on a daily basis, engendering a mutual and growing economic dependence of everyone on everyone.

As the Brockhaus encyclopedia matter-of-factly put it around the middle of the century:

More recent linguistic usage occasionally differentiates between “state” and “society” or “civil society.” The latter term refers to the common life of human beings and the developing relationships emerging automatically from it, without the involvement of the authority of the state, for example relationships between different estates and professional classes, or between opposites like employers and workers, producers and consumers.⁵

It is that civil society which Hegel defined as a sphere reliant upon the state but economically independent, the civil society that inserted itself unpolitically, as it were, with its respective individual interests, between the family and the state and that did not exist before the nineteenth century. Or, it is the civil society that is definable for Marx only by its economic presuppositions and its social class differences; with respect to these, all politics still remain only superstructure or epiphenomena. According to the polemical definition by a French Republican in 1841, civil society involved the rule of the bourgeoisie. What is a bourgeois, he asked: yesterday a slave, a servant—today, a master. “Un maître d’aujourd’hui. Qu’est ce que la Bourgeoisie? La réunion des maîtres qui font travailler, au profit de qui travaillent, les prolétaires. Où commence la Bourgeoisie? Où finit le prolétariat?”⁶ Ruling is no longer defined politically but rather economically, above all by the exploitation that precipitated its social and revolutionary consequences. And the intention of our author (Duclerc) was to provoke precisely these.

A conceptual-historical reference needs to be added to clarify the epochal shift from the old-style politically determined civil society *eo ipso*, to the modern, economically determined civil society. It concerns the dissem-

ination of the concept of the economy (*Ökonomie*), which only became theoretically capable of opening up new experiences from the eighteenth century onward. From the Greeks up until the eighteenth century, the idea of the *oikos* dealt with household economy (*Hauswirtschaft*) and domestic rule over a household. This concrete, experience-saturated, and restricted concept of the economy widened in the eighteenth century, dogmatized, as it were, by Adam Smith. The economy moved out of the Aristotelian triad of ethics, economics, and politics and differentiated itself as an independent sphere of a purely interest-driven civil society henceforth designated as modern. Since then, "economy" refers to large-scale territorial, state, national, and, finally, worldwide networks of constantly growing needs: It is the sphere of industrial society stretching across nations, dependent upon capitalism, and driven forward by science and technology that is henceforth understood as "civil." Its dynamics encompass the entire world since then, and today, for the first time, it has come to be threatened by outside, noneconomic factors, namely ecological ones.

Our theoretical-historical retrospective has come so far as to require a considerable modification. However much the economically determined emergence of a civil society was the product of our recent history, the ancient meaning conceptualized by Aristotle of the *koinōnia politikē* as a self-ruling community of citizens was never lost. The opposite was the case. This model—that the earlier citizenry (*Bürgerschaft*) of the polis or the Roman Republic was such a community of free citizens—not only guided the French revolutionaries and the German idealists but even the Scottish moral philosophers. Moreover, the Stoic public ethic (*Bürgerethik*) and the Christian spiritual principle of the equality of all citizens in a theocracy remained present as a legacy. They were merely transformed and merged to become inner-worldly. These constitutional designs already take shape and gain in penetrating power prior to the social repercussions of industrialization, that is, in the age of the Enlightenment, vindicating all human beings who, as citizens, participate in political power and general self-determination. Thus our semantics, conducted up until now in terms of a conceptual history, move into concrete contexts of action. Several social-historical references are, therefore, allowed.

It was always concrete, delimitable groups of actors that made use of the *Bürger* terminology to register entirely pragmatic demands or to assert themselves within the contested sphere of politics. The battle for political

power, for influence on "the state authorities," and even for political rule went still further under the conditions of a liberalized competitive society. For even the economic bourgeoisie (*Wirtschaftsbürger*) sought to suit and submit their interests to the state. Thus the individual states in Europe became targets for those groups who defined themselves as *Bürger*, as *citoyens*, or as the middle classes. And if these groups are to be characterized as the core of modern civil society—moving out of the theoretical concept of a politically organized society as a whole—then it appears that the influence of this society, in the narrow sense, was variously strong from nation to nation and that it was nowhere dominant before the last third of the nineteenth century. If we take Germany, England, and France as the three nations in which the *Bürgertum*, the middle classes, and the *bourgeoisie*, respectively, are supposed to have gained acceptance, then such a conclusion can only be rendered with significant reservations. In all three nations, there were electoral systems based on restricted suffrage and indirect elections, which pragmatically limited the say of the so-called bourgeois middle strata (*bürgerliche Mittelschichten*). The ownership of land remained politically dominant: "Hors de la propriété foncière point de salut."⁷ Entrenched behind the landownership clauses, a throwback to the *ancien régime*, the nobility knew to preserve a position of leadership for themselves that did not contradict middle-class (*bürgerliche*) (Civil Law) equality. It was that way in Great Britain, where the nobility, with all its familial connections with the *bürgerliche* strata, was always concerned with keeping the "middle classes" middle-class: Because they were not presentable at court, they had de facto only restricted access to Parliament. The social hierarchy remained strictly preserved; wealth alone brought no prestige and, therefore, only limited political influence. It was that way in Germany, where the princes and court nobility remained socially dominant and where the *Bürgertum* could only move into positions of political leadership by finding jobs in the civil service or as attendants to the nobility. The estate-based and parliamentary channels of influence remained rigidly delimited. It was that way in France where the old, prerevolutionary nobility and the new Napoleonic nobility set high suffrage qualifications until 1848 and, moreover, as landowners, comprised a considerable part of those notables who stood out against the bourgeois and petit bourgeois population until far into the Third Republic.

To be radical in England, to be a Republican in France, or simply to be bourgeois in Germany, was still not a sufficient criterion to be accepted

by the old leadership strata. Without forfeiting indirect influence or socially inscribed power, the nobility thus receded slowly into the background (in France, somewhat more quickly than in the rest of Europe). Only in the last third of the nineteenth century did the balance shift when the working lower strata not only learned to become articulate but also gradually began to influence political decisions. As such, in all three nations, the so-called *Bürgertum* came under increasing pressure by those segments of society that did not count as "civil society" in the sense of everyday language.

These social-historical indications only point to the fact that the structures of prerevolutionary ruling orders changed very slowly. The liberal model of order, the attempt to economically stratify society by achievement, wealth, and personal income, continued to be politically structured by landowning leadership groups. At the same time, the new challenges of the growing wage-dependent lower strata already undermined the claim to leadership of the so-called bourgeoisie. The civil society of the nineteenth century could thus be characterized from the beginning as a transitional society whose estate-based past and whose democratic future held it under the constant pressure of change.

Our theoretical-historical retrospective and our social-historical references have moved on a high level of generality in order to render visible epochal thrusts diachronically and Europe-wide challenges synchronically. The political semantics testify to how dubious or provisional such a procedure is. Should one place in a direct context the concrete linguistic acts that helped formulate the social and political claims of a newly conceptualized civil society, then our overview would require still further, more considerable modifications. For each of our three languages of comparison, German, English, and French, treated their various social presuppositions in their own ways, and they correspondingly stylized their politically articulated demands in different ways. Very divergent experiences were condensed into strictly different concepts, according to the language. In precise terms, the new civil society existed only to the extent that it could linguistically assure itself. Everything else implied about it is historical exegesis, *ex post facto*.

The common European theoretical tradition regarding the *societas civilis* was broken apart increasingly along national-linguistic lines in the early modern period. Not only was the praxis differentiated, as it had always been, but since then, the theory also developed separately. The com-

mon tradition took on national peculiarities, suggesting the hypothesis that, empirically, there were three different *bürgerliche* worlds which developed from the Enlightenment onward in Germany, England, and France. A quick look at the semantics of the concept *Bürger* already testifies to this in the case of all three nations.

In France, a dualistic conceptuality stemming from the Enlightenment prevailed that permitted rhetorical rigor and impact but stood in the way of all pragmatic solutions. A *grand bourgeois* could be distinguished from a *petit bourgeois* but not a high *citoyen* from a petty *citoyen*. Semantically, no lasting compromise was possible between the interests of the economic bourgeoisie and the general civil rights that the French Revolution granted to everyone. The revolutions of 1830 and 1848 and the Paris Commune rebellion of 1871 were linguistically preprogrammed, so to speak.

In Germany, because there was only one concept—namely *Bürger*—which gathered together so many different privilege-oriented and estate-based, state, and regional connotations, it was not well suited for producing a homogeneous revolutionary thrust within concrete situations involving action. Just as in 1848, there was barely a geographic center where the revolution could have condensed so there was barely a semantic core around which the demands of the new *Bürger* could have crystallized. The German *Bürger*-concept always remained multivalent and could only develop a comparatively weak political impact.

Finally, in Great Britain, the term “citizen,” a concept of expectation connoting democratic and natural rights, played—perhaps surprisingly to continental Europeans—an entirely marginal role. Rather, until far into the nineteenth century, concrete, individual, and corporate concepts of legality from the Middle Ages competed here with an experience-saturated vocabulary of social description that could better justify the claims of the middle classes—for instance, in situations of parliamentary conflict. One after another, however, the advocates for the middle classes were compelled to make semantic compromises in order to both thwart conflicts and allow for measured changes.

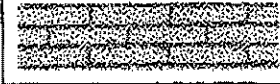
Given these findings, a comparative analysis of European *Bürger-tümer* runs into considerable difficulties unless one is content with a descriptive inventory of usages.

The investigation of all societal conditions and their transformations remains dependent upon linguistic sources that can bear witness to them.

Thus any comparison must proceed along two avenues. The linguistic witnesses have to be translated in order to be semantically comparable. But at the same time, the social, economic, and political processes deduced from them must be made, for their part, comparable—something not possible without the linguistic *pregivens* and their translations. To this extent, any comparison depends upon the translatability of diverse, linguistically stored experiences which, as experiences, remain connected to the uniqueness of the language concerned. Methodologically, we are thus faced with an aporetic situation.

Not all conceptualized experiences can be reproduced in other languages by their seemingly corresponding concepts. Any descriptive translation loses the content of experience of the concrete concept. A comparative analysis of the facts relating to the concept can thus only be methodologically verifiable when unintegratable linguistic differentiations are also reflected. Thus, in addition to a social-historical metatheory that enables international comparisons, there also really needs to be a metalanguage that mediates the differences. But there is no such metalanguage. The *Gesellschaft der Bürger* in the nineteenth century was not only a society in transition; it can also only be analyzed and recognized when it is translated interlinguistically and diachronically.

Translated by Todd Presner



“Progress” and “Decline”

AN APPENDIX TO THE HISTORY OF TWO CONCEPTS

“Progress” and “Decline”

The following incident is said to have taken place in the 1880s in the small town of Frenke, located on the Weser river. The second to last son of an artisan family had been confirmed. Upon returning home, he received a resounding slap for the last time and was, as a result, allowed to eat dinner sitting at the adults' table. Previously, like all the children, he had to eat while standing up. That was the custom. And now, there took place the incident, which was told to me by the actual person himself who experienced it.¹ He was the youngest member of the family, not yet confirmed, and he, too, was allowed to sit at the adults' table just like his confirmed brother, without incident. When the mother astonishingly asked what this meant, the father said: “That comes from progress.”

In vain, the youngster kept his ears open for what that could be, progress? At that time, the town consisted of five owners of full peasant holdings (*Vollmeyerhöfen*), two owners of half-holdings (*Halbmeyerhöfen*), seven artisans, and seven cottagers. However, nobody here knew that answer. And still this word circulated: it may have been a catchword that came from reading books or living in the city; it intersected with the new facts at hand. An old custom was disintegrating. We do not know how the mother characterized the event. If she had had a command of nostalgic, educated language—as was not the case—perhaps she would have employed the concept of “decay” or “decline” to describe, quite differently, the same facts at hand.

Here, we will refrain from suggesting that our story is symptomatic of the long-term process by which the old Europe transformed itself and is still transforming the world of modern industrial societies. We want to ask, first of all, about the employment of the word, about what the usage of the word achieves here.

Obviously, the characterization "that comes from progress" suddenly intervenes in the traditional social structure of an artisan household by moving it into a temporal perspective. Previously, confirmation was treated not only as a religious ritual but also as a social ritual of initiation: now that was changing. The graduation to the adults' table was uncoupled from ecclesiastical tradition. In the past things were done in one way, today in another—that is the minimum relation which our chief witness established with the employment of the word progress. And the overtone that the new behavior is better than the old resounds as well.

But something else was also emphasized: it was not the father's very own deed to fetch the youngest son to the table, but "that comes from progress." Thus the artisan only carried out what was time. The empirical agent of action is exonerated; he consummates a deed whose origin and sense is attributed to progress. The individual deed unveils itself as an event that extends straight through to the agents.

Thus we have gained two criteria for characterizing our linguistic action from the everyday world of around 1890. The first concerns a temporal concept of perspective, and the second is that this concept indicates a transpersonal subject of action. "That comes from progress."

With this, we are already at the center of our investigation. For both conditions—the temporal perspective and the employment of progress as a suprapersonal organ of performance of events—find themselves, once again, on the level of colloquial language as well as on the level of political and scientific language.

In what follows, I will trace the origin and modes of employment of the concept of progress in three stages and, in particular, ask how the concept of decline stood in opposition to it. To anticipate my thesis: in contrast to decline, progress is a modern category whose content of experience and whose surplus of expectation was not available before the eighteenth century. Decline or decay correspondingly change their topological relation in modern times (*Neuzeit*).

It may be indisputably presupposed that progress is a concept specifically calibrated to cope with modern experiences, namely that traditional

experiences are surpassed by new ones with astonishing speed. One need only bring to mind the change from the stagecoach to the railway and from the automobile to the jet airplane: through acceleration, the spatial pre-givens in nature have been completely reconfigured anew within the span of one and a half centuries. And with the new forms of movement for human beings, their everyday world has certainly changed, altering their working world and altering their expectations.

But behind the characterization of this technological-social process as "progress" (because of its problematic consequences the term is increasingly employed skeptically), stands a problem of our language concerning political, social, and historical transformations and processes.

"Progress" and "decline" are both terms that are meant to conceptualize transformations of historical time. But considered linguistically, it is always an enormous abstraction when time itself is supposed to be described, for time eludes intuition. Certainly the past can be intuited: wrinkles in the face refer to age and the intensity of work. The height of trees, or the style of buildings, or the kind of cars allows us to recognize past times, beginnings, growth or duration, and decay in a glance. The past can be shown. But already the folding together of the future, the past, and the present, which is pre-given in humans, can no longer be made evident, let alone the future by itself.

This anthropological finding results in the employment of historical terms that are supposed to thematize time. Almost all such terms have to fall back upon natural and spatial background meanings to become comprehensible. "Movement" (*Bewegung*) contains the "way" (*Weg*) laid out, while "progress" (*Fortschritt*) marks the act of spatially stepping forward (*Fortschreiten*) from here to there; in "decay" or "decline," a downward path is indicated; even "revolution" initially had its spatial meaning in the circular orbit of the stars before the term was applied to social and political trends.

As such, the ways of speaking about history, specifically historical time, derive their terminology from the nature of humans and their surroundings. Numerous borrowings come from the spheres of experience prevailing during a given time—from mythology, from the political life of constitutional states, from the church and theology, from technology and the natural sciences—in order to describe historical phenomena. At first, genuinely historical concepts, ones which have to do with historical time, do not exist. It is always a question of metaphors. In the following, we will

thus have to pay attention to the metaphorical content of our concepts in order to be able to evaluate the power of their historical expressiveness.

At the start, I simply presupposed that progress is a modern (*neu-zeitlich*) concept. My specifically conceptual-historical thesis is now as follows. Progress became a modern concept when it shed or forgot its natural background meaning of stepping through space. The figurative reference faded. Since around 1800, progress has turned into a genuinely historical concept while "decline" and "decay" have not been able to shed their natural and biological background meaning in the same way.

To demonstrate this, we shall first take a look back to antiquity and the Middle Ages.

I

It is trivial to maintain that whenever humans are involved in histories, experiences of transformation or change are to be found, for better or worse, for those affected in a given time. In this sense, there are numerous references from the Greeks and Romans that can characterize a relative progression (*Fortschreiten*) in particular spheres of fact and experience: *prokopē*, *epidōsis*, *progressus*, *profectus*—as well as the opposing indicators of *metabolē* with the trend towards decay, *tarakhē kai kinēsis* in the sense of confusion and destruction, or metaphors of sickness to describe political disintegration.²

One need only bring to mind the notion of constitutional cycles with whose help the ups and downs of human self-organization can be described. In this way Polybius, for instance, summarizing Hellenic arguments, described the emergence of three pure forms of government and their subsequent decay over a period of three generations. In this respect, ascension and decline are here two concepts in which one results from the other. Within the same political community of action, we are speaking of *concepts of succession*. And, if two different political communities of action are to be compared, for instance Greece and Rome, then the decline of one can be tied to or contrasted with the rise of the other. Seemingly seldom employed in antiquity, this involved, then, *oppositional concepts* of equal rank. Constitutions always remained in the vicinity of finite, pregiven possibilities stemming from human nature which themselves could not be exceeded (*überschritten*). The only action that appears to be capable of break-

ing through the cycle is the politically admissible mixing of different constitutional elements in order to effect a greater stability. Such mixing prevents standard decline, so to speak; however, it in no way opens up a process of progress leading to a better future. This is something we should keep in mind when we describe the modern concept of progress later.

Let us proceed with a second reference to classical linguistic usage. In those places where progress was registered in antiquity, it always concerned a look back, not an opening up of new horizons. In his famous introduction to the history of the Peloponnesian wars, Thucydides demonstrates the extent to which the Greeks, thanks to their legal system and to their technological and militaristic expansion of power, distinguished themselves from the barbarians. Earlier, even the Greeks had lived like the barbarians—carrying weapons during times of peace, raping women, and following more of the same barbarian customs. Now, in the fifth century, the Greeks had left these behaviors far behind them. But precisely because of their polis constitutions, their expanded trade, and their increased potential for power, they became henceforth capable of waging a civil war against each other, one whose cruelty and whose expenditure of instruments of power was not to be outdone by any earlier wars.

From both past history and the comparison with contemporaneously living barbarians, we thus find, formulated in modern terms, a relative model of progress that recognizes the uniqueness and singularity of the level of civilization reached by the Hellenes. But the path does not lead to the future. The result, namely the civil war, can only be described in the medical categories of sickness, far removed from a further progress (*Progreß*) opening up into the future. A general, overarching concept is, then, lacking in Thucydides as well, a concept that might have encapsulated earlier Greek history as a process of progress.

One further reference: in other instances where cases of progress were noted during antiquity, for instance in science or in the peace achieved by the Pax Romana throughout the region of the Mediterranean Sea, it was always and only of a partial nature. Progress did not refer to an entire social process, as we associate it today with technological practices and industrialization, for instance. What eternal Rome's world domination could promise was duration and security but no progress leading to a better future. Indeed, on the contrary, the frequent programs of historical interpretation during the age of the Caesars measured it in relation to the model of the

past republic. The duration of the empire and its decadence complemented one another so as to betray centuries of experience. That the world was in a state of old age is a late-antique self-interpretation that was conceptualized over and over again by one term: that of the *senectus*.³ "Decline" was thus better suited to describe an entire societal course, even one of cosmological dimensions, than the variants of a partial advancement.

That went for pagans as well as for Christians. For pious Christians, a new horizon of the future was opened up, namely the expectation of divine Jerusalem; however, this involved a kingdom that would only be realized after the end of history. In this world, they might cling to Rome's duration, or rather that of the Roman Empire, especially since Christianity had become the religion of the empire, and in this, Christians could discern a certain progress in comparison with the time of their persecution. But all that suggested nothing against the actual expectation that the entire world would change with Christ's Second Coming, and that with the Last Judgment, an end would be drawn to previous existence. Thus, also according to the Christian teaching of the interim time between creation and the end of the world, people found themselves, since the coming of Christ, in principle within the last time period, within the last *aetas*, namely the *senectus*, within which nothing else fundamentally new could occur. The biological metaphor of *senectus* could then be understood both in pagan terms—namely, the expectation of a new youth that reopened the cycle everywhere—and as the portent of the end of the world itself and the resurrection of the dead.

In places where theologians spoke of *profectus*, less often of *progressus*, this progress (*Fortschritt*) referred to the soul's salvation.⁴ In this way, Augustine, using a biological metaphor, compared the people of God to a human being reared by God. From age to age, the people of God would advance over time—and upon this the metaphor turns—rising from the ephemeral to the experience of the eternal, ascending from the visible to the invisible.⁵ This manner of progressing is described again and again by the Church Fathers and Scholastics in such terms as *profectus hominis donum Dei est*,⁶ or as Bernard of Clairvaux once preached: *in via vitae non progredi, retrogredi est*. Whoever does not advance, falls back, or: "no one is perfect who does not keep striving for perfection."⁷

Here, we already find that asymmetric relationship prevailing between progress and regression that opposes the eternal alternation of earthly exis-

tence to a directed, goal-oriented movement (an opposition that can appear to be a modern one in another context). However, this progress—*profectus* in the direction of *perfectio*—referred to God's kingdom and must not be confused with the temporal kingdom of this world. The way to perfection cannot be counted in years but only in the soul: *perfectio non in annis, sed in animis*.⁸

Quite frequently in linguistic usage during the Middle Ages, it is a question of *correlational concepts*, whose meaning could be derived from the doctrine of two worlds. The doctrine of the two kingdoms, the kingdom of God and that of the world, underwent many metamorphoses over the course of the Middle Ages; however, these metamorphoses only seldom reached so far as to identify progress as an inner-worldly law. On the contrary, for example with Otto of Freising, the aging world falls into ever greater misery—*defectus*—in the same measure as the faithful become certain of their proximity to the coming kingdom of eternal freedom—*perfectio*. With respect to this world, the ascension to perfection and decline, mostly described verbally, were correlational concepts for Otto of Freising: the more misery there is in this world, the nearer the salvation of the elect. However, the future is not the dimension of progress but rather that of the end of the world; signs of it were repeatedly sought and were repeatedly found anew.⁹

To be sure, there were also unique or occasional cases of progress within this world during the Middle Ages as in antiquity: in the sciences or in imperial doctrine regarding the route from East to West, in architecture, in ecclesiastical law, and seen in social terms, briefly in times of peace, too. However, such examples of secular progress did not in any way contradict the fundamental experience that the world as a whole was aging and rushing toward its end. Spiritual progress and the decline of the world were to this extent correlational concepts that obstructed the interpretation of the earthly future in progressive terms.

II

Forgive me for treating two millennia with such freedom here, but it was only with the purpose of allowing that new stage to appear in relief against the background of a different past and of helping bring the modern concept of progress into view. My overview differentiated the modern concept of progress from its original religious meanings, transforming the

constant expectation of the end of the world into an open future. In terms of nomenclature, spiritual *profectus* was displaced by or detached from a worldly *progressus*. This process extended throughout early modern times. Although the Renaissance did evoke the consciousness of a new time, this consciousness was not yet that of the progression to a better future as long as the Middle Ages appeared as a dark interim period beyond which antiquity was considered the model. Only the growth of knowledge about nature, by way of which the authority of antiquity was displaced through the autonomous use of reason, opened up—at first only partially—a progressive interpretation of the future. Nature itself would remain the same, but the discovery of it would be methodically driven forward, and thus, so would its increasing domination. Farther-reaching inner-worldly goals, such as a general improvement of life, followed from it, allowing the doctrine of Last Things to be displaced by the gamble of an open future. Since then, past and future differentiate themselves qualitatively from one another and, to this extent, a genuinely historical time is discovered that is finally encapsulated in the term "progress."

If I am now going to trace this formation of the modern concept of progress, I will have to refrain from proceeding from the subjects covered by it, the concept's content of experience. The invention of the printing press; the spread of literacy and reading; the inventions of the compass, telescope, and microscope; the development of the experimental sciences; the discovery of the globe; overseas colonization and the comparison with savages; the conflict of modern art with the old; the rise of the middle class; the development of capitalism and industry; the unleashing of natural forces through technology—all this belongs to the experiences or facts that are always conjured up and tied to the concept of progress and, more than that, to the progression toward something better.

Here, I only want to reconstruct the linguistic formation of the concept, of that concept which finally brought together all these phenomena under a single term—in other words, the experience of a new time condensed into a word.

1. The employment of our term testifies first of all to a *denaturalization of age metaphors*. The increasing age of the world lost its biological-moral sense of decay. The association of a decline dissipated and, with this dissipation, a boundless progress was opened up.

The slow process of becoming conscious of the future can be directly

measured by the change in metaphors of growth. Taken literally, every metaphor of natural growth contains the inevitability of eventual decay. Thus whoever takes the category of nature seriously must also—as in antiquity—allow decay to follow from progress. In this respect, the course from youth to old age always excludes the sense of progress to an open future.

At best, a doctrine of rebirth could be connected to the natural metaphors of youth and old age. Therefore, the cyclical doctrines of antiquity and the Christian teachings about the aging world that remained fixed to the eschatological horizon of expectation could both make use (although in different ways) of comparisons involving age. There are numerous witnesses in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries who attest to the fact that scholars found themselves searching for an expression of time that broke from the tether of natural meanings. Bacon, for instance, famously denied the authorities of old their standing claim to truth; rather truth itself was a daughter of time. *Veritas filia temporis*.¹⁰ Generally formulated, truth was only recognized and acknowledged to the extent that it entered into the temporal performance of human knowledge—and thus it also became surpassable.

Already widespread in the high Middle Ages, Christian striving for the kingdom of eternal truth crossed into a process of progressing knowledge in this world. This becomes especially clear with Pascal in his tractate on empty space, the *Traité du vide*. In contrast to animals, man, Pascal writes, is always perfecting himself, a being destined to infinity. He is created for infinity, but now already in an ambiguous sense. For infinity is no longer to be considered beyond the realm of human affairs; instead, individual humans learn and, gradually, all humans learn together. They advance more and more in science from day to day such that humanity finds itself entirely within a continuous progress from its youth onwards—in the same measure as the world itself ages. “Tous les hommes ensemble y font un continuel progres à mesure que l’univers vieillit.”¹¹ From the formerly divine upbringing of the faithful came the self-rearing of all rationally gifted human beings. Infinite progress opened up a future that shirked the natural metaphors of aging. Although the world as nature may age in the course of time, this no longer involves the decline of all of humanity.

Quite openly in 1688, Fontenelle finally repudiated the age comparison because it was no longer suitable for describing progress. Everything in the world pointed to the fact that reason constantly perfected itself. There-

fore, reason shares the advantages of youth with the advantages of mature, sensible humans: that is to say, leaving the allegory behind, humans never degenerate.¹²

Leibniz went a step farther and also bypassed the metaphors of aging from the cosmos. For him, continuous progress was not only a product of the human spirit, but it also related to the universe. Happiness, he said, demanded a constant advancement (*Fortgang*) toward ever newer wishes and perfections. For this reason, the universe could never reach a last degree of maturity. As a whole, the universe neither slipped backwards nor aged, *nunquam etiam regreditur aut senescit*.¹³ Thus not only humans, but also the entire world, constantly improved, and if there was a regression, then it was only to advance again twice as fast and twice as far after it. In a word: The world is, therefore, the best of all worlds because it is constantly improving: *progressus est in infinitum perfectionis*.¹⁴

Without wanting to restrict Leibniz in all his multiplicity to this one central thought, it can certainly be said that he anticipated all the positions available in the eighteenth century in order to interpret the newly discovered historical world. During the eighteenth century and in the time since then, it has become a widespread belief that progress is general and constant while every regression, decline, or decay occurs only partially and temporarily. In other words, decline or regression is no longer a pure oppositional concept to advancement or progress. This can be corroborated from numerous authors. One need only mention Turgot, Condorcet, Iselin, Wieland, or Kant, or in the nineteenth century, Engels, Haeckel, or Eduard von Hartmann. With these authors, the asymmetry between progress and decline is no longer related to the next world, on the one hand, and this world, on the other, as in the Christian Middle Ages, but rather progress has become a world historical category whose tendency is to interpret all regressions as temporary and finally even as the stimulus for new progress.

2. In order to characterize the emergence of the new concept more precisely, a second point of view will be introduced: *temporalization*, in a sense that I will have to explain.

Until well into the eighteenth century, people spoke less of "progress" or "*Fortschritte*" than of *perfectio*, or of perfection as the goal to be striven for in the arts, the sciences, and, finally, in all of society. To discover the eternal laws of nature meant to steer toward a finite goal on the basis of which one became capable of mastering nature. Or, to unlock the laws of

morality, for instance with mathematical methods, likewise meant reaching a goal on the basis of which human society could then be justly organized. These goals became temporalized in the eighteenth century; that is to say, they became part of the performance of human history. It is evident that here Leibniz's metaphysics had a further effect on many lines of inquiry.

In terms of etymology, it can be shown that "perfection" was slowly displaced and detached from the new concept of *perfectionnement*, for the first time in 1725 by St. Pierre. From "perfection" to *perfectionnement*: from the expression of a goal came a processual category of movement. The emulation of unique perfection was placed in the iterative. As such, Turgot first spoke about the mass of the entire human race marching incessantly toward its completion (*Vollendung*). Then, he corrected himself and spoke of the human race as on its way and hurrying toward a *greater and greater* perfection (*Perfection*), through fortune and despair, tranquillity and disquiet.¹⁵ Anticipating Hegel, Condorcet could finally resolve the logical contradiction, the inconsistency by way of a new concept: the *perfectionnement* of the human race is, at once, the goal (*terme*) and unlimited (*indéfini*). The expression of the goal is included in the process of constant improvement itself. As Condorcet also said: the limits of various forms of progress are themselves only forms of progress.¹⁶ Thus we could describe that temporalization which, in the eighteenth century, encompassed more and more spheres of human experience and expectation. Out of the system of nature comes a history of nature, out of the laws of political order come the laws for their constant improvement. In the words of Lessing: "I believe that the creator had to make everything that he created capable of becoming perfect, if it is supposed to remain in the state of perfection in which he created it."¹⁷ The Christian dictum from the Middle Ages comes to mind: no one is perfect who does not strive for further perfection. This principle, first involving the individual soul, is now transformed. It aims at the earthly future and, while tied back to human consciousness, bestows a direction on history. It is, so to speak, the progress of progress which surpasses any regression. "Progress" becomes a processual concept of reflection.

To use a cliché, one can say that historical time was dynamicized, as it were, when it was discovered as a process. Or, as Kant said: "Creation is never completed. It certainly began on a particular day, but it will never cease."¹⁸ No previous experience could force expectations that were not coming to pass. The experience of the past and the expectation of the fu-

ture moved apart; they were progressively dismantled, and this difference was finally conceptualized by a common word, "progress."

3. What was previously described as temporalization and as the unlocking of an open horizon of the future was the genesis of a new concept. Perhaps it will be surprising to hear that the word *der Fortschritt* (progress) was only coined in German toward the end of the eighteenth century. We have only used the word here in order to discuss the prehistory of our concept. As we have already seen, the Latin terms *profectus*, *progressio*, *progressus*, and other similar variants had existed for a long time. In French, *le progrès* was seldom used in the singular. One mostly spoke of *les progrès* in the plural, of cases of progress in individual sectors. Even Condorcet spoke only of the sum of individual instances of progress, not of *progrès* as such, as its own subject. In English as well, "progress" was used almost exclusively in the plural, like "improvement" or "advancement." Similarly, German usage was very multifarious. With a stronger dependence upon spatial meaning, one still spoke of *Fortgang* (advancement), of *Fortschreiten* or *Fortschreitung* (progression), or one spoke more in the biological metaphors of *Wachstum* (growth), *Anwachs* (increase), *Zuwachs* (accretion), or more often in a moral meaning, of *Verbesserung* (improvement) or, generally, of *Vervollkommnung* (perfection). However, in all of these cases, a central term is missing that could have brought the various interpretations and nuances of usage under a common concept. Progress (*der Fortschritt*), a term first put forth by Kant, was now a word that neatly and deftly brought the manifold of scientific, technological, and industrial meanings of progress, and finally also those meanings involving social morality and even the totality of history, under a common concept.

"Progress itself" is a *collective singular*. It ties together numerous experiences into a single term. It is one of those collective singulars (they abruptly increased toward the end of the eighteenth century) that condense ever more complex experiences on a higher level of abstraction. In terms of etymology, this involved a process corresponding to the French Revolution in politics and to world commerce and the Industrial Revolution in economics in a way that still has to be investigated.

How progress emerged as a collective singular and since then became a guiding historical concept can be described in formal terms. It came about in three overlapping phases. First of all, the subject of progress was universalized. It no longer referred to a delimitable sphere, such as science, tech-

nology, art, etc., any of which were formerly the concrete substratum of particular progressions. Instead, the subject of progress was expanded to become an agent of the highest generality, or one with a forced claim to generality: it was a question of the progress of humanity. At first, "humanity" was not meant as the acting but rather the referential subject, for instance in the sense of those "hypothetical people" to which Condorcet subordinates all individual instances of progress as an intellectually constructed subject. The chosen people of the Judeo-Christian heritage become the hypostasis of progress. Soon one can also speak of the "progress of time" and much later, of "the progress of history."

Thus, out of the histories of individual cases of progress comes the progress of history. This is the second phase. For in the course of the universalization of our concept, subject and object switch their roles. The subjective genitive turns into the objective genitive: In the expression "the progress of time" or "the progress of history," progress assumes the leading role. Progress itself becomes the historical agent. We might recall our opening example, "That comes from progress." Now we can say: the temporal modality shifts to the function of the agent.

Finally, in a third phase, this expression came to stand alone: progress became "progress purely and simply," a subject of itself. While previously one could only speak of the progress of art, of technology, and finally of time or of history, it became common and customary in the nineteenth century to call upon progress by itself. With this, the term turned into a political catchword, a catchword that first had an effect on the formation of political parties and awareness, but that was eventually claimed more and more by all factions. Thus, since the nineteenth century, it has become difficult to gain political legitimacy without being progressive at the same time.

This can be seen, for example, in a Catholic pamphlet from Paderborn in 1877: "The Catholic church is the social-conservative power *par excellence* as well as the creator of freedom and of progress."¹⁹ But I want to forgo pursuing the history of the catchword in the nineteenth century since it had already faded toward the end of the century and in many places fallen into discredit. Rather, in concluding, I want to direct our attention to what actually happened in the conceptual field of decline, of decadence, of decay or of regression.

4. We became acquainted with progress and decline as successive con-

cepts in antiquity and as complementary concepts relating, in uneven ways, to the kingdom of God and to this world during the Middle Ages. In early modern times, regression or decline was obviously mediatized and every setback was credited to the account of progress. Progress and decline fell into an asymmetric relationship of tension, something that permitted Enlightenment intellectuals to interpret any decay and any detour as a step that would be followed by even more rapid progress. As it is well known, this scheme of thought is still employed today when political ideologies prescribe a linear progress that allows for interruptions but creates political legitimacy through its inexorability. Admittedly, things have not always stuck to this schema. Thus we need only ask—I am thinking of Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West*—where every concept of decline, decadence, or even destruction remained.

Decline surfaces again and again as the aporia of progress or as the reproduction of decline through progress itself.

First of all, it must be remembered that many kinds of progress did belong to the experience of the eighteenth century; however, progress itself was in no way the exclusive, overarching concept from which history was understood.

Diderot published his encyclopedia in order to accelerate general enlightenment, but, at the same time, he saw a catastrophe, analogous to the cycles of antiquity, threatening on the horizon. Having organized all knowledge, his encyclopedia was supposed to be a Noah's Ark of *raison* that might salvage all prior knowledge for the coming age.

Even Voltaire, who again and again sought to stimulate the progress of individuals through his sharp criticism of injustices, remained entirely reserved with respect to any optimism. The panorama of history offered him constant ups and downs. In terms of historiography, he granted only four high points to culture—Athens, Augustan Rome, the Renaissance, and the age of Louis XIV—high points that were always followed by decline. His *Candide* completely demolishes any progressive-mindedness like that offered by Leibniz's metaphysics.

Neither Diderot nor Voltaire were dogmatists of a linear progress, nor were they even dogmatists of a discontinuous progress. Too many opposing experiences, not to mention their classical education through which they processed their experiences, stood in their way.

Rousseau's achievement was to bring progress and decline under a

new complementary formula suited to grasp many phenomena of our modernity (*Neuzeit*). In both of his *Discourses*, he thematized the contradictions which for him seemed to prevail between the progressive development of art and science on the one side and morals and their decay on the other side, or the correlation between the progress of civilization on the one side and growing political inequality on the other. To explain this tension, Rousseau coined a new term, *perfectibilité*, clumsily translated into German as *Vervollkommnungsfähigkeit* or as *Vervollkommlichkeit*, or simply Germanized as *Perfektibilität*. As Novalis said: "Humans are differentiated from all other creatures of nature by (rapid) progression (*Progressivität*) or perfectibility (*Perfektibilität*)."²⁰

The ability to perfect oneself, perfectibility, was for Rousseau the criterion that differentiated individual human beings as well as the entire *genus humanum* from animals. This perfectibility was not an empirical-historical determination but rather an anthropological, that is to say, meta-historical category. It specified the basic definition of a human as a historical being, the condition of all possible history. Humans are condemned to progress, to direct all their energies at mastering the powers of nature, to bring the pillars of civilization into their everyday life, to organize themselves politically in order to be able to live, and to develop their industry through the growing employment of reason. But this summation of progress is only one side of the balance sheet. The other side reads: loss of natural innocence, decay of morals, instrumentalization of language at the cost of the unity of feeling and reason. Progress thus produces decadence. But it is not my purpose here to work through the culture-critical or neurotic components of Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

What should become clear is that perfectibility (*Perfektibilität*) is a temporal compensatory concept. With their perfectibility (*Vervollkommnungsfähigkeit*), human beings are constantly capable of, even condemned to producing, steady decay, corruption, and crime. Moreover, if progress is already irreversible, something which Rousseau had accepted, then a gap opens up over time. The more humans are required to perfect themselves in civilization, the greater their chances of losing their integrity.²¹

Thus Rousseau set up a consciously hypothetical cognitive model, one which is certainly suitable for understanding the many experiences of modernity in our own time. It was precisely progress that reproduced the phenomena of decay that are part and parcel of it. And the more violent the

progress—one need only to think of atomic energy and the atomic bomb, of gas and gassing—the greater the human capability to realize catastrophes.

Kant, too, took this into account when he considered progress a moral task and derived from it the idea that humanity will progress for the better because it is supposed to progress. The thesis of continuous decline, that the world is speeding toward its end in an accelerating descent, is not, according to Kant, to be substantiated because in that case, we would have long since been destroyed. Quite the opposite: the infinite view into the future is unhindered by any obstructions. However, with this, the view of *an infinite succession of evil* presents itself, something that Kant never conceals from himself.²² To this extent, Kant also remains indebted to Rousseau.

Rousseau's quixotic nature qualified him as the first to recognize the aporia of progress. Precisely because and so long as progress is unfinished, the chances of decay increase—admittedly, no longer read in natural metaphors but rather in the sense of catastrophes that human beings have become capable of bringing about for themselves with the technological powers at their disposal.

It was another outsider, namely Nietzsche, who probed the aporetic structure of progress as originally and provocatively as did Rousseau. "Progress" and "regression" served as diagnostic categories for Nietzsche. At the same time, he unmasked them as historical and perspectival illusions if only "to implant into that which is degenerate and desires to die a longing for the end."²³ But we will break off at this point²⁴ and take a look back.

The concept of progress brought about its historically unique achievement. For in it is contained the idea that following industrialization and the growth of technology, the conditions of our prior experience will never suffice to predict coming surprises and innovations. Since the eighteenth century, progress produces a necessity for planning but its goals must be constantly redefined as a result of the steady influx of new factors. The concept of progress encompasses precisely that experience of our own modernity: again and again, it has yielded unforeseeable innovations that are incomparable when measured against anything in the past. Taking this into account has itself become an element of the concept of progress so that it has already gained a stabilizing, conservative field of meaning within modernity. The faith in progress as always leading onward became, so to speak, outmoded, without thereby becoming completely unjustified.

Of course, the concept distinguished itself foremost by thematizing

the uniqueness of change. The transformation of the agrarian dominated world of the estates with its recurring famines into a modern, technologically shaped industrial society was unique when seen with respect to all previous history. With increasing speed, new spaces were opened up, not only across the globe but above all in the mobility between places and in the social improvement of the masses, in the increase in consumption and comfort for almost everyone. Finally, life expectancy increased on average nearly threefold from that of the Middle Ages.

But staggered spatially and temporally, all this applies in different ways. The phenomena of indisputable progress that were mentioned above remain unequally distributed in terms of class and, up until now, remain limited to the areas along the Atlantic, to Europe and North America, and occasionally additional territories such as Japan and other regions within the remaining continents. The greater part of the world is scarcely affected, or only negatively, by this progress.

In terms of power politics, an opposing account can be quickly proposed. The relations between political units of action in our world can hardly be understood linearly on the scale of a singular progression. The shrinkage of the formerly centralized European power base has allowed stark disproportions to emerge between civilizing progress and political potency. Here, a discrepancy emerged, diagnosed in 1919 by Paul Valéry with extraordinary clarity. Formerly the model and forerunner of all progress, Europe has seen its position of leadership deteriorate. And the question arises as to whether the imperial self-destruction of the European great powers will not repeat itself on a global scale so that here, too, the conditions of possible progression will simultaneously also prove to be their obstruction.

If one leaves aside the spatially staggered gradient of heretofore differing rates of progress, the immanent opposing account first proposed by Rousseau always still remains. The possibilities of effecting mass death through technology have risen alongside the civilizing gains—and have been already realized, regardless of the further threat of ABC weapons.

Thus we still have the chance to look back at the experiences of earlier times in order to historically relativize progress from the perspective that we have learned. The knowledge that for identical units of action a decline follows every rise is already an unsurpassed formulation of antiquity; furthermore, with different units of action, the rise of one implies the decline of the other. But even the Christian interpretation of *profectus*—ex-

changing all the chaos of the world for mental composure and poise—cannot be refuted for the people involved.

Hence, the following conclusion is unavoidable. The progress of modernity, despite its universal claim, reflects only a partial, self-consistent experience and, instead, masks or obscures other modes of experience for understandable reasons. Obviously, there are long-term structures that persist across human history without being affected by technologically and industrially determined progress at all.

This can already be demonstrated from the discussions among progressives (*Progressisten*) since the seventeenth century. In particular, as soon as our category was filled with meaning, a discrepancy was already discovered to exist between the technological progress of civilization and the moral stance of humans. It was noticed again and again that morality hobbled along behind technology and its development. Hobbes took this as his starting point when he directed all of his efforts at finding rules, even for the state, which would be as certain as geometry. Kant took it as his starting point that civilization had already progressed to excess, while humans, as moral beings, could only reduce this lead with great effort and that they must do so quickly if they wanted to adapt morality to the status of technical knowledge. Even in the nineteenth century, it was customary to assert that technology and industry were rushing forward at a geometrical rate but that morality was only hobbling along at an arithmetical rate. It is this difference, evidently belonging to progress right from the beginning, which constitutes the following aporia: progress itself cannot catch up with what it has triggered; or in other words, the planning of progress can never keep to that direction in which "progress itself" is carried out over the heads of those involved.

Translated by Todd Presner

Some Questions Regarding the Conceptual History of "Crisis"

Whoever opens the newspaper today comes across the term "crisis." The concept indicates insecurity, misfortune, and test, and refers to an unknown future whose conditions cannot be sufficiently elucidated. A French lexicon pointed this out in 1840.¹ Even today, the situation is no different. Its inflationary usage covers almost all aspects of life: domestic politics and foreign policy, culture, economics, theology, and religion, all the humanities and social sciences, as well as the natural sciences, technology, and industry, provided these are understood as parts of our political and social system, as indispensable elements of our life-world (*Lebenswelt*). If this ever-accumulating word usage is an adequate sign for an actual crisis, then we must live in an all-embracing crisis. However, this conclusion attests more to a diffuse manner of speaking than it contributes to the diagnosis of our situation.

In the following discussion, I will try to separate out several structural features of the term in the medium of conceptual history. This may contribute to strengthening the power of arguments by making them more precise. In so doing, I will first give an overview of the history of the concept; secondly, I will sketch a semantic model for focusing the modern use of the word; and, thirdly, I would like to newly pose several questions that arise out of the relationship between Christian tradition and the modern language of concepts.

I. Conceptual-Historical Overview

"Crisis" belongs among the fundamental concepts, that is to say, irreplaceable concepts, of the Greek language. Derived from *krinō*, to cut, to select, to decide, to judge; by extension, to measure, to quarrel, to fight—"crisis" aimed at a definitive, irrevocable decision. The concept implied strict alternatives that permitted no further revision: success or failure, right or wrong, life or death, and finally, salvation or damnation.

In the field of power politics, the concept implied—according to Thucydides—decisive battles determining the outcome of war, four of which would have decided the great Persian War. In so arguing, Thucydides already places the battles (as Montesquieu later does) into the general background conditions which first made it possible that four battles could become decisive for the outcome of war.

For the Hippocratic school, the concept involved the critical phase of a sickness in which the battle between life and death was definitively settled, in which the decision was due but not yet made.

In the sphere of politics—according to Aristotle—it had to do with the enforcement of law or the legal findings that all citizens were called to be involved in, but it also concerned political decisions that ought to precondition all required legal judgment.

In theology, specifically since the New Testament, *krisis* and *judicium* both gain a new and, to a certain extent, unsurpassable meaning taken up from legal language: the judgment before God. This might be that *crisis* meant the Last Judgment at the end of time, or the judgment that appeared with Christ's Second Coming through the light that he brought to this world, something that would already be present to all believers during their lifetimes.

Thus the concept potentially registered all the decision situations of inner and outer life, of individual humans and their communities. It was always a question of definitive alternatives about which an appropriate judgment had to be passed and whose alternative consummation was also determined by and in connection with the particular issues themselves.

It was a concept that always posited a temporal dimension, which, parsed in modern terms, actually implied a theory of time. Be it that the right point in time must be met for successful action, be it that the ruling

order was stabilized through legal preservation or legal finding, or be it that medical judgment—according to Galen—had to diagnose the correct temporal phase of the progression of a sickness in order to be able to risk making a prognosis. Or be it in theology that God's message is accepted in order to—according to John—*hic et nunc* escape damnation, despite the still pending Last Judgment toward which the cosmos moved and whose arrival still remained veiled in darkness.

"Crisis" pointed toward the pressure of time, so to speak, which constituted the understanding of the sense of the concept. The knowledge of uncertainty and the compulsion toward foresight were part of almost every mention of crisis in order to prevent disaster or to search for salvation. In so doing, the particular temporal spans were delimited in varying ways according to the spheres of life thematized.

From antiquity to early modern times, word and concept endured in the Latin language: *crisis* in medical fields, *judicium* or *judicium maximum* in theology. Thomas Aquinas differentiated, for example, in his *Compendium Theologiae* (c. 242) three temporal phases of judgment practiced by the Son of God: the judgment exerted over human beings during the course of their lives; judgment at the hour of their death; and, lastly, the final judgment after the Second Coming of Christ. The conceptual history of "crisis" took place in terms of the language of institutions, so to speak, bound to the church or various university faculties. Since the adoption of the Greek word into European vernaculars—toward the end of the Middle Ages—its gradual and increasing dissemination can be registered. The concept encompasses more and more spheres of life: politics, psychology, the evolving economy, and, finally, newly discovered history. One can venture that the concept of "crisis" even contributed to establishing these fields as autonomous disciplines.

The medical usage of the word first acted as the influence behind its spread. The use of figures of speech drawn from the body for the life of states may have fostered the medical metaphor. It served to diagnose sickness or health and predict life or death.

In the eighteenth century, the concept certainly became freestanding. The reference to the medical sense was now consciously apostrophized as a metaphor, as with Rousseau. In Germany, for instance, there was talk about the crisis of the German Reich system, in which the federal structure of the constitution was criticized because its internal rules no longer sufficed to

stabilize the Reich. Therefore, a special Fürstenbund was to be established from which the formulations of the 1785 preamble stemmed.

To this extent, "crisis" followed a career similar to that of "revolution" or "progress." Both of the latter turned into temporal concepts, and their initial spatial or natural meaning dissipated with the Enlightenment as they became primarily historical concepts. This can be shown, for example, with Leibniz who saw a new world constellation of power beckoning with the rise of the Russian Empire during the Northern War: "Momenta temporum pretiosissima sunt in transitu rerum. Et l'Europe est maintenant dans un état de changement et dans une crise où elle n'a jamais été depuis l'Empire de Charlemagne."² The concept moved toward a historico-philosophical dimension, and even more than this, it opened up this dimension and occupied it to an ever greater extent in the course of the eighteenth century. "Crisis" becomes a fundamental historico-philosophical concept on the basis of which the claim is made that the entire course of history can be interpreted out of its diagnosis of time. Since then, it is always one's own particular time that is experienced as crisis. And reflection upon the particular temporal situation disposes one to both a knowledge of the entire past and a prognosis of the future.

At least since the French Revolution, "crisis" turned into a central *interpretament* for both political and social history. The same goes for the long-term Industrial Revolution, which was accompanied and influenced by a scientifically differentiated doctrine of crises and economic activity.

It is certainly striking that no explicit theory of crisis was developed for the overall historical conceptualizations, as opposed to the economic system, of the nineteenth century. Jacob Burckhardt is the sole exception. And even Marx, who tried to connect his economic theory to a philosophy of history, became mired in developing a theory of crisis, something which Schumpeter—in reference to this concept—expressly renounced. Even in the twentieth century, theories of crisis are restricted to specialized scientific spheres like psychiatry or political science. Global theories of crisis, like those on which the philosophy of history in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was implicitly based, quickly come to be regarded as dubious nowadays because they cannot be sufficiently confirmed or empirically substantiated. With this, we will now turn toward the semantics of crisis as a fundamental historical concept.

II. Three Semantic Models

While the medical meaning of “crisis” originally shaped the political deployment of the word, numerous theological elements now began to feed into this fundamental historical concept. This was already the case with the language of the English Civil War from 1640 to 1660. It was likewise the case with the historically and philosophically reflected linguistic usage that became generally accepted since the late Enlightenment. The associative power of both God’s judgment and the Apocalypse constantly contributed to the use of the word such that no doubt can be raised as to the theological origin of the new form of the concept. Not least of all, this is proven by the fact that historico-philosophical diagnoses of crises often operate within rigid compulsory alternatives which preclude a differentiated diagnosis but which appear to be all the more effective and plausible because of their prophetic associations.

The following outline of three semantic models accepts the risk of inappropriately simplifying the historical facts concerning the usage of the concept. The three semantic options can be stated as follows.

First, history can be interpreted as a permanent crisis. World history is the judgment of the world. It is, then, a question of a concept of trial (*Prozeßbegriff*).

Secondly, “crisis” can characterize a singular, accelerating process in which many conflicts, bursting the system apart, accumulate so as to bring about a new situation after the crisis has passed. “Crisis,” then, indicates the crossing of an epochal threshold, a process that can repeat itself *mutatis mutandis*. Even if history always remains unique in individual cases, this concept attests to the possibility that the thrusts of change can take place in analogous forms. Therefore, I will suggest characterizing it as an iterative periodizing concept.

Thirdly, “crisis” can mean purely and simply the final crisis of all history that precedes it, where proclamations of the Last Judgment are everywhere employed, but only metaphorically. When measured with respect to the prior course of our history, it can no longer be excluded that this model, necessarily characterized as utopian, has every chance of being realized in light of present-day means of self-destruction. In contrast to the others, this concept of crisis is a purely future-oriented one and aims at a final decision.

These models do not actually appear in philosophical-historical or

theoretical-historical language in a pure form but rather support one another and become mixed together in different proportions. Despite their theological impregnation, what is common to all three models is that they make the claim to offer historically immanent patterns of interpretation for crises that are theoretically able to do without the intervention of God.

Let me follow up with some clarification of the three fundamental semantic positions.

1. "World history is the judgment of the world" is a dictum of Schiller's³ and was promoted as a motto, so to speak, for modernity (*Neuzeit*). Seemingly by chance, the phrase came up in a love poem where Schiller laments a missed opportunity. "What one has missed in one minute / No eternity gives back."⁴ Formally, this concerns the temporalization of the Last Judgment which is always and constantly enforced. It has a pronounced anti-Christian thrust because all guilt mercilessly enters into the personal life of the individual, into the history of political communities, into world history in its entirety. This model is compatible with fate, which in Herodotus appears behind all individual histories and which can be read again and again as the consummation of a world-immanent justice. However, Schiller's dictum raises a greater claim. An inherent justice, one which acquires almost a magical air, is not only required of individual histories but of all world history in toto. Logically, every injustice, every incommensurability, every unatoned crime, every senselessness and uselessness is apodictically excluded. Thus the burden of proof for the meaning of this history increases enormously. It is no longer historians who, because of their better knowledge, believe themselves to be able to morally judge the past *ex post facto*, but rather it is assumed that history, as an acting subject, enforces justice. Hegel took it upon himself to settle the moral discrepancies and shortcomings resulting from this dictum. His world history remains the judgment of the world because the world spirit or the thoughts of God are realized in it in order to achieve their identity. Seen theologically, it is a question of the last imaginable heresy which wants to fully reckon with a Christian interpretation of history.

But Schiller's dictum could be henceforth easily applied, provided history was interpreted as a world-immanent trial. Because liberals could derive a moral legitimacy for their action from it, they never became tired of appealing to this interpretation. But even Darwinian and imperialistic

philosophies of history could easily take up this interpretation because success, survival of the fittest, redeemed the claim to historical legitimacy—up until Hitler's sentimental repudiation of self-pity: those who drown, in all fairness, deserve it.

There are semantic options whose consequences can in no way be attributed to their authors. Whoever tries to trace Hitler back to Hegel or Schiller succumbs to a claim to be able to chart influences through history, one that proceeds in a selective manner. World history as the judgment of the world implies foremost and above all the statement that every situation is marked by the same urgent sense of decision.

In this sense, Schiller's dictum was also theologically adaptable, for instance when Richard Rothe proclaimed in 1837: "All of Christian history is a great and continual crisis of humankind";⁵ or when Karl Barth stripped this perpetual crisis of all final or teleological overtones in order to interpret it existentially: "So-called 'salvation history' is but the ongoing crisis of all of history, not a history in or next to history."⁶ Here, as a concept, "crisis" lost its apocalyptic or transitional meaning—it turns into a structural category of Christianly understood history pure and simple; eschatology is, so to speak, historically monopolized.

2. Theoretically less demanding is an understanding of "crisis" as an iterative periodizing concept. It asks about the conditions of possible courses of history in order to be able to work out commonalities and differences based on their comparability. The semantic model does not make the claim to interpret history as a whole or permanently. Jacob Burckhardt, for example, was able to isolate anthropological constants that made possible varying courses of crises in their particular historical articulations. He defined the period of the barbarian invasions as a historically unique crisis which, not least of all, furthered the emergence of a church with universal claims. Next to this, he only allowed modernity (*Neuzeit*) to be considered as a permanent crisis with an open end. Ultimately, behind all other crises, he discovered more continuities than those involved at a particular time perceived and were ready to admit.

Here the economic concept of crisis can also be mentioned. Economic models of crisis are based on the equilibrium metaphors of the eighteenth century which, empirically, can never be completely confirmed. Roughly said, crises always surface when the balance between supply and demand,

between production and consumption, between the circulation of money and the circulation of goods is disturbed to such an extent that recessions and deterioration become visible everywhere. At the same time, however, previous experience teaches us that a general increase in productivity always follows a crisis. The paradox of this doctrine of crisis seems to consist in the fact that a balance can only be preserved or regained when productivity increases steadily and does not, for instance, stagnate: for, at such times, regression would appear to be inevitable. In this respect, this model hitherto requires progress, without which it would not be empirically provable. As Molinari, an economic theorist of the nineteenth century, said: "Every small or large progress possesses its crisis."⁷ That crises are the generators of progress seems to me to be a semantic model that has been confirmed up until now only in the spheres of economics, natural sciences, technology, and industry. I will spare myself citations illustrating the application of the model to the whole history of humanity. Their number is enormous. Instead, one reference may stand for them all: "Out of every crisis mankind rises with some greater share of knowledge, higher decency, purer purpose."⁸ These words were spoken by Franklin D. Roosevelt shortly before his death. Proceeding from the semantic option, the question must be posed as to whether "progress" is the guiding concept for "crisis" or whether the iterative periodizing concept of "crisis" is the true guiding concept under which "progress" is also subsumed. If, as an iterative periodizing concept, "crisis" may make claims to a greater explanatory power, then "progress"—which undoubtedly exists—could be admitted in its relative right.

3. *Crisis as a final decision.* That the crisis in which one currently finds oneself could be the last, great, and unique decision, after which history would look entirely different in the future—this semantic option is taken up more and more frequently the less the absolute end of history is believed to be approaching with the Last Judgment. To this extent, it is a question of recasting a theological principle of belief. It is expected of world-immanent history itself. Several witnesses can be cited. Robespierre saw himself as the enforcer of a moral justice whose final breakthrough would be obtained by violence, not will. In regard to the crisis of the American and French revolutions, Thomas Paine believed that the future harbored an absolute turning point. Even initial partisans of the French Revolution who became embittered opponents of its Bonapartist consequences could maintain this

semantic option. One need only name Friedrich Schlegel, Fichte, or Ernst Moritz Arndt from the German-speaking lands. The absolute nadir of history guarantees the change toward salvation. In France, the birth of sociology out of the spirit of the revolution (not just the Restoration) can be mentioned. St. Simon or Auguste Comte saw themselves as living during the “grande crise finale”: through scientific planning and an increase in industrial productivity, it would be possible to pass through and overcome it. Lorenz von Stein can also be mentioned here. He saw the last chance to save Europe from slipping back into barbarism in the balance between capital and labor. Here, Karl Marx is stuck, so to speak, in an in-between position. On the one hand, he was completely convinced that the final crisis of capitalism would bring about the withering away of the state and the eradication of class differences in the future; on the other hand, he did not see himself in a position to interpret the crises of capitalism as necessitating the inevitable scuttling—as opposed to the conserving—of the system.

On the one side, he operated with a concept of crisis immanent to the system while he expounded the iterative structure of economic crises. On the other side, he knew of a concept of crisis destroying the system which he derived from other premises, making it possible to see world history drifting toward a last great crisis. The supposedly final struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie is, without doubt, consummated for Marx in the dimensions of a Last Judgment, which he did not succeed in defining on purely economic grounds. With this, I come to my conclusion.

III. “Crisis” as a Question Posed to the Christian Tradition

The assumption that every crisis is a final decision is easily revealed as a perspectival illusion. It is part of human mortality to view our own particular situation as more important and to take it more seriously than all preceding situations have ever been. However, one should be on the guard against dismissing this hyperbolic self-estimation—especially in light of the doctrine of the Last Judgment—as only a perspectival fallacy. Precisely when safeguarding survival is at stake, it could be that many decisions prove to be final decisions. As in the Greek sense of a compulsion to judge and act under the pressure of time, “crisis” remains a necessary concept even under the complex conditions of modern society. I would like to explain this with a historical thought experiment.

In Christian teaching, before the end of the world arrives, God is said to make time pass by more quickly. Behind this teaching stands the cosmological idea that God, as master of times, could bring about the planned end of the world earlier than scheduled and, in fact, would do so for the sake of the elect whose suffering would be alleviated (Mark 13:20, Matthew 24:22). Of course, one might psychologize or ideologize this mythological language of apocalyptic expectation. Within this belief in the imminent foreshortening of time, it is not difficult to see the wish of the suffering and the oppressed to exchange misery as fast as possible for paradise. However, if one observes the topos of the eschatological foreshortening of time in terms of its historical interpretations, one arrives at the astonishing finding that from the initially suprahistorical foreshortening of time came a gradual acceleration of history itself. Luther, for example, strongly believed that God would foreshorten time before the unknown end of the world. But he no longer believed years would turn into months, months into weeks, and weeks into days before the eternal light would negate the difference between day and night; instead, he already interpreted the foreshortening of time historically: events themselves, with the disintegration of the church rapidly rushing onward, were for him a harbinger of the coming end of the world. The burden of proof for the engulfing Last Judgment was no longer summed up in the mythological imagination that time itself is able to be foreshortened, but rather it was expected from empirically observable historical events as such. From an entirely different perspective, the history of discoveries in the natural sciences was analogously interpreted. For Bacon, it was still a principle of expectation and hope that inventions would occur at shorter and shorter intervals so as to be able to better and better master nature. From this, the cognoscenti of early modern times, for instance Leibniz, concluded that world-immanent progress was accelerating faster and faster and would lead to a better world order. From the apocalyptic foreshortening of time came the acceleration of historical progress. The contents of the interpretative pattern were completely interchanged. The attainability of paradise only after the end of the world and its attainability already in this world logically excluded one another.

Yet the cosmic foreshortening of time, which formerly was supposed to precede the Last Judgment, did not rob the concept of crisis of its sense. Even the acceleration of the modern world, the reality of which is not to be doubted, can be comprehended as crisis. Obviously, decisions are due, sci-

entific or not, wanted or unwanted, which will determine whether and how survival on this earth is possible or not. The cosmic foreshortening of time, which was formerly supposed to precede the Last Judgment in mythic language, can today be empirically verified as the acceleration of historical sequences of events. In Jacob Burckhardt's words: "The process of the world (*Weltprozeß*) suddenly assumes a dreadful rapidity; developments that used to require centuries appear in months and weeks, passing by like fleeting phantoms and, with their passing, vanish."⁹ The generic concept for the apocalyptic foreshortening of time that precedes the Last Judgment, and for historical acceleration, is "crisis." Should that only be a linguistic accident? In Christian and in non-Christian usage, "crisis" indicates in every case a growing pressure of time that appears inescapable to humanity on this earth.

Therefore, in concluding, a temporal hypothesis can be offered that is not new at all. Considered from the standpoint of today, the previous history of humanity can be represented by three exponential time curves. Measured with respect to five billion years, the time that it took for the earth to be covered with a solid crust, one billion years of organic life is a short time span. But still much shorter is the time span of ten million years during which there have presumably been humanoid creatures, and only for the past two million years can artificial tools be shown to have been used.

The second exponential time curve can be drawn within the two million years during which humans distinguish themselves by using artificial tools. The first record of genuine art, so to speak, is thirty thousand years ago, the origin of agriculture and the breeding of livestock is around ten thousand years ago. And measured with respect to the two million years of self-productivity, the approximately six thousand years of urban high culture with written communication symbols is a short time span. And philosophy, poetry, and the writing of history have only taken place in an even shorter span.

The third exponential time curve begins to emerge when one proceeds from the organization of state-like high cultures that came into existence only six thousand years ago. Measured with respect to their comparatively continuous history, modern industrial society grounded in science and technology has only unfolded in the last three hundred years. The acceleration curve can be demonstrated by three series of data. The transmission of news has accelerated in a way that has practically led to the identity of

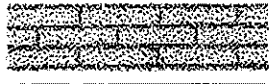
the event and news of it. Transportation has also accelerated tenfold: natural means such as wind, water, and animals have been displaced by technical devices like steam engines, electric motors, and internal combustion engines. The acceleration of the means of communication has made the earth shrink to the size of a spaceship. At the same time, the increase in the population has resulted in an analogous exponential time curve: at about a half billion in the seventeenth century, the population of the world has grown, despite all mass annihilations, to 2.5 billion human beings in the middle of our century, and already approaches eight billion at the end of the twentieth century.

The three exponential time curves might be dismissed as mere number play. However, a limit obviously begins to emerge that can no longer be overstepped by technological and scientific progress. Moreover, there is the fact that in the same exponential time curve, the power for the self-destruction of autonomous humanity has multiplied.

So, the question can be raised as to whether our semantic model of crisis as final decision has gained more chances of realization than it has ever had before. If this is the case, everything would depend upon directing all our powers toward deterring destruction. The catechon is also a theological answer to crisis.

The three exponential time curves can be read as an amplifier for acceleration, rendering it completely impossible to venture projections into the future. Perhaps the answer to crisis consists in looking out for stabilizers which can be derived from the long duration of prior human history. It could be that this question allows itself to be formulated not only historically and politically but also theologically.

Translated by Todd Presner



The Limits of Emancipation

A CONCEPTUAL-HISTORICAL SKETCH

You know how servants are: without a master
They have no will to labor, or excel.
For Zeus who views the wide world takes away
Half the manhood of a man, that day
He goes into captivity and slavery.¹

The virtue of a man is cut in half by servitude. With these words, Odysseus's faithful swineherd, Eumaeus, described the state of affairs which has, since then, shaped world history in multiply changing forms. A slave is only half a human being, inasmuch as human beings have a need for domination. Or vice versa: the slave, subservient to a master, becomes a half-human. Although the quantifying statements can vary, they are not merely to be understood metaphorically.

In the early Middle Ages, depending on gender or degree of freedom, the wergild² of an unfree person only amounted to a third or a half of what a free man was entitled to. Likewise, an oath taken by a noble outweighed the oaths of several serfs. In 1787, when the founders of the American constitution failed to manumit the slaves, the voting power of a slave counted as three-fifths of that of their owners (Article I, section 2). And in Prussia, when compulsory services and serfdom were abolished, the liberal school argued that the work output of those liberated would increase by a factor of two-thirds to one. The doctrine of surplus value appropriated by capitalist exploiters can be situated within this series of quantifying statements.

Whether a slave is classified as half, two-thirds, or three-fifths of a hu-

man being, whether slaves are completely deprived of their humanity, or whether they are, as slaves, counted as chattel—irrespective of profound historical changes, the structural finding remains the same: human beings owned by other human beings do not count as entirely human. This sort of calculation is the case regardless of whether the intended result was considered necessary and positive or arbitrary and negative.

Generally speaking, it can be said that in view of the prevailing forms of power (*Herrschaftsformen*), the legality of ruling (*Herrschaft*) was not fundamentally contested until the eighteenth century. Of course, despite general consent, the relation between master and slave in terms of its infinite possibility of gradation was seldom accepted in theory without modifications. Stoicism and Christianity, through their doctrines of inner freedom to which all human beings equally have a right or are accorded through faith, also made possible an allowance for slavery, servitude, and subordination of all types. This allowance might have influenced the relationship between master and slave in some places, for instance under feudalism, but this was certainly not the case everywhere. No theological or moral doctrine of inner freedom, of the equality of all human beings before God, or of their equality given by nature ever questioned indentured labor, serfdom, servitude, or slavery as institutions—all of which spread in the most terrible way in the early modern period (*frühe Neuzeit*). De la Boétie is probably the first modern thinker who wanted to show by reference to the element of free will (*Freiwilligkeit*) in every system of servitude that it could also be abolished by free will (*freie Willen*) (1577).

This leads us to another type of argumentation that could be characterized as a doctrine of inversion. It infers a better-grounded system of ruling from the well-understood system of servitude: whether Diogenes assigned to each lord his own slave as the actual master; or whether priests, as slaves to God, claimed to be the supreme rulers in this world or sought to indirectly control power; or whether since Diderot and Hegel, slaves themselves have acquired true power over time because slaves, through their work and reflection, make the masters subordinate and rob them of their function. Thus, for a while, the mutual recognition is forced, and, later, the dissolution of all personal subordination into social functions becomes conceivable. Only since the Enlightenment does the challenge of emancipation emerge, demanding the fundamental eradication of domination by humans over humans.

Only since the Enlightenment does the privilege of exercising power

over human beings, a privilege previously limited only to free citizens or lords, become a general right: that rule could henceforth only be self-rule by mature human beings (first men and, then later, women too) over themselves. Out of what was earlier only applied as an ethical principle of self-rule comes a political demand: namely, that inner freedom can only exist if it is also realized outwardly.

What is new about the Enlightenment position is that it no longer permits a way out: neither in the isolated interior nor in a world beyond, two authorities that until then might have worked in a compensatory fashion for either servitude or ignominy that was suffered. This does not mean that these authorities are not applicable to humans in our century. On the contrary, they are strategically omitted or abolished in places where the demand for a complete and total liberation of human beings from human rule is posited. The burden of proof for such a demand—free from logical self-contradictions and morally comprehensible—shifted in the course of the eighteenth century from its contextual grounding in natural law toward a historical future that had been blocked by all previous experience. The transformation from personal rule into rational custodianship may be empirically demonstrated: such an expected, contested, and anticipated liberation of human beings from human subordination, in other words, their redemption within history or the negation of alienation, had hitherto never occurred. Thus I arrive at the point: since the eighteenth century, emancipation turned from a European challenge into a world historical challenge.

I will treat this subject in two stages. First, I will offer a conceptual-historical sketch by reconstructing the meaning and diffusion of meaning of *emancipatio*. Secondly, I will attempt to draw several systematic conclusions from the conceptual history.

I. On the Historical Semantics of “Emancipation”

In the Roman Republic, *emancipatio*, derived from *e manu capere*, described the legal act by which a *paterfamilias* could release his son from paternal power. With this act, the son completely left the family and became, in terms of civil law, *sui juris*. A son who was not yet emancipated still possessed civil rights, the right to trade, and the privilege of marriage—only he was not yet entitled to the power of discretion over property. A legal claim for him to free himself from the father’s power did not exist.

Over the course of the late Republic and the imperial period, the rigidity of possible discharge from the power of the patriarchal house became more and more lenient through administrative acts that facilitated the formation of one's own familia.

In the Middle Ages, this technical legal term was also used in the field of German common law. When one reached the age of maturity, when one got married, when one reached economic independence, or gained positions of rank and distinction, civil independence was achieved automatically, so to speak. Thus the term lost the specific meaning from Roman law of a unilateral legal act on the part of the *paterfamilias* and became generally used to designate the naturally attainable state of having come of age and maturity, at the latest after twenty-five years. The linguistic usage became elastic. For instance, only prematurely granted release was characterized as emancipation (or also as *manumissio*, which originally referred only to the release of slaves), while, around 1700, the state of independence thereby already reached could also be described as emancipation. The Roman legal meaning thus lost its conceptual monopoly. The idea that emancipation would arrive automatically when the age of maturity, and hence the status of being legal, was naturally reached already belonged to the principles of numerous doctrines on natural law prior to the Enlightenment. This line of argumentation, from natural *pregivens* to the status of being legal, remained part of the term from then on.

The actually prevailing differences of rank and legal status—with their dependence on the manor lord or feudal law, or with their estate privileges that extended to the entire political, economic, and social system—could not really be affected by emancipation until the eighteenth century. Any emancipation, whether it was effected unilaterally or arrived naturally, presupposed domination (*Herrschaft*). And so it is not by chance that during the late Middle Ages the term *Knecht* (vassal), at first signifying someone who was still naturally young and had then reached a marriageable, mature age, lost its natural meaning in German-speaking lands: one could remain a *Knecht* all one's life in the feudal system. There was no legal term that could have indicated a general release from domination. Precisely this meaning—in the late eighteenth century—was ascribed to the term “emancipation”; The decisive transformation of meaning was brought about not by legal language but rather by the psychological, social, political, and, above all, philosophical usage of the word. Moving from a civilly and legally circumscribed

meaning into the domain of general human relationships and behavior patterns, the expansion of the concept of “emancipation,” finally to the point where it acquired revolutionary potential, took place—linguistically and socio-historically—not in the civil sense of the noun form of “emancipation,” but first in verb and adverbial usage of our term.

In Latin, the verb *emancipare* was used transitively and could mean, for example, “to sell, to dispose of.” After its adoption as a noun and a verb in western European vernaculars—in Italy and France in the fourteenth century, in England and Germany in the seventeenth century—a reflexive usage now came about. It extended from the common law sense of having reached the legal age of maturity and later indicated an act performed on one’s own authority, something that was precisely excluded from legal terminology. That one could emancipate oneself was unthinkable in the Roman legal tradition.

The following thesis may be ventured: with the introduction of the reflexive verb “to emancipate oneself” (*sich emanzipieren*), a profound shift of mentality was, for the first time, foreshadowed and then brought about. While initially it was a word used by the cognoscenti, the poets and philosophers, who sought to liberate themselves from all pregivens and dependency, the new active word usage was expanded to increasingly refer to groups, institutions, and entire peoples. One spoke of an emancipated heart that would evade religious vows (René d’Anjou, 1455); Rabelais spoke of people who had emancipated themselves from God and reason in order to indulge their perverse passions, but also in the positive sense of being emancipated from the slavery of ignorance. Montaigne saw the difference between humans and animals embodied in the fact that humans emancipate themselves from the rules of nature so that they can pursue the freedom they fancy. Such anthropologically and psychologically legible shifts were directed against the church, theology, tradition, and authority, and rapidly had an effect in the political sphere as well. Thus one of the reasons for the 1595 religious war in France was that the Third Estate was emancipated too much: all subservience had been shed—two hundred years before the great revolution. Contained within the reflexive word usage was *eo ipso* a thrust against the estates system. In German, this linguistic result—to completely break with obedience or claim improper freedoms—was mostly registered negatively in the lexical administration of the language—which only confirmed the thrust against the estates.

The positive associations of self-liberation apparently spread farthest and fastest in England. From Bacon—"for I do take the consideration in general . . . of human nature to be fit to be emancipated and made a knowledge by itself"—via Sir Thomas Browne, who based belief on reason having emancipated itself from all written testimonies—to Bentham, who saw governments emerging that would have already emancipated themselves from established governments—the act of being declared free was always overtaken by the move toward self-authorization. In certain respects, the Roman law sense turned into its opposite during the early modern period, even though the result, to become free from violence, was covered simultaneously by the transitive and intransitive word usages.

Of course, self-authorization was able to draw on more general means of legitimation, such as nature, reason, or free will, authorities which, since the Enlightenment, went beyond the reflexive concept of emancipation and forced all forms of traditional rule to change and justify themselves. This had repercussions on the newly expanded meaning of "emancipation": the unilateral act of state power, placing someone on an equal footing in terms of civil law through emancipation (which remained rigorously preserved in the legal language of the Napoleonic code), was challenged by the demands of those who knew how to legitimately emancipate themselves. Together, the privileged legal titles of nature, reason, and free will led to a historico-philosophical recasting of our concept.

Kant, therefore, knowing the Roman law meaning, defined Enlightenment not as emancipation but as "man's emergence from his self-imposed immaturity." As the stimulant for and consummation of the process of maturing, Enlightenment thus applied to a time that exceeded the singular legal act of emancipation. Kant could do without the term "emancipation" all the more so because he argued that human beings, in accordance with common law, "*naturaliter majorenn*, nonetheless gladly remain in lifelong immaturity."³ The transference of natural maturation into a moral and political imperative, not only in keeping with nature but also exceeding nature, was a more exacting and also a more effective linguistic usage than the metaphors of a juridical emancipation still tied to domination. Maturity, always automatically realized by each succeeding generation, became a historical perspective on the future of a politically self-ruling humanity. Part reality, part goal, a processual event was thus redescribed, for which the term "emancipation" soon came to be used.

In Paris during the revolution, Forster was the first to subsume the Kantian philosophy of history under the new and fashionable concept of emancipation. With this, the term simultaneously became associated in German with the colloquial meaning given to it by its Western neighbors: it was both understood reflexively as self-liberation from all the fetters of tradition as well as expressed a normative claim that had to be legalized through a state-sanctioned act.

In its general usage around 1800, the advantage of the new concept of emancipation was that it not only indicated the recurring and natural degrees of maturation of generations that were growing up but it also designated the legal act of liberation coming to pass with self-emancipation. In this triangle between natural *pregivens*, subjective or collective self-authorization, and the establishment of legal norms, "emancipation" gained its new historical quality. The concept was legible, at once, normatively, evolutionarily, and self-reflexively: In its temporalization, a processual meaning leading to the establishment of laws was always contained. Emancipation becomes an authentic case of a historico-philosophical process-concept which, primarily during the first half of the nineteenth century, achieved the power of a guiding concept. Even with its resuscitation in the 1960s, no new valences were theoretically added to it. "What is the greatest task of our time?" asked Heine in 1828. "It is emancipation. Not just of the Irish, the Greeks, the Frankfurt Jews, the West-Indian Blacks, and other oppressed peoples, but it is the emancipation of the entire world, especially Europe, which has become mature and is now tearing itself free from the iron yokes of the privileged and the aristocracy." Emancipation has turned into a concept of historical movement, without disavowing its juridical implications. Emancipation provided the common denominator of justice for all demands aimed at the eradication of legal, social, political, or economic inequality. Thus, in every case, the term became a concept that demanded the eradication of personal domination by humans over humans; it was both liberal, in favor of the rule by law, as well as democratic, in favor of the sovereignty of the people; it was interpretable in a socialist fashion, in favor of community of property, as well as being the supposed means of abolishing economic domination. Emancipation became, as Scheidler, the clearest systematist of an emancipatory philosophy of history, formulated it in 1840, "practically the most important of all concepts." However, in the same moment, the term also lost its efficacy because it became multivalent and could signify completely different politi-

cal meanings without losing its general plausibility. It took on the status and force of a catchword, one that admittedly presupposed or evoked a minimal consensus about the equal rights of all human beings.

As a concept of political struggle, emancipation was, at the latest since 1830, employed everywhere: first, in order to acquire individual and personal equal rights with respect to pre-given civil and legal conditions. Second, it was used for the purpose of making possible equal rights for groups: classes, social strata, women, particular churches and religious groups, entire peoples. Third, emancipation aimed at freedom of rule and equal rights for all of humanity, for the world, or for the emancipating time, as one could empathetically say then.

It is striking that the legal acts and statutes that instituted the legal equality of previously subjugated groups—the emancipation of the Jews in France in 1791, in Baden in 1808, or in Prussia in 1812; the laws for the liberation of the peasants (which were only later given this name); the emancipation of the Catholics in Ireland in 1829; or the emancipation of the slaves in 1865 in the United States—did not employ the term “emancipation” in a juridical sense, although this is the way the laws falling under this designation entered into political language and thus into general consciousness. Given this finding, we can suspect that the strict and narrow Roman law meaning was just as much present to the lawyers formulating the laws as the sense that more claims were expressed behind every emancipation than at the time seemed purely juridically possible to concede. As O’Connell predicted with political intuition after he succeeded by way of his mass Catholic organization in obtaining the right for all Catholics in Great Britain to run for office—the so-called Catholic Emancipation: “How mistaken men are who suppose that the history of the world will be over as soon as we are emancipated! Oh! *That* will be the time to *commence* the struggle for popular rights.”⁴ The goal of universal equal rights, including freedom from domination, obviously triggered reactions that, with every partial emancipation, were in turn, only mastered by emancipation.

To remain with our English example: Catholic Emancipation forced the Reform Act of 1832; it extended the right to vote but only found its general democratic sanction in 1919. Since then, the welfare state tasks of bringing about a redistribution of wealth and production profits for social justice have followed, without, however, reaching an economic balance—as the precondition of lasting social justice.

Likewise, to mention an example from America, during the War of Independence, the demand for the liberation of the slaves was scaled back so that the war could be won and not be eclipsed by a socioeconomic revolution. As such, an excess obligation remained, which, with the Bill of Rights, was to come back in the future. Following the American Civil War, the legal equality of blacks led—partly foreseen, partly unexpected—to a calcification of socioeconomic and thus also political inequality that even today, despite slow and gradual advocacy for change, still remains a challenge for American domestic and foreign policy.

A certain *ex post facto* teleology, saturated with experience, corresponds to the objective projected *ex ante* with the Bill of Rights. However, actual history has so far never linearly followed such a clear-cut program. It is obviously an enduring problem that the consequences of a legal emancipation stretch farther and last longer than (indeed often only first surface long after) the mere fact of their being incorporated in a legal act.

This leads to several systematic questions that I shall raise upon concluding. I will proceed to these questions in two steps. First, I will argue with the help of an empirically understood set of facts; second, I will investigate the multivalent use of the concept in order to suggest conclusions to be drawn from it.

II. Limits of Emancipation?

If one follows the history of the ratification of legal emancipation acts, one *first* observes that they are retarded again and again by backlashes. When the Catholics gained the right to run in elections in 1829 and thereby broke the political monopoly of the Anglican state religion, the British parliament, in the same act, raised the property qualification for suffrage from forty shillings to ten pounds. Because of this, the Catholics lost about 60 percent of the parliamentary seats that they were expected to win. What had become absolutely necessary to concede on political grounds became largely undermined again by conditions of economic power—not to mention that the daily bread of the Irish continued to be scarce.

Our other examples from the United States also testify to analogous backlashes. During the Civil War, there were many white workers who simply refused to fight against the rebellious Southern states because they feared

that the emancipated blacks would take away their jobs. Political and economic emancipation mutually blocked one another. Later, the equal right to vote finally granted to blacks was nullified by quasi-legal manipulations—through ancestry tests, literacy tests, gerrymandering, tests measuring loyalty to the Constitution and more of the same—taking the advances almost back to the zero point for many decades.

Similar backlashes can be seen in the history of Jewish emancipation. The civil and political equal rights introduced by the French Revolution were again restricted in the economic sphere by Napoleon in the case of the Alsatian and Rhenish Jews. This was also the case, only to a much greater extent, for the Papal State after 1815. Less persistently, although similarly, the history of Jewish emancipation in Germany is a history of retardations. The 1812 civil equality granted in Prussia was not extended to the expanded state after 1815; most notably, Jews were, once again, barred from academic careers by a newly adopted edict. Although civic equality was supplemented by political equality after 1869 (almost taken for granted by this time), the same obstructions remained in effect *de facto*: obtaining political office remained almost entirely denied to Jews.

An initial conclusion can be drawn from these historical findings. Legal acts of equalization can be a help or an impediment to effecting civil rights: there is no guarantee of this. Social and economic conditions always come into play alongside arguments testifying to restrictive behavior patterns. Legal emancipation is thus a necessary, but never a sufficient, condition for effective equal rights.

A second observation also takes us beyond the limits of strictly legal emancipation. As the first black-ruled colony, French Haiti put into effect, with help from the Jacobins in the motherland, its own sovereign human and civil rights under Toussaint L'Ouverture. He was genuinely imbued with revolutionary ideals, and their realization cost the lives of 95 percent of the former white planters there. A racially and economically motivated civil war erupted, a war of settling accounts and revenge, which only came to an end with the help of Napoleon and Britain, but the horror continued much longer. Here, a historical experience exists whose repetition under analogous conditions represents a hitherto unavertable danger. It can only be averted if the legal principle of equal rights for all human beings around the world is proclaimed not only as a legal norm but practiced as a politically necessary and conscientiously enforced principle of justice—for se-

curing our very survival. Here, we should avoid projecting the empirical result of this conditional prognosis one-sidedly.

The annihilation of the Jews by the Germans cannot be completely defined as a backlash in the history of emancipation. All parallels or encapsulating attempts at explanation in socioeconomic terms or those of critique of ideology do not touch the brutal fact of the annihilation itself. In defiance of all legal efforts, even an assignment of guilt and sin is eluded. Trying to understand the victims as active or passive also makes no sense. In this way, the annihilation of the Jews calls us to remembrance as a possible guarantee of maxims for acting in the future: as is always the case, without the actual recognition of the equal rights of all human beings, no organized and peaceful political world order can be reached.

This leads us to a *third* observation in the wake of previous experiences of emancipation. Liberal theory has always related the equal rights of groups to be emancipated only to the individuals within these groups who, as humans and citizens, should have the same rights as those held by the other participants in the pre-given legal community. Any recognition of the groups as such falls under the suspicion of building a state within a state or a nation within a nation, whether it involves Freemasons, Jesuits, Jews, Protestants or Catholics, or estate-based groups. The recognition of individuals as humans and citizens has the advantage of being something that can be legally granted by a general act. But the historical consequences of this individualizing perspective have run into a dead end.

Most emancipation theories in the nineteenth century argued that Jews would have to be assimilated in the long term, whether traditionally, through conversion to Christianity, or progressively, through the attainment of a supradenominational or nondenominational form of community that would negate or sidestep the opposition between Jew and Christian. A minority of Jews even considered both goals worthy of striving for, or at least acceptable. But the other side of this seemingly evolutionary emancipation process consisted precisely in the fact that it did not emancipate the Jews *as* Jews. Whether Kant counted on "the euthanasia of Judaism" with the coming of pure religions based on morality; or whether Bruno Bauer also expected the Jewish question to be resolved with the relinquishment of an otherworldly Christian religion; or whether Marx also believed that the necessity of every further emancipation was eliminated by the emancipation of the working class, resulting in a classless society free from domi-

nation: in these perspectives, the Jews had to disappear *as* Jews in every case. They disappear not as individuals granted equal rights but as a group, as a religious community, as their own nation or race, regardless of how they were understood or had understood themselves.

One of the ironies of the time was that conservative Christian arguments were the very ones most capable of recognizing Judaism as such. Of course, these arguments concealed, only too willingly, reservations of an anti-Jewish and later anti-Semitic nature which, in Germany, prevented the Jewish religious community from being treated in the same way as the Christian church. Here, this equal recognition remained denied to Jews, whereas it became possible in the England of the Dissenters and non-Anglican denominations, and even more so in the United States. And throughout France, such recognition was at least safeguarded by Napoleon's compulsory national organization of the Sanhedrin, something which was not possible in the German Reich.⁵

A further conclusion can be drawn from these historical findings. No emancipation can merely place individuals on an equal footing; it must always include the interhuman relationships within which people actually live. But that presupposes the recognition and equal rights of groups. Without pluralism, whatever its legal status, be it of organizations, religious communities, political parties and associations, or within federal constitutions, no equal rights at all will be realized. Humans always live within units of action, without whose cohesion no individual equal rights seem to be possible. If this historical conclusion is accepted as a diagnosis of the present-day situation, it is particularly difficult, although not entirely impossible, to make prognoses.

The history of the recognition of the role of labor unions in Germany might serve as a partially successful example (although less so today in England where industrialization took place earlier). The legally secured task of unions in social emancipation was pushed aside in view of the apparently structural economic crisis: something that cannot dissolve their rights as a group.

Whether the reclaiming of a particular identity and internal homogeneity by blacks in the United States—"black is beautiful"—promotes general equal rights, or whether it is a hindrance in the long run, I cannot say. To be sure, the admissions quotas for specific groups in schools, colleges, employment, and official positions have produced a drive toward recogni-

tion whose intensity probably cannot be curtailed any longer. An analogous issue exists in the State of Israel where Arab citizens individually enjoy full equal rights, but are not recognized as a social or religious group. Their individual rights shrink proportionally to their group identity. Every emancipation of peoples into state-based sovereign units of action continues to provoke questions of minorities demanding not only individual but also group recognition—and only through this are equal rights made possible. Further examples are unnecessary, for they can be found all over the world.

The equality of all human beings as the theoretical presupposition of their equal rights can thus only be preserved if the multitude of concrete units of action is taken into consideration. The universal premise of justice can only be realized as a minimal imperative if particular communities gain relative guarantees of existence in their diversity. Although historical experience certainly demands skepticism, it can, however, be a more effective stimulus for and corrective to action.

As a last example, the second Prussian *Kulturkampf* can be cited. The equal rights of individual citizens secured by the Reich's constitution of 1867/71 at first provoked a clash between groups. The *Kulturkampf* was waged on the part of the Center party and the Catholic church in the name of the same fundamental rights in whose name the liberals strove to eradicate from public law every influence of the churches on education and marriage. This historical situation has (almost) been overcome. The comparatively religiously neutral state asserted itself: both leaving the church (without being forced to convert or join another church) and civil marriage became individual rights protected by the law from then on. But afterwards, the church-linked Center party and the moral weight of the Catholic church remained just as effective—as units of group action in the secular state.

To what do these empirical findings testify? They have led us into four situative aporias, which were only able to be resolved, if at all, in the course of historical time: political, social, religious, and economic demands for emancipation cannot be immediately brought into agreement. In reality, they can block one another again and again. Both individual rights claims and group claims to equal rights mutually buttress one another but can just as well provoke irresolvable contradictions. In the course of time, these aporias have also led to the fact that a legalization of emancipatory demands generates new problems that hinder their realization and, at the

very least, keeps open problems that cannot be solved solely through legal means. The absurd conclusion of accepting a seemingly hopeless situation or even declaring it hopeless for the purpose of putting an end to it through the annihilation of the other, leads us into apocalyptic dimensions. Therefore, in concluding our discussion of the concept of emancipation, it appears to be necessary, once again, to evaluate the concept with respect to its legitimacy and its use.

1. *The natural substratum* at the base of the emancipation concept—that every succeeding generation becomes mature—is so long-lasting that it compels of itself the possibility of new emancipations. To this extent, while preserving a common legal heritage, emancipation is a fundamental category for all conceivable histories. With every succeeding generation, corresponding to the generation passing away, the possibility arises for it to liberate itself from hitherto pre-given bonds. Only seemingly does this involve regularly recurring conflict between parents and children, which is explicable in terms of social psychology. Rather, what is naturally pre-given, provided it produces histories, always already moves within social changes. Above all, since the technological-industrial revolution, the formerly unchanging preconditions on the basis of which our lives are institutionally regulated, change constantly. What was customary for the father is no longer necessarily right for the following generations growing up with new challenges. The ecological crisis and the threat of atomic annihilation need to be mentioned here because their prevention will only be possible, if at all, when new behavior patterns are learned and practiced in order to survive. In this sense, emancipation is legitimately understood as liberation from those pre-givens obstructing survival on the globe. To be sure, it is not sufficient to simply place our hope and trust in coming generations that naturally succeed the preceding generations and, therefore, appear to be qualified and required to take up the challenges with greater freedom from old assumptions.

2. The apocalyptically interpretable threats to our planet are too close at hand for transgenerational obligations not to be formulated and articulated now. Here, the traditional concept of emancipation plays an ambivalent role as a universal goal determinant. All previous experience speaks against freedom of rule (*Herrschaftsfreiheit*) as something demanded by and derived from equal rights. Therefore, the concept has to be differentiated as a goal determinant. We have no choice but to recognize the diverse pre-

givens of heterogeneous units of action that exist within and among politically oriented powers of decision. Only when the plurality of existing communities is taken into consideration can rational politics take their course. To avert the apocalyptic threat even to some extent, the rules of political calculation cannot be countermanded.

On the other hand, and this poses a new challenge, the situation has intensified to such a degree that the general right of all living human beings to this earth must enter into maxims for action by every political leader, if the atomic threat and the ecological crisis are to be directed along controllable pathways. The utopia of freedom of rule can be reduced to its actual core, namely to achieve the distant goal of equal rights today: the responsibility of everyone for everyone and, to this extent, their equal rights on this globe, have become an implicit condition of any politics. The point is to explicate this. That politics is only possible and can only be mediated via particular and small-scale aggregated units of action, without, however, losing from sight the universal claim of an empirically present humanity, is today's challenge. It is thus necessary to consolidate and render present the goal of freedom of rule, a utopian goal stemming from the Enlightenment, so that the claim contained in it, the claim of all human beings to an equal right just to be able to live, becomes enforceable. The concrete goal of a universal minimal consensus regulating the conditions of possibility for life would then come from the concept's utopian goal of a universal emancipation. Even this presupposes an emancipation, namely from those deep-seated behavior patterns that hinder the attainment of the necessary minimal consensus. The path to this may be long and blocked by nearly insurmountable obstacles, but there is no longer any alternative except atomic catastrophe or the depletion of all our natural resources.

3. The *temporal ambiguity* of the traditional concept of emancipation may be instructive here. Either the concept meant the singular act of the state granting equal rights: in that case enforcement by society, the maturity of everyone, was legally presupposed in order for it to be realized in due time. Alternatively, the concept indicated that long-term process which was supposed to bring about equal rights through adaptation, habituation, or self-emancipation.

Both semantic fields could mutually block one another in praxis. During the German state parliamentary proceedings in the period before the 1848 revolution, when attention was called to the lagging self-emancipation

of the subordinated or oppressed, the Jews, the workers, and also women, the proposed legislation was blocked as anachronistic. The anticipated legal act was postponed because future development was believed to bring about an equality anyway.

In England, this historico-philosophical position of evasion could not be adopted because in the English juridical system, every law was enacted as a singular "act" involving definitive and delimitable persons. It did not posit temporally wide-ranging general norms such as the compelling nature of fundamental rights. Only retrospectively can British history, therefore, be interpreted as an emancipatory process of increasing equal rights: in political reality, the social adaptation of different groups always moved through the isolated, limited, and narrow bottleneck of their legalization.

It was different in the United States where general civil rights (unknown in England) received both a wide-reaching and direct practical significance. When he did so at all, Lincoln only tried to effect the emancipation of the slaves in a gradual and evolutionary manner, with the help of legal compensations and institutional learning phases for those to be liberated. General fundamental rights and concrete steps toward legalization were to be brought into accord over time. But the events of the Civil War went ahead of him. Lincoln had to reluctantly pronounce the unique legal act as a general liberation in 1865. The planned way had to be progressively accelerated. Every gradual solution became obsolete over the course of the Civil War. This could not, however, obviate further court decisions and amendments in order to promote the general principle of equal rights. In Lincoln's words, "I claim not to have controlled events but confess plainly that events controlled me."⁶

This temporally multilayered concept of emancipation—both the unique legal act as well as the social process—thus leads in praxis to quite varying combinations. The difference between granting and championing, between "Lord" and "serf," between emancipation and self-emancipation, between legal act and social process, must be defined precisely so that one does not abandon the concept to the multivalency of a catchword. If we apply the patent ambiguity of our modern concept of emancipation to our situation, then the following conclusion can be drawn: the temporal dimension of gradual change and the temporal dimension of unique action evidently move together. Not just the spans of action but also the spans of expectation become shorter. The pressure to act has grown so strong that

the legal anticipation of equal rights for all human beings can no longer remain merely a traditional demand of the philosophy of history. Rather, equal rights must become immediate maxims of action for all politics, necessarily interest-directed and minority-oriented. The interdependence of all problems on our globe may help to force this minimal consensus. In this way, the concept of emancipation can only remain effectual if it is thought of iteratively: as a constant challenge to reduce or bridge the hiatus still existing between what is legally and intellectually necessary, what can be legally formulated, and what is socially and politically practicable. In other words, the equal rights of all humans on this earth are more than a theoretical pre-given or a utopian goal: they are the minimum that must be preserved from the traditional concept of emancipation in order to make it possible to remain politically and rationally capable of acting. This presupposes, however, that there can be a historical change in experience which is both effective and knows to forge a virtue out of necessity. Here, we might pay homage to St. Jerome:⁷ *Fac de necessitate virtutem*.

Translated by Todd Presner