

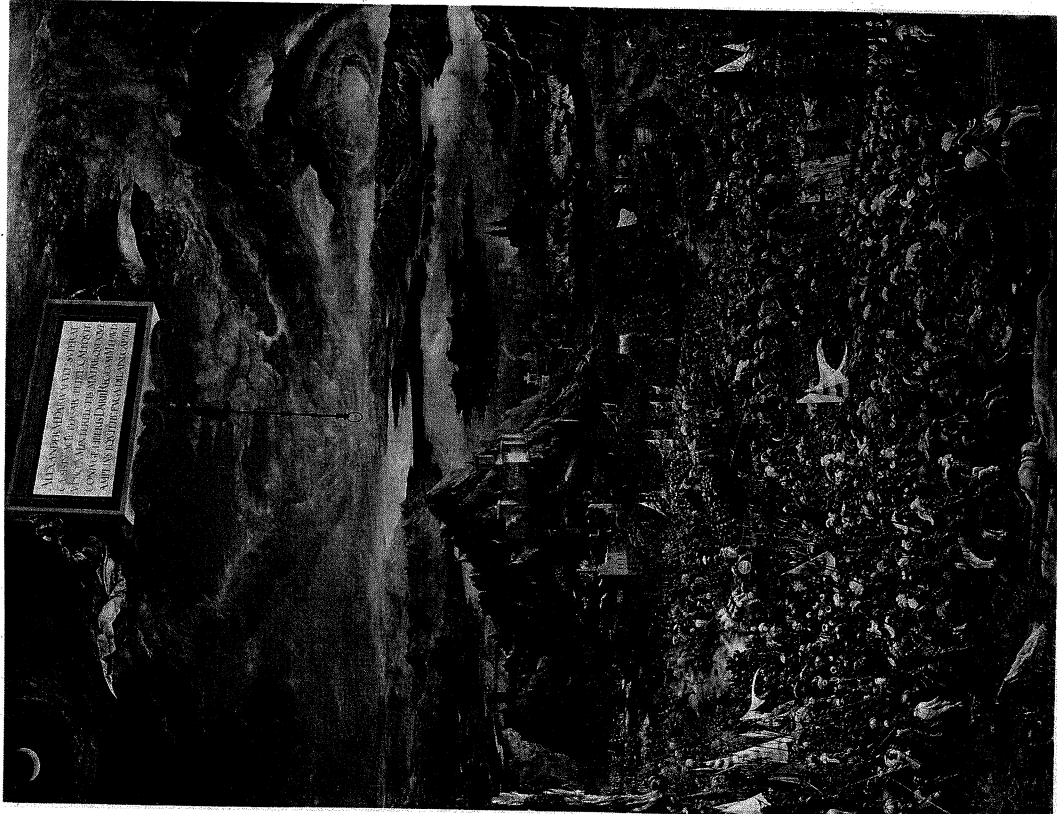
FUTURES PAST

ON THE SEMANTICS OF HISTORICAL TIME

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COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY PRESS NEW YORK



Albrecht Altdorfer, Die Alexanderschlacht, Inv.Nr. 688 (The Battle of Alexander [Issus])
Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Alte Pinakothek, Munich

2 HISTORIA MAGISTRA VITAE THE DISSOLUTION OF THE TOPOS INTO THE PERSPECTIVE OF A MODERNIZED HISTORICAL PROCESS

*There is a history in all men's lives,
Figuring the natures of the times deceased;
The which observed, a man may prophesy,
With a near aim, of the main chance of things
As yet not come to life, which in their seeds
And weak beginnings lie intreasured.*

—Shakespeare (Henry IV, Part Two Act III Scene 1)

Friedrich von Raumer, known as the historiographer to the Hohenstaufen, reports the following episode from the year 1811, when he was still Hardenberg's secretary:

During counsel in Charlottenburg, Oelssen [section head in the Ministry of Finance] animatedly defended the preparation of a quantity of paper money so that debts could be paid. All argument to the contrary failing, I said with immense audacity (knowing my man): "But Privy Councillor, do you not remember that Thucydides tells of the evils that followed from the circulation of too much paper money in Athens?" This experience," he concurred, "is certainly of great importance" — and in this way he allowed himself to be persuaded in order that he might retain the appearance of learning.¹

In the heated debates over the redemption of the Prussian debt Raumer made use of a lie; he knew that Antiquity had known no paper money. But he risked a lie since he calculated its effect—appealing rhetorically to the schooling of his opponent. That effect relied on the force of that old topos, according to which history is supposed to be the great teacher of life. The privy councillor acquiesced to this formula, not to an argument. *Historia magistra vitae*.

"For that which we cannot ourselves experience, we have to follow the experience of others"—thus Zedler's *Universal-Lexicon* in 1735,² where history is presented as a kind of reservoir of multiplied experiences which the readers can learn and make their own; in the words of one of the ancients, history makes us free to repeat the successes of the past instead of recommitting earlier mistakes in the present day.³ This was the function of history for about two thousand years, a school in which one could become prudent without error.

What does the application of this topos to our Charlottenburg example tell us? Thanks to his skill in argument, Raumer placed his colleagues in a seemingly continuous space of experience, but one that he himself treated with irony. The scene demonstrates the continuing role of history as the teacher of life, while also demonstrating how questionable this role had become.

Before pursuing the question of the degree to which this older topos had dissolved into a modernized historical process, we need to look back on its persistence. It lasted almost unbroken into the eighteenth century. Until the present we have had no account of all the expressions through which historicity has been conceptualized. Hence we lack a history of the formula *historia magistra vitae*, regardless of how much its meaning led historians' own understanding through the centuries, if not their work. Despite a verbal identity, the coordinates of our formula have varied greatly over time. It was not unusual for historiographers to reduce the topos to an empty rubric, only used in prefaces. It is therefore more difficult to identify the difference that always prevailed between the mere use of a commonplace and its practical effectiveness. Besides this problem, however, the longevity of our topos is certainly instructive, indicating its flexibility in accommodating the most diverse conclusions. We can also note the manner in which two contemporaries employed this exemplary function of history: Montaigne's purpose was more or less opposite to Bodin's. For Montaigne, histories showed how every generalization was nullified, whereas Bodin used them to disclose general rules.⁴ For both men, however, histories provided exempla of life. Thus the idiom is a formal one, as later expressed in the familiar saying, "One can prove anything with history."⁵

Whatever doctrine our formula serves, each instance of its use is indicative of something. It implies a thorough apprehension of human possibilities within a general historical continuum. History can instruct its contemporaries or their descendants on how to become more prudent or relatively better, but only as long as the given assumptions and conditions are funda-

mentally the same. Until the eighteenth century, the use of our expression remained an unmistakable index for an assumed constancy of human nature, accounts of which can serve as iterable means for the proof of moral, theological, legal, or political doctrines. Likewise, the utility of our topos depended on a real constancy of those circumstances implying the potential similitude of earthly events. If there were a degree of social change, it occurred so slowly and over such a period that the utility of past examples was retained. The temporal structure of past history bounded a continuous space of potential experience.

I

The idiom *historia magistra vitae* was coined by Cicero, borrowing from a Hellenistic pattern.⁶ It found its place within the rhetorical principle that only the orator was capable of lending immortality to a history instructive of life, of rendering perennial its store of experience. The usage is, moreover, associated with further metaphors indicating the tasks of history. "*Historia vero testis temporum, lux memoriae, magistra vitae, nuntia vetustatis, qua voce alia nisi oratoris immortalitati commendatur?*"⁷ The primary task assigned here by Cicero to a knowledge of history is principally directed toward the praxis in which the orator involves himself. He makes use of *historia* as a collection of examples—"*Plena exemplorum est historia*"⁸—that can be employed instructively, and in a more straightforward manner than had Thucydides, who emphasized the usefulness of his work by delivering up his history as *κρημὴν ἐς αἰεὶ*, a permanent possession for knowledge of similarly constituted cases in the future.

Cicero's authority persisted into the Christian experience of history. Monastery libraries not infrequently catalogued his philosophical works as collections of examples, and were widely available.⁹ Therefore the possibility of literal resort to the idiom always existed, even if it at first provoked some opposition against the heathen *historia magistra* on the part of Church fathers upholding the authority of the Bible. Isidor of Seville had made frequent use of Cicero's *De oratore* in his widely available etymological compendium, but he suppressed the expression *historia magistra vitae* in his definitions of history. The apologists of Christianity had no little trouble passing on as precedents events belonging to a profane history, and a heathen one at that.¹⁰ The employment of such a history as the teacher of life, replete with bad examples, was beyond even the transformative powers of

Church historiography. Nonetheless, even Isidor allowed heathen histories an educational function, if somewhat covertly.¹¹ Likewise, Bede consciously justified profane history on the grounds that it provided examples that were either intimidating, or worth imitating.¹² The great influence of both clerics thus ensured that, alongside a history mainly founded upon religion, the motif of a profane instructional history retained its constant, if subordinate, role.

Melanchthon too made use of this pairing, according to which both biblical and heathen histories were capable of delivering exempla for earthly change, variously indicating God's works and arrangements.¹³ The conception of the task of historical writing derived from antiquity could thus be brought into line with a Christian experience of history associated with expectations of salvation. Nor did the linear schema of biblical prefiguration and its fulfillment—right up to Bossuet—rupture the framework within which one derived lessons for the future out of the past.

As millennial expectations became more volatile, ancient history, in its role of teacher, once more forced itself to the fore. Machiavelli's call, not only to admire the ancients but also to imitate them,¹⁴ gave an edge to the resolution that one should continually draw benefit from history because of the unique manner in which it united exemplary and empirical thought. At the head of his *Methodus ad facilem historiarum cognitionem*, Bodin placed the Ciceronian topos: this prominence was owed to the way in which it indicated the holy laws of history, thanks to which men could recognize their present and illuminate the future—and this was not intended as a theological, but as a practical political statement.¹⁵ It would be too wearisome to list the ceaseless repetition¹⁶ or baroque elaboration¹⁷ of an idea that recurred right up to the later Enlightenment, and writers such as de Mably.¹⁸ We can find our topos varied in chronicles and histories from pathetic formulas such as *futurorum magistra temporum*¹⁹ to casual, imitative maxims.

Thus, for instance, Lengnich, a Danzig historiographer, wrote that a knowledge of history opened up to us "all that could be used again under the same conditions."²⁰ Or, to cite a far less obscure man: Lieutenant General Freiherr von Hardenberg instructed his son's tutor not to confuse his charge with dry facts. For

... in general all past and present actions appear to be similar; systematic knowledge of them is broadly superfluous, but nonetheless of great utility if this skeleton is covered with the appropriate flesh, and a young man shown the forces behind great changes, or the nature of the coun-

sel or other means behind the achievement of this or that objective, or in what way or why it failed. In this way one preaches more to understanding than to memory; history becomes pleasant and interesting for the pupil, and he is imperceptibly instructed in the prudence of both private and state affairs, and educated in the way of *artes belli ac pacis*.²¹

The importance of this last testimony of a concerned father relating to the proper education of a son underlines the manner in which pedagogic expectations of an enlightened age once again coincide with the accustomed task of history.

Without prejudice to these evidently historiographic statements, one should not underestimate the practical, didactic force of early modern historico-political literature.²² Legal process depended directly on historical deductions; the relative eternity within which the law operated at that time corresponded to a history conscious of its implication within a changeless, but iterable, nature. The increasing refinement of contemporary politics was mirrored in the reflections of memoirists and the doings reported by envoys. But in this way it remained bound to the indices of *Kameralistik* and *Statistik*: the chronicling of space. It is more than a habitual topos that Frederick the Great constantly invokes in his memoirs: that history is the school of the ruler, from Thucydides to Comynnes, Cardinal Retz, or Colbert. By continually comparing earlier cases, he claimed to have sharpened his powers of deduction. He finally invoked—as a means of explaining, without any apology, his “immoral politics”—the countless examples thanks to which the rules of *Staatsräson* had guided him in his political actions.²³

Irony is certainly mixed with resignation when Frederick claims in his old age that the scenes of world history repeat themselves and that it is necessary only to change the names.²⁴ In this dictum there might even be seen a secularization of figurative thought, for it is certain that the thesis of iterability and thence the pedagogy of historical experience remained an element of experience itself. Frederick's prognosis of the French Revolution testifies to this.²⁵ Within the closed space of the European republic of rulers, with its domestic state bodies and its various *ständisch* orders, the pedagogic role of history simultaneously guaranteed, and was at the same time symptomatic of, a continuity connecting the past to the future.

Naturally, there were objections to the maxim according to which one could learn from history. For instance, Guicciardini—with Aristotle—always regarded the future as uncertain, and consequently denied the prog-

nostic content of history.²⁶ Or take Gracian, who, on the basis of the doctrine of circulation, affirmed the principle of foreknowledge, but emptied it of meaning, rendering it ultimately superfluous by the inevitability inherent in it.²⁷ Or take old Frederick himself, who closed his memoir of the Seven Years War by disputing the pedagogy of all examples: “For it is a property of the human spirit that examples teach no one. The stupidities of the fathers are lost upon their children; each generation must commit its own.”²⁸

Of course, the skeptical attitude sustaining such views did not shatter the distinctive integrity inherent to our didactic formula, since it was rooted in the same experiential space. For the contention that one could learn nothing from history was itself a certainty born of experience, a historical lesson that could render the knowing more insightful, more prudent, or, to borrow a term from Burckhardt,²⁹ wiser. The constant possibility of otherness proved so powerless in abolishing similitude from the world that this otherness cannot as a consequence be conceived as an otherness. “What vanishes is the determinate element, or the moment of difference which, whatever its mode of being and whatever its source, sets itself up as something fixed and immutable.”³⁰ The skeptical undercurrent which was still able, in the Enlightenment, to articulate itself in terms of eternal similitude, was incapable of fundamentally questioning the meaning of the topos. Nevertheless, at the same time the meaningful content of our idiom was hollowed out. The ancient form of History was pushed from its lectern, not least by enlightened men who made such free use of its teachings, and all in the course of a movement bringing past and future into a new relationship. It was ultimately “history itself” that began to open up a new experiential space. This new history assumed a temporal quality peculiar to itself, whose diverse times and shifting periods of experience drew its evidence from an exemplary past.

This process will now be used to investigate symptomatic points in the transformation of our topos.

II

As a way of characterizing this event—of a newly emergent temporality—we will use a statement from Tocqueville. His entire work is laden with the tension of the modern breaking free of the continuity of an earlier mode of time: “As the past has ceased to throw its light upon the future, the mind of man wanders in obscurity.”³¹ This dictum refers to rejection of tra-

ditional experience. Behind this is concealed a complex process whose course is in part invisible and gradual, sometimes sudden and abrupt, and which is ultimately driven forward consciously.

Begriffsgeschichte, as practiced here, serves as a preliminary means for determining the nature of this process. It can show how shifting semantic relations break up and distort our topos as it is handed down. Only through this process does the idiom gain its own history; but at the same time, this history does away with its peculiar truth.

To begin in the German language area, there first occurred a terminological displacement that emptied the older topos of meaning, or at least furthered this. The naturalized foreign word *Historie*—which primarily meant a report, an account of what had occurred, and in a specialized sense identified the "historical sciences"—was rapidly displaced in the course of the eighteenth century by the word *Geschichte*. Since around 1750, the turn from *Historie* toward *Geschichte* is detectable and emphatic enough to be statistically measurable.³² But *Geschichte* principally signified an event, that is, the outcome of actions either undertaken or suffered; the expression referred more to an incident than to an account of it. To be sure, *Geschichte* had for a considerable time implied such an account, just as *Historie* referred to an event.³³ Each was colored by the other. But this mutual limitation (which Barthold Niebuhr tried in vain to reverse) led to the development of an emphasis peculiar to the German language. *Geschichte* assumed the sense of history and drove *Historie* out of general linguistic usage. As history (*Geschichte*) converged as event and representation, the linguistic basis was laid for the transcendent turning point leading to the historical-philosophy of idealism. *Geschichte* as the context of action was incorporated into its knowledge. Droysen's formula that history is only knowledge of history is the result of this development.³⁴ This convergence to a dual meaning led naturally to a change in the meaning of *Historie* as *vitae magistra*.

History as unique event or as a universal relation of events was clearly not capable of instructing in the same manner as history in the form of exemplary account. The scholarly boundaries of rhetoric, history, and ethics were undermined, and thus the old formula gained new forms of experience from the new linguistic usage. Luden, for example, argued that the weight of proof in historical teachings consisted, if anything, in the events themselves. As he wrote in 1811, such proof depended on the fact that "it is really history (*Geschichte*) itself which speaks there. . . . It is up to each person to either make use of its lessons or neglect them."³⁵ History gained a new dimension which deprived accounts of their coherence; history was always "more" than

any account made of it. If, then, history could speak only for itself, a further step was possible which completely flattened the formula and rendered it a tautological shell. "One just learns history from history," commented Radowitiz sarcastically, in turning Hegel's phrase back on Hegel.³⁶ This particular verbal conclusion was not the only one which—not by accident—was suggested by linguistic usage. A political opponent of Radowitiz lent the old formula a new and direct sense by making use of the ambiguity of the German word: "The genuine teacher is history itself, not written history."³⁷ Thus history (*Geschichte*) is instructive only to the degree that one does without its written representation (*Historie*). All three variants demarcated a new, experiential space within which the old *Historie* had to revoke its claim to be *magistra vitae*. Although it survived, it lost this claim to *Geschichte*.

This brings us to a second point. We have negligently spoken of history, or of "history itself," in the emphatic singular, without related subject or object. This curious expression, which today is quite usual, dates from the second half of the eighteenth century. To the degree that *Geschichte* displaced *Historie*, so the former assumed a different character. Initially, and in order to emphasize the new meaning, one spoke freely of history in and for itself, of history pure and simple, of history itself—from History. Droysen later resumed this process with the words "beyond histories there is History."³⁸

One cannot underestimate the linguistic concentration upon one concept that has taken place since about 1770. Since the French Revolution, history has become a subject furnished with divine epithets of omnipotence, universal justice, and sanctity. The "work of history," to employ the words of Hegel, becomes a driving force dominating men and shattering their identity. Here as well, the German language had made some preparations. The semantic abundance and contemporary novelty of the word *Geschichte* derived from the fact that it concerned a collective singular. Up until the middle of the eighteenth century, the expression *die Geschichte* generally prevailed in the plural. Taking a typical example from 1748, Jablonski's *Allgemeines Lexikon der Künste und Wissenschaften* informs us that "*die Geschichte* are a mirror for virtues and vices in which one can learn through assumed experience what is to be done or left undone; they are a monument to evil as well as praiseworthy deeds."³⁹ What we hear in this example is the usual definition, which is characteristic; it is bound up with a plurality of additive individual histories, just as Bodin wrote his *Methodus ad faciendam cognitionem historiarii* for the better knowledge of *historiarum*, of histories in the plural.

In the German language, then, *Geschichte(n)*—from the singular forms *das Geschichte* and *die Geschicht*⁴⁰—were both plural forms, referring to a corresponding number of individual examples. It is really interesting to follow the imperceptible and unconscious manner in which, ultimately with the aid of extensive theoretical reflection, the plural form *die Geschichte* condensed into a collective singular. It was first lexically noted in 1775 by Adelung, in anticipation of the coming development.⁴¹ Just three years later, a reviewer in the *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek* complained of the way in which the new *Geschichte*, empty of all narrative or exemplary meaning, had spread: "The fashionable word *Geschichte* represents a formal misuse of the language, since in the text [under review] we find only *stories* (*Erzählungen*) in the main."⁴²

This usage, which effectively marked out history, separating it from all repeatable exemplary power, was due not least to a shift in the boundary distinguishing history and poetics. Increasingly, historical narrative was expected to provide the unity found in the epic derived from the existence of Beginning and End.⁴³ Past facts could only be translated into historical reality in their passage through consciousness. This became clear in the dispute on Pyrrhonism.⁴⁴ As Chladenius said, only in "rejuvenated images" can *Geschichte* be recounted.⁴⁵ As greater representative art was required of *Historie*—whereby it was expected to elicit secret motives, rather than present chronological series, create a pragmatic structure for the establishment of an internal order out of accidental occurrences—so then poetic demands entered into *Historie*. This became subject to demand for intensified reality long before it was able to satisfy such a demand. It persisted in the form of a collection of ethical examples, although with the devaluation of this role, the value of *res factae* shifted with respect to *res fictae*. An unmistakable index of the propagation of the new historical consciousness of reality is the fact that, conversely, stories and novels proclaimed themselves "true histories" (*histoire véritable, wahrhaftige Geschichte*).⁴⁶ In this fashion, they participated in the increased claim to truth on the part of real history, a degree of truth which had been withheld from *Historie* from Aristotle to Lessing.⁴⁷ Thus the demands of history and poetics folded together; the one penetrated the other so that light could be cast on the immanent meaning of *Geschichte*.

Leibniz, who still conceived of historical writing and poetry as arts of moral instruction, could view the history of humanity as God's novel, whose point of departure was the Creation.⁴⁸ This idea was taken up by Kant, who used the term "novel" (*Roman*) metaphorically so that the natural unity of general history might be allowed to emerge. At a time when universal his-

tory, composed of a summation of singular histories, transformed into "world history." Kant sought the means by which the planless "aggregate" of human actions could be transposed into a rational "system."⁴⁹ Clearly, it was the collective singular of *Geschichte* that rendered such thoughts capable of expression, irrespective of whether it was a matter of world history or of individual history. Thus, for example, Niebuhr announced under this title his lectures on the history of the era of the French Revolution, arguing that only the Revolution had lent "epic unity to the whole."⁵⁰ It was history (*Geschichte*) conceived as a system that made possible an epic-unity that dissolved and established internal coherence.

The centuries-old dispute between history and poetics was finally dissolved by Humboldt when he derived the peculiarity of "history in general" from its formal structure. Following Herder, he introduced the categories of "strength" and "tendency," categories which continually escape their givenness. He thereby denied all naively accepted material exemplarity of past instances and drew a general conclusion for historical writing on any theme: "The writer of history who is worthy of such a name must represent each incident as part of a whole or, what amounts to the same thing, within each incident illuminate the form of history in general."⁵¹ He thus reinterpreted a criterion of epic representation and transformed it into a category of the Historical.

The collective singular permitted yet a further step. It made possible the attribution to history of the latent power of human events and suffering, a power that connected and motivated everything in accordance with a secret or evident plan to which one could feel responsible, or in whose name one could believe oneself to be acting. This philological event occurred in a context of epochal significance: that of the great period of singularization and simplification which was directed socially and politically against a society of estates. Here, Freedom took the place of freedoms, Justice that of rights and servitudes, Progress that of progressions (*les progrès*, the plural) and from the diversity of revolutions, "The Revolution" emerged. And with respect to France, one might add that the central place the Revolution in its singularity occupies in Western thought is, in the German language, assigned to *Geschichte*.

The French Revolution brought to light the concept of history characteristic of the German Historical School. Both of these smashed the preceding models, while at the same time apparently incorporating them. Johannes von Müller, still in Göttingen a follower of the pragmatic intractability of his teacher, wrote in 1796: "One does not so much find in history what is to

be done in specific cases (everything is ceaselessly altered by circumstance) as rather the general resultant, or eras and nations." Everything in the world has its own time and place and one should purposefully carry out the tasks handed down by fate.⁵²

The young Ranke reflects the semantic shift by which the given singularity of a universal reality might be subsumed under one concept of history. He wrote *Geschichten der romanischen und germanischen Völker* in 1824 and expressly added that this concerned "Geschichten, nicht die Geschichte." He did not, however, dispute the existence of the specific uniqueness of history (*Geschichte*). If an event became the object of and set in motion unique and genuine forces, this set to one side the direct applicability of historical models. Ranke continued: "The task of judging the past for the benefit of future generations has been given to History: the present essay does not aspire to such an elevated task; it merely seeks to show the past as it once was (*wie es eigentlich gewesen*)."⁵³ Ranke increasingly limited himself to the past tense, and only during a temporary departure from this limitation, when he edited the *Historisch-Politische Zeitschrift*, did he resort to the old topos of *historia magistra vitae*.⁵⁴ His conspicuous failure appeared to compromise recourse to the old topos.

It was not the historical view of the world as such that led—above all, in the transmission of our idiom through historiographies founded on natural law⁵⁵—to the abandonment of direct application of its doctrine. It was, rather, that hidden behind the relativization of all events consumed by *historia magistra* was a general experience also shared by those in the camp opposed to the progressives.

This brings us to a third point. It is no accident that in the same decades in which history as a collective singular began to establish itself (between 1760 and 1780), the concept of a philosophy of history also surfaced.⁵⁶ This is the time when conjectural, hypothetical, or alleged histories flourished. Iselin in 1764, Herder in 1774, Köster in 1775, working up the "philosophy of history" for consumption by historical scholars,⁵⁷ did rather limp along behind Western authors. They substantially adopted or transformed western writers. What was common to all, however, was the destruction of the exemplary nature of past events and, in its place, the discovery of the uniqueness of historical processes and the possibility of progress. It is linguistically one and the same event which constituted history in the sense customary today, and on this basis gave rise to a philosophy of history. Whoever makes use of the expression "philosophy of history" must note, wrote Köster, "that this is no special or particular science, as might easily be believed on first sighting

the term. For it is, where a complete section of history (*Historie*), or a whole historical science, is dealt with, nothing more than history (*Historie*) in itself."⁵⁸ History and the philosophy of history are complementary concepts which render impossible any attempt at a philosophization of history; this is an insight which was to be fundamentally lost in the nineteenth century.⁵⁹

The potential similarity and iterability of naturally formed histories was assigned to the past, while History itself was denaturalized and formed into an entity about which, since that time, it has not been possible to philosophize in the way one can about nature. Nature and history could now separate conceptually from each other; the proof of this is that in precisely these decades the old domain of *historia naturals* is eliminated from the structure of historical sciences: for the French by Voltaire in the *Encyclopédie*, for the Germans by Adelung.⁶⁰

Behind this separation, which was prefigured by Vico and might seem to belong only to the history of the sciences, exists the decisive registration of the discovery of a specific historical temporality. This involves what one might call a temporalization of history, which has since that time detached itself from a naturally formed chronology. Up until the eighteenth century, the course and calculation of historical events was underwritten by two natural categories of time: the cycle of stars and planets, and the natural succession of rulers and dynasties. Kant, in refusing to interpret history in terms of astronomical data and rejecting as nonrational the course of succession, did away with established chronology on the grounds that it provided a guideline that was both annalistic and theologically colored, "as if chronology were not derivative of history, but rather that history must arrange itself according to chronology."⁶¹

The exposure of a time determined solely by history was effected by contemporary historical philosophy long before historicism made use of this idea. The naturalistic basis vanished, and progress became the prime category in which a transnatural, historically immanent definition of time first found expression. Insofar as philosophy conceived history in the singular and as a unitary whole and transposed it in this form into Progress, our topos was inevitably robbed of meaning. With such a history functioning as the solitary source of the education of the human race, it was natural that all past examples lost their force. Individual teachings disappeared into a general pedagogic arrangement. The ruse of reason forbade man to learn directly from history and indirectly forced him toward happiness. This is the progressive conclusion that takes us from Lessing to Hegel: "But what experience and history teach is this—that nations and governments have never learned any-

thing from history or acted upon any lessons they might have drawn from it."⁶² Or, in the words of an experienced contemporary of Hegel, Abbot Rupert Kormmann: "It is the fate of states as well as of men to become prudent (*klug*) just when the opportunity to be so has disappeared."⁶³

There is, underlying both statements, not only a philosophical reflection on the properties of historical time, but just as directly the forcible experience of the French Revolution, which seemed to outstrip all previous experience. The extent to which this new historical temporality was based on just this experience was quick to show itself with the revival of the revolution in Spain in 1820. Immediately after the outbreak of unrest, Count Reinhard was prompted by Goethe to make an observation which made the temporal perspective obvious: "You are quite right, dear friend, in what you say on experience. It arrives for individuals always too late, while for governments and peoples it is never available. This is because past experience presents itself concentrated in a single focus, while that which has yet to be experienced is spread over minutes, hours, days, years, and centuries; thus simultaneity never appears to be the same, for in the one case one sees the whole, and in the latter only individual parts."⁶⁴ It is not only because transpired events cannot be repeated that past and future cannot be reconciled. Even if they could, as in 1820 with the revival of the revolution, the history that awaits us deprives us of the ability to experience it. A concluded experience is both complete and past, while those to be had in the future decompose into an infinity of different temporal perspectives.

It is not the past but the future of historical time which renders similitude dissimilar. With this Reinhard demonstrated the temporality peculiar to the processual nature of a modern history, whose termination is unforeseeable.

This leads us to another variant of our topos which alters itself in the same direction. It frequently occurred in connection with *historia magistra* that the historian did not only have to teach, but also had to form opinions and on the basis of these make judgments. This task was taken up with particular emphasis by enlightened *Historie*, and it became, in the words of the *Encyclopédie*, a *tribunal intègre et terrible*.⁶⁵ Almost stealthily, a historiography which had been making judgments since antiquity turned into a *Historie* that executed its judgments autonomously. Raynal's work, not the least thanks to the aid of Diderot, testifies to this. The Final Judgment was thereby rendered temporal: "World-history is the world's tribunal." This phrase of Schiller's from 1784 quickly entered circulation, already stripped of any historiographic traces and addressing itself to a form of justice contained within

history itself, and embodying all human actions. "Whatever is left undone stays forever undone."⁶⁶

Prevalent journalistic usages such as the idea of the chastisement of time, or of the spirit of the age to which one had to constantly adjust, constantly evokes the inevitability of the manner in which the Revolution, or the history of mankind, was forced into a confrontation of alternatives.⁶⁷ But this historico-philosophical determination, equivalent to the temporal singularity of history, is only one side from which *historia magistra vitae* was deprived of its potential. Another, by no means weaker, attack came from an apparently opposed direction.

This was that, fourthly, consistent Enlighteners tolerated no allusion to the past. The declared objective of the *Encyclopédie* was to work through the past as quickly as possible so that a new future could be set free.⁶⁸ Once, one knew exempla; today, only rules, said Diderot. "To judge what happens according to what has already happened means, it seems to me, to judge the familiar in terms of the unfamiliar," deduced Sieyès.⁶⁹ One should not lose the nerve to refuse a turn to history for something that might suit us.⁷⁰ These revolutionaries then supplied in dictionary form a directive to write no more history until the Constitution was completed.⁷¹ The constructibility of history dethroned the older *Historie*, "for in a state like ours, founded on victory, there is no past. It is a creation, in which—as in the creation of the universe—everything that is present is but raw material in the hand of the creator by whom it is transformed into existence." So crowed one of Napoleon's satraps.⁷² And so Kant's forecast was fulfilled in this manner, when he posed the question: "How is history *a priori* possible? Answer: when the soothsayer himself shapes and forms the events that he had predicted in advance."⁷³

The predominance of history which corresponds quite paradoxically to its constructibility betrays two aspects of the same phenomenon. Since the future of modern history opens itself as the unknown, it becomes plannable—indeed it must be planned. And with each new plan a fresh degree of uncertainty is introduced, since it presupposes a lack of experience. The self-proclaimed authority of "history" grows with its constructibility. The one is founded on the other, and vice versa. Common to both is the decomposition of the traditional experiential space, which had previously appeared to be determined by the past, but which would now break apart.

A byproduct of this historical revolution was that historical writing now became not so much falsifiable as subject to manipulation. With the Restoration there came an 1818 decree forbidding history lessons on the period

1789-1815.⁷⁴ By denying the Revolution and its achievements, it seemed implicitly to adapt itself to the view that repetition of the past was no longer possible. But it sought in vain to trump amnesia with amnesia.

Behind all that has been said up to now: behind the singularization of history, its temporalization, unavoidable superiority, and productivity, can be registered an experiential transformation that permeates our modernity. In this process, *Historie* was shorn of the objective of directly relating to life. Since that time, moreover, experience seemed to teach the opposite. An unassuming witness who summarizes this experience for us is the modest and intelligent Perthes, who wrote in 1823:

If each party were to take turns at governing and organizing institutions, then all would, through their self-made history, become more reasonable and wise. History made by others, no matter how much written about and studied, seldom gives rise to political reasonableness and wisdom: that is taught by experience.⁷⁵

This assessment, within the sphere of the expressive possibility of our topos, represents its complete inversion. Counsel is henceforth to be expected, not from the past, but from a future which has to be made. Perthes' statement was modern, for it took leave of *Historie*, and as a publisher Perthes was able to further it. Historians engaged in a critical reconstruction of the past were at one with progressives who, in agreeing that no further utility was to be gained from the directives of an exemplary *Historie*, consciously placed new models at the forefront of the movement.

This brings us to our last feature, which contains a question. What was common to this new experience, whose uniqueness had previously been determined by the temporalization of history? As Niebuhr, in 1829, announced his lectures on the previous forty years, he shied away from calling them a "History of the French Revolution," for "the Revolution is itself a product of the period. . . . We do indeed lack a general word for the period and in view of this we should like to call it the Epoch of Revolutions."⁷⁶ Behind this dissatisfaction was a recognition that a temporality adequate to history first emerges as something internally differentiated and differentiable. The requisite experience for differentiating time in general is, however, that of acceleration and retardation.

Acceleration, initially perceived in terms of an apocalyptic expectation of temporal abbreviation heralding the Last Judgment,⁷⁷ transformed itself—also from the mid-eighteenth century—into a concept of historical

hope.⁷⁸ This subjective anticipation of a future both desired and to be quickened acquired an unexpectedly solid reality, however, through the process of technicalization and the French Revolution. Chateaubriand drew up while in emigration in 1797 a parallel of the new and the old revolutions, whence he drew conclusions from the past for the future in the usual manner. But he was soon forced to realize that whatever he had written during the day was by night-time already overtaken by events. It seemed to him that the French Revolution led into an unparalleled open future. Thus, thirty years later, Chateaubriand placed himself in a historical relation by republishing his outdated essay, unchanged in substance, but with added notes suggesting progressive constitutional prognoses.⁷⁹

After 1789 a new space of expectation was constituted whose perspective was traced out by points referring back to different phases of the past revolution. Kant was the first to foresee this modern system of historical experience when he established a temporally indeterminate, but nevertheless ultimate, goal for the repetition of revolutionary attempts. "Instruction through frequent experience" of failed projects perfects the course of the Revolution.⁸⁰ Since then historical instruction enters political life once again via the back door of programs of action legitimated in terms of historical philosophy. Mazzini, Marx, and Proudhon can be named as the first revolutionary teachers seeking to apply such lessons. According to party or position, the categories of acceleration and retardation (evident since the French Revolution) alter the relations of past and future in varying rhythm. This principle is what Progress and Historicism share in common.

It also becomes comprehensible, against the background of this acceleration, why the writing of contemporary history, *Gegenwartschronik*, was left behind,⁸¹ and why *Historie* failed to keep abreast of an increasingly changing actuality.⁸² In a social world undergoing emphatic change, the temporal dimension within which experience had previously been developed and collected became displaced. Historicism—like the historical philosophy of Progress—reacted to this by placing itself in an indirect relation to *Geschichte*. However much the German Historical School conceived itself as concerned with a science of the past, it did nonetheless fully exploit the dual meaning of the word *Geschichte* and seek to elevate history into a reflexive science. Here, the individual case lost its politico-didactic character.⁸³ But History as a totality places the person who has learned to understand it in a state of learning that should work directly on the future. As emphasized by Savigny, history is "no longer merely a collection of examples, but rather the sole path to the true knowledge of our own condition."⁸⁴ Or, as Mommsen

stated in trying to bridge the gulf between past and future: history is no longer a teacher of the art of making political prescriptions, but is "instructive solely in that it inspires and instructs independent creative judgment."⁸⁵ No matter how scholarly, every past example is always too late. Historicism can relate to history only indirectly.⁸⁶ In other words, historicism renounces a history which simultaneously suspends the condition of its possibility as a practical-historical science. The crisis of historicism coincides with this, but this does not prevent the its survival so long as "Geschichte" exists.

Henry Adams was the first to make a serious attempt at dealing methodically with this problem. He developed a theory of movement that dealt simultaneously with Progress and History, and that was specified by his questioning of the structure of historical time. Adams proposed a law of acceleration (as he called it), on the basis of which standards were continually altered, since the acceleration of the future constantly foreshortened resort to the past. Population increased in ever-decreasing intervals; technically-created velocities rose exponentially; the increase of production showed similar tendencies, likewise scientific productivity; life expectancy was rising and hence extending generational span—from these and many other examples that could be freely multiplied, Adams drew the conclusion that one could no longer teach how to behave, but at the most, how to react. "All the teacher could hope for was to teach [the mind] reaction."⁸⁷

3

HISTORICAL CRITERIA OF THE MODERN CONCEPT OF REVOLUTION

There are few words so widely diffused and belonging so naturally to modern political vocabulary as the term "revolution." It also belongs, of course, to those widely used forceful expressions whose lack of conceptual clarity is so marked that they can be defined as slogans. Quite clearly, the semantic content of "revolution" is not exhausted by such sloganistic usage and utility. Instead, the term "revolution" indicates upheaval or civil war as well as long-term change, events, and structures that reach deep into our daily life. Obviously, this sloganizing ubiquity and the occasional very concrete meaning of "revolution" are closely related. The one invokes the other, and vice versa. And it is this semantic relationship that will be addressed in the following.¹

The linguistic situation is variable. While practically every newspaper talks of the second industrial revolution, historical science is still arguing about the way in which the nature and inauguration of the first should be defined. This second industrial revolution not only relieves the world of physical exertion, but also entrusts intellectual processes to automatic machines. Cybernetics, atomic physics, and biochemistry are all included in the concept of the second industrial revolution; the first is left far behind, related as it is to the use of capital, technology, and the division of labor in extending human productivity beyond existing needs. Generally accepted demarcation criteria are lacking.

Likewise, we read daily of the Marxist program for world revolution, formulated originally by Marx and Lenin and then, in particular, inscribed by Mao Zedong on the banners of the Chinese Communist Party. More recently, the concept of Cultural Revolution has become a part of the domestic Chinese situation, the clear purpose of which is to impel disruption into Chinese sensibility, dictating revolution into the body as it were. The conditions for the extension of the proletarian revolution around the

According to a well-known saying of Epictetus, it is not deeds that shock humanity, but the words describing them.¹ Apart from the Stoic point that one should not allow oneself to be disturbed by words, the contrast between "pragmata" and "dogmata" has aspects other than those indicated by Epictetus's moral dictum. It draws our attention to the autonomous power of words, without whose use human actions and passions could hardly be experienced, and certainly not made intelligible to others. This epigram stands in a long tradition concerned with the relation of word and thing, of the spiritual and the lived, of consciousness and being, of language and the world. Whoever takes up the relation of *Begriffsgeschichte* to social history is subject to the reverberations of this tradition. The domain of theoretical principles is quickly broadened, and it is these principles which will here be subjected to an investigation from the point of view of current research.²

The association of *Begriffsgeschichte* to social history appears at first sight to be loose, or at least difficult. For a *Begriffsgeschichte* concerns itself (primarily) with texts and words, while a social history employs texts merely as a means of deducing circumstances and movements that are not, in themselves, contained within the texts. Thus, for example, when social history investigates social formations or the construction of constitutional forms—the relations of groups, strata, and classes—it goes beyond the immediate context of action in seeking medium- or long-term structures and their change. Or it might introduce economic theorems for the purpose of scrutinizing individual events and the course of political action. Texts and their attributed conditions of emergence here possess only a referential nature. The methods of *Begriffsgeschichte*, in contrast, derive from the sphere of a philosophical history of terminology, historical philology, semasiology, and onomatology; the results of its work can be evaluated continually through the exegesis of texts, while at the same time, they are based on such exegesis.

This initial contrast is superficially quite striking. Once engaged methodologically, however, it becomes apparent that the relation of *Begriffsgeschichte* and social history is more complex than would be the case if the former discipline could in fact be reduced to the latter. This is immediately apparent when considering the domain of objects which the respective disciplines study. Without common concepts there is no society, and above all, no political field of action. Conversely, our concepts are founded in sociopolitical systems that are far more complex than would be indicated by treating them simply as linguistic communities organized around specific key concepts. A "society" and its "concepts" exist in a relation of tension which is also characteristic of its academic historical disciplines.

An attempt will be made to clarify the relation of both disciplines at three levels:

1. To what extent *Begriffsgeschichte* follows a classical critical-historical method, but by virtue of its greater acuity, also contributes to the tangibility of sociohistorical themes. Here, the analysis of concepts is in a subsidiary relation to social history.
2. To what extent *Begriffsgeschichte* represents an independent discipline with its own method, whose content and range are to be defined parallel to social history, while both disciplines mutually overlap.
3. To what extent *Begriffsgeschichte* poses a genuine theoretical claim without whose solution an effective social history cannot be practiced.

Two reservations condition the following remarks: first, they do not deal with linguistic history, even as a part of social history, but rather with the sociopolitical terminology relevant to the current condition of social history. Second, within this terminology and its numerous expressions, emphasis will be placed on concepts whose semantic "carrying capacity" extends further than the "mere" words employed in the sociopolitical domain.³

THE METHOD OF BEGRIFFSGESCHICHTE AND SOCIAL HISTORY

An example can be used here to show that the critical-historical implications of *Begriffsgeschichte* are a necessary aid to social history. It comes from the time of the French, and of the emergent industrial, revolu-

tions; hence, from a zone that was to prove decisive for the development both of sociology and of sociohistorical questions.⁷

Hardenberg, in his well-known September Memorandum of the year 1807, drafted guidelines for the reorganization of the Prussian state. The entire state was to be socially and economically restructured according to the experiences of the French Revolution. Hardenberg wrote:

A rational system of ranks, not favoring one *Stand* over another, but rather providing the citizens of all *Stände* with their places alongside each other according to specific classes, must belong to the true needs of a state, and not at all to its immaterial needs.⁴

Some exegesis is required to understand what is, for Hardenberg's future reform policy, a programmatic statement; a critique of the sources will disclose the specific concepts that the policy embodies. The transfer of the traditional differentiation between "true" and "immaterial" from the *Stände* to the state was a conception current for just half a century and will not here be examined. It is however striking that Hardenberg opposes the vertical ranking of the *Stände* to a horizontal articulation of classes. The *Standesordnung* is evaluated pejoratively insofar as it implies the favoring of one *Stand* over another, while all members of these *Stände* are, at the same time, citizens and as such should be equal. In this statement they do, as citizens, remain members of a *Stand*, but their functions are defined "according to specific classes," and it is in this way that a rational system of ranks should arise.

Such a statement, liberally sprinkled as it is with sociopolitical sociopolitical expressions, involves, on the purely linguistic level, not inconsiderable difficulties, even if the political point, exactly on account of its semantic ambiguity, is clear. The established society of orders is to be replaced by a society of citizens (formally endowed with equal rights), whose membership in classes (yet to be defined politically and economically) should make possible a new, state-based system of ranks.

It is clear that the exact sense can be obtained only by reference to the complete Memorandum; but it is also necessary to take into account the situation of the author and the addressee. Due regard also must be paid to the political situation and the social condition of contemporary Prussia; just as, finally, the use of language by the author, his contemporaries, and the generation preceding him, with whom he shared a specific linguistic commu-

nity, must be considered. All of these questions belong to the usual critical-historical, and in particular historical-philological, method, even if problems arise that are not soluble by this method alone. In particular, this concerns the social structure of contemporary Prussia, which cannot be adequately comprehended without an economic, political, or sociological framework for investigation.

Specific restriction of our investigation to the concepts actually employed in such a statement proves decisive in helping us pose and answer the sociohistorical questions that lie beyond the comprehension of such a statement. If we pass from the sense of the sentence itself to the historical arrangement of the concepts used, such as *Stand*, "class," or "citizen," the diversity of the levels of contemporary experience entering this statement soon becomes apparent.

When Hardenberg talks of citizens (*Staatsbürger*), he is using a technical term that had just been minted, that is not to be found in the Prussian Civil Code, and that registered a polemical engagement with the old society of orders. Thus, it is a concept that is consciously deployed as a weapon in the struggle against the legal inequalities of the *Stände*, at a time when a set of civil rights that could have endowed the Prussian citizen with political rights did not exist. The expression was novel, pregnant with the future; it referred to a constitutional model yet to be realized. At the same time, at the turn of the century, the concept of *Stand* had infinite shades of meaning—political, economic, legal, and social—such that no unambiguous association can be derived from the word itself. Insofar as Hardenberg thought of *Stand* and privilege as the same thing, he critically undermined the traditional rights of domination and rule of the upper *Stände*, while in this context, the counterconcept was "class." At this time, the concept "class" possessed a similar variety of meanings, which overlapped here and there with those of *Stand*. Nevertheless, it can be said for the language in use among the German, and especially the Prussian, bureaucracies, that a class at that time was defined more in terms of economic and legal-administrative criteria than in terms of political status or birth. In this connection, for instance, the physiocratic tradition must be taken into account, a tradition within which the old *Stände* were first redefined according to economic criteria: a design which Hardenberg shared in its liberal economic intention. The use of "class" demonstrates that here a social model which points to the future is set in play, while the concept of *Stand* is related to a centuries-old tradition: it was once again given legal expression in the Civil Code, but the Code's ambivalence was already increasingly apparent and in need of reform.

Surveying the space of meaning in each of the central concepts here employed exposes, therefore, a contemporary polemical thrust; intentions with respect to the future; and enduring elements of past social organization, whose specific arrangement discloses a statement's meaning. This activity of temporal semantic construal simultaneously establishes the historical force contained within a statement.

Within the practice of textual exegesis, specific study of the use of sociopolitical concepts and the investigation of their meaning thus assumes a sociohistorical status. The moments of duration, change, and futurity contained in a concrete political situation are registered through their linguistic traces. Expressed more generally, social conditions and their transformation become in this fashion the objects of analysis.

A question equally relevant to *Begriffsgeschichte* and social history concerns the time from which concepts can be used as indicators of sociopolitical and sociopolitical change and historical profundity as rigorously as is the case with our example. It can be shown for German-speaking areas from 1770 onward that both new meanings for old words and neologisms proliferate, altering with the linguistic arsenal of the entire political and social space of experience, and establishing new horizons of expectation. This is stimulating enough without posing the question of priority in this process of change between the "material" and the "conceptual." The struggle over the "correct" concepts becomes socially and politically explosive.

Our author, Hardenberg, likewise sets great store by conceptual distinctions, insisting on linguistic rules which have, since the French Revolution, been part and parcel of the everyday business of politicians. Thus he addressed noble estate owners in assemblies, as well as in writing, as "estate owners" (*Gutsbesitzer*), while he did not forbear from receiving representatives of regional *Kreisstände* quite properly as *ständische* deputies. "By confusing the names, the concepts also fall into disorder," Hardenberg's opponent, Marwitz, stated irritably, "and as a result the old Brandenburg Constitution is placed in mortal danger." Marwitz's conclusion, while correct, deliberately overlooked the fact that Hardenberg was using new concepts and hence initiating a struggle over the naming of the new form of social organization, a struggle that drags on through the following years in all written communication between the old *Stände* and the bureaucracy. Marwitz certainly recognized that what was at stake in this naming of *ständisch* organization was the title of right that he sought to defend. He therefore disavowed a mission of his fellow *Stand* members to the chancellor because they had announced themselves as "inhabitants" of the *Mark*

Brandenburg. They could do that, he suggested, as long as the question concerned "the economic. If the issue, on the other hand, concerns our rights, then this single word—inhabitant—destroys the point of the mission."⁵ Marwitz thus was refusing any longer to follow the course toward which, on economic grounds, other members of his *Stand* were then inclined. They sought to exchange their political privileges for economic advantage.⁶

The semantic struggle for the definition of political or social position, defending or occupying these positions by deploying a given definition, is a struggle that belongs to all those times of crisis of which we have learned through written sources. Since the French Revolution, this struggle has become more acute and has undergone a structural shift; concepts no longer serve merely to define given states of affairs, but reach into the future. Concepts of the future became increasingly new-minted; positions that were to be secured had first to be formulated linguistically before it was possible to enter or permanently occupy them. The experiential substance of many concepts was thus reduced, while their claim to realization increased in proportion. Actual, substantial experience and the space of expectation coincide less and less. It is here that the coining of numerous "isms" belongs, serving as collective and motivating concepts capable of reordering and mobilizing anew the masses robbed of their place in the old order of estates. The application of such expressions reached, as today, from slogan to scientifically defined concept. One needs only to think of "conservatism," "liberalism," or "socialism."

Ever since society has been swept into industrial movement, political semantics has provided an interpretive key to its related concepts without which, today, the phenomena of the past cannot be conceived. One needs only to think of the shifts in meaning and function of the concept "revolution," a concept which at first offered a model formula for the probable recurrence of events; was then reminded as a concept of historicophilosophical objective and political action; and is for us today an indicator of structural change. Here, *Begriffsgeschichte* becomes an integral part of social history.

From this there follows a methodologically minimal claim: that past social and political conflicts must be interpreted and decoded in terms of their contemporary conceptual boundaries, and the self-understanding on the part of past speakers and writers of their own language-use.

Hence this conceptual clarification of selected examples—*Stand*, class, estate owner, owner, the economic, inhabitant, and citizen—is a precondition for interpretation of the conflict between Prussian reformers and Junkers. The fact that the parties involved overlapped both personally and

socially makes it all the more necessary to clarify semantically political and social fronts within this stratum, so that we might determine interests and intentions concealed within them.

Begriffsgeschichte is therefore initially a specialized method for source criticism, taking note as it does of the utilization of terminology relevant to social and political elements, and directing itself in particular to the analysis of central expressions having social or political content. It goes without saying that historical clarification of past conceptual usage must refer not only to the history of language but also to sociohistorical data, for every semantic has its link to nonlinguistic content. It is this that creates the precarious marginality of *Begriffsgeschichte* for the linguistic sciences, while being, at the same time, the origin of its great advantages for the historical sciences. The condensation, effected by the work of conceptual explanation renders past statements precise, bringing more clearly into view contemporary intentional circumstance or relation in their linguistic make-up.

THE DISCIPLINE OF BEGRIFFSGESCHICHTE AND SOCIAL HISTORY

Up to this point emphasis has been placed on the critical evaluation of sources in the specification of concepts as a means in formulating socio-historical questions: *Begriffsgeschichte* is, however, capable of doing more than this would indicate. More precisely, its methodology lays claim to an autonomous sphere which exists in a state of mutually engendered tension with social history. From the historiographic point of view, specialization in *Begriffsgeschichte* had no little influence on the posing of questions within social history. First, it began as a critique of a careless transfer to the past of modern, context-determined expressions of constitutional argument;⁸ and second, it directed itself to criticizing the practice in the history of ideas of treating ideas as constants, assuming different historical forms but of themselves fundamentally unchanging. Both elements prompted a greater precision in method, such that in the history of a concept it became possible to survey the contemporary space of experience and horizon of expectation, and also to investigate the political and social functions of concepts, together with their specific modality of usage, such that (in short) a synchronic analysis also took account of situation and conjuncture.

Such a procedure has of necessity to translate words of the past and their meanings into our present understanding. Each history of word or concept

leads from a determination of past meanings to a specification of these meanings for us. Insofar as this procedure is reflected in the method of *Begriffsgeschichte*, the synchronic analysis of the past is supplemented diachronically. Diachrony has the methodological obligation of scientifically defining anew the inventory of past meanings of words.

In time, this methodological perspective consistently and substantially transforms itself into a history of the particular concept in question. Insofar as concepts, during this second phase of investigation, are detached from their situational context, and their meanings ordered first according to the sequence of time and then secondly with respect to each other, the individual historical analyses of concepts constitute themselves as a history of the concept. Only at this level is historical-philological method superseded, and only here does *Begriffsgeschichte* shed its subordinate relation to social history.

Nevertheless, the sociohistorical payoff is increased. The sociohistorical relevance of the results increases precisely because attention is directed in a rigorously diachronic manner to the persistence or change of a concept. To what extent has the intentional substance of one and the same word remained the same? Has it changed with the passage of time, a historical transformation having reconstructed the sense of the concept? The persistence and validity of a social or political concept and its corresponding structure can only be appreciated diachronically. The fact that a word has remained in constant use is not in itself sufficient indication of stability in its substantial meaning. Thus, the standard term *Bürger* is devoid of meaning without an investigation of the conceptual change undergone by the expression "Bürger": from (*Stadt-*)*Bürger* (burgher) around 1700 via (*Staats-*)*Bürger* (citizen) around 1800 to *Bürger* (bourgeois) as a nonproletarian around 1900, sketching this out in a rough-and-ready manner.

Stadtbürger was a concept appropriate to the *Stände*, in which legal, political, economic, and social definitions were indifferently united—definitions which, with other contents, made up the remaining concepts of the *Stand*.

Toward the end of the eighteenth century, the *Stadtbürger* was no longer defined in the *Allgemeines Landrecht* (Prussian Civil Code) in terms of a listing of positive criteria (as in the draft), but negatively, as belonging neither to the peasant or noble *Stand*. In this fashion, a claim was registered in a negative manner for a higher generality, which was then conceptualized as *Staatsbürger*. The negation of the negation was accordingly achieved as, in 1848, the *Staatsbürger* assumed positively determined rights which had previously been enjoyed only by "inhabitants" and shareholders of a free eco-

nomie society. Against the background of the formal legal equality of a liberal economic society underwritten by the state, it was then possible to assign this *Bürger*, in a purely economic fashion, to a class according to which political or social functions were only subsequently derived. This generalization is true both for systems of voting by class and for Marx's theoretical framework.

The diachronic disposition of component parts reveals long-term structural changes. This is, for instance, characteristic of the creeping transformation of the meaning of *societas civilis*, or politically constituted society, to *bürgerliche Gesellschaft sine imperio*, which can finally be conceived as an entity separate from the state; this is a piece of knowledge relevant to social history, which can only be gained at the level of the reflections engendered by *Begriffsgeschichte*.

Hence, the diachronic principle constitutes *Begriffsgeschichte* as an autonomous domain of research, which methodologically, in its reflection on concepts and their change, must initially disregard their extralinguistic content—the specific sphere of social history. Persistence, change, or novelty in the meaning of words must first be grasped before they can be used as indices of this extralinguistic content, as indicators of social structures or situations of political conflict.

From a temporal point of view, social and political concepts can be arranged into three groups. First are such traditional concepts as those of Aristotelian constitutional thought, whose meanings have persisted in part and which, even under modern conditions, retain an empirical validity. Second are concepts whose content has changed so radically that, despite the existence of the same word as a shell, the meanings are barely comparable and can be recovered only historically. The variety of meanings attached today to the term *Geschichte*, which appears to be simultaneously its own subject and object, comes to mind, in contrast with the *Geschichten* and *Historien*, which deal with concrete realms of objects and persons; one could also cite "class" as distinct from the Roman *classis*. Third are recurrently emerging neologisms reacting to specific social or political circumstances that attempt to register or even provoke the novelty of such circumstances. Here "communism" and "fascism" can be mentioned.

Within this temporal scheme there are, of course, endless transitions and superimpositions. The history of the concept "democracy" can, for example, be considered under all three aspects. First, ancient democracy as a constantly given, potential constitutional form of the Polis: here are definitions, procedures and regularities that can still be found in democracies

today. The concept was modernized in the eighteenth century to characterize new organizational forms typical of the large modern state and its social consequences. Invocation of the rule of law and the principle of equality took up and modified old meanings. With respect to the social transformations following the industrial revolution, however, the concept assumed new valences: It became a concept characterizing a state of expectation which, within a historicophilosophical perspective—be it legislative or revolutionary—claimed to satisfy newly constituted needs so that its meaning might be validated. Finally, "democracy" became a general concept replacing "republic" (*politeia*), that consigned to illegality all other constitutional types as forms of rule. This global universality, usable for a variety of distinct political tendencies, made it necessary to refurbish the concept by adding qualifying expressions. It was only in this manner that it could retain any functional effectiveness: hence arise representative Christian, social, and people's democracies, and so forth.

Persistence, change, and novelty are thus conceived diachronically along the dimension of meanings and through the spoken form of one and the same word. The temporal question posed by a potential *Begriffsgeschichte* with respect to persistence, change, and novelty leads to the identification of semantic components, persisting, overlapping, discarded, and new meanings—all of which can become relevant for social history only if the history of the concept has been first subjected separate analysis. As an independent discipline, therefore, *Begriffsgeschichte* delivers indices for social history by pursuing its own methods.

This restriction of analysis to concepts needs further elaboration, so that the method's autonomy can be protected from hasty identification with sociohistorical questions related to extralinguistic content. Naturally, a linguistic history can be sketched which itself can be conceived as social history. A *Begriffsgeschichte* is more rigorously bounded. Methodological restriction to the history of concepts expressed in words must have a basis that renders the expressions "concept" and "word" distinguishable. In whatever way the linguistic triad of word (signification)—meaning (concept)—object is employed in its different variants, a straightforward distinction—initially pragmatic—can be made in the sphere of historical science: sociopolitical terminology in the source language possesses a series of expressions that, on the basis of critical exegesis, stand out definitively as concepts. Each concept is associated with a word, but not every word is a social and political concept. Social and political concepts possess a substantial claim to generality and

always have many meanings—in historical science, occasionally in modalities other than words.

Thus it is possible to articulate or linguistically create a group identity through the emphatic use of the word "we," while such a procedure becomes conceptually intelligible only when the "we" is associated with collective terms such as "nation," "class," "friendship," "church," and so on. The general utility of the term "we" is substantiated through these expressions, but at the level of conceptual generality.

Remolding a word into a concept might occur without noticeable disturbance, depending on the linguistic usage in the sources. This is due primarily to the ambiguity of all words, a property shared both by concepts and words. This is the source of their common historical quality. This ambiguity can be read in diverse ways, according to whether a word can be taken as a concept, or not. Intellectual or material meanings are indeed bound to the word, but they feed off the intended content, the written or spoken context, and the historical situation. This is equally true for both word and concept. In use a word can become unambiguous. By contrast, a concept must remain ambiguous in order to be a concept. The concept is connected to a word, but is at the same time more than a word: a word becomes a concept only when the entirety of meaning and experience within a sociopolitical context within which and for which a word is used can be condensed into one word.

Consider the variety of objects that enter the word "state" such that it might become a concept: domination, domain, bourgeoisie, legislation, jurisdiction, administration, taxation, and army, to invoke only present-day terms. A variety of circumstances with their own terminology (and conceptuality) are taken up by the word "state" and made into a common concept. Concepts are thus the concentrate of several substantial meanings. The signification of a word can be thought separately from that which is signified. Signifier and signified coincide in the concept insofar as the diversity of historical reality and historical experience enter a word such that they can receive their meaning only in this one word, or can be grasped only by this word. A word presents potentialities for meaning: a concept unites within itself a plenitude of meaning. Hence, a concept can possess clarity, but must be ambiguous. "All concepts within which an entire process is semiotically summarized escape definition; only that with no history can be defined" (Nietzsche). A concept bundles up the variety of historical experience together with a collection of theoretical and practical references into a relation that is given and can be experienced only through the concept.

It becomes plain here that, while concepts have political and social capacities, their semantic function and performance is not uniquely derivative of the social and political circumstances to which they relate. A concept is not simply indicative of the relations which it covers; it is also a factor within them. Each concept establishes a particular horizon for potential experience and conceivable theory, and in this way sets a limit. The history of concepts is therefore able to provide knowledge which is not accessible from empirical study (Sachanalyse). The language of concepts is a consistent medium in which experiential capacity and theoretical stability can be evaluated. This can of course be done sociohistorically, but sight must not be lost of the method of *Begriffsgeschichte*.

The autonomy of the discipline should not lead to a diminution of actual historical materiality simply because the latter is excluded from a specific part of the investigation. On the contrary, the restriction of a line of questioning to the linguistic assessment of political situations or social structures permits these to speak for themselves. As a historical discipline, *Begriffsgeschichte* is always concerned with political or social events and circumstances, although only with those conceptually constituted and articulated in the source language. In a restricted sense it interprets history through its prevailing concepts, even if the words are used today, while in turn treating these concepts historically, even if their earlier usage must be defined anew for us today. If we were to formulate this in a somewhat exaggerated fashion, we could say that *Begriffsgeschichte* deals with the convergence of concept and history. History would then simply be that which had already been conceptualized as such. Epistemologically, this would imply that nothing can occur historically that is not apprehended conceptually. But apart from this overvaluation of written sources, which can be sustained neither theoretically nor historically, behind this theory of convergence there lies the danger of an ontological misunderstanding of *Begriffsgeschichte*. The critical impulse to introduce the history of ideas or intellectual history into social history would be lost, and with it the critique of ideologies that *Begriffsgeschichte* can prompt.

The method of *Begriffsgeschichte* breaks free of the naive circular movement from word to thing and back. It would certainly be a theoretically irredeemable short circuit if history were to be constructed out of its own concepts, establishing a kind of identity between linguistically articulated *Zeitgeist* and the conjunction of events. Rather, there exists between concept and materiality a tension now transcended, now breaking out afresh, now seemingly insoluble. There is always a certain hiatus between social contents

and the linguistic usage that seeks to fix this content. Transformation in the meaning of words and of things, change of situation, and impulse to re-name things, all of these correspond diversely one with another.

From this there flow methodological consequences. The investigation of a concept cannot be carried out purely semasiologically; it can never restrict itself to the meanings of words and their changes. A *Begriffsgeschichte* must always keep in view the need for findings relevant to intellectual or material history. Above all, the semasiological approach must alternate with the onomasiological; i.e., *Begriffsgeschichte* must register the variety of names for (identical?) materialities in order to be able to show how concepts are formed. So, for instance, the phenomenon of *Säkularisation* cannot be investigated solely on the basis of the expression itself.¹⁰ For the historical treatment of words, parallel expressions like *Verweltlichung* (secularization) and *Verzeitlichung* (temporalization) must be introduced; the domain of church and constitutional law must be taken into account historically; and in terms of intellectual history, the ideological currents that crystallized around the expression must be examined—all before the concept *Säkularisation* is sufficiently worked up as a factor in and indicator of the history to which it relates.

To take another phenomenon, the federal structure of the old Reich belongs to long-term political and legal facticities which have, from the late Middle Ages down to the Federal Republic of today, laid down a specific framework of political potential and political action. The history of the word *Bund* by itself, however, is not adequate to clarify federal structure in the historical process. This can be very roughly outlined as follows. Formed in the thirteenth century, the term *Bund* was a relatively late creation of German jurisprudence. *Bundesabmachungen* (*Einungen*), insofar as they could not be subsumed under such Latin expressions as *foedus*, *unio*, *liga*, and *societas*, could initially be employed only orally in this legal language. At first, it was the aggregation of completed and named *Verbündnisse* that brought about the condensation into the institutional expression *Bund*. Then, with the increasing experience of *Bünde*, linguistic generalization was possible which then became available as the concept *Bund*. From then on, it was possible to reflect conceptually on the relation of a *Bund* to the *Reich* and on the constitution of the *Reich* in the form of a *Bund*. But this possibility was barely made use of in the final decades of the Middle Ages. The concept's center of gravity remained associated with estate rights; in particular, designating *Städtebünde* (town unions), as opposed to *fürstlichen Einungen* (unions constituted of the rulers of principalities), or *ritterschaftlichen Gesellschaften* (societies of knights).

The religious loading of the concept *Bund* in the Reformation era resulted—in contrast with the Calvinist world—in its political corrosion. As far as Luther was concerned, only God was capable of creating a *Bund* and it was for this reason that the Schmalkand *Vorstand* never characterized itself as a *Bund*. It only became referred to as such historiographically at a much later time. Simultaneous and emphatic use of the term, in a religious as well as a political sense, by Müntzer and peasants in 1525 led to discrimination against usage; it became taboo. It thus went into retreat as a technical term of constitutional law, and the confessional forces assembled themselves under expressions initially interchangeable and neutral, such as *Liga* and *Union*. In the bloody disputes that followed, these expressions hardened into partisan religious concepts that in turn became notorious in the course of the Thirty Years War. From 1648 on, French terms like *Allianz* permeated the constitutional law of the states in the empire. Penetrated by terminology drawn from the law of nations, it slowly and quietly changed. It was only with the dissolution of the old imperial *Standesordnung* that the expression *Bund* reemerged, and this time it did so at the levels of society, state, and law, simultaneously. The social expression *bündisch* was coined (by Campe); the legal distinction of *Bündnis* and *Bund*—equivalent in meaning earlier—could now be articulated; and ultimately, with the end of the *Reich*, the term *Bundestaat* was discovered, which first brought the formerly insoluble constitutional aporia into a historical concept oriented to the future.¹¹

This brief outline should suffice to indicate that a history of the meanings of the word *Bund* is not adequate as a history of the problems of federal structure "conceptualized" in the course of Reich history. Semantic fields must be surveyed and the relation of *Einung* to *Bund*, of *Bund* to *Bündnis*, and of these terms to *Union* and *Liga* or to *Allianz* likewise investigated. It is necessary to question the (shifting) counter concepts, clarifying in this fashion the political fronts and religious and social groupings that have formed within federal possibilities. New constructions must be interpreted; e.g., it must be explained why the expression *Föderalismus*, entering language in the latter eighteenth century, did not in the nineteenth become a central concept of German constitutional law. Without the invocation of parallel or opposed concepts, without ordering generalized and particular concepts, and without registering the overlapping of two expressions, it is not possible to deduce the structural value of a word as "concept" either for the social framework or for the disposition of political fronts. Through the alternation of semasiological and onomasiological questions, *Begriffsgeschichte*—aims ultimately at *Sachgeschichte*.¹²

The varying valency of the expression *Bund* can be especially suggestive of those constitutional conditions that might or might not be conceptually formulable solely in its terms. Insight into constitutional history is thus provided by a retrospectively oriented clarification and modern definition of past usage. Discovering whether the expression *Bund* was used as a concept associated with *Stand* rights, whether it was a concept of religious expectation, or whether it was a concept of political organization or an intentional concept based on the Law of Nations (as in Kant's minting of *Völkerbund*), clarifying such things means discovering distinctions which also "materially" organize history.

Put in other terms, *Begriffsgeschichte* is not an end in itself, even if it follows its own method. Insofar as it delivers indices and components for social history, *Begriffsgeschichte* can be defined as a methodologically independent part of sociohistorical research. From this autonomy issues a distinct methodological advantage related to the joint theoretical premises of *Begriffsgeschichte* and social history.

ON THE THEORY OF BEGRIFFSGESCHICHTE AND OF SOCIAL HISTORY

All examples introduced so far—the history of the concepts of *Bürger*, democracy, and *Bund*—have one thing formally in common: they (synchronically) treat circumstances and (along the diachronic dimension) their transformation. In this respect they aim at an account of what social history calls structure and structural transformation. Not that one can be directly deduced from the other, but *Begriffsgeschichte* has the advantage of reflecting this connection between concept and actuality. There emerges in this way a productive tension, with significant implications for the knowledge of social history.

It is not necessary for persistence and change in the meanings of words to correspond with persistence and change in the structures they specify. Since words which persist are in themselves insufficient indicators of stable contents and because, vice versa, contents undergoing long-term change might be expressed in a number of very different ways, the method of *Begriffsgeschichte* is a *conditio sine qua non* of sociohistorical questions.

One of the advantages of *Begriffsgeschichte* is that shifting between synchronic and diachronic analysis can help disclose the persistence of past experience and the viability of past theories. By changing perspective it is

possible to make visible dislocations that exist between words whose meanings are related to a diminishing content and the new contents of the same word. Moribund meanings that no longer correspond to reality, or realities that emerge through concepts whose meaning remains unrecognized, can then be noted. This diachronic review can reveal layers hitherto concealed by the spontaneity of everyday language. Thus the religious sense of *Bund* was never completely abandoned once it became descriptive of social and political organization in the nineteenth century. Marx and Engels acknowledged this when they created the "Communist Manifesto" out of the "articles of faith" of the *Bund der Kommunisten*.

Begriffsgeschichte can therefore clarify the diverse strata of meaning descending from chronologically separate periods. It therefore goes beyond a strict alternation of diachrony and synchrony and relates more to the contemporaneity of the noncontemporaneous (*Gleichzeitigkeit des Ungleichzeitigen*) that can be contained within a concept. Put another way, it deals with the theoretical premises of social history when it seeks to evaluate the short, medium, or long term, or to weigh events and structures one against the other. The historical depth of a concept, which is not identical with the chronological succession of its meanings, gains in this fashion systematic import, which must be duly acknowledged by all sociohistorical research.

Begriffsgeschichte thus takes as a theoretical principle the idea that persistence and change must be weighed against each other, and measured in terms of each other. To the extent that this is conducted in the medium of language (both of the original source and of modern scientific discourse), it reflects the theoretical presuppositions with which even a social history concerned with "materiality" must come to terms.

It is a general property of language that each of the meanings of a word reaches further than the singularity to which historical events can lay claim. Each word, even each name, displays a linguistic potentiality beyond the individual phenomenon that it at a given moment characterizes or names. This is equally true of historical concepts, even if they initially serve to conceptually assemble the singularity of complex structures of experience. Once "minted," a concept contains within itself, purely linguistically, the possibility of being employed in a generalized manner, of constructing types, or of disclosing comparative insights. The reference to a particular party, state, or army linguistically involves a plane potentially including parties, states, or armies. A history of related concepts leads to structural questions that social history has to answer.

Concepts not only teach us the uniqueness of past meanings, but also contain structural possibilities, treating the concatenations of difference invisible in the historical flow of events. For the social historian prepared to think conceptually, seizing past facts, relations, and processes, these concepts become the formal categories that determine the conditions of possible history. It is only concepts which demonstrate persistence, repeatable applicability, and empirical validity—concepts with structural claims—which indicate that a once "real" history can today appear generally possible and be represented as such.

This becomes even clearer if the method of *Begriffsgeschichte* is applied to the relation of the language of original source and the language of analysis. All historiography operates on two levels: it either investigates circumstances already articulated at an earlier period in language, or it reconstructs circumstances which were not articulated into language earlier but which can be worked up with the help of specific methods and indices. In the first case, the received concepts serve as a heuristic means of access to the understanding of past reality. In the second case, history makes use of categories constructed and defined *ex post*, employed without being present in the source itself. This involves, for example, principles of theoretical economics being used to analyze early phases of capitalism in terms unknown at that time; or political theorems being developed and applied to past constitutional relations without having to invoke a history in the optative mood. In either case, *Begriffsgeschichte* makes plain the difference prevailing between past and present conceptualization, whether it translates the older usage and works up its definition for modern research, or whether the modern construction of scientific concepts is examined for its historical viability. *Begriffsgeschichte* covers that zone of convergence occupied by past and present concepts. A theory is therefore required to make understanding the modes of contact and separation in time possible.

It is clearly inadequate, to cite a known example, to move from the usage of the word *Staat* (*status, états*) to the modern state, as has been demonstrated in detail recently.¹³ The question why, at a particular time, particular phenomena are brought into a common concept remains a suggestive one. Thus, for instance, it was only in 1848 that the Prussian states were legally established as a state by Prussian jurisprudence, in spite of the established existence of the army and bureaucracy, i.e., at a time when liberal economic society had relativized the distinctions associated with the *Stände* and engendered a proletariat which had penetrated every province. Jurisprudentially,

it was in the form of a bourgeois constitutional state that the Prussian state was first baptized. Certainly, singular findings of this nature do not prevent historical discourse from scientifically defining established historical concepts and deploying them in different periods and domains. If an extension of the term is warranted by a *Begriffsgeschichte*, then it is possible to talk of a "state" in the High Middle Ages. Naturally, in this way, *Begriffsgeschichte* drags social history with it. The extension of later concepts to cover earlier periods, or the extension of earlier concepts to cover later phenomena (as is today customary in the use of "feudalism"), establishes a minimum of common ground, at least hypothetically, in their objective domains.

The live tension between actuality and concept reemerges, then, at the level of the source language and of the language of analysis. Social history, investigating long-term structures, cannot afford to neglect the theoretical principles of *Begriffsgeschichte*. In every social history dealing with trends, duration, and periods, the level of generality at which one operates is given only by reflection on the concepts in use, in this way theoretically assisting clarification of the temporal relation of event and structure, or the succession of persistence and transformation.

For example, *Legitimität* was first a category in jurisprudence and was subsequently politicized in terms of traditionalism and deployed in inter-party strife. It then took on a historicotheoretical perspective and was colored propagandistically according to the politics of whoever happened to be using the expression. All such overlapping meanings existed at the time when the term was scientifically neutralized by Max Weber, making it possible to establish typologies of forms of domination. He thus extracted from the available reserve of possible meanings a scientific concept: this was both formal and general enough to describe constitutional potentialities both long-term and short-term, shifting and overlapping, which then disclosed historical "individualities" on the basis of their internal structures.

The theoretical premises of *Begriffsgeschichte* demand the formulation of structural statements that in turn require a response from any social history seeking precision.

6 HISTORY, HISTORIES, AND FORMAL TIME STRUCTURES

The dual ambiguity of the modern linguistic usage of *Geschichte* and *Historie*—both expressions denoting event and representation—raises questions that we shall here investigate further. These questions are both historical and systematic in nature. This characteristic meaning of history, such that it is at the same time knowledge of itself, can be seen as a general formulation of an anthropologically-given arc, linking and relating historical experience with knowledge of such experience. On the other hand, the convergence of both meanings is a historically specific occurrence which first occurred in the eighteenth century. It can be shown that the formation of the collective singular *Geschichte* is a semantic event that opens out our modern experience. The concept "history pure and simple" laid the foundation for a historical philosophy, within which the transcendental meaning of history as space of consciousness became contaminated with history as space of action.

It would be presumptuous to claim that, in the constitution of the concepts "history pure and simple" or "history in general" (that are themselves part of specifically German linguistic forms), all events prior to the eighteenth century must fade into a prehistory. One need only recall Augustine, who once stated that, while human institutions made up the theme of *historia*, *ipsa historia* was not a human construct.¹ History itself was claimed to derive from God and be nothing but the *ordo temporum* in which all events were established and according to which they were arranged. The metahistorical (and also temporal) meaning of *historia ipsa* is thus not merely a modern construction but had already been anticipated theologially. The interpretation according to which the experience of modernity is opened up only with the discovery of a history in itself, which is at once its own subject and object, does have strong semantic arguments in its favor. It was in this fashion that an experience that could not have existed in a similar way before was first articulated. But the semantically demonstrable process involving the emergence of modern historical philosophies should not itself be exaggerated in a historicophilosophical manner. We should,