respond to the recognizable experiences of millions in the twentieth century, at least in the Western world, to the effect that our evolving attitudes to the past are not merely the attitudes of nostalgia; that these are our historical reactions to our historical situation, a situation which is different from Dante's.[3]

In any event, amid the present flood of unprecedented cultural anarchy, we, in the West, are now experiencing a broad recurrence of historical interest. In the United States, for example, there exists now a widespread popular interest in history, probably for the first time in the American national experience: the sales and the contents of books, magazines, articles, television programs attest to this.[4] I need not illustrate this in detail: consider only the Civil War "fad" of the 1950's or the First World War "fad" of the early 1960's or the publishing success of "documentary" reconstructions of certain brief episodes (Days, Battles, Tragedies) of the past by enterprising journalists. The same phenomenon exists in Europe. Literature on all kinds of levels is involved in it, of course; so is popular entertainment, including television; I shall not analyze it at this point where all I wish to say is that these are superficial symptoms of an evolution whose sources are more profound. Of course this evolution coexists (and often within the mind of the same person) with an older and vaster development which, in the name of Science and of Progress, liquifies traditions and promotes a kind of mass rootlessness now on all levels of education*; in America as well as in Europe we face now massive manifestations of the twentieth-century kind of conformism that might as well be called "presentism." Yet I believe that of these two countervailing developments the slow evolution of a

[3] An Italian 650 years after Dante: ". . . for me, no less than for her, the memory of things was much more important than the possession of them. . . . How well she understood me! The way I longed for the present to become the past *at once*, so that I could love it and gaze fondly at it any time; it was just exactly the way she felt. It was *our* vice, this: looking backwards as we went ahead. . . ." Giorgio Bassani, *The Garden of the Finzi-Continis.*

[4] The success of more-or-less popular historical magazines (*American Heritage, Horizon, History, History Today, Historia, Miroir de l'histoire, Historama, L'Histoire pour tous*), while remarkable in itself (in France alone their monthly sales amount to more than 600,000), is only a superficial symptom: we ought to consider these figures together with the rising proportion of historical books in what is still called the "nonfiction" field.

* This symbol indicates a relevant note to be found in the *Certain Notes* section (pages 325–359) which may be read separately.

historical consciousness is more significant than the evolution of what some people, perhaps too facilely, have called "post-historic man"—even in the mass-democratic societies of the West; even in the Far West; even in California; even in the university of Berkeley.* I strongly feel that even if a great physical catastrophe would smite our civilization, destroying most of its institutions, this novel attitude to the past, this new thirst for a kind of historical knowledge would survive, indeed, that it would exist in acute forms.

In short, we may be to some extent ahead of José Ortega y Gasset's pessimism in *The Revolt of the Masses* (a pessimism that Ortega himself later transcended) when, around 1930, he proclaimed his angry impatience with the democratic mass-man who lives only for the present, whose mind is wholly unhistorical, who is no longer influenced by the past. More relevant for us is Johan Huizinga's phrase, around the same time. "Historical thinking," he then wrote, "has entered our very blood." Note that this was not a statement by a facile optimist but by a patrician historian who, more than most of his professional contemporaries, was deeply worried about the decline of historical judgment in our mass-democratic age. Still he wished to state the existence of an already embedded, and at least for some time ineradicable, condition of our thinking.

Let me sum up this condition in these words: I believe that the most important developments in our civilization during the last three or four centuries include not only the applications of the scientific method but also the growth of a historical consciousness; and that while we may have exaggerated the importance of the former we have not yet understood sufficiently the implications of the latter.

(2) History as a form of thought. Its definition?

How does this historical consciousness affect our thinking? Let me attempt to give a simple initial answer: *history, for us, has become a form of thought.*

This means that historical thinking may be applied—indeed, that we often apply it, consciously or otherwise—to every kind of human experience. We can describe and, consequently, understand a person, a nation, any kind of human society, virtually any kind of human endeavor, not only through their material or spiritual, their physical or psychic characteristics but through their history. The

NJW

character of a person will best appear not so much from information of his physical or psychic properties as from what we know of the history of his life; the same is true of a character of a nation. The history of a problem, of an idea, of a concept, of a theory may reveal its evolving diagnosis. There is no field of human action that may not be approached, studied, described, and understood through its history.

In the nineteenth century it became evident that literature, art, philosophy might be studied profitably through their histories. In the twentieth century some of our best physicists have suggested that the clearest explanation of the new concepts of physics may be that of the history of their development. It is even conceivable that chemistry, biology, perhaps even medicine could be taught and learned "historically." (Terms such as "case histories" suggest how historical thinking has now penetrated our language through a not always conscious process.) Instead of proceeding, for example, from organic to inorganic chemistry, one could begin with, say, the Greeks: What did they find out about chemical substances and processes? What were their chemical theories? What is still valid in their discoveries? Where did they go wrong? What did the Romans add to this body of knowledge? Where did *they* go wrong? and so on. I am not saying that this would be always the most propitious approach: what I am saying is that, potentially at least, the history of chemistry is chemistry itself.

Inevitably this brings us to certain relationships of history and science. For it is at this point that we must recognize, for the first time, that history as a form of thought is "larger" than science: because, as we have seen, science can be studied historically, because human science is nothing more than the sum total of its history, because the history of science is nothing more than the history of its human practitioners. In the last chapter of this book I shall have to return to certain implications of this condition. Here it will be sufficient to recognize that it is science which is part of history and not the reverse, and that this is not a complicated philosophical proposition but a common-sense recognition to the effect that human science is part and parcel of the history of mankind, since "nature is earlier than man—but man is earlier than natural science"—the felicitous formulation by the German physicist V. von Weizsaecker (*circa* 1949).*

As a form of thought, therefore, history is "more" than science. But in a different sense, our knowledge of history is "less" than our knowledge of *a* science: history is not a science in the modern sense of the word.[5] Historical information is incomplete: while science and scientific knowledge are the same things, such a complete identity between the past and our knowledge of the past does not exist. Moreover, historical, unlike scientific, information is often inaccurate and not measurable. But, then, the very purpose of historical knowledge is not so much accuracy as a certain kind of understanding: historical knowledge is the knowledge of human beings about other human beings, and this is different from the knowledge which human beings possess of their environment. Of course there are sciences, such as anthropology, sociology, medicine, which involve the study by human beings of other human beings. But these, too, are unlike history (this is, for example, why history should not be considered as a "social science")—because history, unlike these, does not and cannot borrow its methods from the natural sciences. Behind the condition of the unpredictability of history lie many "causes," one of them being that historical causalities are quite different from the categories of scientific causality. At this point it may be sufficient to state a truism: while science, including the so-called social sciences, deals principally (though not exclusively) with what is typical and with what is routine, history deals primarily (though not exclusively) with what is unique and with what is exceptional. ("Exceptions to the rule," said Proust, "are the magic of existence.") As a form of thought, history is a pragmatic but unsystematic knowledge of humans about other humans.

[5] By *science* I mean of course its current English sense, which has become inseparable from physical science. "In modern use," says the O.E.D., "science" means "natural and physical science." (The same meaning holds for "scientists," a word "deliberately made by Whewell, as there was no common word till then to describe students of different kinds of science." Logan Pearsall Smith, *The English Language.*) This means that *science* is somewhat narrower than the Italian *scienza* or the French *science*, and considerably narrower than the German *Wissenschaft*. But these mutations of meanings are not only national; they are historical. A century ago *science* had a broader meaning in English, too: like *Wissenschaft*, it suggested knowledge as well as science. (Before 1903 *science* in Oxford was applicable even to philosophy, a usage that the O.E.D. now marks as obsolete.) Thus during the last one hundred years, while the applications of the scientific method have widely spread, the intrinsic meaning of *science* has narrowed—the opposite development of *history*, whose meaning as well as whose applications have been broadening.

It is because of this unsystematic character of historical life that history cannot be easily defined. Or perhaps it should not be defined at all. When it comes to definitions let me fall back on the pragmatic wisdom of English genius. ("Definitions," said Dr. Johnson, "are tricks for pedants"—an opinion upon which Dickens would expatiate with gusto in *Hard Times.*) Certainly, as not only unphilosophical Englishmen but spokesmen for Latin clarity, such as Salvador de Madariaga, remarked, things such as *atmosphere, beauty, rhythm* exist: we know and feel clearly what they are, even though it is bothersome and difficult and perhaps even senseless to "define" them. So it is with history. In an article entitled "A Definition of a Concept of History" Huizinga in 1936 showed how stiff and pompous and senseless were two current definitions of history, two tapeworm-sentences, by the German historical methodologists Bauer and Bernheim.[6] ("What does Herodotus tell us; why does he tell us?" Huizinga asked. "Neither of the two definitions can answer this.") Interned during the German occupation of his fatherland, Huizinga did not live to see the even more ludicrous attempt at definitions produced by Professor Sidney Hook whom a committee of American historians had commissioned in his capacity as a philosopher in 1942–1946 for the purpose of producing Historical Definitions—these, together with other staggeringly obtuse matters, were then published in a Thing entitled *Bulletin 54 of the Social Science Research Council.*

Huizinga, in his article, came up with a definition: "History is the spiritual form in which a culture is taking account of its past."*

With all respect to Huizinga, this is a statement rather than a definition. Unlike most definitions, it is strong and clear; it is suggestive rather than accurate; it leaves a taste in our mouths, as does Droysen's century-old phrase (1868): "History is Humanity's

[6] "History is the science which seeks to describe and with sympathetic insight to explain the phenomena of life, so far as it concerns changes brought about by the relation of men to different social entities, selecting them with an eye to their effect on subsequent epochs or with regard to their typical characteristics and concentrating chiefly on those changes which are temporally and spatially irreproducible." (Bauer) "The science of history is the science which investigates and narrates in causal connexion the facts of the development of mankind in their activities (individual as well as typical and collective) as social beings." (Bernheim)

knowledge of itself, its certainty about itself. It is not 'the light and the truth,' but a search thereof, a sermon thereupon, a consecration thereto. It is like John the Baptist, 'not the Light but sent to bear witness of that Light,'" a superb poetic statement by a younger contemporary of the Schopenhauer who proposed that history was meaningless and "unworthy of a science." (But, then, History has a Muse.) For our purposes, however, I shall rest satisfied with a simpler statement: *History is the remembered past.*[7]

(3) What history was: from historical existence to historical consciousness

We shall see, in a moment, that this simple statement—*history is the remembered past*—is something more than a truism; indeed, that it represents, in an unorthodox and perhaps even revolutionary sense, a departure from the tenets accepted by many professional historians. But before we address ourselves to the problem of what history now *is*, we should attempt to survey quickly what in the past it *was.* Evidently this order of approach accords with history being a form of thought: the history of a problem may be the principal approach to its diagnosis. Let me, therefore, embark on a short (though perhaps not unoriginal) survey of the history of history—or, rather, of the history of historical thinking. How did historical thinking "enter our very blood"? or, to paraphrase Huizinga, our very minds? Or, again, if I follow my preferred statement: how did the remembered past become history? and how did history become the remembered past?

Someone may object at this point that this equation of history with the remembered past is so broad as to be useless. I acknowledge that it is broad; I deny that it is useless. For history the remembered past is not quite the same as history being memory. All living beings have a kind of unconscious memory; but the remembering of the past is something uniquely human, because it is conscious as

[7] Two similar statements: V. H. Galbraith: "History, I suppose, is the Past—so far as we know it." (*Why We Study History,* Historical Association Publications No. 131, London, 1944.) H.-I. Marrou: "L'histoire est la connaissance du passé humain." (*De la connaissance historique,* Paris, 1954, the most lucid book written on the nature of history and of historical study in the last thirty years, perhaps even in the entire twentieth century.)