

# History

## INTRODUCTION

IN our language the term *History*," Hegel observes, "unites the objective with the subjective side . . . It comprehends not less what has *happened* than the *narration* of what has happened. This union of the two meanings we must regard as of a higher order than mere outward accident; we must suppose historical narrations to have appeared contemporaneously with historical deeds and events."

Our daily speech confirms Hegel's observation that "history" refers to that which has happened as well as to the record of it. We speak of the history of a people or a nation, or of the great events and epochs of history; and we also call a history the book which gives a narrative account of these matters.

It is as if we used the word "physics" to name both the object of study and the science of that object; whereas normally we tend to use "physics" for the science and refer to its subject matter as the physical world. We do not say that matter in motion is physics, but that it is the object of physics, one of the things a physicist studies. We might similarly have adopted the convention of using "history" in a restricted sense to signify a kind of knowledge or a kind of writing, and then called the phenomena written about or studied "historical" but not "history."

That, however, is not the prevailing usage. The word "history" seems to have at least four distinct meanings. It refers to a kind of knowledge. It refers to a type of literature. It means an actual sequence of events in time, which constitutes a process of irreversible change. This can be *either* change in the structure of the world or any part of nature, *or* change in human affairs, in society or civilization.

Historical knowledge and historical writing

can be about natural history or human history. In his classification of the kinds of knowledge, Francis Bacon makes this distinction when he divides history into "natural, civil, ecclesiastical, and literary." Whereas the last three deal with human things, the first is concerned with the nonhuman part of the natural world. At the same time, this natural history is not, in Bacon's judgment, the same thing as "natural philosophy," or what we would now call "natural science."

In this set of great books, natural history, even cosmic history, makes its appearance in works which we ordinarily classify as science or philosophy; for example, Darwin's *The Origin of Species*, Lucretius' *The Way Things Are*, or Plato's *Timaeus*. The great books of history deal with man and society, not nature or the universe. For the most part this is true also of the great philosophies of history. They, too, are primarily concerned with human civilization, not the physical world.

IN ITS ORIGINAL Greek root, the word "history" means research, and implies the act of judging the evidences in order to separate fact from fiction. The opening line of Herodotus is sometimes translated not "these are the histories of Herodotus of Halicarnassus," but "these are the researches . . ."

The word "research" can, of course, mean any sort of inquiry—into what is the case as well as into what has happened. The title of one of Aristotle's biological works, the *History of Animals*, suggests that it is concerned with researches about animals. The book does not deal with natural history; it is not a history of animals in the sense of giving the stages of their development in the course of time.

The redundancy of "historical research" can therefore be excused on the ground that it is necessary to distinguish between two kinds of inquiry or research—scientific and historical.

Originally, research set the historian apart from the poet and the maker of myths or legends. They told stories, too; but only the historian restricted himself to telling a story based on the facts ascertained by inquiry or research. Herodotus deserves the title "father of history" for having originated a style of writing which differs from poetry in this extraordinary respect. He tries to win the reader's belief not by the plausibility of his narrative, but rather by giving the reader some indication of the sources of information and the reliability of the evidence on which the narrative is based.

The poet tries to tell a likely story, but the historian tries to make credible statements about particular past events. He makes an explicit effort to weigh the evidence himself or, as Herodotus so frequently does, to submit conflicting testimony to the reader's own judgment. "Such is the account which the Persians give of these matters," he writes, "but the Phoenicians vary from the Persian statements"; or "this much I know from information given me by the Delphians; the remainder of the story the Milesians add"; or "that these were the real facts I learnt at Memphis from the priests of Vulcan"; or "such is the truth of this matter; I have also heard another account which I do not at all believe"; or again, "thus far I have spoken of Egypt from my own observation, relating what I myself saw, the ideas that I formed, and the results of my own researches. What follows rests on accounts given me by the Egyptians, which I shall now repeat, adding thereto some particulars which fell under my own notice."

Herodotus seems quite conscious of the difference between himself and Homer, especially on those matters treated by the poet which fall within his purview as a historian. The Trojan War lies in the background of the conflict with which Herodotus is directly concerned—the Persian invasion of Greece—for the Persians "trace to the attack upon Troy their ancient enmity towards the Greeks."

Herodotus does not doubt that the siege

of Troy took place as Homer relates, but he learns from the Egyptians a legend about the landing of Paris and Helen on Egyptian soil and the detention of Helen by Proteus, king of Memphis. "Such is the tale told me by the priests concerning the arrival of Helen at the court of Proteus. It seems to me that Homer was acquainted with this story, and while discarding it, because he thought it less adapted for epic poetry than the version which he followed, showed that it was not unknown to him."

Herodotus cites passages in *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* to corroborate this point. He is willing to use the Homeric poems as one source of information, but not without checking them against conflicting accounts. "I made inquiry," he writes, "whether the story which the Greeks tell about Troy is a fable or not." When he comes to the conclusion that Helen was never within the walls of the city to which the Greeks laid siege for ten years, he tells the reader his reasons for thinking so. Homer, however, when he narrates Helen's actions during the siege, does not bother to establish the facts of the matter or to give the reader contrary versions of what took place. That is not the poet's task, as Herodotus recognizes. It belongs to the historian, not the poet. The story which may have greater probability in fact may not be the better story for the poet.

SINCE HE IS BOTH an investigator and a storyteller, the historian stands comparison with the scientist in one respect and with the poet in another. The special character of history as a kind of knowledge distinct from science or philosophy seems clear from its object—the singular or unique events of the past. The scientist or philosopher is not concerned with what has happened, but with the nature of things. Particular events may serve as evidences for him, but his conclusions go beyond statements of particular fact to generalizations about the way things are or happen at any time and place. In contrast, the historian's research begins and ends with particulars. He uses particulars directly observed by himself or testified to by others as the basis for circumstantial inference to matters which cannot be

established by direct evidence. The method of investigation developed by the early historians may be the precursor of scientific method, but the kind of evidence and the mode of argument which we find in Hippocrates or Plato indicate the divergence of the scientist and philosopher from the procedure of the historian.

The contrast between history and science—or what for the purpose of comparison may be the same, philosophy—is formulated in Aristotle's statement concerning poetry, that it is "more philosophical than history, because poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular." History deals with what has actually happened, whereas poetry, like philosophy, may be concerned with whatever is or can be.

One comparison leads to another. Unlike poetry, history and science are alike in that they both attempt to prove what they say. But in distinction from science or philosophy, history resembles poetry, especially the great epic and dramatic poems, in being narrative literature. The historian and the poet both tell stories.

If the poet and the historian—including, of course, a biographer like Plutarch—are also moralists, they are moralists in the same way. Their works do not contain expositions of ethical or political doctrine, but rather concrete exemplifications of theories concerning the conduct of human life and social practices. That fact explains why much of the content of the great historical books is cited in other chapters dealing with moral and political, even psychological, topics. But in this chapter we are concerned with history itself rather than with the particulars of history. We are concerned with the methods and aims of history as a kind of knowledge and literature; and we are concerned with the historical process as a whole, the consideration of which belongs to the philosophy of history.

THE AIMS AND methods of writing history are discussed by the historian himself, as well as by the philosopher. Philosophers like Hobbes, Bacon, or Descartes consider history largely from the point of view of the kind of knowl-

edge it is and the contribution it makes to the whole of human learning. Historians like Herodotus, Thucydides, Tacitus, and Gibbon state more specifically the objectives of their work, the standards of reliability or authenticity by which they determine what is fact, and the principles of interpretation by which they select the most important facts, ordering them according to some hypothesis concerning the meaning of the events reported.

Herodotus writes, he tells us, "in the hope of preserving from decay the remembrance of what men have done, and of preventing the great and wonderful actions of the Greeks and the barbarians from losing their due meed of glory." Thucydides proceeds in the belief that the war between the Peloponnesians and the Athenians "was the greatest movement yet known in history, not only of the Hellenes, but of a large part of the barbarian world—I had almost said of mankind." Not very different is the declaration of Tacitus: "My purpose is not to relate at length every motion, but only such as were conspicuous for excellence or notorious for infamy. This I regard as history's highest function, to let no worthy action be uncommemorated, and to hold out the reprobation of posterity as a terror to evil words and deeds."

But though there seems to be a striking similarity in the purpose of these historians, Tacitus alone of the three avows a moral purpose. Furthermore, each of the three is conscious of the individual way in which he has put his intention into effect. Thucydides, for example, seems to have Herodotus in mind when he fears that "the absence of romance in my history will detract somewhat from its interest; but if it be judged useful by those inquirers who desire an exact knowledge of the past . . . I shall be content." Like Thucydides, Tacitus is a historian of contemporary events and he fears comparison with the historian of antiquity who can "enchain and refresh a reader's mind" with "descriptions of countries, the various incidents of battle, glorious deaths of great generals." His own work may be instructive, he thinks, but it may also give very little pleasure because he has "to present in succession the merciless biddings of a tyrant,

incessant prosecutions, faithless friendships, the ruin of innocence, the same causes issuing in the same results, and [he is] everywhere confronted with a wearisome monotony in [his] subject-matter."

As we have already noted, Herodotus seems satisfied to let the reader decide between conflicting accounts. Only occasionally does he indicate which is more likely in his own judgment. Thucydides claims that he has made a greater effort to determine the facts. "I did not even trust my own impressions," he writes; the narrative "rests partly on what I saw myself, partly on what others saw for me, the accuracy of the report being always tried by the most severe and detailed tests possible. My conclusions have cost me some labor from the want of coincidence between the accounts of the same occurrences by different eye-witnesses." But he thinks that his conclusions "may safely be relied on," undisturbed "either by the lays of a poet displaying the exaggeration of his craft, or by the compositions of the chroniclers which are attractive at truth's expense."

The historians are aware of the difficulty of combining truth telling with storytelling. Most men, Thucydides remarks, are unwilling to take enough pains "in the investigation of truth, accepting readily the first story that comes to hand." The difficulty, according to Tacitus, is the obscurity of the greatest events, "so that some take for granted any hearsay, whatever its source, others turn truth into falsehood, and both errors find encouragement with posterity."

Reviewing the enormous scope of his work, Gibbon at the very end concludes that "the historian may applaud the importance and variety of his subject; but, while he is conscious of his own imperfections, he must often accuse the deficiency of his materials." Because of the scarcity of authentic memorials, he tells us in another place, the historian finds it hard "to preserve a clear and unbroken thread of narration. Surrounded with imperfect fragments, always concise, often obscure, and sometimes contradictory, he is reduced to collect, to compare, and to conjecture; and though he ought never to place his conjectures in the rank of facts, yet the knowledge of

human nature, and of the sure operation of its fierce and unrestrained passions, might, on some occasions, supply the want of historical materials."

Clearly, the historians have different criteria of relevance in determining the selection and rejection of materials and different principles of interpretation in assigning the causes which explain what happened. These differences are reflected in the way each historian constructs from the facts a grand story, conceives the line of its plot and the characterization of its chief actors. Herodotus, for example, has been compared with Homer as writing in an epic manner; Thucydides, with the dramatic writers of tragedy. Even if they all agreed on the ascertainment of fact, the great historians would differ from one another as the great poets do; each has a style and a vision as personal and poetic as Homer or Virgil, Melville or Tolstoy.

ONLY ONE OF THE great books is, by title and design, devoted entirely to the philosophy of history—to the formulation of a theory which embraces the whole of man's career on earth. This is Hegel's *The Philosophy of History*. Augustine's *The City of God* presents an equally comprehensive vision, but a comparison of the two suggests that they differ from one another as philosophy from theology.

The point of this comparison is not that God and His providence are omitted from the philosopher's view. On the contrary, Hegel regards the history of the world as a "process of development and the realization of Spirit—this is the true theodicy, the justification of God in History. Only this insight can reconcile Spirit with the History of the World—viz., that what has happened and is happening every day is not only not 'without God' but is essentially His Work."

The difference is rather to be found in the ultimate source of insight concerning human development and destiny. Augustine sees everything in the light of God's revelation of His plan in Holy Writ; Hegel and other philosophers of history from Giambattista Vico to Arnold Toynbee seek and sometimes claim to find in the records of history itself the laws

which govern and the pattern which inheres in the procession of events from the beginning to the end of human time.

For Augustine, the great epochs of history are defined religiously. They are stages in the development of the city of God on earth, not the city of man. Man is viewed as dwelling on earth under four distinct dispensations from God: (1) in Paradise before the Fall; (2) in the world after expulsion from Eden and before the Promise and the Law were given to the Jews; (3) under the Law and before the coming of Christ; (4) between the first and second coming under the dispensation of grace.

Augustine sometimes makes other divisions of history, but they are always primarily religious. For example, he divides all of time into seven ages, corresponding to the seven days of creation. "The first age, as the first day, extends from Adam to the deluge; the second from the deluge to Abraham . . . From Abraham to the advent of Christ there are, as the evangelist Matthew calculates, three periods, in each of which are fourteen generations—one period from Abraham to David, a second from David to the captivity, a third from the captivity to the birth of Christ in the flesh. There are thus five ages in all. The sixth is now passing, and cannot be measured by any number of generations . . . After this period God shall rest as on the seventh day, when He shall give us (who shall be the seventh day) rest in Himself . . . The seventh shall be our Sabbath, which shall be brought to a close, not by an evening, but by the Lord's day, as an eighth and eternal day, consecrated by the resurrection of Christ, and prefiguring the eternal repose not only of the spirit, but also of the body . . . This is what shall be in the end without end."

This same projection of history—in all essentials, at least—is laid before Adam by the archangel Michael in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, just before Adam leaves the Garden of Eden.

Unlike the four major dispensations of which Augustine and Milton speak, Hegel's four stages of the world are epochs in the development of Spirit as manifested in the State. They are secularly defined as the Oriental, the Greek, the Roman, and the German world and

are seen as a "progress of the consciousness of Freedom." The "various grades in the consciousness of Freedom," Hegel writes, "supply us with the natural division of universal History . . . The Orientals have not attained the knowledge that Spirit—Man *as such*—is free; and because they do not know this, they are not free. They only know that *one is free* . . . that *one* is therefore only a Despot; not a *free man*. The consciousness of Freedom first arose among the Greeks, and therefore they were free; but they, and the Romans likewise, knew only that *some* are free—not man as such . . . The Greeks, therefore, had slaves and their whole life and the maintenance of their splendid liberty, was implicated with the institution of slavery . . . The German nations, under the influence of Christianity, were the first to attain the consciousness that man, as man, is free."

With the complete emancipation of man in the German-Christian world, history is consummated for Hegel. "The grand principle of being is realized," he declares; "consequently the end of days is fully come." Another sign of the finality of the German-Christian world seems to be its reconciliation of Church and State: "European history is the exhibition of the growth of each of these principles severally . . . then of an antithesis on the part of both . . . lastly, of the harmonizing of the antithesis." In the German-Christian world, the secular and the religious modes of life are ultimately harmonized, fused in a single order of "rational Freedom."

APART FROM THE opposition between the philosophical and theological approaches, here represented by Hegel and Augustine, there seem to be two main issues in the general theory of human history. The first concerns the pattern of change; the second, the character of the causes at work.

The pattern most familiar because of its prevalence in modern speculations is that of progress or evolution. The progress may be conceived as a dialectical motion in the realm of Spirit, contrasted by Hegel with the realm of Matter or Nature, according as "the essence of Matter is Gravity . . . and the essence of

Spirit is Freedom." But it may also be thought to occur, as in the dialectical materialism of Marx and Engels, through the resolution of conflicting material or economic forces.

"The whole history of mankind," Engels writes in his preface to the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, "since the dissolution of primitive tribal society, holding land in common ownership, has been a history of class struggles, contests between exploiting and exploited, ruling and oppressed classes; the history of these class struggles forms a series of evolutions in which, now-a-days, a stage has been reached where the exploited and oppressed class, the proletariat, cannot attain its emancipation from the sway of the exploiting and ruling class, the bourgeoisie, without, at the same time, and once for all, emancipating society at large from all exploitation, oppression, class-distinction and class-struggle." The four great economic systems—the systems of slave labor, feudal serfdom, industrial capitalism, and the communistic or classless society—are thus seen as the stages of progress toward an ultimate perfection in which history comes to rest because it has at last fully realized its controlling tendency. Veblen in his *The Theory of the Leisure Class* also contributes to this discussion of cultural history in economic terms.

The pattern of progress may be conceived not as a dialectical motion involving conflict and synthesis, but rather, as by Kant, in terms of an increasing actualization of the potentialities for good in human life. Giving the name of *culture* to "the production in a rational being of an aptitude for any ends whatever of his own choosing," Kant declares, "it is only culture that can be the ultimate end which we have cause to attribute to nature in respect of the human race." The progressive realization of culture consists in "the liberation of the will from the despotism of desires whereby, in our attachment to certain natural things, we are rendered incapable of exercising a choice of our own." In these terms history moves toward a perfection which can never be fully achieved on earth, for man's "own nature is not so constituted as to rest or be satisfied in any possession or enjoyment whatever."

As conceived by the evolutionist, progress may or may not attain its limit, but in either case its manifestation in human history appears to be analogous to as well as an extension of the line of development along which the world or all of living nature has gradually advanced.

THESE VIEWS ARE given further discussion in the chapters on EVOLUTION, PROGRESS, and WORLD. Whether or not the same pattern of change obtains in the historical order of nature as in the history of man and society, is a question to be answered by those who deny as well as by those who affirm progress. There is cyclical change in nature, the same pattern of birth, growth, decay, and death repeating itself generation after generation. That history too repeats itself with the rise and decline of cities and civilizations seems to be the ancient view. It reappears in our day with Oswald Spengler and, somewhat qualified by the possibility of progress, with Toynbee.

"The cities which were formerly great," Herodotus observes, "have most of them become insignificant; and such as are at present powerful were weak in olden time. I shall, therefore, discourse equally of both, convinced that prosperity never continues long in one stay." Lucretius finds the cyclical pattern both in the succession of worlds and in the succession of civilizations. The myth of the golden age of Kronos and the earthbound age of Zeus, which Plato tells in the *Statesman*, also applies both to nature and society.

According to the myth, "there is a time when God himself guides and helps to roll the world in its course; and there is a time, on the completion of a certain cycle, when he lets go, and the world being a living creature, and having originally received intelligence from its author and creator, turns about and by an inherent necessity revolves in the opposite direction." Thus the history of the world runs through "infinite cycles of years," and one age succeeds another in an endless round.

There is still a third view which sees history as neither cyclical nor simply progressive. Virgil reverses the order of the Platonic myth by placing the golden age in the future. It

dawns with Rome, where, in the words of the fourth *Eclogue*,

..... a great new cycle of centuries  
Begins. Justice returns to earth, the Golden Age  
Returns, and its first-born comes down from heaven  
above.

Look kindly . . . upon this infant's birth,  
For with him shall hearts of iron cease, and hearts  
of gold  
Inherit the whole earth.

Rome for Virgil is not only the beginning of the golden age; it is also the consummation of history. In *The Aeneid* Jupiter himself declares that he has given the Romans "unlimited power"—that he has set for them "no bounds, either in space or time." The "togae'd people" of Rome shall be "the lords of creation . . . whose fame shall end in the stars"; then "shall the age of violence be mellowing into peace." The perpetuity of Rome seems to leave little room for any further essential progress and no chance for another cycle of decay and regeneration.

The Christian dogma of the fall of man from grace and his return through divine mediation to grace and salvation seems to give history a pattern that is partly Platonic in the sequence which makes the loss of a golden age the occasion for striving to regain it. But it also seems to be Virgilian in part. The epochal transitions of history happen only once. The coming of Christ is an absolutely singular event, after which there is no essential progress in man's condition until the Last Judgment at the end of the world.

COMMON TO THESE diverse conceptions of the pattern of history is the problem concerning the causes which are at work as history unfolds. Whatever the factors, they will operate in the future as they have in past, unless the millennium is already upon us or about to dawn. From the knowledge of their own past or from their dim perception of divine providence, men derive a sense of the future; but they look forward to that future differently according as some part of it will stem from choices freely made, or according as all of it is inexorably determined by causes beyond their control.

The basic alternatives of fate and freedom,

of necessity and contingency, God's will and man's choice, are considered in the chapters ON CHANCE, FATE, and NECESSITY AND CONTINGENCY. Sometimes the issue is resolved in the same way for the course of nature and the course of history: necessity reigns in both; as there is contingency in the events of nature, so there is freedom in the acts of history. Sometimes the processes of nature and history are distinguished: the motions of matter are governed by inviolable laws; whereas the motions of men are directed by laws which leave them free to work out a destiny which is determined by, rather than determines, the human spirit.

Those who do not deny freedom entirely in the realm of history seldom give it unlimited scope. What men can do is conditioned from below by the operation of material forces, and from above by what Hegel calls "God's purpose with the world." The vast "arras-web of Universal History" is woven by the interaction between God's will (the Absolute Idea) and human purposes or interests, which Hegel calls "the complex of human passions."

History for him is "the union of Freedom and Necessity," where "the latent abstract process of Spirit is regarded as Necessity, while that which exhibits itself in the conscious will of men, as their interest, belongs to the domain of freedom." But this freedom which coheres with necessity seems to belong more to the human race as a whole than to individual men. The individual man is tossed aside if he tries to obstruct the path of history. He is powerless to change its course.

Not even great men can make or determine history. They are great only because, sensing the next phase of the historical process, they identify themselves with the wave of the future and conform their purposes to the march of events—the dialectical development of the Absolute Idea. A few men thus become "world-historical individuals" because their own "particular aims involve those large issues which are the will of the World-Spirit." They have "an insight into the requirements of the time—what was ripe for development . . . the very Truth for their age, for their world; the species next in order, so to speak, and which was already formed in the womb of time."



Like Hegel and unlike the ancient historians, Tolstoy also regards the leadership of great men as illusory. To believe in the efficacy of heroes or great men, he thinks, is to commit the fallacy of the man "who, watching the movements of a herd of cattle and paying no attention to the varying quality of the pasturage in different parts of the field, or to the driving of the herdsman, attributes the direction the herd takes to the animal which happens to be at its head."

Great men are only celebrated puppets, pushed ahead on the moving front of history. The motion of history derives its force and direction from the individual acts of the innumerable nameless men who comprise the human mass. The act of the individual counts little. The mass motion is a complex resultant of slight impulses tending in many directions. But however slight the impulse each man gives, his contribution to history is a free act, conditioned only by the circumstances under which he makes a choice and by the divine providence which grants him the freedom to choose. Like "every human action," history, according to Tolstoy, thus "appears to us as a certain combination of freedom and inevitability."

In the 20th century, with the rise of the social sciences, the separation of history from anthropology is questioned. "We are no longer satisfied with political history," writes Lévi-Strauss, "which chronologically strings dynasties and wars on the thread of secondary rationalizations and reinterpretations. Economic history is, by and large, the history of unconscious processes. Thus any good history book . . . is saturated with anthropology."

According to Lévi-Strauss, we go "on the road toward the understanding of man . . . from the study of conscious content to that of unconscious forms." The historian and the anthropologist "both go the same way. The fact that their journey together appears to each of them in a different light . . . does not in the least alter the identical character of their fundamental approach."

DIFFERENT FROM speculations on a grand scale concerning the whole historical process is that

type of philosophizing about history which considers its place in education—the light it affords to the mind, and the lessons it teaches for the guidance of conduct.

Montaigne, for example, makes the reading of history and biography the window through which a man looks out upon the world. "This great world," he writes, "is the mirror in which we must look at ourselves to recognize ourselves from the proper angle." Only against the large scene history reveals and amid the variety of human nature it exhibits can a man truly know himself and his own time. In a similar vein, Gibbon declares that "the experience of history exalts and enlarges the horizon of our intellectual view." Hegel, on the other hand, insists that "what experience and history teach is that peoples and governments never have learned anything from history, or acted on principles deduced from it."

Shaw takes a much more skeptical view of history in his preface to *Saint Joan*. For him, history is "always out of date." That is "why children are never taught contemporary history. Their history books deal with periods of which the thinking has passed out of fashion, and the circumstances no longer apply to active life. For example, they are taught history about Washington, and told lies about Lenin. In Washington's time they were told lies (the same lies) about Washington, and taught history about Cromwell. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries they were told lies about Joan, and by this time might very well be told the truth about her. Unfortunately the lies did not cease when the political circumstances became obsolete. The Reformation, which Joan had unconsciously anticipated, kept the questions which arose in her case burning up to our own day (you can see plenty of the burnt houses still in Ireland), with the result that Joan has remained the subject of anti-Clerical lies, of specifically Protestant lies, and of Roman Catholic evasions of her unconscious Protestantism. The truth sticks in our throats with all the sauces it is served with: it will never go down until we take it without any sauce at all."

On the practical side, political writers like Machiavelli, Montesquieu, and the Federalists



use history to exemplify or confirm their generalizations. They agree with Thucydides that "an exact knowledge of the past is an aid to the interpretation of the future, which in the course of human things must resemble if it does not reflect it." Most men, adds Tacitus, "learn wisdom from the fortunes of others."

It is on these grounds that the great books of history belong with treatises on morals and

politics and in the company of philosophical and theological speculations concerning the nature and destiny of man. Liberal education needs the particular as well as the universal, and these are combined in the great historical narratives. Apart from their utility, they have the originality of conception, the poetic quality, the imaginative scope which rank them with the great creations of the human mind.

<b>THE GREAT IDEAS from the Syntopicon</b>
<b>HISTORY</b>

*OUTLINE OF TOPICS*

- 1. History as knowledge and as literature: its kinds and divisions; its distinction from poetry, myth, philosophy, and science**
- 2. The light and lesson of history: its role in the education of the mind and in the guidance of human conduct**
- 3. The writing of history: research and narration; the influence of poetry**
  - 3a. The determination and choice of fact: the classification of historical data**
  - 3b. The explanation or interpretation of historic fact: the historian's treatment of causes**
- 4. The philosophy of history**
  - 4a. Theories of causation in the historical process**
    - (1) The alternatives of fate or freedom, necessity or chance**
    - (2) Material forces in history: economic, physical, and geographic factors**
    - (3) World history as the development of Spirit: the stages of the dialectic of history**
    - (4) The role of the individual in history: the great person, hero, or leader**
  - 4b. The laws and patterns of historical change: cycles, progress, evolution**
  - 4c. The spirit of the time as conditioning the politics and culture of a period**
- 5. The theology of history**
  - 5a. The relation of the gods or God to human history: the dispensations of providence**
  - 5b. The city of God and the city of man; church and state**

Note: This outline is from the Syntopicon, a two volume index into the Great Books covering 102 ideas. For each idea, the Syntopicon gives page references throughout the Great Books for the various subtopics of the idea's outline and suggests further readings beyond the Great Books. This outline for the idea of history is page 718 in Volume 2 of The Great Books of the Western World, edited by Mortimer Adler (54 volume set) and page 554 in Volume 1 of the 60 volume second edition of the Great Books. The index was updated for the second edition's additional volumes (see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great\\_Books\\_of\\_the\\_Western\\_World](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Books_of_the_Western_World)).