

# **HISTORY—THEORY, PHILOSOPHY, AND WISDOM**

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WISDOM has been traditionally linked, in almost all cultures, with philosophy and old age. What is the link between old age and wisdom? Well, the older a person grows, the greater the span and matrix of his concrete experience is likely to be. History, as the story of the sum total of human experience of nature and interaction with fellow humans could and should have been regarded as the main source of wisdom, or, at least, as the prolegomena to the study of philosophy. However, the vast majority of eastern and western philosophers has neglected history as the pathway to wisdom, and has tended to confine themselves to reflection on essences, speculation, or logical deduction from self evident premises as the proper way of acquiring wisdom. Thus Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, Descartes, Leibnitz, Kant, were not enamored of the study of history. Ancient Indian sages were even less concerned with the dimension of time in their pursuit of the eternal verities of life. It goes to the credit of classical Muslim culture, that it gave the greatest importance to the study of history. It is, however, Hegel and, after him, Marx, Dilthey, Troeltsch and Collingwood, who recognized the crucial importance of the historical approach to the proper understanding of reality. In this article I wish to analyze the concept of history and show how history helps in the task of pursuing wisdom, which is the avowed goal of the philosopher.

## **What is History?**

What is history? History is a systematic and accurate, descriptive and explanatory study of the significant features of man's total recorded past, in every sphere of human activity or experience. History describes the past, which, however, cannot be perceived but only remembered or inferred from present experience. Thus, even though the descriptive propositions of history belong to factual discourse, as in the case of science, the facts of history are not straightforward facts given to us, like scientific data. These are constructed or inferred descriptions, on the basis of evidence deemed to be reliable by historiographers. Even such a simple historical fact, that Gandhiji was assassinated on January 30, 1948, cannot be perceived or verified in the scientific sense. The so-called facts of history are construed out of pieces of testimony, which come to us through a chain of reporters, going back to the direct experience of some person or persons. The same remarks apply to the difference between scientific and historical explanations. A scientific explanation reduces constant conjunctions or regular sequences of events to particular instances of a general law of nature. A natural law is not a logical necessity or purposive Divine command (from the standpoint of the scientist), but a descriptive generalization. A natural law is always verifiable in theory, directly or indirectly, though it may not be so in practice, at a given moment of time, due to our technological limitations. An historical explanation both resembles and differs from a scientific explanation

## **Cultural Imponderables of History**

An historical explanation partly resembles a natural explanation, in the sense that it makes use of empirical generalization. When, for instance, the historian explains the success of the British in India, in terms of their superiority in technological and administrative organization

and the political disunity of the Indian people, he makes use of the empirical generalization, that superiority in such matters leads to political success. But a historical generalization is also something more—it is an insight into the workings of the human mind, the attitudes, motivations, morale of individuals and groups involved. And it is precisely here that a historical explanation transcends natural causation, and introduces cultural imponderables (which cannot be quantified or mathematically correlated) into its explanatory framework. In other words, history is something much more than chronology though the latter is integral to history.

The historian does not write history unless he connects and explains his carefully reconstructed facts out of the reliable historical data. Again, he cannot explain, unless he accepts some general beliefs as an explanatory base. This base is rooted in the world view of the historian. The world view is never a self-evident truth or a logical deduction or a verifiable hypothesis. Generally speaking, the world view of the historian is seldom chosen, but is culturally conditioned, to begin with. The critical and mature historian may, however, transcend his tradition. Often, those who outgrow or reject their traditional world view come into the grip of some other tradition, instead of winning and preserving their own independent spiritual autonomy. Such persons escape from one conceptual straight-jacket, only to enter into another, instead of opting for an 'open' conceptualization of the human situation and the mystery of the universe.

It does not follow from the above analysis of historical explanation that history is condemned to be subjective and incorrigibly unreliable. There is a clear cut sense, in which history may be subjectively or objectivity written, even after conceding that it can never be objective in the scientific sense of the term. What is important is not the insistence upon subjectivity or objectivity of history, but to decide whether there are some criteria to distinguish good history from bad. If so, reliable history may be said to be objective, while unreliable history subjective without equating historical objectivity with the scientific. The reason why some find themselves perplexed by this issue, is that they think under the spell or fascination of a single paradigm or model of objectivity, i.e., the scientific. They, thus, fail to see that the term 'objective' may well have other meanings or uses in other contexts.

### **Historical Objectivity**

What are the features or distinguishing criteria of historical objectivity? The main features are: absence of bias or antipathy; a sympathetic but critical approach; awareness and utilization of all available records; critical assessment of the motives and personality orientation of the testifier or historian, on the basis of known factual truths or valid insights into human behaviour; and help from archeological evidence. Good history must also reflect a judicious selection from the enormous range of factual material, in order to focus the attention of the reader upon specific issues. Selection also becomes necessary for reducing the cost of publication and also making the material reader friendly, especially for young readers.

No harm accrues from such selection, provided the motive is not to suppress truth at higher levels of research or fuller levels of comprehension, but merely to simplify it out of concern, not for any narrow group, but for human welfare as such. Thirdly, good history must enter into the spirit

of the age or society, just as a good dramatist enters into the spirit of his characters, without passing a value judgment. Finally, the work of the good historian must serve as a mirror to one's contemporary situation, in so far as there are genuine significant similarities between the past and the present.

In spite of all efforts to be objective, in the above sense, historians will continue to differ in their evaluation of historical personalities, their reconstructions of historical facts and their explanations. Like philosophical controversies, historical disagreements can never be settled once and for all. However, the issues of historical debate may become moribund or even dead, due to changed circumstances. Moreover, agreement about future objectives, and the will to achieve them help in creating the mood and inclination to agree to differ about the past without any bitterness. Again, numerous observers, with very varying backgrounds, often do come to agreed conclusions about the past, provided they are gifted with historical empathy. The reason is that critical reflection upon basic concepts and values and awareness of their growth in history lead to a more comprehensive and balanced understanding of how their different versions are shaped by situational factors. This promotes a deeper insight into their essence or basic function in human life, as well as the inner 'feel' of the movement and continuity of history.

This sense of movement in historical space makes man forward-looking and dynamic. Knowledge of the past liberates man from bondage to it, as distinct from a critical appreciation of the values already created in the past. Awareness of stages, that developed, one from the other, in the past makes man aware of the tremendous potentialities of the present, ever spilling over into the future. The active concern for the future prevails over the historical disagreement about the past.

### **Empirical Enquiry**

History is an 'open' empirical enquiry into the total past, and should not be reduced to sociology or any form of sociological mechanics of socio-economic forces, viewed as determinants of the historical process, without any effective role played by the individual. As already indicated, every philosophical interpretation of the universe is an existential interpretation, which is not objectively verifiable, but which may be deemed to be valid or invalid on the basis of stated criteria. These criteria should be spelled out by the systematic philosopher. The interpretation, which denies any effective role to the individual, is as invalid as the one, which ignores the role of the objective or situational factors, which mould the subject's choice of action. Indeed, if the historical process involves decision-making by persons (as it certainly does), and if decisions involve value judgments (as they certainly do), historical dynamics just cannot be reduced, without any remainder, to purely sociological dynamics of social forces hitting and pushing, as it were, human billiard balls, who have no choice of action.

Likewise, if the individual makes his decision in a concrete situation (which is not of his own choosing, but the cumulative deposit of past events or choices, which cannot be undone or wished away from the stage of reality), his decisions cannot be said to be totally free from situational constraints or compulsions modifying his decision, even in unwanted directions, or making his choice forced or 'tainted', as it were. This, however, does not amount to the elimination of the individual's role. Indeed, individuals possessing outstanding imagination, courage, determination

and dedication to ideals have, in fact, given a decisive turn to the course of events throughout the ages. To believe that events would have run the same course, even without the contribution of such outstanding persons, would be unwarranted speculation.

### **Individual and Circumstance**

Of course, it is quite reasonable to hold that the decisive turn could have been given by a similar contribution from some individual possessing similar qualities other than the individual who, in fact, steered events at the time under review. But this substitution of roles presupposes, not merely the abstract logical possibility but rather the actual existence, at the time and place concerned, of another such highly endowed individual or individuals. The actual existence of more than one highly talented or outstanding individual is, however, a contingent fact and certainly not a necessary event in the logical sense, such that it must always be the case. I doubt, if the course of events in 1917 and immediately thereafter, would have been, what it actually was, in the absence of the vision and techniques provided by Lenin. Going much further back, could the history of Arabia and the medieval world been, what it actually was, without the character and achievements of the Prophet of Islam? The controversy, whether the individual or circumstance plays the dominant role in history, is, therefore, totally uncalled for and futile.

### **Questions of Philosophy**

Can there be any philosophy of history apart from historiography? Could a super-historian formulate some laws of history, as a scientist discovers laws of nature? Are there any stages in the historical process as a whole, or any pattern in the birth, growth, decline and death of human societies, as in the case of individuals? Is there any meaning or over-arching purpose of history, as distinct from the undeniable operation of purpose in history? If this super-purpose be deemed to be the purpose of an omnipotent Creator God, does God habitually regulate history, or sometimes intervene or never at all, giving a long rope, as it were, to men, until the final day of judgment in the post-historical or eschatological future? Can we discover any direction in human affairs, quite apart from the metaphysical or theological question of Divine purpose? The discussion of the above questions may be said to constitute the philosophy of history, apart from historiography.

### **Fallacy of Sociological Determinism**

Meanwhile new and unsuspected imbalances and evils have sneaked into the socialist system, which Marxist thinkers supposed to be proof against the temptations and corruptions inherent in a profit seeking highly competitive society. Such developments or changes in the historical process, specially the recent changes in Chinese society, point out the mechanistic fallacy of reducing the essential openness of history to sociological determinism. We would commit the same fallacy in a different garb, if we reduced the openness of history to say, theological or geographical or any other form of determinism. No goal or end is pre-determined or inevitable. Historical change is the outcome of complex causes, including striving by individuals and groups.

Man's potential freedom to choose goals and his actual striving to realise them always keeps history an open process with plural possibilities. Each historical outcome is the product of man's variable responses to an invariable or unchangeable past. No theological or speculative projection

of an inevitable 'telos' or end, no dialectical prediction of a final synthesis, no anthropological generalization, in short, no conceptual formula can extinguish the essential contingency, opaqueness and tragic brittleness of the human story. In other words, history can never be reduced to sociology or philosophy, though these disciplines are essential for mature historical understanding.

### **Divine Purpose of history**

Let us now turn to the question of an over-arching purpose of history, apart from the purposes of individuals and groups, whose interactions constitute the concrete course of events. The word 'purpose', as ordinarily used, implies a mind or person, who is aware of values and goals and understands the connection between ends and means or cause and effect. Thus the expressions, 'purpose of history' or 'purpose of the cosmos' imply the concept of a Super Mind, in some sense or the other, which the philosopher or theologian seeks to unravel. The philosophical historian is only concerned with the question whether or not the course of history, as distinct from the course of nature, is characterized by features which prove, or at least, suggest any over-arching Divine purpose? If we claim that the answer is 'yes', we must be able to understand and identify the said super-purpose and also to point out the ways and means actually found in history for realizing the above purpose.

It *is* precisely at this point that all our attempts to identify the super-purpose of God and His ways and means of realizing it breakdown. We think we have grasped the purpose only to find that some event or set of events in history defy the putative purpose and remain inexplicable brute facts, suggesting some other purpose or rather none at all, in the course of history. It is like finding a succession of numbers, which appear to conform to a mathematical formula long enough to make us believe we have correctly identified it, only to discover, moments later, that the next actual number or numbers fail to conform to the predicted number in the series. To give another illustration, when we think we have identified both the super-purpose and the method of its realization, the supposed purpose or the means or both give us the dodge, and, like Falstaff, escape through the key hole.

### **No Super-Purpose of History**

The validity of the teleological argument for God's existence is a philosophical and not a historical issue. But even if we antecedently accept on faith or on philosophical theological grounds that God exists, the question, whether or not the course of history is guided by God, and, if so, in what way and to what extent, cannot be given any conclusive answer on the basis of empirical history. The complexity of the human story, with its myriad plots and sub-plots in space-time in a bewildering variety cannot be fitted into any definite master-rhythm or super-pattern of history, despite the genius of an Ibn Khaldun, Vico, Hegel, Marx, Spengler or Toynbee. No matter what super-purpose we may identify, the actual historical process does not show any evidence of being a purposeful, rational or systematic movement towards a goal. So great and glaring are the vicissitudes, convolutions, reversals of trends, tragedies and destruction of values that history appears to be devoid of any super-purpose or cosmic meaning.

History cannot prove or disprove God's existence, even as science and philosophy cannot do so. Nature and history both provide man with experience, which is highly complex and gives contradictory messages or clues, as it were, which completely baffle all human efforts to penetrate into the mystery of being. Like a gigantic Rorschach Stimulus card, both nature and history could be interpreted in diverse ways. Some objective justification or reason could always be traced in (the mosaic of the 'empirical manifold' or what is objectively given to us in experience. Thus, many known parts of nature are, in fact, structured with a remarkable mathematical proportion and functional coordination (the epitome of which is the human body). Such structures strongly incline us to the interpretation, that nature is linked with a benevolent purpose or telos, while some other features of nature (enormous waste, nature's circuitousness or trial and error, dead ends, struggle and suffering) incline us towards the interpretation that the cosmic process is blind and absurd. In the final analysis, neither of the two interpretations could be deemed to be a verifiable hypothesis. Both are essentially 'adventures of faith', that could claim existential but not logical scientific certainty.

### **Doubts and Difficulties of History**

It seems to me that existential doubts and difficulties, as presented by nature, in relation to God's existence, are rather less than the doubts and difficulties presented by history. Nature presents the difficulty that it is 'red in tooth and claw' (suggesting that life is a relentless struggle for survival in which the strong devours the weak, rather than a garden in which a hundred flowers bloom to glorify their Creator). The difficulty presented by history is that it is 'blue' in pain and suffering of innocent millions down the ages. Does not the sorry tale of the periodic destruction of cultures and the regression of human societies to barbarism, the untold sufferings of oppressed minorities, the inhuman exploitation of the despised untouchable for millennia mock at our attempts to find the hand of God in history? Does not the tragic story of the sufferings of countless millions of maltreated children, persecuted wives, detested widows, unwanted female children, luckless orphans, mutilated prisoners and slaves, bonded laborers, underfed and emaciated workers, the unattended sick, and last, but not the least, the tortured mute domestic animals, fill our eyes with tears which rather dim the picture of an all loving and all powerful God in heaven? Does not the anguished unrequited prayers of countless millions of innocent sufferers raise a serious question mark against the assumption of the hand of God in history? Is it so easy to dismiss the doubts of an honest skeptic or agnostic in the Divine regulation or intervention in history as nothing more than a perverted or wicked response of a proud atheist or materialist, rather than the anguish of a compassionate and noble soul caught in the antinomies of history. While the brighter side of the tangled and tortuous web of history inclines one towards theistic optimism, the darker side pushes one towards atheistic or agnostic pessimism.

### **God as Master of History**

A person may take the stand that the proper evidence of cosmic purpose should be sought, not in the realm of history, but in the realm of nature, since God has given a long rope to man until the day of final reckoning and chosen, in his Divine wisdom, to withhold His intervention. This does not imply any external or forced limitation of His sovereign power or loving concern as

Supreme Creator of nature and Master of the course of history. He may intervene in nature or history whenever He may choose, suspending, as it were, the laws of nature or history, through exercising His sovereign power in His inscrutable wisdom. According to this view, the course of history is a tiny fragment of the cosmic process, with man enjoying almost total freedom of action as part of a Divine plan, which is necessarily opaque to us in historical time but which will become manifest in the eschatological future. According to this view, history is a game in which players win or lose, not because of any Divine help or wrath, but as a result of their hard work, patience, grit, skill, fraud or other human or natural factors. When temporal history ends eschatological history begins, and it is at this stage of the cosmic process that God's omnipotence and justice will make good the deficiencies and contradictions of temporal history. A person who takes this stand may say that the concept of metaphysical time, as distinct from historical time, though an act of faith is, nevertheless, not an arbitrary response, but a response rooted in man's awareness of the immense and wonderful architectonic complexity and beauty of nature. It seems to me, this approach is quite valid, though it becomes invalid or unwarranted, the moment it is converted into a sort of an ideological argument, for the existence of God or for the presence of a super-purpose in either nature or history. Faith in a Divine purpose of nature and history may evoke only existential, but never logical or objective certainty.

Let us now reconsider the question whether history moves in a particular direction, even though there is no goal as such. We could answer this question in the affirmative, if we could identify some direction, as such, on pure historical evidence. Identifying the direction means being able to point out some basic beliefs and values, towards which the human family may have been moving over the centuries past, albeit, haltingly, deviously, even reversibly, as the case may be. These ideas and values, if any, may well be called 'Consensus ideas and Values'

### **Grand Consensus of Ideas and Values**

It seems to me, the human family has been moving towards an enormously slow but grand consensus. As examples of this consensus one may cite the ideas and values of reverence for life, dignity and equality of man, dignity of labour, gender equality, equality of opportunity, religious or cultural pluralism, secularism or separation of church and state, democracy, scientific attitude and technology, welfare state and planning for social security, family planning, environmental control, political federalism, international controls and standards, and world brotherhood.

The above consensus ideas, which are value judgments, are not capable of any logical, scientific or objective proof. Nor could it be claimed that the consensus has already been reached. Thus, for instance, the issue of the separation of church and state is a highly controversial, rather explosive issue in the Muslim segment of the human family. The concept of the equality of the sexes is also, perhaps, just one shade less controversial. Again, the entire human family is still groping for and, unfortunately violently disputing, about the ideal pattern for reconciling two basic, but highly conflicting human needs—social or economic security and individual freedom and creative self-realization. Even the wisest and most knowledgeable statesmen, philosophers and social scientists of the human family stand baffled and perplexed at the complexity of human affairs. They are not able to lay hands on any simple panacea, for reconciling the above conflicting needs.

Nevertheless, it may, justifiably, be said that a consensus is in the process of emerging, through the steady interchange and fusion of ideas, the shrinking of space, instant global communication, trial and error, the exposure of illusions, the shattering of politico-economic dreams or expectations from one's favoured 'ism' or interpretation of religion, in short, the march of history. The consensus ideas must however be viewed as ever 'open' in the changing human situation.

### **No Verifiable Hypothesis**

Whether the slowly emerging consensus is a willed goal, or is merely the unintended resultant of situational forces cannot be conclusively settled for reasons already given. The 'telos' of the theist, and the 'social dynamics' of the historical materialist, both, more or less, reflect human hopes, fears, attitudes and values. Thus, they can not claim the status of being verifiable hypotheses. While man can live the good life in a universe without God, or without an immanent Divine purpose, these ideas enhance man's ontological dignity, moral motivation and confidence in success in the midst of undeniably heavy odds and obstacles on the cosmic stage.

Empirical history, thus interpreted, becomes a major pathway to wisdom. By describing and connecting different phases and facets of man's story, understanding human character and cultural patterns through historical research and investigation, history leads man, from the philosopher's abstract theories of mind and spirit, towards a concrete organic vision of man in the universe. While classical philosophy deals with the abstract, formal structure of man, history, like great literature, reveals his concrete psychic depth. Both functions are necessary and complementary. Conceptual abstraction is ever in the danger of getting vitiated by linguistic and conceptual confusions, particularly the fallacy of reification—mistaking a grammatical noun for a metaphysical entity. History, at its best, overcomes this ever lurking danger by entering into the spirit of an individual's life or age, enabling the reader to 'empathize' with the inner world of different individuals and ages. The reader becomes the living witness of the human drama on the cosmic stage, and is transformed from a historical microcosm into a historical macrocosm. This is, perhaps, the fullest 'humanization' of the individual, and a much higher stage from his earlier 'socialization' through cultural conditioning. This birth of the 'universal individual' as distinct from the 'ethnocentric individual' is the special gift of history, rather than of philosophy, science, mathematics, religion or art. This special gift is wisdom, while the special gift of science is knowledge and the power of technology.

### **The Distinction between Wisdom and Knowledge**

Wisdom is insight into moral good and evil, and the proper attitudes to self, and others, in the concrete conduct of life as a whole. A wise man is, thus, not he who is an expert in logic, mathematics, science or other branches of knowledge, but does not know what to do, when he is betrayed by a friend or loved one, or when his son is killed in an accident, or when old age, disease or danger confronts him with impending death. Wisdom is constituted by proper attitudes to the world, knowledge by the accurate awareness of the world. Wisdom and knowledge are, however, related, since the proper attitude or the right response to an object, presupposes accurate awareness or knowledge of its nature or its properties.

In the pre-scientific era, philosophy itself, in the form of speculative ontology and cosmology, provided knowledge. This task is now performed by the different branches of natural and social sciences, separately and jointly. And history, in the broad sense, is the source, par excellence, of such knowledge since every scientific discipline has its own history of development.

### **Limitations of classical Philosophy**

Classical philosophy, as the source of wisdom, suffers from some serious limitations. First, it regards cosmological theories as if they were super scientific hypotheses, meant to explain the nature and functioning of Reality at a higher level than that of science. The philosopher further claims his own theory to be true and all other theories to be false. He mistakenly thinks that his technical terms refer to metaphysical entities or essences, whose nature is truly revealed by their own theories, but falsified by rival theories. Thirdly, classical philosophy employs abstract conceptual analysis or reasoning (which is neither logically coercive nor based on any clear cut rules of language), completely ignoring the historical or situational determinants of the rival conceptual systems, which follow from the decision to identify and label man's experience in a particular way.

The role of hidden value judgments, or attitudes and interests, in shaping philosophical theories, is, thus, concealed from him and from others. In other words, the philosopher is unaware of the influence of linguistic, historical, and psychological factors upon the choice of conceptual schemes, which are mistakenly held to be the result of purely rational or logical thinking. The disagreement of other philosophers does not bother him, since he attributes this falsity to their crooked thinking, instead of taking the trouble to go into the complex causes and reasons for the pervasive and chronic disease of philosophical disagreement, in sharp contrast with the uniform conclusions of science.

### **Two Complementary approaches**

The linguistic approach to philosophy emphasizes the role of linguistic or semantic factors, while the sociological approach that of values or interests of individuals or groups in the shaping of conflicting philosophical theories or ideologies. In the final analysis, both the approaches complement each other. The proper pursuit of wisdom requires both systematic linguistic analysis (to avoid semantic confusions and errors that generate philosophical controversies) and the study of empirical history to identify the values or interests which mould the thinking of a person, of a social group or of an entire age

Let us now come to the wisdom, which history teaches us more abundantly than any other discipline. Only a few main themes can be included in this concluding portion of the essay.

#### **(1) Dialectical Movement**

The historical approach to the totality of life gives us a width and depth of vision, to see reality in its total career in space-time, instead of reality at any particular phase or stage in its development. We are, thus, enabled to see things whole and see them steady, instead of being carried away by passing fashions of thought, or by a single perspective which might satisfy a vital but narrow need of the hour, but ignore other needs.

Cultural history reveals the changing rhythm of man's sensibility, and its demand for the logic of relativity. The story of man is not a uni-linear sustained progress towards a transcendental goal, but a multi-linear, cyclical or rather dialectical movement. Progress towards ideals creates new positive ideals, as also new negative realities in the ongoing historical process, which rules out final models of excellence. The criteria of excellence are not purely objective norms, to be discovered by pure reflection, but are conditioned by the bi-polar dynamics of action and reaction, thrust and counter-thrust, change and stability, push and pull. Historicism, in the above sense, does not negate the search for norms or criteria of validity in man's eternal quest for values. It only implies giving up certainties that dissolve into illusions in the clear light of history. The study of history gives us existential poise and mature hope, instead of ill-informed certainty and immature expectations that the triumph of our ideas or values is just round the corner, only to find them swept aside in the inexorable flux of history. Neither public acclaim nor short term rejection, neither success nor failure of one's ideas in one's own life time, disturbs the person who looks to history for guidance.

### **(2) Principle of Recurrence**

A major theme of the wisdom, which we learn from history, is the principle of recurrence or the principle of unity in variety and variety in unity, of the human condition down the ages. The characters of kings, statesmen, artisans, merchants, peasants, priests, teachers, poets and artists, and the pattern of events, say, the lust for power, the workings of jealousy, the intrigues of the court, the betrayal of comrades, the fear of reprisal, the inroads of corruption, the rise and fall of individuals, families, or dynasties, and empires—all are repeated again and again like a musical refrain on different instruments and different keys. When we personally taste the above negativities of life, we are apt to be overwhelmed by bitterness and sorrow, and lose our inner poise, thinking our own lot or times to be uniquely bad. But history takes out the sting of our agonized bitterness and the pain of our outraged innocence at the frailties and follies of our contemporaries, or, for that matter, our exaggerated admiration for their virtues and achievements.

The equanimity of the historian must not, however, be confused with moral indifference or insensitivity to contemporary evils. Mature historical vision lends itself, neither to simplistic moral denunciation of evil, nor to its amoral passive acceptance, but rather prescribes resolute and planned ameliorative action, without the certainty of quick or even lasting success, and with the full knowledge, that no remedy will ever root out evil from the human condition.

### **(3) Slowness of the Movement of History**

As mentioned earlier, the course of history appears to be moving in the direction of a consensus of ideas and values. The principle of recurrence is, thus, supplemented by the principle of direction of history. We must grasp the direction of this basic movement or thrust of man's quest for value, as distinct from the deviations and detours, adventurous explorations and fads, exaggerated reactions and rigid responses that are thrown up on the surface of human experience by the inter-play of man's inner freedom, the variety of his cultural and physical environment, and the unintended consequences of his choices.

The wisdom of history teaches us not to get perplexed at or carried away by the contingent reversals or deviations from its basic direction, but to realise the deeper continuity or flow, beneath the surface eddies of the human story, in terms of its halting progress towards the consensus ideas. These ideas and values are the fruit of man's collective and cumulative search for the impersonal summum bonum, as distinct from his group or parochial interests and goals. The making of this distinction requires a critical analysis of man's plural value systems, as they have evolved in history. The realization of the deeper continuity of the historical movement, requires the capacity for correctly assessing what shape present conditions and seeming trends are likely to take in the long run, rather than in the immediate future. This foresight or vision into the distant future is sharpened by the study of history. But some individuals may be endowed with historical intuition—the foresight into the contours of the future, on the basis of a 'feel' for the significance of the present.

#### **(4) Illusion and Reality**

History teaches us that our greatest heroes, after all, are not entirely without 'feet of clay', and that human excellence contains some grey areas. History reveals the ever recurring instances of the shattering of ideals by even the noblest, the struggle for power, the reign of self-interest, the brittleness of man's achievements, the tragedies of life, the shifting of loyalties, the miscarriages of justice, the exploitation of the helpless, the reign of the irrational, the persecution of dissent, the arrogance of power, the pride of race, the imperialism of culture, the grip of prejudice, the retreat of value, the corridors of cultural darkness in space and time, the power of the bribe, the corruption of the priest, the callousness of the bailiff, the law's delay, the cunning of the trader. History also reveals, the recurring instances of heroic devotion to duty, unflinching commitment to ideals, drinking the hemlock with smiling lips, eternal love and loyalty of the friend or the spouse, the power of creativity, the strength of faith, the resilience of life, the tenacity of will, the re-emergence of value, the triumph of reason and organization, and the immortality of hope. Such, in short, is the ambivalence of life. And the wisdom of history lies in refraining from passing any one sided judgment, but to be patient and serene in the gathering of evidence and humble in the passing of judgments of probability when the time be ripe. Like great literature, history reveals the complexity, ambiguity and the antinomical structure of man's character. More than any other discipline, it is history, which teaches us that the characters of the human drama are neither white nor black but grey. This insight lifts us from the cave of darkness into clear day light, in which we can survey the human condition free from distortion.

**(5) The Oneness of the Human Family** History teaches us that mankind is one indivisible family, despite the diversity of race, religion, language and culture, and that there are no chosen races or peoples. History is not subject to *our* hopes and pious wishes or prayers to an omnipotent God Who is partisan to His chosen people; history is a movement governed by sociological laws. These laws, however, leave ample scope for human creativity and freedom of choice between different existential interpretations and of action.

The realization of the essential oneness of the human family leads to a humanistic sympathy, transcending man's sense of belonging to narrow groups. The rise and fall, achievements and failures, glory and decline of different branches of the human family, at different points of time, appear to the historian as parts of a single story, whose heroes and villains, priests and teachers, soldiers and leaders, gladiators and showmen, poets and bards, harlots and slaves, patricians and plebeians are, after all, the flesh of his flesh and the bone of his bones. The variety and treasures of man's culture—different languages, religions, art forms, political and social patterns—all are seen as the fruit of man's creative response to the essential mystery of the universe, worthy of our respectful attention or study, for enabling us to make our own well informed and free choices, instead of being prisoners of an ethnocentric approach. Every human, thus, learns to rejoice at the achievements of, say, the ancient Chinese, Indians or Greeks, as much as an ethnocentric Englishman would at Clive's victory at Plassey or Nelson's at Trafalgar, or Shakespeare's literary triumphs, or as an ethnocentric German would rejoice at the achievements of Bismarck or Goethe. Likewise, the tragic disunity of the Greeks, the decline and fall of the Roman empire, the dismemberment of the Mauryan empire into warring districts, the sufferings of the Jews down the ages, the destruction of Baghdad and Cordova, and the present humiliation of the Arab peoples, move the universal

man with almost the same historical pathos, since they repeat almost the same story with different characters. The smiles or tears, nobility or sordidness, success or failure, good or evil of the characters is seen as a human phenomenon and not from the perspective of an Arab or Jew, Muslim or Hindu, European or Asian.

The victory of Akbar over Rajput Kings, the successful defiance by Shivaji of the might of the Mughal empire, the crushing of the 1857 rebellion against foreign rule in India, the heroic saga of Stalingrad, the humiliating defeat of Mussolini and Hitler, etc., are judged as happy triumphs or sad defeats, not in terms of the racial or religious affiliations or the interests and aspirations of the protagonists, but in terms of their historical role in promoting universal values. Likewise, the martyrdom of a Socrates, Bruno, Gandhi, Martin Luther King, or the sufferings of a Galileo, Priestley, Freud, Karl Jaspers, purify and inspire the universal man, no less deeply than the martyrdom of a Husain or Sarmad or the sufferings of Hambal or of Abul Kalam Azad.

The universal man explains the vicissitudes of the human family, not as the wages of sin or as the favors of an anthropomorphic God, or as the trials and travails of a chosen people, who have betrayed their Lord but who are destined to conquer the non-believers at a time of God's own choosing; the universal man tries to understand the ups and downs of the human family, as a doctor tries to understand human health and disease, free from praise or blame, pride or prejudice, anger or hate. The historian who has humanistic sympathy and cares for historical veracity explains the vicissitudes of the human family in terms of universal social dynamics, which does not preclude his faith in God or in any particular Divine revelation.

Faith in the oneness of God does not necessarily imply 'one God, one church, i.e., cultural monism; faith in one God implies man's unity in diversity and diversity in unity. History teaches us not to feel hurt or displeased at the pluralism of language, religion and culture, but to view them all as the flowering of man's creative responses to the mystery of being. When the historian-philosopher truly and deeply realizes this he shares, partly, if not wholly, the joy of the mystic at the contemplation of the unity of all being.

#### **(6) Mystical Dimension of History**

Historical contemplation, thus, has a hidden kinship with mysticism. The awareness of the oneness of the human family, and the transience of the characters and events of the human story, add a fresh dimension to man's response to the human condition down the ages.

The decline of great men and empires, the defeat of ambitions, the eclipse of power and glory, the withering away of luxury, the silent eloquence of imposing ruins, the decay of culture and death of creativity, on the one hand, and on the other, the rise to power and greatness of the once lowly, the vindication of the once oppressed and despised, the transfer of power and culture from 'master races' to 'barbarian hordes', the growth of despised and vulgar dialects into the language of learning and culture, the rise of new ideas and values, the emergence of new vistas and horizons, the spectacle of fresh conquests, the entry of new heroes on the centre stage of action from the back-benches of humanity, in short, the contemplation of the transience of life and the ever changing wheels of power and cultural glory, lead the historian-philosopher to perhaps the greatest liberating truth man can contemplate—everything perishes save the countenance of the Lord.

#### **(7) The Antinomy of History**

In the final analysis (as far as empirical history is concerned), power turns antinomically into weakness and weakness into power, knowledge into ignorance and ignorance into knowledge, light into darkness and darkness into light. It is precisely this dualistic process of history, or the antinomical structure of man's life, that constitutes his existential freedom to choose how to respond to his own unique historical situation. He may will to change the darkness in him and around him into light, as far as lies in his power, in the given situation, or he may allow whatever dim light may be present to be swallowed into the enveloping darkness, within and without.

Realizing that the light, which active and dedicated souls help to create in history, with their 'blood, sweat and tears', shines for but a few fleeting moments in the vastness of time and space, before being blown out in dark and stormy nights of the soul, the historian, nevertheless, does not give the counsel of despair to

himself or others, since history tells him that the light, which was extinguished in Babylonia did shine again in Athens, Nalanda and Taxila, Baghdad and Cordova, Padua and Paris, Oxford and Cambridge, Konigsberg and Heidelberg, Petersburg and Harvard, Benares, Aligarh and Shantiniketan.

Should the historian have an existential faith that nature and history move in some direction that partakes of good even if there be no verifiable goal as such, he can very well cherish the hope that ultimately light would prevail over darkness. The historian need not despair at the many noble failures to set right a world, ever out of joint. In the final analysis, the active existential pursuit of good leaves man with little energy or inclination to debate intellectual proofs whether God has created man or man has created God. \*\*\*\*